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IT IS OUR PROBLEM TOO

José Riberio e Castro

Unlike us, Cubans are not yet citizens of the world. Rather, they are prisoners on their own island. This is not only a problem for Cubans on the island but must rather be seen as our problem too, a problem we must all help solve.

We owe our determination to the people that suffer and we owe it to our values and principles. We also owe it to our people, to our younger gen-

erations and to our cultural freedom. There is much work to do both top-down and bottom-up. Top down, we must increase the public's awareness of the situation in Cuba and bottom-up, we must maintain pressure on political decision makers so that they do not ignore future attacks upon human dignity.

A year ago, the European Council recognized in writing that changes in

EU policy had not produced any positive change in Cuba and had even had negative effects. In addition, the European Commission recently acknowledged that the results in this matter were disappointing. These conclusions strongly reflect my own position on changes in EU policy.

The events of June 12, 2006 were yet another sad moment for European diplomacy. The results of the Council's



Photo: PIN exhibition

Wife of prisoner of conscience José Luis García Párrague

meeting demonstrated the EU's ineffectiveness in the field of democracy and human rights. The Council's conclusions regarding Cuba are frustrating, disappointing and shameful to all freedom-loving Europeans. EU representatives at the highest level were incapable of recognizing the validity of the numerous appeals made by Cuban democrats, world leaders, members of the European Parliament and of National Parliaments, political parties and human rights NGOs. In contradiction to its own factual justification, June's decision does not even respect the European Parliament's resolutions on the subject and demonstrates an appalling lack of commitment to the EU's basic values.

The expression "constructive engagement and a critical and comprehensive dialogue with Cuba" will continue to lack practical meaning, unless we immediately resume the invitation of dissidents as our guests to events organized by the embassies of member states and the Commission's delegation in Havana. In this difficult context, we must grant Oswaldo Payá and Damas de Blanco the position of EU guests of honour in our open diplomatic headquarters. This may be a method to signify to the Cuban regime that the European people have not abandoned the winners of the 2002 and 2005 Sakharov Prize. These invitations should not be regarded as sanctions but as the simple and indispensable expression of our own freedom. The Cuban authorities must accept that we are the ones that decide what to do in our own houses.

We must persevere in this line of action and provide access to the outside world for those who suffer. It is essential that there be an EU effort to grant access to the internet for Cubans that are prevented from having contact with the outside world and to support the creation and maintenance of independent libraries. Likewise, the EU must implement regular visits to political pris-

oners and their families by European diplomats, human rights NGOs and humanitarian agencies, namely the Red Cross. Without these two conditions, the Council's words will be only words rather than actions.

Therefore, if the European Union wishes to be democratic, it must finally recognise the European Parliament's resolutions on Cuba and resume official and transparent meetings with the democratic opposition and civil society representatives abandoned in January 2005. European leaders should feel obliged to share in our indigna-

We must grant Oswaldo Payá and Damas de Blanco the position of EU guests of honour in our diplomatic headquarters to show to the Cuban regime that the European people have not abandoned the winners of the 2002 and 2005 Sakharov Prize.

tion and adopt at least some of the sound and coherent recommendations for European Union mid-term strategy presented in this bulletin.

We must persist until we succeed. It is our duty to show Cuban democrats that they are not alone.

Words are just not enough.

José Ribeiro e Castro is a Member of the European Parliament and member of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba.

EDITORIAL

Many diplomats and politicians acknowledge that working on Cuba has been both puzzling and frustrating. In June of this year, the European Council decided to undertake the next step in this long story – now more relevant than ever before – and began working on a long awaited common mid-term and long-term strategy towards Cuba.

In this issue of CED, various European NGOs working with Cuba present a policy paper with detailed suggestions on this strategy. The well-discussed material builds upon an important lesson from past transitions: helping an independent civil society is decisive for peaceful and truly democratic change. The EU should listen and take on this project.

In addition to introductory opinions by José Ribeiro e Castro, Carlos Alberto Montaner and Jorge Oliveira Castillo, the policy paper is complemented by an insightful study on Cuban civil society, which tracks its drift to more local, pragmatic and everyday issues. The case studies gathered here from European NGOs give a unique and extensive picture which is somehow more optimistic than the experience of diplomats. It shows how the EU can increase its assistance, play a more important role and also break the deadlock in US-Cuba relations. Experiences from the past are summed up by Pádraic Kenney, a historian who documents how societies under undemocratic regimes have to relearn the virtues of free public debate on public policies.

We hope that you will find new and interesting perspectives on EU-Cuba relations in this bulletin,

Nikola Hořejš
Editor

CUBA FOR EUROPEANS

Carlos Alberto Montaner

Fidel Castro is now eighty years old and very sick. He is so sick that after an emergency intestinal operation, he declared his health a state secret, an action justifiable only in very serious cases such as cancer; so sick that he passed the reins of government to his brother Raúl. This is unusual behavior for a dictator who has strictly ruled the country for nearly half a century and who previously warned that he would die in power. He is so sick that the propaganda machine of the regime has begun an intense national campaign of emotional homage and demonstrations of national and international support as part of a well-orchestrated funeral program.

The inevitable disappearance of the dictator for a shorter or longer period has accelerated the debate over post-Castroism. To summarize, the matter comes down to two clear alternatives: succession or transition. Succession would be the continuation of the totalitarian communist regime, rigidly collective regarding economics, controlled by only one party and the political police without space for democrats, lacking respect for human rights and allied in the anti-Western battle side by side with Iran, North Korea and Syria. Transition, on the other hand, would represent Cuba's opening up to pluralism and democracy, with a high probability that

the path would lead to a democratic regime, an open economic market system and the existence of private property as happened in Eastern Europe at the end of 1989.

Direct support from the EU as described here encourage opposition and also quiet reformists of the regime, who maintain a silent confrontation with the hard liners and who wait for the right moment to arrive.

Obviously, the moral values, economic interests and political commitments of the European Union coincide with those of Cubans desiring transition towards freedom and not with those who wish to defend succession and the continuation of the dictatorship. There are, in fact, no positive elements for the EU in a post-Castro Cuba which maintains a Stalinist regime and which is, by definition, an enemy of all who believe in and sustain the European democracies.

Starting from this hypothesis, the inevitable question is this: What can the EU do to help with the transition? Without a doubt, there are at least seven measures they can take:

First: Declare that in the face of the juncture of succession or transition, the EU unreservedly supports transition towards forming a government similar to that of countries integrated into a democratic Europe. The EU only wishes for Cuba and other countries of the world what it wishes and defends for itself.

Second: In service of this moral coherence, the EU must formulate a clear and unconditional declaration in which it states that it supports without reservation a free referendum of Cuban society with great international presence. Through this, it can decide if it wishes to be subject to a dictatorial government – as is the case now – or if it prefers transition towards democracy.

Third: Vigorously denounce the violation of human and civil rights in Cuba and perhaps publish a “white paper” which records proven denunciations pertaining to this delicate topic.

Fourth: Declare its resolute support for democrats from the internal and external opposition, facilitate communication and contact and provide

information which demonstrates the strength of European solidarity with democrats to the Cuban government. Furthermore, make clear that its campaign of intimidation and harassment against accredited European diplomats in Cuba has had no effect.

Fifth: Encourage EU functionaries, members of the European Parliament or parliamentarians of member states to visit Cuba with the goal of meeting with democrats to demonstrate their solidarity and to send a clear signal to the Cuban government that the EU resolutely supports the change.

Sixth: Forge a common diplomatic front with Canada, the United States and various Latin American countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico and El Salvador to collectively defend the transition towards democracy and liberty in Cuba.

Seventh: Create a commission inside the EU that studies the type of cooperation and help that Europe can offer to Cuba in case the country chooses the path of transition to democracy and freedom.

These measures have a direct relationship with the ultraconservative strategy of Castroism. The dictatorship moves its propaganda machine in two directions. On the one hand, it bombards Cuban society with horrible, biased information about the Western way of life, from which the least alert Cuban can deduce that any change will bring a way of life similar to the Haitians but with a level of crime and insecurity like Sierra Leone. On the other hand, the propaganda of the regime aims to assure society, especially the ruling class, that nobody expects changes on the

island, except for the insistent North Americans and their allies from the “exiled mafia”.

Direct support from the EU as described here contributes to undermining the dictatorship’s propaganda campaigns and serves to support and encourage opposition and quiet reformists of the regime, who maintain a silent confrontation with the Stalinist hard liners and who wait for the right moment to arrive. The message will be very clear: the democrats of the whole world are waiting for the Cubans with open arms.

Carlos Alberto Montaner is a journalist and writer who has published more than twenty books on Cuba and democracy in Latin America. He founded the Cuban Liberal Union and is president of Liberal International.

CIVIC SOCIETY IN A TIME OF CHANGE

Jorge Olivera Castillo

Two typewriters suitable to be put on a pedestal in a museum of antiquities; several dozen books on different topics (fiction, journalism, human rights and history) and newspaper articles written by myself: all these things had already become heritage to be remembered. Since March 18 2003, they have formed part of the evidence finally used by the police to incriminate me in a bizarre trial that culminated in an eighteen year prison sentence for alleged counterrevolutionary activity.

In the provincial prison of Guantanamo, more than 900 kilometres away, a series of barbarities were taking place. First, it was the tiny space in a cell infested with mosquitoes and rodents, the lack of sunlight, poor food, and water for personal hygiene and thirst overflowing with parasites and earth. Secondly, there were the unbearably hot cubicles which one had to share with criminals and lunatics who were hard to live with and whose harshness was further

encouraged by systematic violence and attempted suicides.

In my mind, I recalled over and over my misery, pictured with tints of surrealism which marked and still marks my existence, and the fury of a district attorney who passionately insisted on branding me a mercenary.

The furniture which my parents bought in 1961 lay scattered around the hall like pieces taken from a work

of fiction, the missing refrigerator, in short the scarcity of it all. Yet the most frequent accusation against dissidents concerned and still concerns the spectacular funding, the thousands of dollars supposedly sitting in my cupboards. Yet poverty has names and has faces, often marked by desolation. Arduous is the labour of those who opt to put their honour before their fear.

MINIMUM STANDARD

Can a civic society overwhelmed by the burden of misery grow? Is it realistic to expect truly significant progress if the repression combines with traces of existential situations which could be called tragedies?

It is unjust to cry that external actors are absolutely indifferent to this issue. Whatever desire to absolutize the wish and will to support any type of help, be it humanitarian, professional or moral, can be thwarted by facts.

It would be a great contribution to design or coordinate a policy which would deal objectively and clearly with offering substantial help to those committed to a peaceful transition to democracy. To adopt such a position should not be considered an infringement of rules. Rather, it is an act which would demonstrate a governments' and societies' commitment to tolerance, plurality of ideas and participation of citizens in solving the various problems of the country (these are premises for which thousands of Cubans face the official gallows).

Logically, there would not be simply a condemning rhetoric trying to make certain narcissistic poses legitimate. Apart from a campaign in which the murderer (the government) would pose as a victim (the dissidents), there would be other additional obstacles.

Considering the above, one cannot believe that the single-party regime will maintain a passive attitude. The immobilism, which manifests itself both in words and deeds, remains vital and remote from common sense, signalling that there are no prospects for the immediate future.

Therefore, the hypothetical willingness to extend solidarity would have to be set in a scope of will that cannot be discouraged by changes and inconsistencies. Otherwise, the reality would remain in a place where dreams and wishes are the only possible creations.

THE EU IN A TIME OF CHANGE

The announced revitalization of the Communist Party has been proclaimed as a relief of a convalescent Fidel Castro, who, no matter how you look at it, suffers from a serious disease. This is substantial proof that there is neither the will nor the conditions to enthrone another dictator.

