

# Communication is the Key

**Gabriel Andreescu**

In 2000, I participated in a conference in which the Directorio's President, Javier de Céspedes (Cuban Democratic Directorate), took part, organized by Foundations for Pluralism, a network of civic organizations. During that conference, Javier expressed his hope to gain the solidarity of Eastern European organizations on behalf of the Cuban opposition. States where the communist regimes had collapsed were symbolically significant to Cuba. No signal from America could have the same impact as events in Havana's former allies. I was surprised by what he told me at that time: that no Cuban dissident was awarded anything by the international community. I remembered that during the communist regime, it was so important to have recognition from outside for your internal struggle.

This was the beginning of an initiative named "The Pedro Luis Boitel" This Award was named after a Cuban hero who died in a communist prison in 1972 during a hunger strike that was meant to change conditions of incarceration. "The Pedro Louis Boitel Award Network of Eastern European Countries" was thus created and provided an award of \$1500.

My experience allows me to draw on some conclusions. Firstly, we need to cooperate with people in Cuba and with NGOs in America. Otherwise, it would be impossible for an organization — in Romania, for example — to have sufficient knowledge and tools to be involved in this battle. I don't think that in Eastern Europe we really have the knowledge and the instruments we need in order to be active in Cuba. Another conclusion I drew from my activity in these last four years related to the Cuban case is that there are people committed to freedom in Cuba, but there are not so many. Therefore, we must work to convince people to take action, and convince them that their actions can have some effect on the situation in the island. We must write about Cuba, but we must also encourage others to write about Cuba, thus bringing the issue to both public and international debate. Furthermore, we must act at the level of parliamentarians and decision-makers, that is to say those that could have influence on policy at a higher level. The position of the state on the international level is one of the most important ways to aid the Cuban opposition.

Furthermore, we need the imagination to think and plan a non-conventional way of doing something for Cubans. From my perspective, an essential advantage is the possibility of communication with Cuba. There is such a possibility, even under the Castro's rule. In 2001, the blind Cuban activist, Juan Carlos Leiva, was awarded in Bucharest for his courageous fight for freedom. I had the opportunity to speak from Bucharest online with someone in Miami Directorio, and also with Leiva, in Cuba. This kind of connection has only been possible because of the existence of a network of cooperation in Cuba. This network must receive further support and encourage.

As regards to the establishment of a truth commission, suggested by a former speaker, I would like to comment

as follows. A truth commission is a good solution during the dictatorship as a way to start negotiations with the actual power base, as a way to free people and to restore fundamental freedoms and liberties in Cuba. Therefore, Cuban people could bring about change, secure lives and secure sufferance. Yet even if a truth commission is a legitimated form of dialogue between the opposition and the main power, it is not the same after the collapse of the regime. Democracy in Cuba requires justice. The language of democracy must stand as justice, rather than any established truth commission. The truth is a cultural issue, a professional issue, rather than a route to justice in a post totalitarian society.