

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK

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Ever since official relations were established between the then European Economic Community (EEC) and Cuba in September 1988, shortly before the end of the Cold War, they have been conditioned by major changes in their respective regional environments and the global context.

After the Berlin Wall fell, the EEC's external action towards Cuba went through various stages of rapprochement and estrangement. Several attempts were made to negotiate a bilateral agreement, but all failed, preventing the development of a stable, mutually beneficial, long-term relationship. The disappearance of the Soviet Union (USSR) – for decades Cuba's main international ally – helped open up new spaces for cooperation between the island and the European Union (EU), which became an important trading partner and the largest provider of cooperation to Cuba from the 1990s onwards. Russia's share of trade with Cuba fell from 68% in 1990 to just 6.1% in 2020, while EU member states' contribution rose to 36%, ahead of China with 11%.

The Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) signed between Cuba, the EU and its member states in December 2016 began a new stage of constructive engagement. This instrument, which formally replaced the Common Position established in 1996, discontinues the policy of imposing inefficient unilateral conditionalities on bilateral relations and the achievement of the goals the parties set within the framework. It achieves a better match between EU policy and the level of relations member states have maintained with Cuba in the economic, political and cooperation fields. By the time the parties signed the PDCA in December 2016, 22 EU member states already had official bilateral cooperation agreements with the island and inter-ministerial political meetings were being held with 24.

In their 33 years of official relations, both Cuba and the EU have changed, along with their regional and international environments. The EU has faced various processes of regional change, among which stand out the challenge of enlargement and the integration of the post-

socialist countries of Eastern Europe, neighbourly relations with Russia, the development problems on its southern border with Africa, and Brexit.

The integration process continued to develop, despite the rise of populist and right-wing governments in the aftermath of the 2008 economic and financial crisis, the largescale arrival of migrants in 2014 and the multifactorial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 onwards. These events led institutional priorities to be redrawn, economic recovery programmes to be enacted and the espousal of a more solidarity-based approach that encourages short-term fiscal expansion, common indebtedness and a “green and digital Europe”.

Cuba, meanwhile, was engaged in significant political, economic and social reforms within the framework of a singular socialist system and with the expectation of boosting its international insertion. Greater depth was given to the changes begun in the 1990s by the Guidelines of the economic and social policy of the Party in 2011 and the new Constitution of the Republic in 2019, which influenced Cuban society's social relations, inter-institutional ties, property relations and even civic culture. Politically, generational handover took place in the leadership of the government and the party.

Among the socioeconomic and political changes most noted from Europe were the recognition of private property and the promotion of forms of foreign direct investment, international economic partnership contracts and mixed or wholly foreign-owned enterprises. The monetary and exchange rate unification implemented since January 1st 2021 was another decisive step for the country's financial structure, along with increased flexibility in the Cuban labour market, the easing of restrictions on self-employment and greater autonomy in the socialist state enterprise, which remains the main actor in the Cuban economic system. The first Cuban micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with their own legal personality emerged, with the private sector tending to predominate.

The full acceptance Cuba today enjoys in many of the Latin American and Caribbean organisations and forums shows that the 60-year US policy of isolation and economic coercion has failed. Indeed, Washington's approach has faced growing opposition since the 1970s, and during the Ford and Carter administrations there were even signs of negotiations that might lead to the normalisation of relations with Cuba. In the Organization of American States (OAS), Resolution 1 on “Freedom of Action”, which was supported by the government of Gerald Ford and approved in July 1975 at the 16th OAS Meeting of Consultation, left the establishment of relations with Cuba to the discretion of each country. Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Panama, Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia all opened diplomatic channels with Cuba in the first half of the 1970s; while Guyana, Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago made a collective decision to re-establish relations in 1972.¹

Cuba's regional insertion has been achieved through its active contribution to ALBA since 2004 and its alliance with Venezuela, its incorporation first into the Rio Group in 2008, and then into CELAC, its participation in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), in the Summits of the Americas, in CARIFORUM and the holding of bilateral summits with the Caribbean

1. The government of Cuba was expelled from the OAS using Resolution 6 from the Punta del Este meeting in 1962, which cited the alleged incompatibility of its ideology with the inter-American system and its relations with the USSR and China. The exclusion remained in force until 2009, long after the socialist bloc had disappeared and China had begun to play its own major role in the region's commercial, financial and cooperative relations.