Therefore, what should be considered is a certain degree of flexibility and the aim to provide extraordinary, or at least sufficient, courage for rationality and pragmatism to navigate in the tumultuous seas of a succession to power which for now seems channeled within normality.

On this chessboard, where good sense should win and open the country gradually and irreversibly up to democracy, there are external actors who have the opportunity to play a role which is undoubtedly very important, if not essential.

The European Union, for instance, could get more involved by introducing a systematic program of conferences, debates and talks dealing with the topic. This is how knowledge regarding different civic, intellectual

and environmental issues would be extended. It is obvious that people predestined to face great adversities will draw benefit from every sort of help.

Invitations to experts on the various problems and the possibility to interact in a space free of ideological locks would not only be an opportunity to debate but also to sustain the premises of diversity and responsibility which are inherent to democracy. Possible elements of proposals to be discussed openly in an unprejudiced atmosphere include reconciliation in societies traumatized by decades of conflict, the advantages and disadvantages of capitalism and the impact of cultural factors on development.

INTERNET WITHOUT FRONTIERS

One of the initiatives put into practice by some European embassies and which has proved very useful has been the provision of internet access in a country where information is controlled with an animal zeal.

Until now, there have been no negative incidents concerning this provision. The government has not launched any campaign to distort the role of this type of service.

The possibilities of providing access to the internet are modest due to the scarcity of computers but, undoubtedly, progress has been done. The main internet providers beyond the scope of the state are the establishments which the US government possesses in Havana. These were the forerunners and obviously the targets of subsequent verbal attacks, ranging from condemnation to more insulting language.

The fact that Europe and Canada maintain diplomatic and business relations with Cuba is not a sin. Regardless of successes and failures, it enables them

to act as interlocutors. Rather than observe the intentions of such relations, it is now more worthwhile to observe what in particular has been achieved in the sphere of human rights.

As leaders of the Cuban absolute power take so little action in this area, those who back and protect the peaceful labour whose only objective is a government based on rationality, legitimacy and respect of human dignity must redouble their efforts.

PROPAGANDA AGAINST DEVELOPMENT

There are agreements, investments, programmes and projects to support development in Cuba. However, it should be noted that their ability to bring about dynamic changes is zero. Nevertheless, a country devastated by decades of inefficiency, chaos and ridiculous strategies can always find some way to benefit. All of us, or almost all of us, are poor. It is a sentence dictated by the stigma of absurd regula-

tions and by the delirium of ideological proclamations.

Apart from control and diabolical distribution mechanisms, the state of Cuba cannot successfully handle the aid or capital provided by a number of daring entrepreneurs. Corruption, the unfair labour schemes which put workers into the category of slaves and the absence of a structure compatible with productivity became elements inherent to an unviable and terribly retrograde system.

Dissidents remain outside the circuit of both those who receive privileges and generous facilities derived from different transactions (government officials) and those who are given the breadcrumbs (a limited segment of people).

The propaganda has a rich vocabulary for description which links the notion of hostility to the voices of critics: lackey, traitor, worm, references to the animal.

PROVIDING ONLY WHAT IS NECESSARY

Cuban democrats expect a positive response from Europe at the juncture of the reorientation of an island marked by totalitarianism.

Not much is asked, only what is necessary for laying the foundations of a transition which would bring about balance and provide tools for repairing the consequences of a disaster.

As usual, there will be someone fencing with misleading words. It would not be strange to hear the word interference or some worse connotations.

The most brilliant gesture would be repentance, however negligible its manifestation may be, for establishing a madhouse rather than a republic.

Jorge Olivera Castillo, independent journalist of the "Group 75". Having served 20 months and 18 days of prison, he was conditionally released on December 6, 2004 for health reasons.



Photo by Dáisi Ferrer Ramírez

Public collection organized by Cuban Independent Doctors in Havana

RECOMMENDATION FOR MID-TERM STRATEGY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION TOWARDS CUBA

Nikola Hořejš, Kristina Prunerová
People in Need

This paper is comprised of recommendations for the mid-term strategy of the European Union towards Cuba. It was prepared by following the European NGOs that carry out projects in Cuba in support of independent civil society and it is thus based on their research on the island and interviews with civil society representatives:

- Asociación Española Cuba en Transición, Spain
- Christian Democratic International Centre (KIC), Sweden
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, United Kingdom
- Cuba Futuro, Netherlands
- Freedom House Hungary
- Fundación Hispano Cubana, Spain
- Iberoamerican Association for Freedom, Spain
- International Society for Human Rights, Germany
- Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Germany
- Lech Walesa Institute, Poland
- People in Need, Czech Republic
- People in Peril, Slovakia
- PONTES, Czech Republic
- Pontis Foundation, Slovakia
- Swedish International Liberal Center, Sweden

The paper aims to contribute to the discussion on EU policy towards Cuba and enhance the dialogue on Cuban policy between Ministries of Foreign Affairs, EU institutions, NGOs, and other relevant actors.

BACKGROUND

In the last evaluation of the Common Position of 1996, the European Council confirmed the further deterioration of the human rights situation in Cuba and decided to start working on a mid-term and long-term strategy. The presenters of this paper welcome this decision and believe that a reasonable strategy will enable the EU to assist Cuba in a peaceful transition towards democracy and a free society.

Our proposed strategy is based on the Common Position of 1996, which states that “a constructive engagement and a critical and comprehensive dialogue at all levels remained the basis for the European Union’s policy towards Cuba. The Council underlined its determination to pursue a genuine dialogue with the Cuban authorities as well as with Cuba’s peaceful political opposition

and civil society. Using the full range of its resources available, the EU will continue to offer to all sectors of society practical support towards peaceful change in Cuba.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The above mentioned organizations would like to offer their experience of working with Cuban independent civil society and monitoring the situation on the island, and thus suggest that the strategy should be based on the following areas of activities.

- 1) Strengthening the common policy of EU member states towards the regime.
- 2) Increasing support for independent civil society in Cuba as a key actor in a peaceful transition towards democracy.
- 3) Finding common ground with other international actors for an approach towards Cuba.

We consider an increase in support for Cuban independent civil society as important as EU policy towards the regime.

1. COMMON POLICY OF EU MEMBER STATES TOWARDS THE REGIME

Maintain pressure regarding the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights

The Cuban government has not respected any demands for the release of political prisoners and respect for human rights set as a condition by the EU for further negotiations concerning EU-Cuba relations. The overall human rights situation has worsened over the past year as reported by many international organizations.

It would be recommended to strengthen the appeal for the respect for human rights as well as insisting on a visit of the EU HR Special Envoy and on a visit of the International Committee of the Red Cross to the Cuban prisons. Any further cooperation with future Cuban leaders must be only entered into with the precondition of the release of political prisoners.

Not succession but democratic transition

As recent developments on the island show, the succession of power from Fidel Castro to his brother and Minister of Defense Raúl Castro is the scenario the regime is slowly pushing through. There is no doubt that this succession would preserve the totalitarian nature of the regime and oppression against the Cuban people who have had no possibility to decide if this is the fate they want for their country.

The EU should demand that the new heads of the regime organize free and fair elections with the presence of international observers and allow Cubans to decide on their future.

Punitive Measures Targeted at the Cuban Leadership

Pressure on the government to respect human rights should be complemented by targeted punitive measures. In particular, it should be considered regarding the top echelons of the Cuban government. HOMs in Havana should prepare a list of Cuban officials who are directly responsible for human rights violations. This list should be regularly updated, made public and distributed to EU member states. In response to the expulsions of EU politicians, EU diplomats and other visitors to Cuba, the EU should reciprocate by applying a visa ban on selected Cuban officials.

2.1 SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA

A well-informed, organized and structured civil society is the main guarantee of peaceful democratic transition that follows the wishes of Cubans themselves. EU member states and EU institutions should find ways to increase support to the independent civil society in Cuba and the international NGOs working within it.

Funding projects supporting Cuban independent civil society by the EU

Emerging civil society exist in Cuba that is able to partly evade the omnipresent state imposed control and survive its repressions. These movements are key to peaceful changes in Cuba. They cannot survive without at least modest support from the international democratic community. However, there are currently no common EU funding programs accessible to such groups. This narrows their choice when locating resources.

Financial support should include the establishment of a new funding instrument which would provide assistance to independent groups on the island oppressed by the regime. The funding instrument should be designed and implemented by a board composed of experts with experience on Cuba and transition to democracy.

The present funding of civil society through development cooperation and the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights has been limited in its reach. Their rules have prevented work with independent organizations that are denied legal registration inside the country. The existing EU funding programs should be modified to facilitate their access.

Forming an advisory body (task force) to coordinate policy making

The transition to democracy in Cuba is a process that will presumably last for many years. The Council of the EU or a group of member states should form an advisory body comprised of experts on Cuba and transition to democracy in communist and totalitarian regimes. This body (task force) would assess the key actors in transformation, design different alternatives for the strategy based on similar experiences in other regions and propose specific steps to be taken to implement this strategy.

Sharing the experience of transition to democracy from EU member states

Many EU member states have gone through successful transitions from a totalitarian regime to democracy and they are willing to share their experience with Cubans. Former actors of these transitions have become politicians that create present foreign policies of member states and try to implement their experience into new

EU policy. Experts from new EU member states should form part of the advisory body that will prepare the long-term strategy and future EU assistance to Cuba in transition to democracy.

There are numerous publications on European transitions to democracy that analyze the pros and cons of different aspects of transitions and compare the steps taken in each country. The EU and its member states should encourage the distribution of such information on transition at their missions and should support projects that present in Cuba both the European and Latin American transitions to democracy.

Free Flow of Information

All possible means should be employed to facilitate the free flow of information to Cuba. The diplomatic missions of EU member states should serve as an accessible source of information for

all Cuban citizens but also as reporters to their own countries monitoring the real situation in Cuba.

Every mission of an EU member state should be encouraged to have computers with internet connection accessible for the general Cuban public. It should also make available a selection of European newspapers, magazines and recently published books. At least some of these publications should be available in Spanish.

Emphasize Symbolic Elements of EU Policy towards Cuba

The opposition and Cuban citizens should know that they are internationally supported and that they are not alone. New symbolic measures should be implemented by EU diplomats in Havana – for example, personal visits to the families that have been subjected to an act of repudiation and to the leaders of independent civil society movements. They should also

invite civil society representatives to all public events organized by EU and member states embassies.

Although these measures might not have a tangible impact, they are an important symbolic gesture signaling that the EU is not satisfied with the response of the Castro regime to the January 2005 change in EU policy. As stated by one of the leading Cuban dissidents Oswaldo Payá, „the invitations (for the dissidents) were a sign of very high value”.

2.2 PROJECTS OF SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA THROUGH EUROPEAN ORGANIZATIONS

The presenters of this paper have gathered information about projects that have benefited independent civic society not controlled by the Cuban regime and which should be supported. The list does not exhaust all possibilities and the model case



Photo by Dita Gruberová

March of Damas de Blanco (Ladies in White) in Havana

studies do not necessarily represent the largest or most important projects in Cuba.

Free flow of information

Providing technical, financial and expert support to independent journalists and media is essential in a country where one cannot have internet access without special permission. Providing access to books, magazines, radio programs, uncensored internet and world media can be used to overcome the isolation the Cuban regime imposes on Cubans. Teleconferences held with members of the opposition and journalist help Europeans to understand the situation and provide much needed feedback.

Support to the victims of repression

It has proved crucial to distribute humanitarian and financial help to the victims and their relatives and support Cuban organizations and human rights defenders that themselves monitor the situation and help political prisoners. Simply monitoring human rights violations and helping victims to speak out and seek solidarity and support both inside and outside their country forces Cuban authorities not to ignore legal procedures. Managing European public solidarity funds for the prisoners and families has been a method of gathering support.

