

CUBA – EUROPE DIALOGUES

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QUARTERLY BULLETIN ON RELATIONS BETWEEN CUBANS AND EUROPEANS

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PHOTO: HELENA HOUDOVÁ

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

THE DISCREET TERROR OF FIDEL CASTRO

Václav Havel

This spring marks the third anniversary of the wave of repression in which Fidel Castro's regime arrested and handed out long sentences to seventy-five leading Cuban dissidents. Soon afterwards, many friends and I formed the International Committee for the Support of Democracy in Cuba.

The bravery of those who found their social conscience, overcame fear, and stood up to communist dictatorship

remains fresh in my memory. It reminds me of the jingle of keys that rang out on Prague's Wenceslas Square – and later around the rest of what was then Czechoslovakia – in the autumn of 1989.

This is why I rang keys during the conference calling for democracy in Cuba that our committee held in Prague three years ago. I wanted to draw the international community's attention to the human-rights situation in

Cuba, to support that country's opposition, and to encourage all pro-democratic forces. The European Union then introduced diplomatic sanctions, albeit mostly symbolic, against Castro's regime.

Soon after, however, a contrary position came to the fore. The EU opened a dialogue with the Cuban regime, sanctions were conditionally suspended, and it was even made clear to dis-



Photo: Tomáš Němec

Václav Havel meeting with Raúl Rivero

sidents that they were not welcome at the embassies of several democratic countries. Cowardly compromise and political alibis – as so often in history – defeated a principled position. In return, the Cuban regime made a sham gesture by releasing a small number of the prisoners of conscience – mostly those who were tortured and seriously ill – who the regime most feared would die in its notorious prisons.

Those of us who live in Europe's new post-communist democracies experienced similar political deals when we lived behind the former Iron Curtain. We are also extremely familiar with the argument that European policies have not led to any mass arrests in Cuba. But democracy has shown weakness and the Cuban regime has in turn adapted its tactics.

Respected organizations like Reporters without Borders and Amnesty International have collected ample evidence of violence and intimidation against free thinking Cubans, who can expect a different kind of ring than that from jangling keys. Their cases often do not end in courts but in hospitals. Groups of "fighters for the revolution" – in reality, the Cuban secret police – brutally attack their political opponents and accuse them of absurd crimes in an effort to intimidate them or to force them to emigrate. On the island, such planned harassments are called "actos de repudio" – "acts of rejection."

Political violence that creates the impression of mere street crime is never easy to prove, unlike jail terms of several years, and therefore it does not receive due attention from the world. However, thousands of former political prisoners in Central and Eastern Europe can attest to the fact that a kick from a secret policeman on the street hurts just as much as a kick from a warden behind prison gates.

The powerlessness of the victim of state-organized street fights and threats against his family is experienced in the same way as the powerlessness of somebody harassed during a state security investigation. Many European politicians who have sought to see the situation on the ground have been barred in recent years.

Some Europeans apparently regard Cuba as a faraway country whose fate they need take no interest in, because they have problems of their own. But what Cubans are enduring today is part of our own European history. Who better than Europeans, who brought communism to life, exported it to the world, and then paid dearly for it over many decades, know better about the torments inflicted upon the Cuban people?

Humanity will pay the price for communism until such a time as we learn to stand up to it with all political responsibility and decisiveness. We have many opportunities to do so in Europe and Cuba. And it is no surprise that the new member countries of the EU have brought to Europe fresh historical experience, and with it far less understanding for and tolerance of concession and compromise.

Representatives of the EU's member states will meet in Brussels in mid-June to review a common policy towards Cuba. European diplomats should weigh up the consequences of accommodating Castro's regime. They should show that they will neither ignore his practices nor neglect the suffering of Cuban prisoners of conscience. We must never forget the seemingly anonymous victims of Castro's "acts of rejection."

Václav Havel, the former president of the Czech Republic, is a founder of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba.

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EDITORIAL

There is a great deal of interaction between Cuba and Europe going unnoticed besides official cocktail party fights and other diplomatic quarrels. Numerous Europeans and European NGOs work with Cuban partners, travel to Cuba, monitor human rights and support civic society there. We believe there is a need to provide a forum for the knowledge resulting from these activities and present the first issue of a quarterly bulletin entitled CUBA-EUROPE DIALOGUES. Very often the most aggressive and well organized groups dominate the media and intimidate others who participate in the discussions. That is why we would like to show that different dialogues are being entered into by a range of sections of society and that it is important to take them all into account and distinguish their characters.

We dedicate the first issue of the bulletin to a summary of the human rights situation in the last year from the experience of visitors to the island and to an overview of the EU's common policy towards Cuba and NGOs opinions on it, because these two things are and should be related.

The future issues are planned to cover various activities and events of European NGOs, their experiences and important developments in Cuban society. You are all invited to send any suggestions, reports and articles. I hope you will find this project helpful for your work.

Nikola Hořejš
Editor

THE EU'S COMMON POLICY TOWARDS CUBA: ALWAYS A FEW STEPS BEHIND

Jakub Klepal

When adopted in 1996, the EU's Common Position towards Cuba sought to encourage transition to democracy and respect for human rights, using "constructive, result-oriented political dialogue" and cooperation with all sectors of Cuban society. Unfortunately, ten years later, Cuba continues to violate basic human rights, has stepped up aggression against its civic society and rolled back some of the modest reforms of the 90s. This paper, therefore, reviews a pat-

tern that seems to repeatedly emerge in EU-Cuba relations: an offer of cooperation from the EU is followed by a particularly visible act of repression committed by the Cuban authorities against the opposition, to which the EU reacts by hardening its stance.

THE BIRTH OF THE POSITION

The EEC established relations with Cuba in September 1988. It hoped to speed up the internal transition process by

strengthening relations and by binding Cuba into the international community. The EU began to prepare the negotiations for a trade and economic cooperation agreement with Cuba.

When the Cuban airforce shot down two civilian aircraft of the Miami-based NGO *Brothers to the Rescue* in February 1996, the EU postponed the dialogue on the cooperation agreement and stated that it would be renewed only on condition of progress in the politi-



PHOTO: PAVEL BRATSKÝ

Chzech MPs Petr Bratský and Taňa Fisherová meeting with the Ladies in White in Havana

cal sphere. On 2 December 1996, the Council in Brussels adopted the Common Position on Cuba (96/697/CFSP) by which EU-Cuba relations are guided to this date¹. The declared objective of the EU, as stated in the Common Position, is “to encourage a process of transition to pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as a sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people.”

According to the Common Position, “a transition is most likely to be peaceful if the present regime were itself to initiate or permit such a process.” The EU pledges to facilitate peaceful change in Cuba and promote the respect for human rights by intensifying the dialogue with the government and “all sectors of Cuban society;” by reminding the Cuban authorities of their responsibilities regarding human rights; by encouraging reforms of legislation; and by evaluating developments in Cuban internal and foreign policies in accordance with the standards applied to other countries; to provide ad hoc humanitarian aid; to carry out “focused economic cooperation actions in support of the economic opening being implemented” and to lend its cooperation if the Cuban authorities progress towards democracy. The implementation of the Common Position is monitored by the Council².

