

The Limits on Freedom in Cuba

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At present, there is perhaps the impression that the focus of Europe is currently on its projects of global consolidation, projects including the birth of the European Constitution; the EU-enlargement; negotiations with further candidate countries (including Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia); the responsibility in the Balkans, in Central Asia (with regard to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq), the Middle East; and relations with the US. However, the European Union has always had an incontestable and indisputable commitment to the cause of human rights. Furthermore, due to their global and universal character, they do not have to be advocated with regard to one region or country or continent.

In loyalty to the principle of and commitment to human rights, in 1985, the European Parliament created the Sakharov Prize, awarded to those who demonstrate and defend freedom of thinking and freedom of conscience. The first prize winner was Nelson Mandela who, as you all know, had spent many years of his life in prison. I also cannot forget to mention that in 1989 the Sakharov Prize was awarded to Alexander Dubček, one of the personalities of the Prague Spring. When receiving the prize in the European Parliament he said some very emotional words. He expressed his wish that as a result of the Prague Spring the great symphony of the European community spirit will continue to resound in 1990 and in all the years to come.

Sakharov was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975. This physicist and member of the Academy of the ex-Soviet Union died in 1988, leaving us a legacy of moral integrity and commitment to the values of peaceful coexistence among nations. Andrei Sakharov said that many times the voices that count most are the voices that are not heard. Particularly in order to take into account the concerns of the prize's namesake, in 2002 I, with my colleagues such as Cecilia Malmstrom, had the privilege to present Oswaldo Payá's candidacy first in the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs and Human Rights and to later defend it at the Conference of the Chairmen of Political Groups of the European Parliament. Last year when the European Parliament awarded the Sakharov Prize to the United Nations, the UN Secretary General came to receive it. The most recent prize winners were present but Oswaldo Payá could not be with us. His forced absence seems to be the most meaningful argument in favour of Oswaldo Payá and the Varela Project, a project that deserves our full attention as it strives towards the opening of a transition process that would allow Cubans, especially the fifty percent of the population younger than 30, to see hope and reconciliation in the future. Based on these principles, it would support a development that would lead to Cuba becoming a part of the international and Latin American community from both a political and economic point of view.

Those speakers here representing Europe, including Mrs Malmström, Mr Moragas and Mr Ouzký, all mentioned the anomaly present in European Union policy- the lack of a framework for institutional relations with Cuba, which is the only Latin American country not bound by an association or co-operation agreement. This has not been possible for a simple reason.

Cuba simply does not fulfil the requirements of the democratic clause that characterizes the relation between the European Union and all the above mentioned countries and regional communities.

This democratic clause was forged during the time that President Aylwin took his post in the La Moneda Presidential Palace, in Santiago de Chile in March 1990. The European Commission Delegation chaired by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, and then European Commissioner Abel Matutes, met the Argentinian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Caballo (in one of his many roles), and in the office of the head of the La

Moneda Presidential Palace guard asked him to sign an agreement with a democratic clause to protect his country, Argentina, from any reactionary inclinations. The agreement with Argentina was signed in Luxemburg in June 1990 and it was one of the most quickly concluded agreements between the European Union and a third country. This clause was later included in the agreement with Chile and the EU fourth generation agreements and association agreements with México.

One of the conclusions of our roundtable in Prague has been that we have to review the European common position every six months, based on the reports of the heads of missions in Havana. Therefore it is important not to break the democratic clause but rather to maintain it so that it can be subject to renewal under the same conditions by the EU Presidency. Other conclusions reached include the need to maintain pressure via resolutions; via the support of declarations such as the declaration for the freedom of political prisoners mentioned by Mr Moragas; the importance of parliament diplomacy and the need to support different initiatives such as the adoption of political prisoners. I believe that we must strive to move from euphoria to accounting books. Therefore when we in the European Parliament voted about 2005 EU budgets, we decided to allocate a significant amount of funds to the budget line of human rights so as to be able to fund activities via movements dedicated to the defence of human rights in Cuba.

I would also like to tell you that the support of integration, understanding, agreement and reconciliation and the support of politics that represents democratic freedoms and the respect for human rights is honourable politics. The European Union has shown such support in IberoAmerica and other places and, now that it seems as if these values have been consolidated, we in the European Parliament understand that in this time of inclusion we must call to everyone including Cuba. And Cuba must take the necessary steps to overcome the problematic situation of its lack of involvement in continental and sub-continental processes of inclusion. Considering all the good and bad experiences we have gained of the process of European inclusion, we can say without doubt that development would be more difficult today without it. That does not mean that we are not aware of the difficulties accompanying the old aspiration for inclusion and that we are not aware of the fact that, as a great Irish poet said, too long a sacrifice can turn the heart into a stone. Yet today 'united we stand', the old maxim of the Roman Empire, is truer than ever.

With all this, it is clear that the Cuban regime is an anachronism in both the Latin American Union of Nations and in the world, as I have mentioned on various occasions in the European Parliament. Today freedom in Cuba is limited. Therefore, those of us from the European Parliament want to pay homage to those in prison, internal dissidents, the Cuban exile and all those who today fight inside and outside Cuba for their freedom and dignity. There is no such thing as individual dignity without every man and woman having the choice and without recognition that citizens have the right to participate in deciding their future through the utilization of freedom of expression, regular elections, the demystification of political persons and dogmas. The future cannot be imposed either on individuals or on nations without taking their opinion into account and no generation may commit or mortgage the following generations. Therefore the European Union has shown and continues to show its unlimited solidarity with those who suffer, with the Cuban nation, and will be ceaseless in the inevitable requirements for freedom.