Labor rights and unions

Support to independent labor unions and their cooperation with international bodies lays the foundations for future social policies and the protection of labor rights. Public awareness campaigns about investment, corporate responsibility and labor rights, as well as monitoring violations, prevents the exploitation of the state monopoly by private companies operating in tourism and other sectors.

Education

Organizations supporting fully independent think tanks and educational centers inside Cuba help people to shape their ideas and learn to participate in free discussions. Lectures on human rights and international law have always been welcomed in Cuba, especially in its less developed regions. Scholarships, distance learning programs and expert exchanges help ordinary Cubans overcome their difficulties with traveling outside the island.

Sharing information on transformation

Information on countries that have recently undergone transformation and visits by those who participated in the process can prepare Cubans for various difficulties that any substantial change may bring. Leaders informed about transformation can prevent chaos and suggest viable solutions to the Cuban people.

Womens' rights and social work

The defense of womens' rights and the rights of the family is also being taken up by independent organizations that need support. These defend family values against the regime that denies many parents the right to decide freely about their children and the right of women, including in rural areas. Independent professional groups created from below, such as Independent Doctors and Pedagogues, bring self-organization and let people freely engage in helping marginalized communities.

Church organizations

Many of the above described activities are carried out under the protection of and with the help of many religious communities, themselves subject to oppression. The churches can act with relative independence and

at present should be preferred in providing humanitarian assistance, until humanitarian organizations can work without governments restraints.

Partnership of political parties

Any kind of transformation towards democracy is facilitated by a well structured and free system of political parties. For this reason, partnership with European parties, their foundations and international party groups, as well as regular visits is beneficial for Cubans.

For more background please refer to the following case studies and analysis.

3. FINDING COMMON GROUND FOR AN APPROACH TOWARDS CUBA WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

If independent, and in many ways unique, European policy is to be effective, it is important to find common ground with other relevant international actors, such as the US, UN and the countries of Latin America.

Despite apparent differences in their policies, there are already many shared elements. Common ground is a necessity for a peaceful transition and there are many similarities between the policies, among others:

- Political normalization is placed under the condition of democratic changes.
- The unconditional release of political prisoners is demanded.
- The USA, the UN, LA countries and the EU regularly criticize Cuba's human rights record.
- Both the USA and the EU offer humanitarian assistance and maintain regular dialogue on various issues with the Cuban authorities.
- Both the US and the EU maintain trade ties with Cuban companies.

CASE STUDIES

SUPPORT TO THE VICTIMS OF POLITICAL REPRESSION

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS IN SLOVAKIA AND THE SUPPORT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

Public collections in support of Cuban political prisoners have been designed to help those political prisoners arrested during the repressions in spring 2003 and their families. It is not unusual that the prisoners suffer from malnutrition and maltreatment and their families are often subject to persecution and acts of repudiation.

The Slovak-based Pontis Foundation, together with the Slovak NGO People in Peril, manages a public collection entitled "Help for the families of political prisoners in Cuba". The collection was initiated in September 2003 as part of a wider international support initiative to the prisoners, their families and victims of repression. Over 3 years, we collected a total of approximately 12,000 Euro, donated mostly by individuals. This was used for the direct support for 31 families of political prisoners, either in the form of cash or basic medical supplies that are difficult to obtain in Cuba. The only safe method of delivering humanitarian aid direct to the families is the use of volunteer travelers. These travelers often face problems

such as finding the location or actually meeting the people (it is not safe to ask openly for the house of a political prisoner nor to set up a meeting through phone calls). Therefore, they must be careful not to expose themselves or the families to danger. Taking place several times a year, these visits to the homes of political prisoners in towns and villages around the island have a important psychological and symbolic value for the victims' families. Their wives and mothers are active members of Damas de Blanco. As the regime tries to isolate them from the rest of the Cuban society and puts them under heavy psychological pressure, families highly appreciate contact with real people and moral support from Europe. Updated information about the prisoners and the needs of the families are then documented and exchanged with partners in international NGO networks.

Part of the collection is also the symbolic adoption of Cuban political prisoners by politicians –Ján Figel, member of the European Commission, Slovak members of the European Parliament from EPP/ED and PSE, and other Slovak politicians including Róbert Kaliňák, current Minister of the Interior, who donates 400 euro each year. The financial aid distributed to the families is used for basic living expenses and also occasional visits to the prison. The adopted prisoners and their fami-

lies also receive greater international protection. The politicians monitor "their" prisoner's health and watch for possible news of persecution or maltreatment. If they learn of such news, they try to intervene with Cuban and international organizations. Copies of letters of support are then taken by volunteer travelers to supported families in Cuba. Pavol Hrušovský, former Chairman of the Slovak parliament, intervened on behalf of the family of his adopted prisoner Luis Enrique Ferrero in December 2005 when they were stopped and threatened by a mob during a visit to the prison. He wrote directly to his counterpart, the Chairman of the Cuban Parliament and after his intervention the attacks on the family stopped.

This public collection also raises awareness among the Slovak public. The collection is an expression of solidarity by the people of Slovakia with dissidents and political prisoners in totalitarian countries that fight for the universal ideals of freedom and democracy. This sympathy is largely based on personal experience: before 1989 people in the former Czechoslovakia suffered under a similar regime and this fact is still a living memory.

Martin Pasiak

PONTIS Foundation / www.nadaciapontis.sk

WHAT DO THEY NEED?

People in Need has been regularly visiting families of political prisoners for almost ten years and since 2003, our volunteers have traveled ten times per year. What things do the prisoners and their families need?

Most of them ask for general medicines which are hard to buy in Cuba:

- Pain killers
- Anti-inflammatory medicines
- General antibiotics
- Antacids
- Insecticides
- Water purifiers
- Vitamins and nutrition supplements
- Medicine for arthritis and hemorrhoids

Financial help

The families are often forced to travel across half the island so as to visit their relatives in distant prisons. This can take two or three days. They have to buy everything the prisoner needs, including soap, toothpaste, clothes and canned food in the dollar shops and spend a lot on travel costs. They are banned from working and rely on help from relatives and Cuban human rights organizations. PIN brings them a small amount, depending on the donations made to our public collection. This represents less than the minimum Cuban wage and is insufficient for most Cubans.

Books and letters

The books which are popular among political prisoners include the biographies of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Aung San Su Kyi, Václav Havel, Primo Levi and Alexander Solzhenic. These are sometimes smuggled in due to the intellectual negligence of the prison guards. Any literature, fiction or modern history is also needed. Prisoners and their spouses very much welcome articles from the world press and letters of support.

Other

The families often ask for small cameras, which they could use to document "actos de repudio", attacks by mobs organized by the police.



Photo: PIN

European NGOs in workshop at the ICDC conference in Stockholm.

CASE STUDIES

FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION

HELPING INDEPENDENT JOURNALISTS IN CUBA

„When I was a samizdat journalist in communist Czechoslovakia, the only thing I was interested in was if someone from abroad could give me a simple copy machine. I felt that no foreigner understood our situation and that I couldn't follow any advice from the West,” a Czech journalist and editor told me when asked how best to support Cuban independent journalists.

An independent journalist in Cuba strives to become a reporter as similar as possible to one working in any free country. He likes to follow the same rules, use the same techniques and feel the same professionalism. Ironically, that is the very thing he is not allowed to do by the authorities. One of the most recently detained journalists in Cuba, Armando Betancourt Reyes, was arrested and beaten by the police when he dared to go to the poor suburbs of Camaguey to interview citizens evicted from their homes. He wanted to report for his news bulletin of a few pages which he then handed out to his neighbours (approximately 50 copies). As another Cuban journalist Jaime Leygonier put it, “he wanted to report on everyday and local problems”. Although he had previously written comments and sent reports to the exile media, the authorities stopped him when he tried to reach the audience inside Cuba.

The intended isolation by the regime is just one of many dilemmas a Cuban independent journalist has to solve. He has to write for the exile media and suffer being labeled a “mercenary” unless he wants to risk being immediately arrested for publishing a paper samizdat. He does not easily reach his natural audience and he cannot report and investigate. Therefore, he settles for commentaries, inevitably political. If he can report, it is often concerning persecuted people and he must therefore protect them and rely on anonymous sources. He is often denied formal training, but most importantly he wants to stay independent and needs help.

Independence – often misinterpreted as “living in a vacuum” – is just another synonym for traditional samizdat or the underground. It simply means that journalists do not belong to the state's media monopoly. In any other country, journalists work for the media and are paid with money. Cuban state propaganda has achieved its goal and today even some of those who support an independent media feel apprehensive about giving money to journalists not yet imprisoned.

In addition to the twenty-plus journalists in prison and the members of political and civil movements who write regularly, there are at least fifty active independent journalists on the island. They have to work alone as the police come down hard on anyone who

forms a group. The most recent example of such oppression was against the new movement called Jovenes sin Censura. They work with a small number of notebooks and often spend a few days traveling to the only available internet at the US Interest Section in Havana, where they wait in turns for a computer and are even not allowed to use a floppy disk. As internal samizdat is stopped by state security, they are forced to send their articles to the exile media. International disinterest, a lack of resources and the Cuban police place them in a situation where they can be presented to the outside world as spies.

For this reason, People in Need became involved in helping journalists. Recent programs have been based on the following areas:

PROVIDING MATERIAL HELP

When People in Need volunteers first visited groups of journalists in the provinces outside Havana, they found almost no computers or other equipment. For example Guillermo Farinas' group of twenty young journalists relied on one ten-year-old computer.

It is almost humorous to see how a simple notebook can turn into something more dangerous than a gun in the eyes of the Castro regime. Cuban journalists find themselves in a world where they compete with pictures and

video using only audio and paper. Furthermore, paper is an expensive commodity. They need digital cameras and computers but must often then go to the US Interest Section to learn how to use them.

We now know that distributing several old notebooks can never saturate the demand, as the equipment is often seized by the state security forces.

ACCESS TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD

As everyone who writes, journalists need perspective which they can only form from international newspapers and magazines to which they have no access. They need the internet and an untapped phone. For a long time, we have been lobbying for internet access at the diplomatic missions in Havana and the regular sending of books to Cuba. Journalists also need foreign media to accept their articles and reward them financially so that they can pay minimum living costs. In this, they are helped by Europeans who read their work and translate it for their

local editors. This work has been facilitated greatly by Cuban exile journals yet the mainstream media continues to ignore the high quality of Cuban independent journalists.

LEGITIMACY

Primarily, Cuban journalists need understanding and support from Europeans, so as to view themselves as journalists and counter state propaganda. In the case of the distinguished journalist and press agency head Guillermo Farinas, he began a hunger strike more than seven months ago to call for uncensored internet and to prove he wrote for his principles rather than foreign money.

There are many Europeans who still believe Castro's propaganda that many Cuban journalists are not doing honest and important work, despite exiled journalists such as Raul Rivero doing a lot to help their image. Therefore, it is important to explain what their work is, to help them publicly and demonstrate that helping them is natural in

a democracy and does not diminish their objectivity or free reporting.

It is of no surprise that one of the longest sentences given in 2003 was reserved for a journalist. Omar Rodríguez Saludes was sent to prison for 27 years. Europeans that have visited him remember well the poor conditions he lived in and his almost stubborn willingness to show visitors both the bright and dark side of his country. Haunted by this memory and shocked by the arrest, People in Need and other organizations were inspired to regularly visit the families of the imprisoned journalist, to donate modest amounts of money and to denounce maltreatment and new arrests. The most common sentence journalists used to face in communist Central Europe was between one – two years in jail. "No one can expect anyone to write samizdat when they face the threat of 20 years in prison," says the editor mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Nikola Hořejš

People in Need / www.peopleinneed.cz

ORGANIZING A TELECONFERENCE

In January 2006, the Lech Walesa Institute organized a video conference between representatives of the Cuban opposition and President Lech Walesa to show solidarity with pro-democracy activists in Cuba and to offer them moral support. A major indicator of success was the fact that about 100 people attended the conference in Havana, including diplomats from Poland and other Eastern European states as well as international journalists. Needless to say, it was the first opportunity for Cuban opposition figures to talk

to Lech Walesa and personally ask him for support and advice. The teleconference was widely commented on in Europe and USA and was met with criticism from the Cuban government.