Since its adoption in December 1996, the Common Position has been regularly reviewed every six months and is currently being reviewed every year. The Cuban government rejects the Common Position as interference in its internal affairs.

DÉTENTE 1998 – 2003

During the second half of the 1990’s, there were no substantive changes in the political and economic situation in Cuba and the Common Position was repeatedly reconfirmed. In 1998, mutu-

al relations improved after the visit of Pope John Paul II and the release of a number of political prisoners. However, the increased dialogue did not lead to the release of four members of the Internal Dissidence Working Group, as requested by the EU. The EU criticized unfair trials in Cuba (March 1999) and called on the authorities in Cuba to introduce a moratorium on executions (June 1999). In 2000, Cuba

The objective of the CP is “to encourage (...) respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”

suspended its application for the EU cooperation agreement in reaction to the resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission. The resolution, elaborated by the Czech Republic and Poland, was backed by all EU member states present in the commission. On the other hand, all EU member states regularly vote against the US embargo in the annual UN General Assembly.

Between 2001 and 2002, EU-Cuba relations improved – the Council noted signs of improvement in living standards for the population (June 2001), Belgian Foreign Minister Louis Michel, holding the rotating presidency of the EU, visited Cuba (August 2001), and the European Commission and the ACP countries made their support for Cuba’s incorporation into the Cotonou Agreement clear. The political dialogue was resumed and in January 2003, Cuba applied for accession to the Cotonou agreement. In March 2003, the EU’s Delegation was inaugurated in Havana.

RESPONSE TO BLACK SPRING

An abrupt deterioration in EU-Cuba relations came following the arrests of 75 Cuban dissidents, including representatives of *Varela Project*, in March and April 2003, and the executions of three men for an attempted escape to Florida on a hijacked ferry. In May, the European Commission suspended the process of Cuba’s accession to the Cotonou agreement.

On 5 June, the EU, on Spain’s initiative, decided to take following measures: “to limit the bilateral high-level government visits; reduce the profile of member states’ participation in cultural events; invite Cuban dissidents at national days’ celebrations and proceed to the re-evaluation of the EU Common Position.”³ In response, the Cuban government took back for the second time its application to the Cotonou Agreement; called off the political dialogue scheduled for December 2003; refused direct aid coming from the EU, and launched a propaganda campaign against some EU member states and EU accession countries. In April and May 2004, a group of 16 human rights activists and journalists were arrested and the Cuban government imposed new restrictions on private enterprises. In June 2004, GAERC reaffirmed the measures of 5 June 2003.

Following a change in the Spanish government (José Maria Aznar’s conservative government was replaced by the socialists of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero), Madrid changed its position and started to advocate the suspension of EU diplomatic sanctions. During the second half of 2004, Cuban authorities released some of the 75 political prisoners imprisoned in March 2003, and in November Cuba reopened diplomatic contacts with Spain. By the end of January 2005, the Cuban government had renewed diplomatic contacts with all EU countries. On 31 January 2005, the Council temporarily suspended the 5 June 2003 measures.

VIOLENT 2005

To this date, Cuba remains the only country in the region without an EU cooperation agreement. After the Cuban authorities expelled several European politicians and journalists planning to attend the *Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil* (Assembly to Promote Civil Society) in May 2005 in Havana, the Council of the EU “categorically condemned Cuba’s unacceptable attitude towards foreign parliamentarians and journalists” but reaffirmed the Common Position and “reiterated its willingness to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Cuban authorities.”⁴ The measures of 5 June 2003 remained suspended and the date of the next evaluation of the Common Position was set for June 2006.

Despite the EU’s willingness to enter into dialogue, the position of the

Cuban government remains confrontational and the repression in Cuba is deteriorating. In October 2005, Fidel Castro labeled the EU nations “hypocrites” and in the service of the United States, after the European Parliament granted *Damas de Blanco*, a group of wives, mothers and sisters of jailed Cuban dissidents, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. Only fourteen of the 75 activists arrested in March 2003 have been conditionally released. The number of prisoners of conscience has grown by 40 in the second half of 2005. Prisoners’ families are subject to persecution and an increasing number of acts of repudiation (*actos de repudio*)⁵. These acts, aimed mostly at dissidents’ homes and families, consist of psychological torture as well as assaults on property. They are illegal both under international law and under the Cuban constitution. Given their rather dispersed character, they – unlike visible big events such as mass

arrests in March 2003 – have so far not attracted the level of attention from the international community that would have been appropriate.

THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF THE COMMISSION AND PARLIAMENT

The key actor in designing, reviewing and changing EU policy and the Common Position on Cuba is, as has been already described, the Council of the European Union. Nonetheless, another two EU institutions play a role in EU policy towards Cuba. The European Commission implements some of the components of the policy (e.g. it administers development aid) and may submit proposals while the European Parliament has a consultative role.

Since March 2003, the European Commission has had a delegation in Havana (under the responsibility



Photo: PIN

„Hands off Venezuela and Cuba“ - demonstration against debate on Cuba in Vienna, 5/2006

of the delegation in the Dominican Republic). As the Cuban government in 2003 rejected all direct bilateral cooperation, the European Commission is channeling aid funds to Cuba by co-financing European NGOs. Since the EC rules make it complicated to channel small amounts of money and as all funding is made public, the EC is criticized for its methods of funding being inadequate for democracy promotion and the needs of independent civil society in Cuba. It is estimated that the EC has channeled around 150 million Euro to Cuba since the mid-90s.

The European Parliament has repeatedly criticized the human rights situation on the island. In April 2004 the EP appealed to the Cuban government to release its political prisoners and to reestablish the moratorium on the death penalty. It also appealed to the Cuban authorities to permit Oswaldo Paya to travel in order to receive the Sakharov Prize. On February 2, 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the EU's policy towards the Cuban Government. It regretted the unresponsiveness of the Cuban authorities towards the EU's calls for its respect for fundamental freedoms and it condemned the worsening repression, the increase in the number of political prisoners and the travel ban on the *Damas de Blanco*.

LOSING LEVERAGE

During the 1990's, economic relations became the key component of Cuba's relationship with the EU. The bilateral economic exchange with, in particular, Spain, France, Italy, Britain, the Netherlands and Germany, has intensified. As Cuba was struggling to overcome its economic crisis after the collapse of the Soviet bloc during the 1990s, the EU became its most important partner. In 2004, the major export market for Cuba was the Netherlands with nearly

23 % and the major importer to Cuba was Spain with almost 15 % (slightly ahead of Venezuela and the US)⁶. In recent years, however, Cuba has benefited from the economic support of Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, primarily oil supplies, in return for which Cuba has sent its doctors, nurses, and teachers to Venezuela. China

A rapprochement from the EU has, in the past, been followed by repression against the opposition

also has a growing economic presence on the island, particularly in the mining sector. These new economic relationships diminish the importance of economic cooperation with the EU and could gradually lead to the EU's loss of leverage.

