

The International Recognition of Prisoners and Dissidents

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The International Committee for Democracy in Cuba is the embodiment of the political concept of transatlantic relations which brings together America, Europe and Latin America, a concept which has sometimes become no more than a rhetorical exercise. The ICDC provides tangible content for such transatlantic relations, including the defence of shared values and principles and the freedom of the Cuban nation. As the battle of ideas requires the support of mass media in modern democracies, such initiatives and demonstrations of international solidarity are highly necessary.

Here I will detail both the activities we are involved in at present and what we should do in the future. A series of legislative initiatives have been launched in Congress as well as in the Senate and we also want to bring these efforts to the European Parliament. Of course, in the European The next issue we will present in the Spanish Parliament will be the adoption of prisoners, in coordination with an association known in Spain for a relatively short period of time but with a nevertheless important role, called Cuba en Transición (Cuba in Transition). That is to say, we want to explain to Spanish people and the Parliament that each Spanish deputy can adopt one Cuban political prisoner and in doing so this deputy, in contact with public opinion, mass media and political forces, will follow closely the situation of the prisoner and his family. In this way, as in other areas of humanitarian aid, we will be able to put society in closer and more tangible contact with the real problems of Cuban political prisoners. Therefore there are specific initiatives that I would include under one concept — parliamentary diplomacy of a humanitarian kind — that I think we have to develop more, at least in the Spanish Parliament.

Some months ago I travelled to Cuba with the intention of meeting friends from my party in Spain who are those that in Cuba suffer from the most direct oppression by the regime. Obviously, I was not allowed to visit the prisoners so I met with several of their wives. I also talked to those dissidents that still can work “in freedom”, which is the case of Oswaldo Payá with whom we have a common political project. The most influential and important meeting with the wives of prisoners was with Blanca Reyes, the wife of Raúl Rivero. Blanca explained to us the terrible situation of Raúl Rivero and said that the sinister and cynical system of pressure exercised by the regime via its tentacles inside the prison involving blackmailing, psychological and physical torture was increasing and becoming more and more unbearable.

Later, I had the opportunity to participate in the celebration of the French National Holiday in the French Embassy since it took place during my visit. This occasion was fantastic since in a limited space and time we could make contacts with all dissidents that are still free in the streets. We can participate in such events thanks to the European common position, and the series of measures taken since the detentions in spring 2003.

I would like to stress the obligation of the European Union Embassies to invite internal dissidents for the celebration of their national holidays as this is a political message with a wide impact. This measure does not prohibit the Ambassadors inviting public officials. However, for some months the Cuban public authorities have not been attending the celebrations of the European Embassies.

I realized the advantage of such breathing space offered to the internal dissidents on the island. Unfortunately however, when I returned to Spain I could see from a series of declarations by the new socialist Spanish government of Mr Zapatero that there was the intention to gradually modify the common European position or at least some of its measures. In particular they want to change the measure that requires European Embassies to invite internal dissidents for the celebration of their national holidays. I would like to bring this intention to

modify the common position planned by my government to the attention of my European colleagues. We must not forget that in the case of Cuba, Spain has a certain credit and we would not like to witness the Spanish name being used to reduce the pressure of humanitarian aspects. Therefore I would like to use this occasion to urge all participants of the Prague Summit to decide, during the next meeting of the relevant working group and based on reports of the EU Ambassadors, whether to maintain the system of measures we support or whether to reduce the pressure. What are the arguments for the reduction of pressure? Firstly, the argument that we are negotiating with the Cuban government for the possibility to set some prisoners free. This is a reality we cannot conceal, yet we must be aware of the fact that it could lead to trafficking with human drama between the Castro regime and European institutions. The piecemeal liberation of political prisoners is a planned strategy but we do not know what it will ultimately achieve. Therefore we have to appeal to our governments, especially to the Dutch Presidency of the EU, informing them that there is such a plan. And therefore I would like to use this occasion to communicate to them this message and involve them in the process.

The Spanish Secretary of the Exterior has recently expressed some opinions with regard to Cuba that were closely followed by Spanish public opinion. They have been, as usual, ambiguous declarations that it was necessary to relieve tension in relations with the regime, as if Cuba was a seaside resort. We have criticized this political strategy by communicating our opinion to the Spanish people. I personally presented and submitted a proposal in the Congress to support the Varela Project. I do not appeal here to my political power, public opinion or the opinion of my party but explicitly to the sector of the Spanish Left, the Socialist Party. This party is sensitive to these topics as currently in Spain there is a bipolar disruption in the Left, that is to say conflict between those who do not want to ease the commitment to defend human rights and those who maintain a nostalgic romantic image from the past, an image we hoped to have overcome already. Therefore it is necessary for those of you who have any kind of relationship with the Socialist Party to convince them of the need of pressure. We must implement multidirectional political pressure if we want the European Union to maintain the commitment and politics that has developed over the recent years.

Therefore we must not forget one thing: that the conditional liberation of prisoners, whatever they symbolically represent, could become a cause of an internal division of opinion. In this sense, most of us would automatically think of Raúl Rivero whom of course we all support. The objective of the regime, of which we are aware as we have witnessed it on many occasions, is to use this piecemeal liberation to worsen the situation of the dissidents by selectively saying 'you will be liberated' and 'you will not'. We know that the overall objective is to divide the internal dissidents. We must not underestimate the Maquiavelic capability and cynicism of the Cuban regime and we must trust in our experience. In this sense, we have to be aware that there is a possibility that some EU governments might make the mistake of establishing a new relationship with the Cuban regime that could unfortunately lead to the division of internal dissidents.

In conclusion, I believe in the committed spirit that I think still exists in a sector of the Spanish and European Left. But if this spirit does not prevail over the pragmatism and nostalgic ideology of the other spirit of the European Left, I and my party will declare ourselves dissidents in our own countries. This is because we firmly believe that governments following this path act contrary to the fundamental principles of the European Union, where the commitment to human rights should be the basic rule that guides us along our political path.