This particular initiative showed that organizing such an event is not possible without close co-operation with your Foreign Ministry, the U.S. Interest Section and other diplomatic missions in Havana. It is thanks to the collaboration between these bodies that we could avoid communica-

tion difficulties and gather together such a large number of people in one place.

Furthermore, the video conference was particularly difficult to organize due to the fact that not all diplomatic missions are equipped with a video conferencing set, which is extremely expensive.

Agnieszka Gratkiewicz

Lech Wales Institute

COOPERATION BETWEEN CUBAN AND SLOVAK EDUCATIONAL EXPERTS

In 2005, PIPA (the People in Peril Association) initiated a project entitled "Supporting the Work of Independent Think-Tank Representatives in Cuba". The objective of the project was to encourage and facilitate the development of independent non-ideological research organizations, encourage critical thinking, provide space for open debate and opinion change, and initiate a transfer of know-how from the post-communist Slovakia to communist Cuba.

This project began with an educational research group established in Cuba which collected contributions from Cubans across the island skilled in the topic with the aim of preparing a draft document on possible education reform. A roadmap of key topics had been prepared beforehand and five weekend "opinion exchange" meetings were organized. The meetings were attended by approximately 40-50 teachers/professors from Pinar del Río and other provinces. A voluminous 95-page paper entitled "Propuesta ética para un proyecto educativo de inspiración cristiana para Cuba" was completed in July 2005 and was subsequently commented on by several Slovak educational experts. The Slovak experts most frequent praised the social context of the document and the Cuban authors, attempts to locate an educational model that does not restrict itself solely to the school but rather includes a variety of shareholders (family, church, civic society) that contribute to education. On the other hand, the most frequent objections of the Slovak experts concerned the under-estimation of the role of the school, the Christian character of the paper and the uncertain objective of the entire proposed reform.

The 2006 project Preparing Independent Think-Tank Representatives for the Future Cuban Transition goes further and involved more Cuban stakeholders and the higher involvement of a Slovak specialist. More concretely, the project enabled direct interaction between Cuban educators and a Slovak expert in the field, sent to Cuba to carry out the lectures and discussions with Cubans. Unfortunately, Zuzana Humajova, our educational analyst from the Conservative Institute, visited Cuba in February/March 2006 but was only able to personally carry out two lectures about the changes in Slovak educational system after 1989 (in Havana and Pinar del Río). However, the educators from the provinces of Holguin, Matanzas and Santiago de Cuba were involved in the project during the subsequent trip of PIPA activists who distributed the written version of the Humajova analysis and encouraged Cuban educators to write their own analysis of the state of the Cuban education system and present proposals for its future reform.

Before the lecture, the role of Cuban educational experts was described very clearly, i.e. the structure, content and formal requirements necessary for their analysis/contribution. The lecture in the Pinar del Río province met with a high level of interest, with a variety of questions asked and a lively discussion. The educators expressed interest in receiving the Slovak National Program of Formation and Education. On the other hand, teachers in the Havana province were practically and locally orientated and did not have a high degree of technical knowledge about the education system and possible reforms.

Besides holding lectures and discussions with independent educators and teachers, during her trip Zuzana Humajova also collected information to elaborate an analysis on the current state of the Cuban educational system and to propose the reforms she considers as crucial. To date, PIPA has also collected 15 analyses/proposals from the Havana and Pinar del Río provinces.

Rather than engaging in "analytical" work, the Cuban educators mostly limit themselves to an empirical description of the faults of the Cuban educational system. It was particularly common that participating educators would write that a strategy and a complete change is needed but without providing concrete recommendations.

Cuban independent researchers do not work in free conditions, are subjected to threats and harassment from the regime and live in a isolated country where all information is submitted to censorship and strong propaganda. Cuban educators' lack of knowledge is completely understandable due to the long-term isolation of the island in its propaganda. Therefore, the fact that many of those who contributed to the project were able for the first time, asked to formulate their opinion, can be perceived as a real success. The project was an important activating mechanism for participating educators to recognize their responsibility for developments in the Cuban education system following regime change.

Ivana Kullová

Cuban Projects Coordinator

People in Peril Association / www.peopleinperil.sk

OVERCOMING THE INFORMATION BARRIER

The fact that some Europeans speak the same language as Cubans is one reason to support those in Cuba begging for information on the island. The potential impact of more than 150,000 Spanish tourists visiting Cuba every year is an issue that European institutions should focus on so as to contribute to a peaceful transition on the island. Fidel Castro repeatedly attempts to strengthen the barrier between tourists and Cuban citizens. The common sense of Spanish tourists provides the possibility to demolish that barrier.

The "Asociación Española Cuba en Transición" regularly spreads information among universities all over the country asking those students who travel to Cuba to bring books to families, parishes and Cuban democrats who are working to build a real civil society on the island. A number of people, among them many

Spanish NGO's, collect similar materials and ask Spanish tourists to get in touch with people in Cuba who are eager for information. These books are not about politics but about different subjects (literature, the Spanish media on Cuba, history books) that Cubans are interested in but which they don't have access to because the Cuban government doesn't allow it.

It is not easy to measure the real impact that these activities can have. Our experience during recent years shows that a lot of people use the materials brought by Spanish tourists. Furthermore, these written materials are often prized possessions as this is the only way to read something that does not come directly from the Cuban government.

But that is not enough. The limits of what tourists can do are obvious. The

materials carried by tourists are difficult to transport to distant regions that tourists do not visit. The amount of books they are allowed to carry is limited and, considering the current situation in Cuba, it is not easy to create a real network through which all the information can be shared.

European governments and institutions should be able to create alliances with non-government institutions in Cuba, supporting them in their dangerous work of spreading information freely. The Spanish media, that produces thousands of radio programs in Spanish every year, should be able to transmit some relevant programs to Cuba as has been done in Equatorial Guinea and by other stations in Cuba.

Matías Jove, AECT / www.cubaentransicion.es

RADIO PRAGUE: FROM TOTALITARISM TO DEMOCRACY

Radio Prague is an FM radio station broadcasting worldwide in six languages. The aim of the station is to mediate the Czech reality and experience to foreign listeners. We represent the Czech Republic as a developed state with broad cultural traditions that come from its position as the European cultural crossroads. Yet at the same time, we do not deny the range of problems that have stemmed from the post-communist transformation process.

Since we believe that some elements of this transformation process are common in all post-communist countries, we introduced a weekly Spanish-language program entitled From Totalitarianism to Democracy in March 2005. This is an approximately ten-minute weekly feature. We try to cover all aspects of the

transformation process – from law, social issues and education to armed forces or corruption. The program gives voice to the main actors of the transformation process, analysts, even communists who are now members of the official political opposition. We hope that in spite of the long friendly relationship between Czechoslovakia and Cuba, the Cubans will not see this Czech experience as condescending.

The first reaction came from Cuban exile radios in Florida. Later, listeners from Cuba started to respond. Their letters are full of caution. Generally, they write about different shows on Radio Prague or about themselves; only some of them dare to mention the From Totalitarianism to Democracy show. It turns out that radio broadcasting, unlike the internet, is one of

the few activities that are difficult to control or limit effectively. To achieve better coverage in the Caribbean region, Radio Prague uses a transceiver in Canada.

We really appreciate letters from our listeners in Cuba for the feedback they provide. It is sad that our replies, which often include small presents such as pens or stickers, often arrive opened and without their content. Despite this, the experience of listening to Radio Prague in Cuba and other Latin American countries is a positive one. All of this contributed to Radio Prague's new program called On the Road to Democracy for our listeners in ex-Soviet countries. All Radio Prague shows are also available on the internet on www.radio.cz.

Miroslav Krupicka, Director of Radio Prague

REPORTING FROM CUBA

Opinion by Juan Gonzalez Febles

Cuba's independent press is an essential sector of the island's civic society. In fact, some consider it to be the "gem of the opposition". It is made up of a group of people of whom the most is expected, the most is asked yet they are also the last to be taken into consideration. The independent press can be seen as something between another opposition group and the most active element of a fledgling Cuban civic society.

The independent press is a favourite target of the official media which operates in the service of Fidel and Raúl Castro. Moreover, it is attacked by the pro-castro left in Europe, the United States and Latin America.

It is not easy to be an independent journalist in Cuba. As happens to his counterparts in the rest of the world, an independent journalist in Cuba must also deal with pressure resulting from the interests of whoever is in power, which will eventually capitalize, whether he likes it or not. He must cling to what he considers right and proper. Furthermore, he can see himself as maintaining balance in direct confrontation with a ruthless dictatorship.

For more effective political action, he must depoliticize his work. He has to ask of himself much more than a journalist in other circumstances would do. An independent journalist cannot be wrong. Mistakes are paid for by long

years of prison or by something worse: defamation.

An independent journalist in Cuba must be a chronic paranoid by definition, capable of reading signals in the wind. He depends on sources which, in the majority of cases, he cannot reveal. He must protect them and strengthen trust in his work. He must create the conditions for sources to feel safe and denounce without hesitation the evil men hidden behind the official or executive seats.

He must guarantee that the dirty laundry of the wicked will be washed in public. He must banish the myths and stereotypes created by the official propaganda.

Although different points of view exist, a Cuban independent journalist is a free-lancer par excellence. Being a member of an independent press agency can be a reason for investigation and inquiry by the State Security Police.

To be on the trail of several dozen unrestricted individuals (electrons) is more difficult and arduous than to pursue a centralized and localized group whose actions can, after all, be controlled and predicted.

Therefore, the main problem of an independent journalist goes far beyond mere material survival.

THE MASKED REGIME

To report from Cuba is to demonstrate one's goodwill and one's love for journalism, Cuba, its people and freedom. In spite of this fact, more than 90% of independent journalists in Cuba do not even have a laptop. They also lack hardware such as flash drives, a scanner, a printer and so on, not to mention basic equipment such as a camera or even a notebook and a pen.

In relation to this, it should be said that the labours of the Cuban independent press has compelled the dictatorship to put on a mask. The official position has been adjusted to such an extent that the state-run distribution chain now sells hardware elements with which you can arm your PC.

Naturally, the catch is the unfair prices of these products. The prices are such that a common citizen – and much less an independent journalist – cannot afford them and therefore is denied access.

Possession of a PC is, after all, no longer forbidden by the regime. Yet this equipment cannot be owned because of the price at which it has been valued.

Criticism and accusations against the regime have been of much help when made directly in Cuba, by the exile in other capitals around the world or by NGOs such as Reporters without Borders and People in Need.

The recent hunger strike carried out by my colleague, Guillermo Fariñas, has had a strong effect. So has the public which has slowly begun to demand the dictatorship take responsibility. As a result, change has taken place, albeit it hypocritically, in the regime's original position towards access to the internet.

Nowadays, the regime of Fidel and Raúl Castro, represented by its official civil servants, claims access to the internet is "limited" due to the American embargo. This means that this service may be contracted without any problems by foreigners and the regime's infantry.

As usual, Cuban citizens are excluded from this, unless they have internet access through by a foreigner.

Everybody fails to understand why no EU member states have rented this service for independent journalists. I can provide a very illustrative example based on my own experience at one of the few meetings I have attended. The host of this event was Michael Klepsch,

the counsellor of the German mission in Havana. His country presided over the European Union at that time and at this meeting, I heard this honorable gentleman saying something I believe was pathetic and disappointing.