ALWAYS A FEW STEPS BEHIND

As is clear from this brief overview of EU policy towards Cuba, there is a repetitive pattern in the mutual relations: a rapprochement including increased dialogue and the opening of the possibility of a cooperation agreement has, in the past, been followed by a particularly visible act of repression committed by the Cuban authorities against the opposition (the shooting down of exile opposition airplanes in 1996; mass arrests in 2003), to which the EU reacted by freezing the dialogue and introducing limited punitive measures. These measures are in turn slowly abandoned by the EU without really receiving anything in exchange. In this pattern, the EU has

accepted Castro's lead in the mutual relations and limited itself to reacting to his steps. Given that neither the economic nor the human rights situation on the island has improved significantly since the beginning of the 1990s, this reactive policy seems to be rather ineffective.

The EU is one of the main global agenda-setters in promoting democracy, the respect for human rights and an open market economy that brings benefits to wide sectors of the population. There has been no improvement made towards meeting the aims set in the Common Position and, moreover, the EU is losing its economic attractiveness and incentives for Cuba. It would be logical for Brussels to employ consequent and unanimous diplomacy, to show its discontent with the Cuban regime, to strengthen its support for the peaceful internal opposition, and to further its assistance in preparations for a peaceful transition to democracy. It still has several options to do so.

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1 Common positions are one of the main legal instruments of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Articles 13, 14 and 15 of the Treaty on European Union). Common positions define the approach of the Union to a particular matter of general interest of a geographic or thematic nature. Member States must ensure that their national policies conform to the common positions.

2 96/697/CFSP: Common Position of 2 December 1996 defined by the Council on the basis of Article J.2 of the Treaty on European Union, on Cuba, <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31996E0697:EN:HTML>

3 Declaration by the Presidency, 5 June 2003, http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/cfsp/76075.pdf

4 GAERC, 13 June 2005, http://ue.eu.int/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/85430.pdf

5 Working Visit to Cuba, Pax Cristi, January 2006

6 The World Factbook, <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/cu.html#Econ>

REPORT ON VIOLENCE AND REPRESSION IN CUBA

INTRODUCTION

Repression and violence are omnipresent phenomena in Cuban society. As such, they easily slip from the attention of the outside world. No matter how repetitive and tiring the repression, it ceaselessly instigates fear in society. Fear is, in fact, the true governor of Cubans and thus affects and twists all aspects of its reality.

That is why this section is dedicated to political prisoners and repression in Cuba. It tries to give a concise summary of the situation inside the island based on first hand experience from visits and independ-

*ent sources. The first part is dedicated to political prisoners and summarizes interviews People in Need and other NGOs have conducted with nearly all the families of those imprisoned in March 2003. The second part explores the violence against the opposition – *actos de repudio* – that has been reinvented as a new, less visible terror and has exceeded expected limits. Two comments give extra illustration to the problem: a commentary by a Cuban independent journalist who claims that the international reaction to the 2003 crackdown saved him and others from a simi-*

lar fate and a personal account by Czech Senator Jaromir Stetina who has recently visited the island. The final paper describes the vast network of special prisons where any Cuban can end up without committing a crime or being properly sentenced.

After the massive crackdown, the 2003 Black Spring, everyone hoped and expected that things could not get any worse. Yet, without a doubt, we are now witness to the highest total number of political prisoners and a regime that is escalating in violence.

PART I:

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Nikola Hořejš

The past year saw a new sad development in the saga of the aging communist regime in Cuba. The estimated total number of people imprisoned for freely expressing their opinion continued to increase. Although the violation of human rights cannot be simply measured in numbers, Cuba remains the country with the highest number of political prisoners in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest prison for journalists after China. According to a well-researched report by *Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional* (CCDHRN), the total estimated number of political prisoners is 333 and there were 53 people arrested for political reasons in the last year¹. At least nine of them still remain in detention without charges².

Cuba does not permit any international organization to monitor human rights violations inside the country, including the UN special representative for human rights Christian Chanet, who complained about the lack of response from the Cuban authorities³. Cuba also denies the International Committee of the Red Cross access to the islands' prisons. This summary of illegal imprisonment in Cuba is based mainly on the interviews People in Need and other European NGOs have conducted in the last three years and unfortunately does not tackle all the arrests that have taken place since 2003 as it is of great difficulty to follow all cases in detail without being based in Cuba.

NEW DETENTIONS IN 2005

The new detentions mainly followed two peaceful manifestations in Havana. One of those still being illegally detained is a lawyer René Gómez Manzano, Vice President of the *Asamblea para Promover la Sociedad Civil* (APSC). This detention can be considered as retaliation for the APSC's meeting in May 2005 and shows that the police did not want to arrest participants of the meeting when they were closely watched by the international media. Another of those arrested, the journalist Oscar Mario González Pérez, experienced harsh conditions in a detention cell and went on a hunger strike to draw attention to his illegal detainment. According to his wife, the health of her 62 year old husband seriously deteriorated.

rated as a result of insufficient time outside the cell and neglect in medical attention and treatment.

The newly arrested were mostly accused of *peligrosidad predelictiva*, which according to article 72 of the Criminal Code, means that they showed an inclination towards behaviour that contradicts socialist morality. As this accusation accommodates a broad range of behaviour and minor offences, it can be used against anyone and complicates the tracing of politically motivated detentions.

HEALTH MATTERS

One of the critical features of Cuban prisons – one that affects both regular and political prisoners – is that as a result one's health is dramatically damaged. This has been documented by many authors in their articles and books from prison, including Víctor Rolando Arroyo and Antonio Díaz Sánchez in 2005⁴. Antonio Díaz Sánchez gave evidence about how regular prisoners mutilate themselves and try to get infectious

illnesses so as to escape regular prisons to those with better conditions. This has also been proven in numerous interviews with families of the prisoners.

One of the tragic examples is the case of Librado Linares García very tragic, as he has been rapidly losing his eyesight in prison without any chance of proper medical treatment. Sometimes medical treatment had to be won with a fight, as in the case of Omar Pernet Hernández. In October 2004, he suffered serious injuries and broke his leg whilst being transferred to another prison and the car crashed. A guardsmen lost his life in this accident and, as retaliation, the authorities denied proper medical treatment to the prisoner. This was openly stated by the national security police when they visited his relative Berta Antunez. A year after the accident, when Omar Pernet could no longer use his leg because of agonizing pain, he decided to go on hunger strike to protest against the lack of treatment. He was then allowed to go to hospital in Havana where he underwent an operation.