Community (CARICOM) since 2002. The island is also a member of organisations of an economic nature: it joined the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System in 1996, the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) in 1998, and became an extra-regional partner of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration in 2017.

Cuba has also managed to diversify its economic, political and cooperation relations beyond the regional sphere, and the Ibero-American Summits recognised the island as a full member state in 1991. Within this framework, the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention were strengthened, and each people's right to the freedom to build its own political and institutional system in peace, stability and justice was recognised. As a full member of CELAC Cuba also participates in all the summits and ministerial meetings between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean.

In terms of South–South cooperation, Cuba has played a leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which brings together 118 countries, while in 2021 it joined China's Belt and Road Initiative and became an Observer State in the Eurasian Economic Community. The island's international prestige grew when the world was suffering peaks of COVID-19 contagion and Cuba sent 57 medical brigades abroad to territories including Italy, Andorra and several so-called European overseas territories in the Caribbean Sea. Cuba was the first Latin American country to have its own vaccine and the first in the world to develop a COVID-19 vaccination programme for children with proven levels of efficacy.

Barack Obama recognised the failure of the US policy of isolating Cuba and in December 2014 the parties initiated a new framework for bilateral relations, which, in turn, influenced other international actors to change their approaches to the island. The thaw included the restoration of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba, opening the way to the signing of 23 agreements in various areas. These include immigration policy, law implementation and enforcement, tackling drug trafficking, environmental protection, health, agriculture and dealing with oil spills, among others.²

Each year Cuba presents a Resolution at the United Nations General Assembly: "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba". For over 20 years it has been approved by an overwhelming majority. In 2016 the United States abstained and the Resolution received 191 votes in favour, none against and just two abstentions. And yet, the extraterritorial nature of the Helms-Burton Act (HBA), first applied in 1996, continued to hinder Cuba's international insertion and its relations with the EU. During the Obama presidency a number of sanctions were applied under the HBA, with several European institutions affected. Fines were issued to the Dutch bank ING in 2012, the Italian bank Intesa Sanpaolo in 2013 and in May 2014 the French bank BNP Paribas received a record sanction of \$8.97 billion.

The Trump administration (2017–2021) revived a stagnant Cold War discourse that was embodied in a package of unprecedented coercive measures against Cuba. President Joe Biden's perpetuation of this policy continues to hinder the island's international insertion and makes the

2. In this context, postal services, direct flights and agreements were signed with telecommunications, cruise and hotel management companies and port authorities in four states.

European business and financial sector the target of sanctions that violate basic norms of international law. The US executive continues to impose a number of measures that are currently worsening the socioeconomic situation resulting from COVID-19 in Cuba. Among them are the activation of Title III of the HBA, which shattered the 1998 agreement between the EU and the US, the island's return to the list of state sponsors of terrorism, which creates additional difficulties buying or receiving goods from Cuba, the restrictions on family remittances, the unilateral closure of consular services and the measures restricting travel from the United States to Cuba.

Cuban society has had exceptional conditions imposed upon it by the tightening of the blockade/embargo, the multifactorial impacts of the COVID pandemic and the effects of the reforms to its system. The economy lost 13% of its GDP between 2020 and 2021 in an international context affected by the rising prices of a number of products and services, including fuel, food and freight.

It was in this complex scenario that the protests of July 11th took place in Cuba, whose outcome once again strained the political atmosphere between Brussels and Havana. Conservative European Parliament (EP) forces questioned the PDCA's effectiveness and sought to convince the Council to undermine the existing framework and abandon constructive engagement in order to return to unsuccessful unilateral policies and pressure even as Cuba is in the midst of major economic, political and institutional changes.

The relationship between Cuba and the EU remains conditioned by the asymmetries between the two actors, Cuba's slight economic weight compared to the EU bloc, the limitations resulting from the impacts of the global crisis, later aggravated by COVID-19, the different natures of the political and economic systems and the costly strategic calculations forced upon Cuba by US policy.