Mr. Klepsch, distressed, stated that they (the diplomats) could not risk to upset the administration of Fidel and Raúl Castro. By doing so, they would become "cut-off". And this, according to the interpretation of the respected diplomat, would be a failure of his office in Havana. No further comments are needed.

Moreover, the sponsors of the Cuban independent press are reluctant, or find it impossible, to grant journalists the privilege of decent salaries, in accordance with international standards.

The Castro propaganda machine, with its efficient intelligence and counter-intelligence police force and groups of pro-regime intellectuals all over the world, are committed to an unrelenting campaign against free journalism in Cuba.

The failure of the line proposed by the Spanish government of Mr Rodríguez Zapatero points out the kind of help and policies which are of most benefit to freedom and democratization. It is not by pleasing the dictatorship or by making concessions that Cuba can be helped.

As far as help is concerned, it would be invaluable if every European diplomatic mission opened at least one internet establishment with at least five computers. These computers would represent immense support for Cuba's independent press as well as for the internal opposition and the emerging civic society.

Just a little strength, determination and political will would be a benchmark, the triumphant formula through which to defeat a dictatorship which is heading towards its expected and foreseeable end.

Juan Gonzalez Febles is a Cuban independent journalist who regularly publishes at www.cubanet.org



Photo: PIPA

Meeting of Independent Pedagogues in Havana

CASE STUDIES

SUPPORT TO INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONS AND CHURCHES

ADVOCATING FOR CHURCHES IN CUBA

In Cuba, the Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) focuses on the issue of religious freedom – working to monitor, document and analyze both individual cases and the overall situation. We take action if the opportunity arises and we have permission from those involved. This takes the form of political advocacy, working with the press, and activating our network of supporters for urgent action.

Historically, the majority of church leaders in Cuba have been very fearful of being involved in any activity that could be construed as critical of the government and its policies. Church leaders from all denominations, including those that do and do not belong to the government sanctioned Cuban Council of Churches, preferred to concentrate solely on “spiritual matters” as the safest policy for both them and their congregations.

This was the case when CSW first visited the island seven years ago. While church leaders spoke of difficulties, including systematic discrimination and the use of government informants within the churches, they requested that no advocacy be carried out. They preferred not to “provoke” the government.

However, a number of church leaders from all denominations are becom-

ing increasingly vocal, speaking out on issues affecting human rights, religious liberty and democracy. This includes young church leaders, who have grown up under Castro, as well as older leaders who managed to survive under the restrictions but are now angry after waiting for decades for changes that have not arrived. Many, both young and old, feel that they have nothing left to lose.

We are aware of a number of cases of church leaders from the Cuban Council of Churches (CCC) who are becoming more and more outspoken on issues related to human rights and religious liberty. At least one has been arrested for this and we have received reports that at least 10 pastors from CCC member denominations have defected in recent years and, according to our source, “not for economic reasons”.

CSW’s advocacy, which has increased in recent years at the request of Cuban church leaders, has focused on individual cases and the overall situation of religious liberty. Over the past year, we have been particularly concerned about new legislation that was implemented in late 2005. Directive 43 and Resolution 46 on “the holding of religious services in personal property homes” (targeting house churches) have the potential to severely curtail religious freedom in

Cuba. They contain a number of clauses in direct contravention to international human rights law. While they have not been implemented across the board, CSW is aware of a number of cases of church closures, confiscations, fines and even demolitions that have taken place under the new legislation.

Political advocacy and the activation of supporter networks seem to have been successful in at least two cases over the past year.

The first of the cases was the threat to close and demolish the Baptist Church of Yamanigüey (a remote village in Eastern Cuba) around Christmas last year. It appeared that the local CP authorities were shocked at the fact that the international community knew what was happening at all and quickly rethought their tactics. In this case, the order for demolition was rescinded and CP officials actually came to make a personal apology to church leaders. They went so far as to say that the local official responsible for the original order would be punished. However, CSW continues to be concerned that the church has yet to receive official authorization to exist and continues in a precarious position.

The second case concerned the detention of Pastor Carlos Lamelas, who was arrested and imprisoned in February and

held for 126 days without charge. Sources reported that this was due to his calls for increased religious freedom. This case was also significant because Pastor Lamelas was formerly the president of the Church of God denomination, part of the CCC. He was apparently removed from that office when the denomination came under pressure from Caridad Diego, the Minister for Religious Affairs. After his family finally overcame their fear to request political advocacy, the EU was asked to make appeals on his behalf. Two weeks later, he was released

but has yet to be told exactly why he was arrested in the first place. He and his family continue to live in fear that he will be detained again.

These two cases ended with positive results. However, there are countless more that do not. As is always the case with Cuba, the primary difficulty is to obtain information early enough that something can actually be done, for example before an arrest or a demolition takes place. The other difficulty is for the Cubans themselves to over-

come their fear and request international action. Finding secure methods of communication is always a major issue. However, it has become increasingly apparent over the past few years that more and more Cubans, from all walks of life but particularly within both official and unofficial churches, see no alternative but to speak out on these issues, regardless of the cost.

Lena Lopez

Christian Solidarity Worldwide / www.csw.org.uk

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Cuba has been repeatedly criticized for its non-compliance with international labor conventions. The political restriction of workers rights includes the holding of various labour rights activists in prison, imposing a monopoly on employment and labour unions and employing a double currency to excessively tax the workers in foreign companies. The slavery of Cubans working abroad is also rampant.

One of the activities of Cuba Futuro is the promotion of corporate social responsibility and labour rights in Cuba. Cuba Futuro is co-founder of the Grupo por la Responsabilidad Social Corporativa en Cuba (GRSCC), through which 35 NGOs from the EU, the USA and also Latin America have worked together since April 2005. Their goal is to create awareness in Europe about the risks and ethical problems involved in investing in a dictatorship like Cuba. During its second conference in May 2006, a Socialist MP called on Spanish investors to leave Cuba. He argued that those who invest in such a country will be later accused of having allied themselves with a dictatorship.

Prior to this, Cuba Futuro, together with Dutch trade unions, raised the issue of investment and government subsidies for Dutch investors in Cuba. The Dutch Social Democrats were the first to vote in favour of cancelling subsidies to Dutch entrepreneurs who invest in Cuba. Entrepreneurs have to accept the conditions of the Cuban state which are in violation of international labour conventions. In this way, the investor is an accomplice in these violations and contributes to the maintenance of an internationally condemned dictatorship.

In June 2006, Cuba Futuro, together with Joel Brito, director of the GRSCC, and the president of the Colombian union Fedepetroquim (Christian Trade Union CTC), explored the possibilities in Colombia of concrete solidarity between Colombian trade unions and workers in Cuba. The talks in Bogota resulted in various protest letters to the Cuban authorities and declarations of solidarity with their unfortunate counterparts. Plans were developed to promote contact between Colombian trade unions and independent trade unions in Cuba. Similar plans were previously discussed with trade

unions and NGOs in Argentina, which are yet to be implemented.

Cuba Futuro continues to follow the concrete case of the violation of international labour conventions by Cuba and the national dockyard in Curacao, where Cuban workers are heavily exploited, even to the level of slavery. In 2005, three workers managed to escape and Cuba Futuro and the Colombian CTC helped them to receive asylum in Colombia and finally leave for the USA. Cuba Futuro made this scandal of labour exploitation public at the international level. The authorities in the Netherlands and Curacao were questioned about the conditions in the dockyard and the role of the Cuban state in the labour agreement. As a consequence, working conditions initially improved, but no structural change has yet occurred. An international lawsuit against Cuba and the dockyard is being prepared. In addition, Cuba Futuro assists Cuban medical doctors who decide to desert when sent to work in Latin America in finding a safer future.

Ben Schennink and Liduine Zumpolle,

Cuba Futuro / www.cubasindical.org

CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA

Marie Peřinová and Nikola Hořejš

Civil society is usually defined as a realm between the state and the family which contains citizens who act collectively in order to promote or defend their interests from the state. Since in every society a great variety of interests exist, it is inevitably a diverse and pluralistic concept. Civil society thus encompasses associations of many different types, such as women's organizations, social and welfare associations, intellectual clubs, trade unions and so on.

In every country, civil society stands in a very complex relationship towards the state, which includes competition and mutual struggle as well as necessary cooperation. The first is inevitable as citizens often promote interests that would increase their rights at the expense of the rights of the state. The latter must at least partially occur as well, if civil society is to work effectively, as the state provides civil society with the legal framework and necessary limitations where it could harm the rights of an individual.

The relationship between civil society and the state is apparently even more complicated in an authoritarian regime. The non-democratic regime strives to encompass civil society into its structures, for example by founding mass organizations which would

guarantee that people claim only those interests that can be controlled by the state. Other, more spontaneously founded associations are rather suppressed by the regime.

Cuba is no exception. For example, the Union of Young Communists (Unión de Jovenes Comunistas) is the largest youth organization in Cuba and the Cuban Constitution states its chief role as "to promote the active participation of the youth masses in the task of building socialism and to prepare the youth to be mature citizens able to accept the great responsibilities benefiting to our society" (Article 6, Chapter 1 of the Constitution of 1976, revised in 1992). Similarly, the Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas) was founded to represent Cuban women in 1960. These mass organizations have been established by the state and are under strict state control.

The mass organizations do not serve to defend the interests of the citizens, but rather associate citizens in order to ensure their support of state policies. Therefore, active citizens who want to promote particular interests or provide services that the state is not able to guarantee begin to establish small associations, both registered and illegal. In Cuba, we can see the recent emergence of many such indi-

viduals and groups of citizens, such as independent doctors, independent libraries, independent teachers, independent trade unions and so on. Some of them operate as individuals whereas some as reasonably organized and structured groups, yet all strive to work in a public sphere and promote their interests which makes them, in our opinion, a part of the emerging civil society in Cuba.

CIVIL GROUPS OR OPPOSITION?

The regime's monopoly on civil groups mean there is no legal space for them and they have become as illegal as the political opposition. The main rule of an authoritarian regime is that every single aspect of life should or must be political. This doctrine subsequently means that nobody who intends to work independently of the state can avoid politics, no matter how hard he tries. This has to be understood in any analysis of Cuban civil society.

Political groups are indistinguishable from civil groups in concerning whether they participate in power, as as oth have been denied this for more than forty years. On the other hand, the civil groups differ as they take on smaller and more practical issues and not being aimed primarily at complex reforms.

For example, the Asamblea Para Promover la Sociedad Civil en Cuba (APSCC), presided over by Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello, held a meeting of small political and civil groups in 2005, where they worked on suggestions for a future transformation towards democracy. Hence they participated in a body, considered one of the main present oppositional political initiatives in Cuba. This gave them the possibility of overcoming their fragmentation as well as work in specialized expert committees.

There are many other groups that would be regarded as civil movements in a democratic country. These are mainly human rights defenders and organizations that support the victims of repressions. The well known example is Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional led by Elizardo Sánchez or Fundación de Derechos Humanos based in Ciego de Ávila.

FILLING IN THE GAPS

Generally speaking, civil society in Cuba is still rather rudimentary. Often, the role was taken by an active individual and the process of gathering active people around him/her cannot be fast in a society where all public activities are under the scrutiny of state security. The associations often have national goals, but their work is usually locally-based as traveling on the island is expensive and difficult for Cubans. Therefore, communication with similar groups in another city is limited. Nevertheless, there are some who began successful activities, a noteworthy act when taking into account the rigid environment of the authoritarian regime.

The basic objectives of civil society associations in Cuba are two-fold. Many associations developed from individuals realizing that the state does not fulfill its responsibilities

sufficiently in some fields. This is the case with the independent doctors who decided to provide medical help to those who cannot be treated in ordinary hospitals (relatives of political prisoners, the poor and all those discriminated against by the regime). Independent libraries may be viewed from the same perspective – they are operated because the state does not provide adequate access to literature (not only books with political or historical content, but also children's books and novels which are often lacking in Cuba). Most Cuban civil society associations thus form structures which act as an alternative to those created by the state and delivering a service to the Cuban public.