The conditions in prison are so serious that the youngest among the 75 sentenced in 2003, Léster González Pentón (29), developed several problems in two years of imprisonment and had to undergo surgery. He also underwent psychiatric examinations against his will and was prescribed a very strong dose of medicine, which caused problems with his attention and orientation. Other example of the cruel effects of imprisonment is Ricardo González Alfonso, who had to undergo multiple operations because of improper conditions in prison hospital, and Héctor Palacios Ruiz, who suffers from various serious cardiovascular problems.

The lack of food and clean water causes malnutrition, gastritis and kidney damage. Several prisoners suffer from asthma and bronchitis, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Most of them complain about haemorrhoids and infections. All of them also suffer from everyday fear, the limitation of contact with relatives who, in many cases, live hundreds of kilometres away, iso-

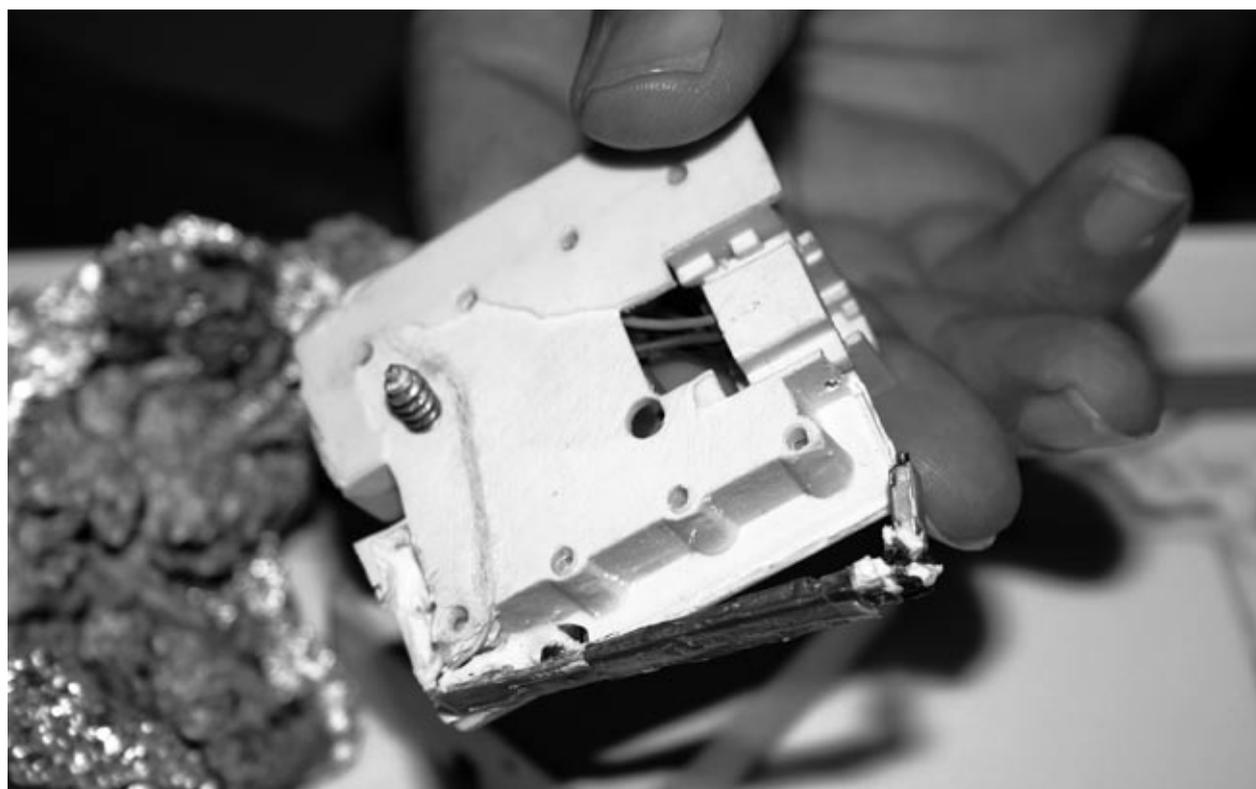


Photo: Pavel Beatsky

Oswaldo Payá showing a bug he discovered

lation in *celdas de castigo* and psychological terror conducted against them through bribed inmates.

These are only a few examples of the hardship faced by political prisoners. Some of the most seriously ill prisoners were released on *Licencia extrapenal*, i.e. conditional release to recover their health.

UNTIL THEY RECOVER

The Cuban authorities prefer to maintain uncertainty among their persecuted citizens about their rights or status. If the political prisoners are released from prison before the end of their sentence, it is only a conditional release. From the 75 arrested in 2003, the fifteen released were only granted a *Licencia extrapenal* (LEP) or conditional release, which in most cases states: "for medical reasons, until they recover". This means that the police can decide at any time to return the person to prison.

People in Need is aware of at least two cases in which conditionally released prisoners have been threatened with their sentences being resumed. In the first case, Jorge Olivera Castillo and Oscar Espinosa Chepe, both released conditionally, were called to the police station and threatened with their LEP being revoked. In the second, an opposition activist in the eastern part of Cuba was told by the police that her LEP had been cancelled. Such an action has not yet happened to any of the 75 prisoners from 2003.

The most prevailing reason for the releases since 2003 has been worsening health conditions and international pressure (or in some cases both). An example of the former is Margarito Broche Espinosa (49), a leading dissident in the province of Villa Clara, who suffered two heart attacks while imprisoned. His LEP expired in Autumn 2005 but he fortunately remains out of prison in a state of legal uncertain-

ty. Another prisoner from 2003, Mario Enrique Mayo Hernández, suffered serious depression and was granted LEP in 2005 after two suicide attempts. Others from the group of 75 include Roberto de Miranda Hernández (59) who suffered from untreated prostate problems, Orlando Fundora Alvarez who was in need of a wheel chair, Oscar Espinosa Chepe, who spent several months in the prison hospital and Julio Antonio Valdés Guevara (54) who needs several hours hemodialysis every other day. However, some of those prisoners in the most critical condition are still in prison.

Authorities denied proper medical treatment to injured prisoner, because a guardsman lost his life in the accident

The following prisoners are just some of those who, despite extremely critical conditions, remain in prison: Héctor Palacios Ruiz, Ricardo González Alfonso, Librado Linares García, Omar Pernet Hernández and Léster González Pentón.

REPUDIOS AND FAMILIES

Released prisoners are being watched by the police and are often subjected to *actos de repudio* every month, as in the case of blind lawyer and civil rights defender Juan Carlos González Leiva or member of *Movimiento Cristiano Liberación* Ezequiel Morlaes Carmenate, who faced a violent mob of a hundred party militants upon his release from 13 years imprisonment.

