

# The Bermuda Triangle of Support, Multi-lateralism and Communication

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This essay will act as an introduction to three main areas of interest and importance regarding the situation in Cuba. The first of these I would like to illustrate through personal reminiscence. I was privileged to take an active role in the specific and for some people somewhat surprising link between my country in the “heart of Europe“, and a distant Caribbean Island. I was the head of the Czech delegation at the annual session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva in 1999, charged with an uneasy task: to present and put through a resolution expressing concern over violations of human rights in Cuba.

The reason why the Czech delegation, strongly encouraged by then-President Václav Havel, decided to take over this initiative after a similar resolution proposed by the United States was rejected in 1998 was simple: to express our solidarity with the members of Cuban internal democratic opposition, and to raise our voices on behalf of Cuban political prisoners. According to the text of our Cuban resolution, ‘The co-authors, the Czech Republic and Poland, have strong reasons to take this step. The reasons largely stem from their historical experience with the same totalitarian system as the one now practiced in Cuba. Former dissidents learned to appreciate the value of support from the democratic world when they were themselves persecuted not so long ago. Our commitment to help other people persecuted for their active defense of human rights originates from here.’

This reasoning — as simple or even naive as it may seem to today’s professional diplomats and ‘realistic’ politicians has lost nothing of its validity to this day, despite being dishonored and caricatured by Fidel Castro as indicative of the ways in which the Czech and Polish ‘lackeys’ ‘kowtow’ to their new American masters. I am immensely proud that what was once seen as an isolated act supported by just a handful of idealistic politicians with their background in the Central European human rights movements of the 1970s and 1980s, has become an integral part of our current Foreign Policy, which is well respected abroad. This gives us an active role to play within the EU and helps generate new forms of international cooperation.

The second crucial area of interest from our Geneva experience was that if we were to succeed where the United States had failed before us, we had to try to frame the debate on Cuba in the Commission on Human Rights in an international context, in other words, to “de-bilateralize” the debate. The productive cooperation between the US, the EU and the democratic countries of Latin America was the condition sine qua non for our success in what often seemed like a ‘mission impossible’. Within this Bermuda Triangle, the fact that we succeeded not only in 1999, but also in 2000 and 2001 has only confirmed my conviction that it is this spirit of new internationalism within the Free World, which does not allow itself to be paralyzed by all the worn-out and hundred times recycled ideological disputes of the past, which will eventually initiate the final push that will set Cuba on the path toward democracy. It has made me believe that it is the ability to have an open dialogue about all issues, the sense of an unconditional moral obligation to express solidarity with the unjustly persecuted, those jailed and harassed dissidents struggling for freedom and human dignity denied to them by totalitarian regimes, that makes democracy strong enough to prevail in the current turmoil, and that sends a clear signal to all usurpers of power like Fidel Castro that his career as dictator is coming to an end.

The third point I would like to make is based on my experience with the Cuban community in exile. During the past couple of years, as a diplomat representing the Czech Republic in Washington D.C, I have had the chance to communicate extensively with various groups of Cuban-Americans, above all in Miami. I am convinced that if we want to help create a new international environment enabling Cubans to make a fresh start in the beginning of

the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we should support and, if necessary, facilitate by all available means, open communication between Cuban democrats at home and those in the 'near abroad'. However, we must take into consideration the elementary fact that these two groups of essentially likeminded people have been living for decades in very different worlds, without enough opportunities to have a genuine political dialogue, with their arguments being maliciously distorted and misrepresented by Castro's propagandistic machine.

Without wanting to interfere in essentially "domestic" Cuban matters, I do believe that the relationships between Cuban internal democratic opposition and Cuban exiles in Miami are going to play an extremely important role in the process of Cuban democratization. In this respect, the situation has improved significantly in past years and I find it very encouraging that all major Cuban-American groups based in Florida are now willing to actively support the dissidents on the island and are ready to conduct an open dialogue with them concerning national reconciliation.