Secondly, many civil society associations soon went further with their objectives and strived to point out publicly the social gaps neglected by the state. For example, some independent doctors publicly reveal the



Photo by Omar Rodríguez Saldaña

Oswaldo Payá returning from Europe after receiving Sakharov award in 2002

worsening state of Cuban hospitals and the unwillingness of the official medical bodies to inform the public about dirty drinking water which causes severe epidemics. They not only provide an alternative service, but also ask the state for the correction of the situation. They send complaints to the authorities (regarded as a rather safe activity) or inform the international community, which is often the reason for persecution by the state authorities. By carrying out these activities, Cuban civil society slowly takes over a second and important role: advocacy and lobbying.

For this reason, civil society organizations in Cuba are, in our view, an important part of the opposition and may contribute to transition in Cuba. Although they often do not have political goals, they help expand the space for the participation of an individual in society and defend many of the natural rights of the Cuban people which are denied by the government.

In the chapters below, we describe the most important fields of civil society in Cuba, as encountered by PIN travelers during their visits to the island. We depict the following as the most important yet are aware that there may be many more which deserve mentioned.

Independent journalists are often considered an element of civil society, however unusual this would be considered in a democratic country. Independent journalists strive to break governmental propaganda and reveal the real situation on the island. They are persecuted for their work, no matter whether they deal with highly political issues or solely draw attention to social issues neglected by the government. In doing so, they are inevi-

tably involved in public affairs and in defending the interests of various groups.

INDEPENDENT LIBRARIES

Having an independent library is currently one of the most common opposition activities in Cuba. Although some independent libraries undoubtedly existed before, the idea of a network of independent libraries was born in 1998 after Fidel Castro's statement at the International Book Fair in Havana, that "in Cuba, no books are prohibited". The statement engendered an initiative of establishing small home-based libraries which offered books not available in official libraries operated by the Cuban government. Two Cuban activists – a married couple Berta Mexidor and Ramón Colas – were behind the initiative, both of them were later exiled. They are now in the board of directors of the Network of Independent Libraries in Cuba (Bibliotecas Independientes de Cuba) based in Miami.

Independent libraries are often considered as the only well organized structure on the island. Many of the independent libraries also serve as meeting places for dissidents and offer additional activities, such as commented reading, books presentations and seminars on different topics. This may offer a reason as to why so many independent librarians were arrested during the mass crackdown on the opposition in 2003.

The network requires librarians on the island to have at least 300 books, a catalogue, to keep the books visible and sorted by topic, and to make the library available to all. However, not all those with an independent library are tied to the rules. PIN travelers met individuals who had much less than 300 books but lent them openly

to a number of people. On the reverse, some librarians have a greater collection of books, but it is noticeable that these are not frequently lent out. Many of the independent libraries are administered by opposition activists of different kinds, for example political activists, independent doctors, independent journalists and so on. Having an independent library is thus the main opposition activity for some, but only an additional activity for others. The collections of books also differ from one library to another – some have books on history and political issues, others might be strictly apolitical and contain for example mainly books for children. Others have more specialized libraries. One of the largest independent libraries with about 500 books is administered by Julia Cecilia Delgado, the current leading person of the Liberal Democratic Party of Cuba.

The books in independent libraries are usually family collections and books given by friends. Most of the librarians also get books from the US Interest Section in Havana, which serves today as almost the only source of books (some foreign embassies have given books to dissidents, but it is a rather rare activity). Sometimes, the library owners are also sent some packages with books from abroad, but as Julia Cecilia Delgado claims these are often confiscated by customs. All independent library owners are thus very interested in getting books from other sources, as stated to PIN travelers. Since bringing books into the country via tourists is difficult and the books may be confiscated at the airport, the only alternative route seems to be through involving more embassies in giving books to librarians.

As far as the content is concerned, many librarians asked for books on history, politics and the transition

of Central and Eastern Europe. Books by Vaclav Havel and Milan Kundera were often mentioned as very popular. Others, however, prefer less “political” books which bring up some social and moral issues, but cannot be so easily considered anti-regime by the state security. Books for children are also not easy to find in Cuba, and are sought out by librarians.

INDEPENDENT TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES

In the mid-1990s, another part of Cuban civil society has emerged in the form of independent teachers. Roberto de Miranda has become the most known activist in this field. He is a well respected person among the opposition and one of the opposition activists arrested in spring 2003. He was sentenced to 20 year imprisonment but was released on medical parole in June 2004. In 1980s, he used to work as a professor of mathematics but was later fired from his post by school administrators for his alleged refusal to participate in public political acts. In 1992, he founded the Institute of Independent Pedagogues of Cuba (Colegio de Pedagogos Independientes de Cuba) which seeks “the de-ideologization of education in Cuba and denounces violations against students and professors who do not share the political ideals of the system.” The Institute today is run by Roberto de Miranda and his sons. In their house, they organize meetings of teachers who were fired from schools for political reasons or who do not agree with the regime.

Roberto de Miranda also organizes classes of English, mathematics and the history of Cuba for children and has administered the Félix Varela Independent Library since July 2000, which includes a greater collection of books for children. The institute claims to

organize hundreds of independent teachers from different provinces who give lessons in their homes and create a system of education alternative to the state-run system.

INDEPENDENT DOCTORS AND PHARMACIES

In recent years, Cuban civil society has experienced a growing number of independent doctors and independent pharmacies. This sector may be regarded as the core of today’s civil society in Cuba and a kind of bond

Many associations developed from individuals realizing that the state does not fulfill its responsibilities sufficiently in some fields. This is the case with the independent doctors who decided to provide medical help to those who cannot be treated in ordinary hospitals.

between ordinary Cubans and the opposition – the activities of independent doctors are apolitical enough and easily understandable for ordinary Cubans, but at the same time include a political aspect of revealing the gaps in the state-run health system in Cuba and the inability of the Cuban government to solve the problems.

Independent doctors are usually people who were fired for political reasons and doctors who still work in hospitals but decided to help all

in need after working hours. The patients of independent doctors are often former political prisoners and their families who may have problems in receiving adequate treatment in ordinary hospitals. Many independent doctors, however, decided to help all those in need, including the poor and patients with HIV/AIDS. The independent doctors often have pharmacies in their homes yet due to the general shortage in medicine in Cuba, the doctors rely solely on the supplies of medicines from abroad.

Although the Cuban health system is often praised as the best in Latin America by the media, the statements of Cuban doctors testify that the situation is far from being so favorable. For example, Sandra Dominguez, an independent doctor from Santa Clara has stated that hospitals often have broken windows and ventilation, insufficient lights, bathrooms without showers and so on. The quality of food and water is usually inadequate. Darsí Ferrer, an independent doctor based in Havana, criticized the Cuban government for sending many doctors for humanitarian missions abroad as a part of the aid program to Latin American countries while the health system in Cuba is suffering from a serious lack of medical staff. Another independent doctor – Arturo Pedro Hernández Cabrera from Cienfuegos – claims that although there should be one doctor for 120 families, one doctor has to almost take care of up to 1000 families, due to the lack of doctors in Cuba.

The lack of drugs represents another serious problem in the Cuban health care system. The independent doctors confirm that there is severe shortage in drugs against ordinary illnesses, such as antibiotics, sedatives, vitamins, pain-killing and anti-

inflammatory pills etc. Other medical equipment, such as injections and bandages are also often lacking. As Darsí Ferrer says, the shortage in drugs is not experienced only by pharmacies and hospitals for foreigners. Generally, the medicines are also expensive for ordinary Cubans, especially with regard to their average monthly wage of 250 peso (app. 11 USD).

In recent months, Darsí Ferrer has strived to draw attention to another serious problem – the bad quality of drinking water in Cuba. In his opinion, Cuban official medical authorities are unwilling to warn people against the drinking of dirty water as the government conceals the problem so as not to discourage foreign tourists. The Cubans, in his view, often do not know that they should boil the water or use water-purifying tablets and various diarrhea epidemics caused by dirty water thus continue to spread all

over the island and may severely endanger the population, especially children.

Another problem rests on the fact that politically active people are sometimes discriminated against in the provision of medical care. Most political prisoners' families have testified that so far they have been unable to obtain medicines, often as a result of the political activity of a family member. One of the former political prisoners said that for the same reason the hospital did not allow him to be transferred in an ambulance.

Independent doctors are not organized in any nation-wide organization, but rather form independent units in cities or regions, often called an Institute of Independent Doctors (Colegio de Médicos Independientes). The first Colegio Médico Independiente was said to have been established by the neurosurgeon Hilda Molina in Havana in 1995. Since then, the number of inde-

pendent doctors and institutes has been growing; however doctors from different cities are not in sufficient mutual contact.

INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS, AGRICULTURAL GROUPS AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Civil society in Cuba also encompasses other more specialized groups, such as independent trade unions, independent agricultural groups, women groups and so on. Here is a short description of only a small selection of them.

National Association of Independent Farmers

Although agriculture is, to a great extent, controlled by the state private farms up to 65 hectares are allowed to exist in Cuba. In the province of Matanzas, small private farmers joined the National Association of Independent Farmers of Cuba (ANAIC).



Photo by Nikola Hagić

Press conference of the Assembly to Promote the Civil Society in Cuba, March 2005

According to its president and small farmer Herminio Torres Aguiar, the organization involves several farmers with mostly 3-6 hectares of land, but also ones with up to 25 hectares. The activities of the ANAIC are mainly of a professional character. The association members maintain traditional Cuban varieties of fruit trees and vegetables on their farms since state-owned farms produce only a low number of crop varieties and valuable genotypes of traditional varieties are in danger of disappearing. The members support each other manually (e.g. by helping each other at harvests) and morally as a community of people with similar attitudes. They also cooperate in acquiring seeds, which are hard to obtain in Cuba.

Herminio Torres Aguiar claims that the members of the ANAIC are of oppositional attitudes, although the organization apparently does not have any political activities. However, they are aware of the agricultural problems in Cuba and are willing to talk about them.

The Latin American Federation of Rural Women

Women rights and the participation of women at all levels of Cuban society are the main issues discussed by the Latin American Federation of Rural Women (FLAMUR) which is supposed to connect up to 200 women from different parts of Cuba. The FLAMUR organizes seminars on domestic violence and the role of women in the family, meetings where women do needlework or cook together, literary meetings and so on. On different occasions, it also collected clothes and food and gave it to poor pregnant women and mothers, including the relatives of political prisoners.

Although FLAMUR does not seek political goals, many politically active

women are among its members and the organization has not been registered. In November 2005, FLAMUR attempted to organize the election of its leadership, but state security intervened and forced a number of women to return to their homes. In December, the elections were held for the second time without interruption and about 70 women came to the meeting in San Luis in the province of Santiago de Cuba, according to the Cubanet server. Maurice González Burque was elected the president of FLAMUR, whereas former president Anna Rosa Veitía became the secretary of the organization.

Independent Trade Unions

As in other public spheres, trade unions in Cuba are heavily controlled by the government and the Communist Party through a mass organization called the Central Bureau of Cuban Workers (Central de Trabajadores de Cuba - CTC), which has existed since 1939. Shortly after reaching power, Castro's regime designated CTC as the official and sole representative of workers. Today, it claims to connect 18 national trade unions with almost 3 million workers. Although it should defend the interests of workers, the organization is considered to serve as an instrument to promote the policies of the Communist Party.