Understandably the repression is not limited to the sentenced dissidents but

also includes their families. *Actos de repudio* – violent staged mobs verbally and physically attacking the homes of the families – are reported to have been used to threaten dozens of prisoners' relatives. With the exception of only a few, the wives of prisoners are not allowed to work. Repression finds many ways to their relatives. To quote just a few examples: the wife of the above-mentioned youngest political prisoner Léster González Pentón was forced to undergo a psychiatric examination, diagnosed with supposed depression and ordered to take medicine; and the children of the prisoners are regularly denied a higher education, as in the example of Félix Navarro Rodríguez and others.

CONCLUSIONS

The crackdown on the opposition in 2003 drew attention towards Cuban political prisoners and since then, international organizations monitor the situation more closely. Nevertheless, the situation is complicated by the sheer number of prisoners and the variety of short-term arrests employed by the Cuban police. The mere fact that foreign organizations and the media are watching these cases makes arbitrary arrests less likely. Nevertheless, the number of arrests and imprisonments is increasing and the security forces are searching for other ways to circumvent official sentences.

Although fifteen of the 75 prisoners have been conditionally released, this is not a sign of the regimes good will, but rather demonstrates the seriousness of the prisoners' health conditions. Those who remain in prison continue to suffer more each day.

1 CCDHRN, January 11, 2006, www.adcuba.org

2 Amnesty International, 17 March 2006

3 Report on human rights in Cuba, 7 March 2006, http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/documentos/onu_situacion_de_los_derechos_humanos_en_cuba

4 Victor Rolando Arroyo, *Mi celda*; Anotnio Díaz Saez, *Locos o desesperados*, www.cubanet.org

THINKING BACK ON THE BLACK SPRING

Opinion By Jaime Leygonier

It has been three years since the massive repressions against the opposition – an anniversary that brings both memories and reflections. The peaceful opposition and independent press had managed to gain a space for itself during 2003, but then the regime began to panic and decided to destroy them all in one foul swoop.

This came as a surprise for many of us as we used to have the impression that the state would not pass a certain limit of repression. The international reaction, despite the censorship of all information about the repressions, was even more surprising. Castro must have been amazed as the world had allowed him to do the same thing many times before without saying a single word. In the past, there had been no disapproval of similar acts by the state. Yet despite the appeals by foreign politicians and governments and their “insistence” on the “immediate liberty” of all 75 prisoners, Castro knew well how to encourage inconsistency in those who make such declarations. He did not pay attention to them and they chose to agree that he was quite right regarding the ridiculous “cocktail war”. By using expressions like “dialogue”, they forgot the

meaning of the word “immediate”, and thus left the 75 prisoners to rot behind bars and ignored those newly imprisoned.

OPPOSITION EXTINGUISHED

The narrators of the TV program Round Table (*Mesa Redonda*) recently proclaimed the opposition extinguished. The opposition still speaks

The reaction of foreign governments saved other journalists from the fate of the 75 prisoners

from time to time, but most often achieves nothing more than to extend their prison sentences. This situation suits Castro as he merely gains time, time that destroys the prisoners of consciousness and the whole of Cuba, kidnapped away from real time. Nevertheless, the simple

reaction of foreign governments saved other members of the peaceful opposition from the fate of the 75 prisoners.

Many of those that weren't imprisoned did refuse to keep on fighting whilst others have continued. Today the peaceful opposition and press raise again their heads, in spite of all the weaknesses and limitations. The increasing disintegration and social failure of the regime gives them the strength. This is also visible in that more and more people are being imprisoned by the regime yet now, due to the governments desire for discreetness, the sentences are shorter and the entire process quieter. The regime also revived their “acts of repudiation”, in which crowds of police gather, shout at and beat up those who speak out against them. Their aim is not to make the opposition give up but is rather to terrify the population and thus discourage them from joining the opposition.

A WHIP LESS VISIBLE

As the regime now uses the whip in a less visible way, foreign politicians do not see, or pretend not to see, that the repression has become

more virulent since 2003. The liberation of 15 of all 75 prisoners was taken as a “gesture”, which it wasn’t at all. It was simply proof of the fact that Cuban jails destroy a person’s health in a very short time. It would be superficial to speak just about the 75 prisoners from 2003. This would forget those 333 political prisoners suffering without being noticed as much as the others by the media, the more than 100 000 common prisoners living in inhuman conditions and even those 11 million Cuban citizens, for whose liberty the 75 have fought for.

The only exception to this is the Ladies in White (*Las Damas de Blanco*), who have succeeded in gaining some recognition. They suffer repeated abuse at the hands of the authorities, such as insults, threats

and the recent travel ban on their trip to receive the Sakharov Prize from the European Parliament. The regime manoeuvres successfully to discourage other women who suffer the same ordeal from joining the Ladies in White. They threaten their prisoners and build up the women’s hopes of an individual solution for their loved ones, such as a conditional release.

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF INTERNATIONAL POLICY

The vicious circle of international policy towards Cuba lies in the fact that it is not based on principles, but on interests, quite often miserable ones. No one would look down on the opposition if they owed thousands of billions as Castro presently does. Likewise, nobody would sup-

port the opposition if it had no power and will thus be accommodating towards Castro whilst he has it. They say that they do not take part as it is a “Cuban matter”, but they have been taking part in supporting Castro for 47 years just because of business interests and shady dealing. By doing this, they help to extend the life of the regime and shorten those of the prisoners.

Jaime Leygonier is a Cuba-based independent journalist whose articles appear on CubaNet and Neuva Prensa Cubana.



PHOTO: PAVEL BRATSKY

Czech MP Tana Fischerova visiting Marcha Beatriz Roque in Havana. People around gather to prevent the visit.

PART II:

ACTS OF REPUDIATION REFLECT THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE REGIME

Freddy Valverde

The system of the Cuban regime, based on demagogy and repression, has begun to reveal its disintegration by its continued violent harassment of all those who deviate from the official opinions imposed by Fidel Castro and his staunch supporters. We are today witnessing an escalation in violence which seeks to intimidate not only dissidents but also anyone who demonstrates any form of disagreement with the regime in power.

CHANGE OF TACTICS

The so-called *Actos de Repudio* (Acts of Repudiation) are the rally cries of aggressors who insult, threaten and attack their fellow citizens. These incidents have become relatively well documented thanks to reporters from the independent press (for example, journalists writing for Cubanacan Press, Cubanet or Cuba Free Press). However, it is difficult to summarize the overall extent of these acts, which are illegal both according to the Cuban Criminal Code and the international treaties signed by Cuba. A very modest estimation indicates that around 100 of these acts have taken place since the summer of 2005. This number is not exaggerated as, for example, an independent report documented 17 similar acts in less than a month.¹

Actos de Repudio are well-known from the history of the Cuban communist regime, but they are changing in form. Previously, it was the feared state security, the official repressive apparatus in Cuba, which was directly responsible for the intimidation of dissidents. Since the

The peaceful opposition fears that Actos de Repudio can spread more violence

independent press began denouncing these violations of human rights in 2003, the government has simply changed its tactics, while their aim and nature has stayed the same.