Establishing independent trade unions is prohibited and the government continues to prevent any attempts to organize independent workers' associations. In spite of the repression, four larger labor movements dealing with labor issues have emerged in the country: the Independent Democratic Trade Union Movement (Movimiento Sindical Independiente y Democrático), the Democratic Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores

Democráticos de Cuba), the United Council of Cuban Workers (Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos) and the Independent Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Libres de Cuba).

To describe at least some of them, the United Council of Cuban Workers (Consejo Unitario de Trabajadores Cubanos - CUTC) is an independent organization aimed at promoting the freedom of trade unions and the rights of Cuban workers. It was established in 1995. Many of those arrested in the mass crackdown on dissidents in spring 2003 were members of the CUTC. The CUTC secretary general - Pedro Pablo Álvarez Ramos - was sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment and is detained in the province of Ciego de Ávila. While being arrested, the state security confiscated books from his independent library specialized in books on trade unions and labor law, which was run by his wife Elizabeth Pruneda Balmaseda in their apartment in Havana. Another well-known Cuban dissident Víctor Rolando Arroyo, who was sentenced to 26 years imprisonment and recently attempted a hunger strike in prison, was a member of the provincial delegation of the CUTC in the Pinar del Río province, likewise was Alfredo Felipe Fuentes who was sentenced to 26 years imprisonment.

The Democratic Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Democrático de Cuba - CTDC) claims to have coordinators in every province and about 2000 members with member cards. The President of CTDC, Angel Berrier, told PIN travelers that it connects people with different political opinions and they thus do not link themselves to any political groups (for this reason, the CTDC did not attend the Assembly for Civil Society Promotion).

In February 2001, the Independent National Confederation of Cuban Workers (Confederación Obrera Nacional Independiente de Cuba – CONIC) was also formed as an umbrella confederation. It claims to associate 92 union organizations representing the chemical industry, education and health sectors, though this number cannot be confirmed. CONIC seeks the freedom of trade unions, respect for international labor standards and human and labor rights and it recognizes the necessity of economic and political reforms in Cuba. In 2001 and 2002, it organized its congress in Havana where these topics were discussed by activists from different provinces. It also established the Institute of Socio-Labor Studies (Instituto de Estudios Sociolaborales) which conducts research on the labor situation and international investment in Cuba. CONIC seems to have quite extensive support from abroad, mainly thanks to its international representative – The Federation of Trade Unions of the Electricity, Gas and Water Plants (Federación Sindical de Plantas Eléctricas, Gas, Agua de Cuba) which is based in Miami.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN POLITICAL AND CIVIC LIFE

The church itself is generally not counted as part of the political opposition in Cuba or elsewhere. However, the role of the Cuban church in political and social life seems to have increased during recent years. Therefore, we here include a brief account of church activities.

In the beginning of Castro's rule in Cuba, churches and religious communities were considered counter-revolutionary and thus suffered immensely. Believers were discriminated against in many ways, for example practicing your belief was

often a reason for losing your job. The 1990s brought some relaxation of repression by the state towards religion and, at the same time, more confidence to different churches. One of the greatest stimuli for changes on both sides was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Cuba in 1998. The visit of the Pope was great encouragement for believers in the country to stop hiding their religious belief. At the same time, it raised

The state council is considered to be a regime tool for control over the life of churches and a mean of oppressing those within the church who are critical towards the government.

the expectations of all Cubans frustrated by severe economic problems. The visit of the Pope had been prepared for in communities for over several months in all provinces and thus helped increase the organizational and mobilization capacity of the church.

Since the visit, the churches have been constantly working on their regeneration. With greater self-confidence, their importance in public life has also increased. Yet nevertheless, the state continues to impose its control over religious life.

There are about 60 different Christian churches and religious communities in Cuba today. In addition, the religious movement Santería, which combines the elements of African religions and Christianity, is signifi-

cant as the Castro regime gives a certain degree of verbal support to this community, as it considers it a Cuban religion.

There are no laws concerning state-church relations in Cuba, but the government clearly demonstrates preference for those who are members of the Cuban Ecumenical Council of Churches (Encuentro Nacional Eclesial Cubano – ENEC). The ENEC has several responsibilities. It has an agreement with the government concerning the distribution of Bibles, it assists churches in the reconstruction of church buildings and it arranges and obtains the various permissions and visas required for official visits (to all churches, not only members of the ENEC). It seems that these arrangements might be provided on condition of a certain degree of obedience on the part of the churches, for example churches should keep a distance from the democratic opposition, support three Christian members of the Cuban National Assembly and should support the work of the ENEC. The Council is thus considered to be a regime tool for control over the life of churches and a means of oppressing those within the church who are critical towards the government.

Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church, an important member of the ENEC, is the most significant church in the country. The head is cardinal Jaime Ortega who is seated in Havana. Officially, the church strives not to be involved in the opposition-government conflict and claims that the church should always stay away from politics. For this reason, it also keeps its distance from Christian Liberation Movement, despite being based on strong Catholic beliefs. However, in recent years, the church has allowed a number

of educational and social activities within different dioceses which may have a big impact on the population, sometimes even in regard to political life. It seems that the extent of these activities has depended first and foremost on the personality of the bishop of the diocese.

The Roman Catholic Church has eight dioceses. Three of them – in Pinar del Río, Santiago de Cuba and Holguín – are led by bishops who seem to support social activities and people with a critical stance towards the regime. As previously mentioned, the Pinar del Río diocese organizes seminars on civil society and citizens rights through the Civic and Religious Education Centre, led by Dagoberto Valdés. Similarly, the bishop of Holguín established the Centro de Formación y Promoción de Laicos Beato Arnoldo Janssen which organizes seminars and teaches the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. In Cienfuegos, similar centre named The Committee of Justice and Peace (Comisión Episcopal Justicia y Paz) has been founded. All centers organize various other activities, such as computer or language courses, alternative education and health care where necessary. A number of magazines have also been published by the Roman Catholic Church.

Outside the official stance of the church, many priests also discreetly give a certain degree of support and help to the families of political prisoners. However, the reasons for such assistance, differ from one person to another – some priests believe that they have to help those that suffered from injustice; others simply want to help those in need, no matter the cause. For obvious reasons we cannot mention those most active in supporting opposition activities. Other priests, for example with regards to the Ladies

in White, view the women simply as believers and let them pray in their churches, despite the political connotation of their prayers. Some female family members of political prisoners also reported to PIN that the church arranges accommodation for them when they visit their husbands in prison, often very far from their home.

Other denominations

Furthermore, Cuba has more than 50 different protestant churches with roughly half of members of the ENEC, in particular the more traditional churches, such as Methodist and Presbyterian church. The main Baptist churches, the Occidentales and the Orientales, are the largest religious communities which are not members of the ENEC. Officially, the Baptist churches claim they do not want to be politically involved which explains their wish to stay outside the ENEC which, in their view, legitimizes and supports the regime. This can be viewed as their refusal to express their allegiance to Castro. Yet at the same time, they apparently try to avoid possible conflict with the state authorities by downplaying the trouble resulting from non-membership in the ENEC as administrative problems typical in Cuba.

The Baptists as well as all other churches also have difficulties in doing social work on the local community level. When a local church wants to start an activity for the wider neighborhood, the authorities often intervene. For example, the Baptist churches previously worked on establishing kindergartens within the local community, but were ordered to close them down, officially for hygiene reasons. This example indicates that the churches, and especially local priests, would like to increase their involvement

in social life in Cuba, but are faced with obstacles imposed by the government. Nevertheless, some activities within the churches, such as educational centers, especially when led by strong personalities, definitely have some political impact on the Cuban public.

Civic and Religious Education Centre in Pinar del Río

Dagoberto Valdés is one of the most important exponents of the Catholic current within the Cuban opposition. Unlike Oswaldo Payá, Dagoberto Valdés has decided to work from within the Church and has pushed for its greater civic involvement. Valdés, although a lay person, is head of the Civic and Religious Education Centre, which is an educational department of the Roman Catholic diocese in Pinar del Río. The centre organizes seminars and lectures on different religious and lay topics with specific focus on raising the awareness of the Cuban people about their civic rights and their role within civil society.

The level and extent of the work of Dagoberto Valdés is very unique. A number of travelers stated that the activities of Dagoberto Valdés are very well-planned and efficient. "Delegates were surprised by the quality and high level of seminars and civic education presented at the Centre and, according to the delegates, this project is far more advanced than any opposition project in Central and Eastern Europe before 1989," reported Czech Senator Karel Schwarzenberg and German Member of Parliament Arnold Vaatz after their visit in Cuba in May 2005.

The centre also publishes Vitral magazine, which has focused particularly on social issues, but ultimately has become Cuba's de facto foremost

political opposition magazine in spite of being produced under extremely rudimentary conditions. Dagoberto Valdés as the editor-in-chief strives to discuss civil society and other issues in so much depth as the Cuban authorities allow. The magazine has been published every two months since 1993.

Conclusions

This brief analysis of Cuban independent civil society shows that from the mid-nineties, Cubans have been learning about the concept of non-political civil movements as it is conceived in democratic countries. Although such civil movements cannot survive long in the authoritarian regimes' conditions, it has helped democratic groups to change their focus to local and everyday problems.

As historians and scientists argue, local and less political issues are often the only way to start public discussion without ending up immediately in jail. In a society that has avoided free debates for decades, local issues are key to re-learning free politics. That is why civil society is of enormous importance for Cubans and any possible peaceful transition.

Cuban independent civil society is emerging and dozens of small and middle size groups have been able to cover a broad range of areas. The regimes' repressive reactions on the other hand, have proved that there is currently no free space for much needed bottom-up development.

The lack of technical equipment and funds, as well as the daily struggle for minimal living needs, keeps

the work of emerging organizations mostly within small groups. The Cuban public needs a chance to discuss and solve its own problems freely, as well as to receive help from the international community. These grassroots movements are a promising start which may prevent future democratic change in society from falling into chaos. Thus far, their access to education, funds, international support, media and IT equipment has been very limited.

*Marie Peřinová and Nikola Hořejš
People in Need, 2005*



Photo by Jan Pulverini

CIVIC SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

**CENTRAL EUROPE'S
MOMENT**

Padraic Kenney

In Poland it took ten years, in Hungary ten months, in East Germany ten weeks: perhaps in Czechoslovakia it will take ten days!¹ These words, spoken by Timothy Garton Ash to Vaclav Havel in late November 1989 during a planning session in Prague's Magic Lantern Theater, have become one of the memorable phrases of that revolutionary time. There are a few others (every revolution has them, of course): Gennadi Gerasimov's quip that the Brezhnev doctrine had been replaced by the „Sinatra Doctrine“ (itself a misquote, but never mind); Lech Walesa's devastating retort, in a television debate, that the Polish communists might be taking the country to the future but on foot, while everyone else was traveling by car; and Ronald Reagan's Berlin exhortation: „Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!“

Garton Ash's bon mot, though, seems to encompass the entire sequence of events, in a way dear to the hearts of students everywhere. In fact, I offer it to my students every semester, as a handy mnemonic device. It was also instantly popular in Czechoslovakia itself. Before Garton Ash could relate his story in the *New York Review of Books*, the phrase had been immortalized on hand-painted banners in Prague; in Poland commentators dryly added the ominous prediction that in Romania the rev-

olution would require only ten minutes.

Yet when it comes to making sense of the revolutions of 1989, Garton Ash's quip is not a very good guide. It was not, of course, intended to be so; it would be a dreary world where people would be held accountable for the accuracy of their jokes! Nevertheless, Garton Ash's line is incorrect in three fundamental ways: it underestimates the past; elides the present; and allows for an overly benign view of the future.

Was it only ten days (or ten weeks, ten months)? Ten days describes rather a coup d'état. Garton Ash had in mind, though, something more. Poland over ten years had seen a universalization and pluralization of opposition – a parallel society, to use a phrase coined by Vaclav Benda. This, of course, could hardly be accomplished in ten days, or even ten months.