A SCRIPT

An act of repudiation generally takes the following form: a group of 40 to 100 ordinarily dressed people gather around the house of a dissident or his family – even children and elderly grandmothers are targeted. They come simultaneously, driven in trucks (any transport is scarce in Cuba) and are coordinated by soldiers and policemen in civilian dress. Sometimes they come in the early hours of

the morning – this was especially true for Roberto de Miranda and his family in Havana – so as not to scare away tourists and others wandering in the area by chance. Similarly, they are often designed to interrupt Sunday mass or a small gathering of five or six members of local opposition.

The acts often begin with a war of nerves which includes the shouting of expletive insults and the throwing of mud, vinegar, rotten eggs, paint or whatever they receive from the undercover organisers. Death threats are always present and in recent months, there has been an increase in the number of attacks to the person, including punches and attacks with sticks and stones.²

Numerous *actos* have failed because people from the neighbourhood of the targeted dissident refused to attack someone they know, as in the case of the psychologist and journalist Guillermo Fariñas in Santa Clara in 2005 when the organisers chose to bring a crowd from more distant locations. The mobs do not know the person they are attacking and they always follow the same script and the same chanting. This could be illustrated by the case of *repudio* against Berta Antúnez, a relative of two political prisoners, who witnessed how an act of repudiation turned into a party, when

organisers brought in beer to motivate people and encourage more violence. Even if they wished to participate in the attacks, neighbours are unable to do so as undercover policeman seal off the place of *repudio* and the surrounding streets. This suggests that they do not want any witnesses.

PARTY MILITANTS TAKING OVER

The difference from *Actos de Repudio* three years ago, when they were conducted by the state security, is that present *actos* have the direct participation of prominent members of the Communist Party. This was testified to by physician Sandra Domínguez and journalists from Cubanacán Press Agency in Santa Clara. The involvement of Communist Party members in this, one of the most violent attacks in Santa Clara that left at least three people seriously injured, reportedly caused conflict among local members, who denied being associated with such excessive violence.

That is why the proponents of the regime now claim even louder that

Actos de Repudio are spontaneous activities of the citizens. That is, if they even chose to talk about them. "We are going to show the counter-revolutionaries that we don't want them here, that we won't permit them to destroy the fatherland of Martí and Fidel. If they don't like our revolutionary Cuba, they should leave for Florida," said a member of the Revolution Defense Committee (CDR) who participated in an *Acto de Repudio* but who would not give us his name as he does not trust foreigners. The most active in attacks even say that awareness in society is so high that the people themselves rise up and attack the "counter-revolutionaries".

CONTRADICTIONS OF THE REGIME

The communist regime undoubtedly contradicts itself. Firstly, in Cuba everything is watched by Revolution Defense Committees, which are de facto subordinated to the state security and together constitute hundreds of thousands of people to spy upon others. And secondly, the freedom of assembly

is practically non-existent and according to Cuban laws, a gathering of more than three people can be considered an attack against the state. Anyone protesting against the curtailment of this freedom ends up in prison.

How would it then be possible that a mob of dozens of attackers could spontaneously rally in the street? The regime simply washes its hands of the issue.³ The peaceful opposition understandably fears that *Actos de Repudio* can spread violence among Cubans worn down by prolonged suffering and demonstrates how much energy the *nomenklatura* still invest in maintaining the *status quo*.

Freddy Valverde is a journalist and the head of the Spanish section of the Czech Radio. He has visited Cuba on a number of occasions.

1 Special report, 9 February 2006, http://www.cubaencuentro.com/es/documentos/informe_especial_nueva_oleada_de_represion_politica_en_cuba

2 See Report on Human Rights Violation in Cuba 2005 – 2006 by Cuban Foundation of Human Rights, www.netforcuba.org

3 According to the last report by CCDHRN, Fidel Castro gave the new wave of *Actos de Repudio* 'green light' in his speech on 26 July 2005. See www.adcuba.org.



PHOTO: PAVEL BEATSKY

Malecón in Havana

SENATOR STETINA'S VISIT TO GUILLERMO FARIÑAS

Jaromir Stetina

The news that the Cuban journalist and dissident Guillermo Fariñas had decided to go on hunger strike reached me literally a few hours before my flight to Cuba. I had planned to go there to support the families of political prisoners and to visit independent journalists. Guillermo had decided to go on a dangerous hunger strike, refusing liquid as well, and had previously spoken about the necessity of sacrifice. His friends all around the world, therefore, decided to try to prevent him from dying and decided to convey their message and act immediately.

While still on the road from Havana to Santa Clara, we learned that Guillermo had fallen into a coma and had been hospitalized. There he was connected to an intravenous drip. When he regained consciousness, he ripped out the needle and ended up in a coma again.

I needed to deliver Fariñas a message from the former Czech president, Václav Havel, who was requesting that he stop the hunger strike. I supposed that an appeal from Havel, who is known and respected among Cuban dissidents and whose book *The Power of Powerless* is widely read in the island, could present Guillermo with a good reason to abandon his suicide attempt.

The visit to the hospital proved crucial. We had been told the number of the building and the relevant floor by Guillermo's colleagues. Secret police guards took turns to guard the front door so we entered by the back door. We were not stopped by the police but by a doctor, who automatically took us to a room with no windows and left us there waiting. After a while, we

It is illegal to even own a computer without special permission

were informed by another doctor that we should not worry about Guillermo's health and he was in stable condition, but nevertheless we were not permitted to visit him. The doctor did not understand that we were there to help him to save the patient's life. It was useless. His role there was to deny that there were any problems. There was nothing else to do than to leave the message with Guillermo's friends.

Guillermo decided to protest for free access to the Internet both for journalists but also for all Cubans. As it is illegal to even own a computer with-

out special permission, let alone access the closely watched Internet, people are forced to find very expensive illegal methods or to visit the US Interest Section in Havana.

The other reason for his protest was the increasing violence in the *Actos de Repudio* staged against the peaceful opposition. Guillermo and his friends had been beaten up by undercover policemen a few weeks previously, when they gathered in front of a court. I was surprised that the things I heard from many people I visited on the island reminded me of the situation in Czechoslovakia in the violent fifties. The level of repression does not resemble the years before the regime broke down in my country and is overall undoubtedly much higher.

Guillermo replied to Havel a few days later. He said he was pleased by a message from a man he respects so much but he could not abandon his cause. Three months after my visit, the fate of Guillermo, in critical condition and hospitalized, still remains undecided.

Jaromir Stetina is a Senator of the Parliament of the Czech Republic. He worked as a war journalist in the Balkans, Central Asia and the former Soviet Union and has written dozens of books. In the mid-eighties he joined the opposition activities of the Czech dissidents.

PART III:

TAILOR-MADE PRISONS

Karel Kejr

The number of correctional facilities for both men and women in Cuba is hard to estimate. Eyewitnesses and human rights activist agree that the facilities hold at least several thousand Cubans accused mostly of either *peligrosidad predelicuente*, which according to article 72 of the Criminal Code means that they showed an inclination towards behaviour that contradicts socialist morality, or *jineterismo*, that is prostitution.¹ One type of such correctional facility for the latter is Centro de Detención y Rehabilitación de Prostitutas (Centre for the Detention and Rehabilitation of Prostitutes). These female-only facilities are overcrowded and therefore the state has been building other establishments of this kind. According to construction workers these new facilities will hold thousands of female prisoners. The charge of prostitution – *jineterismo* – has been used by the state regime against its political opponents, as in the case of the wife of the opposition activist Hernando Sánchez.²

REGULAR DAILY REGIME

The inmates and detainees usually sleep in cells of thirty to forty people. Rooms that sleep over a hundred people are not exceptional. Most time is spent indoors; people are only allowed to go outside on their way to work or during short walks.

Past detainees have described their day as beginning with a wake-up call around five a.m. Then, after a quick breakfast (meals usually consist of rice and vegetables, occasionally supplemented by a meat sauce), revolu-

The correctional facilities hold at least several thousand Cubans

tion education follows. All inmates have to gather in one room and recite celebratory slogans about the revolution and its heroes. The government's proclamations from the daily papers are read aloud along with condemnations of the imperialist policies, the United States in particular. The groups denounce the USA together for several minutes, sometimes even with their fists in the air.

The rest of the day is spent working in the fields, cultivating fruit and vegetables, harvesting the sugar cane, hoeing potatoes or collecting tobacco leaves. In the evening, all inmates have to watch all political or educational TV programmes as well as Fidel Castro's public addresses. The day finishes at 10 pm at

which time everybody must be in their beds. The lights are left on all night and the use of mosquito nets is prohibited. Visits are allowed once every two weeks in the correctional facilities.

PELIGROSIDAD

Some of the arrested Cubans, those charged by the police with so-called *peligrosidad*, have to go through a considerably harder time when imprisoned. They are only permitted to go outdoors for an hour or two every two weeks. All day, they do nothing but sleep and wait for food. There are three meals a day, again consisting of rice, bits of vegetables and scraps of meat or crackling. Twice a month, they are entitled to a piece of chicken. It would seem, therefore, that the detainees are subjected to psychological torture, the denial of daylight, compulsory attendance to political seminars and discussions, a bad unbalanced diet and at least 10 hours a day of grueling monotonous labour.

Physical torture is generally not present, as long as the prisoners fulfill all their duties and show signs of „correction“. However, there are also so-called *Tapia* (*celda de castigo*), tight cells with a concrete bed and a hole in the ground in place of a toilet. Difficult prisoners can be placed in a *Tapia* for a maximum of 21 days and are subject to beatings from the prison guards.

FORESEEING THE DANGERS

A Cuban person can end up in such an institution very easily and often they have no idea whether they are breaking the law or not. The police have been given the instrument of *peligrosidad predelictiva* as a threat. The law is written in an unclear way and leaves a lot of space for arbitrary interpretation. One example is the offense of bothering tourists, which is one with which I have unfortunately had a personal experience. The police do not acknowledge the fact that a Cuban person may in fact be related to or have a long-term friendship with the foreigner. If it is seen fit by the authorities, the accused are transported to a detention facility.

During the course of the detention, an investigation is supposed to be taking place. However, the accused is only given a list of his offences, which shows whether he or she shares socialist morals. The investigating official may, for example, receive a list such as this: low participation in the meetings of the Cuban Revolution Defense Committee, criticism of the regime (a mere statement from another person is considered evidence) and meeting with foreigners. The situation is further worsened for the accused if he or she has no job. All of this appears in the reports written by the members of the Revolution Defense Committee, who often also serve as witnesses. The evidence is often fabricated. Charging a person with *peligrosidad*, however, requires little evidence, because peo-

ple can get imprisoned for the mere assumption that the person might commit a more serious act against the regime in the future. The sentences for *peligrosidad* vary. The maximum penalty is four years imprisonment. Many are released from the detention centres early on the grounds of good behaviour. Some leave the prisons with a police document stating that they would have to serve the rest of their sentence in case of any misdemeanour in the future.

Karel Kejř is a journalist of a leading Czech daily. He has visited Cuba several times.

¹ See Informe del CCDHRN January 2006, www.adcuba.org.

² Jaime Leygonier, cubanet.org, 6 March 2006.

NGO RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY TOWARDS CUBA: COMBINING CONTACT AND CONDEMNATION

Introduction by Roisin Joyce

Common policy towards Cuba is often viewed as an exclusive decision: to encourage contact with Cuban society and engage in cultural exchanges or criticise the totalitarian regime and condemn imprisonments. The Prague Meeting of European non-profit organizations and its final recommendations indicate that those working with Cuba sug-

gest that coordination of the two approaches can attain the maximum effect.

PRAGUE MEETING

On April 26th, 2006, European non-profit organizations and representatives of several foreign ministries met in Prague to discuss the current situ-

ation of human rights and democracy in Cuba and subsequent European policy towards the island. The meeting was held with the support of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was attended by participants from the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden¹. It emphasised the importance of European policy towards Cuba as

a tool for encouraging democratic change on the island. This is particularly important in light of the upcoming revision of the EU Common Position on Cuba on June 6, 2006. A policy paper entitled, EU Common Position on Cuba: Alternative Recommendations' was discussed and finalised by the participants.

COMMON POSITION

The EU Common Position on Cuba, first adopted in December 1996, is the main guiding document concerning EU members' foreign policy towards Cuba. Its objective is to encourage a process of transition to a pluralist democracy and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as (...) improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people.' In June 2006, the Common Position will once again be reviewed by EU member states. This process needs to duly reflect the lack of progress made and propose measures to guarantee human rights on the island.

The European Union previously froze its dialogue with the Cuban government and introduced a limited number of punitive measures in reaction to the 2003 arrests of 75 Cuban dissidents. These measures were temporarily suspended in early 2005, in reaction to the conditional release of a few of the political prisoners. The EU subsequently restored its dialogue with the Cuban authorities. Yet despite this, the position of the Cuban government remains confrontational and repressions are worsening. In 2005, 53 people were condemned and prosecuted for political reasons (Reportes de la Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional www.Adcuba.org) in the second half of 2005 and the prisoners' families are subject to persecution. This persecution is increasingly taking the form of so called acts of repu-

diation (actos de repudio), assaults by seemingly random individuals or even angry mobs directed towards dissidents' families and property.