In my view, the revolution took much longer. In the mid-1980s a new wave of opposition groups emerged across the region. These social movements, tiny at first, shared many characteristics. They were formed by people born in the late-1950s to mid-1960s: in Poland they had been high school or college students during Solidarity's heyday in 1980-81; in Czecho-

slovakia they were the first generation with no memory of the Prague Spring; in Hungary their parents were (mostly) too young to have participated in the 1956 revolution. All were thus distant from the ideological battles that marked their elders. At the same time, this was a generation that had no illusions about reforming the communist system. I have interviewed people across the region, and among them are some of the toughest political animals I have ever met. They would choose their campaigns with an eye to embarrassing, compromising, and discomforting the communists.

Politics – rather than ideology – also meant specific, achievable goals: instead of “sovereignty,” the right not to serve in the army; instead of economic reform or a rise in the standard of living, they demanded that specific plants be closed to ensure clean air and water; and instead of “democracy” and “civil society,” they called for the “breakdown of fear” (a phrase I heard dozens of times) and the freedom to laugh on the street. Each aim offered something concrete to the individual: a specific goal to be accomplished, often one that placed the communists in an uncomfortable situation. For regimes looked foolish or arbitrary if they repressed protesters for opposing a hydroelectric

project, or for offering to serve in the army under different conditions, or for demanding the restoration of the medieval Bohemian monarchy. These protests helped lower the barriers of fear and increased the pool of people who could imagine change. By the autumn of 1989 such activity had been going on not for days, weeks, or months, but years.

Of course, attention to these social movements does not preclude other explanations. After all, revolutions belong to that category of events (like world wars) that cannot be explained monocationally. Explanations rooted in the great power game of the late Cold War, or in the decrepitude of the communist economic system, or in the spread of theories of democratic civil society among the intellectual elites are all true, their relative importance depending on what precisely we wish to explain. That something is missing in other explanations of the revolution is easy to understand if we imagine for a moment one of the many crowd scenes of 1989, such as that in Vaclav Square in Prague that November.

Simplifying a bit, we can ask: had the people of Prague gathered because they felt that Gorbachev had approved of change, or because they hoped the United States would come to their aid, or because they had considered the ideas expressed by Havel and others? Did people flock to the city center to shake their keys because that morning they had decided not to tolerate a further incremental decline in their standard of living? Of course not. While each of those explanations helps us to understand various aspects of the changes of 1989 (such as the weakness of the Party leadership, the lack of violence, the direction of change articulated after the dust had settled), the long path to revolution comes into clearer focus when we

look at the wide array of user-friendly social activism that made political change imaginable.

What of the present? A popular political science text in Poland – citing Garton Ash – offers the following “model” of 1989: “Poland > Hungary > East Germany > Czechoslovakia.” For historians with an aversion to political science models, I offer this as one of the silliest imaginable. What do those arrows mean? How precisely does change spread from country to

The search for the democratic recipe is swiftly turning out to be one of the key problems of the 21st century. Professor Padraic Kenney analyzes what did the Poles, Czech, Hungarians and Germans had to learn to establish institutions and habits of democracy in 1989.

country? What data moves across those arrows, and who or what sends it or receives it? These are questions that a historian (even a political scientist) must take seriously, especially in a multi-country revolution such as that of 1989 (no less, of course, in 1848 or 1968).

The answers to these questions are often surprising, and help to dispose of the domino theory of 1989. That Polish couriers smuggled backpacks full of underground Czech literature over the mountains I knew. But that

Slovak priests smuggled cans of much-coveted spraypaint to Krakow? In fact, the borders throughout Central Europe were quite porous, and the revolutions of 1989 were in part the work of an intertwined grassroots network. To understand 1989, it helps to follow the trail of texts, of legends, of people, and of materials.

Intellectual dissidents (those of the generation active before 1980 especially) interacted primarily through texts. For many more in Central Europe, Radio Free Europe and other broadcasts were, of course, still more important. In every country in the region, one could find young oppositionists, inspired by the legend of Solidarity, who learned Polish in order to learn opposition. Conscientious objector Zsolt Keszthelyi, for example, speaks passable Polish; his fiery speech to a Budapest court at his 1987 sentencing for evasion of service was mentioned as inspirations to the murdered priest Popieluszko as well as Solidarity and the Freedom and Peace movement.

The borders were made porous not, in the end, by liberal communist reform (though the willingness of authorities in Poland and Hungary to allow some citizens to travel west in search of work on the black market was quite important), but by the actions of individual citizens. Often these were lone pilgrims, journeying to the shrines of anti-communist resistance in Poland. Young Slovaks, East Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, and Slovenes – not to mention Western Europeans, of course – sought out contacts in Gdansk, Warsaw, and Krakow. These individual visits could have great resonance: Bernd Oehler, for example, a Leipzig theology student, reported on his encounters with his Polish peers in an article in the samizdat journal *Grenzfall*. His intent is captured in the title: „Impressions

of a Trip to Poland, or, a Lesson in Civil Courage." And indeed, forms of opposition in East Germany over the last two years of the communist era did begin to look more like those in Poland.

Most remarkable of all were the efforts to organize contacts between countries on a larger scale. The spectacular meetings of famous Czech and Polish dissidents in the Karkonosze mountains, organized by Miroslaw Jasiński's Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity, are well known. So let me mention a less known, but more remarkable example: Polonophiles at the Eotvos Lorand University in Budapest led their students on summer trips to Poland in order to teach them anti-communist resistance; among the adepts on these trips was Viktor Orban, future enfant terrible of the young opposition and prime minister of Hungary from 1998 to 2002. The movement he would help found in 1988, Fidesz, bore the clear imprint of contacts with Solidarity and Freedom and Peace.

What these border crossers learned is as interesting as who they were. It was not specific tactics, or even strategy, that the pilgrims sought. Solidarity was a phenomenon that fit nowhere else in the region. And as for the new movements: no one really needed to be told, after Chernobyl, that environmental movements had a powerful message. The currency of revolutionary change was something much simpler, and more easily exported to East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine: the praxis of freedom. How does one act when one is free, and what does one say when one does not fear speaking aloud? The answers to these questions were what travelers to Poland (and sometimes to Hungary) sought, though they often did not realize it until they had arrived. Less than

two weeks before the Velvet Revolution, former Charter 77 spokeswoman Petruška Šustrova managed to sneak into Poland to attend the Festival of Czech Culture in Wroclaw (also organized by Polish-Czechoslovak Solidarity). This was only her second trip outside Czechoslovakia; Poland seemed familiar to her, especially as she heard Czech spoken – freely, in every sense of the word – everywhere. Returning home, she wondered how the experience would affect the hundreds of Czech students who had also

What practices and ideas did the dozens of new movements help to foster as they organized and demonstrated? The mention of two should suffice: the focus on concrete, achievable goals and tolerance of different viewpoints and agendas.

managed to slip through tight border controls into post-communist Poland. For a samizdat paper that appeared just days before the fateful clash of November 17, she wrote: "Those thousands of people, mostly young, will bring home more than just impressions from a concert and from a beautiful gathering, I think that the optimism of our Polish friends has infected them. And then, when you see with your own eyes that something can be accomplished, it stimulates you... The hope we have brought home is a great foundation for the

future. The future, of course, came swiftly that fall.

Czechs, when they painted Garton Ash's slogan on bedsheets that December, understood it in a way that was surely unintended: that ten days would be enough, and one could go from tyranny to democracy in ten days (or even, in Ceausescu's Romania, ten minutes). And of course, that was not true. Indeed, the search for the democratic recipe is swiftly turning out to be one of the key problems of the 21st century. In Central Europe the formal institutions of democracy could be adopted almost immediately. But why, Czechs (and other Central Europeans) have asked many times since, do habits of democracy take so much longer?

One of the things we can ask of any theory of revolutionary change is how well it explains subsequent developments. Whatever one might say about other explanations of 1989 (and to do so would take a great deal more space), the social movements of the 1980s offer some answers. What, indeed, did Poles learn during those ten years of revolution, from Solidarity to 1989? What practices and ideas did the dozens of new movements help to foster as they organized and demonstrated? There are many, but the mention of two should suffice. The first is realism, the focus on concrete, achievable goals. Anti-communist politics had a natural tendency toward the big picture, but democratic politics is quintessentially local. How much better prepared for freedom would a society be that organized to close down a chemical plant than one which protested only on anniversaries of enslavement! The second worth mentioning is pluralism. The realism of the new movements brought a tolerance for differing viewpoints and agendas. Before 1989, this was a pluralism of the streets. Time and time again, I heard in my inter-

views that a basic shared value was to participate in each other's demonstrations, even when the cause was not one's own. There was also an attitude I term interval pluralism: the willingness, familiar perhaps to students of the American electorate, to entertain seemingly opposite viewpoints simultaneously. Thus, I met nationalist hippies, and pro-market greens. And to be sure that such mixed attitudes are not conducive to the building of clear party profiles on the European model; this may explain why politics in Central Europe sometimes seems surprisingly American in style.

Let me set aside these speculations about the present and return to the problem of 1989 itself. Perhaps one of the reasons historians have hesitated to tackle that moment is out of uncertainty about what to call it. At the time, it looked like a revolution, with all the right cinematic attributes (crowds of giant proportions, statues toppling, people reaching across barricades, secret files burning or cascading from looted offices to the streets below). Since 1989, we have set our sights lower: it was a "transformation," a "transition," a "revolution" a transfer of power, in other words, without any new ideas, but simply the adoption of tried and true norms. And of course, there was only the faintest whiff of violence, an essential attribute of every previous revolution.

Yet it is also the case that every great historical change of the last century has led us to rethink our assumptions about revolution (or more broadly, about what sociologists call "contentious politics"): 1917, 1933, 1968, for example, all required us to rethink what we knew about how people resist injustice. The same has not yet been true for 1989. In trying to come to terms with a revolution that was characterized neither

by violence nor ideological conflict, I have employed the idea of the carnival. The use of this term by scholars over the last two decades or so has given it many connotations – reversal of hierarchy, cacophony, etc. Each of these is relevant to the revolution of 1989. But I want to evoke here one meaning in particular, one that I believe can help us look anew at revolutions in general, and those of 1989 in particular. A revolution, like a carnival, is a rupture in ordinary time. During that rupture, the imagination is let loose; new ideas emerge, if only briefly. In 1989 these included ideas about radical political change – a "third way," a "Europe without borders,"² or radical democracy. But usually, these new ideas were more quotidian: people should be able to perform on the streets, or design their own protests, or write or believe what they please, or retreat from society, or negotiate with leaders and sit in parliament.

These ideas are in the end important more for their form than their content (just as it was forms of freedom, and not specific blueprints, that crossed borders). Most of them, after all, are never realized. The inertia of tradition and example and the pressures of everyday concerns turn revolutionaries back into ordinary people with jobs and families, and the exotic is pushed to the margins. But the experience of the carnival remains. In some countries, like Poland, that experience is long and lasting; the surprising resiliency of contemporary Polish democracy (surprising, because it has turned out capable of surviving all manner of extremisms, crises, and dramas of the kind that have destroyed Polish democracy in the past) is in part a result of this. In other countries, like the Czech Republic, that experience was relatively brief (perhaps twenty months or so – still, rather more than ten days), and the

result is noticeably greater difficulties with such things as relations with neighbors, with minorities, and with the past. These are lessons that take years to matter. A critical eye turned toward Central Europe will thus prefer the ten year revolution to the ten-minute one. The revolutions of 1989 did not lack for dynamic, innovative ideas, any more than did previous ones. One can hope that the memory and experience of that time of the carnival will remain one of 1989's lasting legacies.

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1 Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern* (Random House, 1990), 78.

2 Petruška Šustrova, "Polské dojmy," *Sport* 4 (November 1989): 26.

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