RECOMENDATIONS

Participants in the meeting unanimously agreed that EU Common Policy must be based upon two key elements: sustained contact with and support for the Cuban people; and condemnation of the repressive activities of the regime. Both real and symbolic gestures of support towards the Cuban opposition and civil society must be intensified. This may include improving the information flow within Cuba through the provision of literature, internet access and cultural centres; the visits of EU diplomats to families subjected to acts of repudiation and a strong element of consultation with the Cuban people in the development of any long-term EU transition strategy. Furthermore, the rules of EU development aid, in particular the EIDHR, must be adjusted to make it more easily accessible to independent civil society in Cuba. On the other hand, Castro's regime must be closely watched and immediately punished for human rights abuses, for example by targeted visa bans against top Cuban officials. The EU must also strongly condemn the present acts of repudiation and call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. In the following document you will find full details of all recommendations made in the policy paper. The full Policy Paper can be read online at www.icdcprague.org.

Roisin Joyce is a program officer in the Cuba Department of the Czech NGO, People in Need. She is also responsible for the coordination of the ICDC network of European NGOs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE REVIEW OF THE EU COMMON POSITION

The representatives of the non-governmental organizations that have gathered in Prague have acknowledged that there has been no improvement in the aims set in the Common Position concerning the human rights situation in Cuba.

The following organizations took part in the Prague Meeting and assisted in the development and finalization of the recommendations: Asociación Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana (Spain), Asociación Española Cuba en Transición (Spain), Association for International Affairs (Czech Republic), Christian Democratic International Centre (Sweden), 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) and the Pontis Foundation (Slovakia).

The recommendations for the EU Common Position are as follows:

MAINTAIN THE CURRENT EU COMMON POSITION – A MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

As there has been no improvement in the human rights situation on the island since the last evaluation in June 2005, the current Common Position should, as a minimum, be maintained.

STRONGLY CONDEMN THE ACTS OF REPUDIATION (ACTOS DE REPUDIO)

The EU should declare that these „spontaneous“ acts are a gross violation of human rights and should condemn this practice, which is endorsed and often organized by the Cuban government. It should also take practical steps such as the simultaneous summoning of Cuban Ambassadors to EU capitals to signal the unified stance of the EU regarding these acts, as recommended by the EU Heads of Mission (HOMs) in Havana in their report of March 7, 2006.

UNCONDITIONAL RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS

The EU should call for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. Prisoners released over the last two years were released only conditionally and, since their release, have been threatened with their prison sentences being resume if they continue with their activities.

INTRODUCTION OF TIME FRAMES AND BENCHMARKS

As it is increasingly obvious that current EU policy has not led to any improvements regarding the transition to democracy or the human rights situation on the island, it would be recommended to strengthen the position's appeal on human rights, introducing realistic time frames and measurable benchmarks for improvement. These should be complemented by targeted punitive measures.

PUNITIVE MEASURES TARGETED AT THE CUBAN LEADERSHIP

Punitive measures should, in particular, 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 in Cuba. In response to the expulsions of EU politicians and other visitors to Cuba, the EU should reciprocate by applying a visa ban to selected Cuban officials.

LONG-TERM EU TRANSITION STRATEGY FOR CUBA

The EU should prepare a long-term strategy for the transition in Cuba. After Fidel Castro has gone, European countries must be ready to actively help in the first steps of the Cuban transition towards democracy. EU policies should use all possible contacts to prepare Cuban society – to the maximum possible extent – for a swift and peaceful transition to a democratic political system and market economy. An advisory group should be formed by the EU which would provide technical assistance to the future Cuban democratic government. New member states' experience with the transition to democracy could be help significantly in this process.

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. Every mission of an EU Member State should be encouraged to have at least one computer with Internet connection accessible for the Cuban general 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.

All available means should be used to enable Cuban students to receive scholarships to study at European universities. Scholarships for young people who want to participate in “distance learning” in degree programs abroad and the exchange of young professionals should also be established. European radio stations with worldwide coverage should also be supported to broadcast more information on Cuba in their Spanish language programs.

SYMBOLIC ELEMENTS OF EU POLICY TOWARDS CUBA

The opposition and Cuban citizens should know that they are internationally supported, that they are not alone. New symbolic measures should be implemented by the EU diplomats in Havana – for example, visits to the families that have been subjected to an act of repudiation. They should also invite civil society representatives to all public events organized by EU 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 the sign of a very high value“.

INCREASE SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN CUBA

The EU missions in Cuba should intensify their contacts with independent civil society. EU diplomats should regularly visit civil society events and consistently inform their capitals about them. The funds channeled through the EIDHR, or any other instruments that might replace it, should be made easily accessible to independent civil society. We regret that the latest Call for Proposals made under the EC/Decentralized Cooperation in April 2005 was not a step in the right direction.

OPPOSE CUBAN MEMBERSHIP IN THE NEWLY FORMED UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

European Union member states should oppose Cuban participation in the newly formed UN Human Rights Council. It is important that the EU does not support membership for those countries in which severe human rights violations take place.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

30TH MAY – BRUSSELS / ICDC

The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba is organising a conference in Brussels on the 30th May entitled “Europe for Cuba: the New Policy of the EU and its Member States towards Cuba”. Members of the ICDC, delegates from Cuban civic movements, representatives of European institutions and EU member states and delegates from NGOs will meet during this conference to present their reports about the situation in Cuba and their suggestions for the position that the EU and its member states should adopt towards the country.

17TH JUNE – BERLIN / KONRAD ADENAUER FOUNDATION

Konrad Adenauer Foundation is planning a conference for 17 June, 2006, in Berlin entitled “June 17, 1953 – A commitment for Europe’s growing together” (working title) with the participation of Arnold Vaatz. The conference will concentrate on the general issue of human rights, anti-communist movements in Europe, and how to use the European experience in those countries still suffering under Communism.

18TH JUNE – AMSTERDAM / PAX CHRISTI

On June 18th, Pax Christi will organize a non-political cultural activity to run as part of their present Cuba programme. A large salsa fiesta will be organised, aimed at a wider audience, to inform the public of the situation of Cuban dissidents and the Cuban independent libraries. Several salsa schools will participate in the event.

RECENT EVENTS

3RD-4TH MAY – MADRID / CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY IN CUBA

The second conference of the International Group for Corporate Responsibility in Cuba was held in Madrid. The participants focused on labour rights, trade unions and the effects of the country’s economic situation on Cuban workers.

5TH-6TH MAY – FRANKFURT / ISHR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The International Society for Human Rights (ISHR) held a conference in Frankfurt entitled ‘Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Press for all Cubans – perspectives for democratic change in Cuba’.

10TH MAY – VIENNA / “DEMOCRACY IN CUBA – A CONCERN FOR EU-LAC RELATIONS?”

ICDC, Konrad Adenauer, Modern Politics, Pontis and Reporters without Borders organized a panel discussion entitled “Democracy in Cuba – A Concern for EU-LAC Relations?”

17TH MAY – MADRID / FREE INTERNET IN CUBA

Asociación Española Cuba en Transición (AECT), Asociación Iberoamericana por la Libertad (AIL) and Reporters without Borders (RSF) put on an event dedicated to the lack of free internet access in Cuba. A number of journalists from Spanish newspapers held an online discussion with Cuban journalists and dissidents.

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