For domestic, regional and international reasons Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) seems to have dropped down the list of the EU's external priorities, while at the same time the EU's position tends to mean it cedes ground to China's strong presence in the region. However, the EU retains a highly structured relational power, including a dense network of association, trade, political and cooperation agreements with 23 of the region's 33 countries – this gives it some advantage over China. The EU is the region's third-most important trade partner and the largest investor in the region by stock of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Amid this welter of domestic, regional and international changes, Cuba and the EU managed to deepen and expand their political, social and economic ties. The European Union is consolidating itself as the main donor of development aid to Cuba. Its major commercial involvement and foreign direct investment are concentrated in sectors such as tourism, industry, transportation, energy, food and mining. The cross-cutting and strategic axes of cooperation include sustainable development, gender, national capacity building, good governance, human rights and knowledge management.

With an academic perspective, the Foro Europa-Cuba Jean Monnet Network has sought to boost the phase of constructive engagement and, inspired by the principles of the PDCA, to accompany Cuba in the

processes of economic, political and institutional change that could promote its global, regional and interregional insertion.

Taking an interregional view this book presents and analyses the regional and international factors that have affected the bilateral relationship over several decades. It highlights the challenges Cuba faces if it is to transform its pattern of external insertion – an indispensable step in overcoming the structural obstacles hindering the achievement of a prosperous and sustainable society.

The publication is divided into two broad chapters, one on the bilateral relationship in the interregional context, which includes four articles, and the second on regional and global insertion, which contains three contributions from Cuban and European authors.

Raynier Pellón Azopardo, of the International Policy Research Centre (CIPI) in Havana, Cuba, assesses the variables and actors in the current domestic and international setting that encourage or hinder the development of a stable, long-term and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship between Cuba, the EU and its member states. Using historical–logical and analytical–synthetic research and documentary analysis, the author sets out the possibilities for the EU to accompany the updating of the Cuban economic, political and institutional model and its regional and global insertion from a constructive position that is relatively autonomous of US policy.

Katarzyna Dembicz and Tomasz Rudowski from the Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies at the University of Warsaw describe the possible scenarios for Cuba's inclusion in the Caribbean agenda following the post-Cotonou agreements. To do so, they consider the socio-cultural and political geographical specificity of the parties to the new agreement, their international relations and the historical legacy. A SWOT analysis is the key tool used, which allows the specific conditions to be identified in which the Cuban government could sign up to the new agreement, including Cuba's strengths and weaknesses and the potential opportunities and threats that may emerge.

Eduardo Perera Gómez of the University of Havana highlights the risks that Cuba and the EU managed to overcome after the signing of the PDCA and envisages the existing threats and challenges to the development of bilateral relations. Among them, he stresses the unfavourable international context; the domestic situation in Cuba, exacerbated by COVID-19; and the reactions of the EU institutions, in particular the European Parliament (EP). Cuba's necessity, the EU's commitment and the higher levels of cooperation show that there are also opportunities.

Claudia Sánchez Savín, Junior Researcher at CIPI, presents us with a balance sheet of Cuba–Italy bilateral relations, examined in terms of their historical evolution and taking in the fields of cooperation, solidarity and economic and political ties. Taking a critical International Relations perspective, the author highlights extraordinary events like two Cuban medical brigades arriving in Italy in March 2020 in response to a request from local authorities in Lombardy and Turin. At the most difficult time in the COVID-19 crisis, Cuba responded with genuine international solidarity.

As part of the second chapter, **Anna Ayuso** (CIDOB) and **Susanne Gratius** (UAM) investigate the specific features of Cuba's regional insertion that may go some way to explaining its problems participating in Latin American and Caribbean integration processes and the only partial progress in returning it to the inter-American system. It analyses how its US-independent insertion model has conditioned its relationship with neighbouring countries and what costs and benefits it has brought. They also study how Cuba's relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) during and after the Cold War has influenced its ties with the European Union. Finally, the prospects are explored for its full continental insertion at a time of crisis and change in Latin American regionalism.

Marie-Laure Geoffray, from IHEAL-Sorbonne Nouvelle, applies the theoretical approach of politicisation – a Political Science term referring to the polarisation or politicisation of certain subjects and issues – to analyse the role of the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, in the debate over Cuba at the OAS. The author asserts that the Secretary General's discourse and actions have placed the Cuban issue on the organisation's agenda and contributed to dividing or polarising the member states on the issues of the island's political system and human rights. Geoffray concludes that Luis Almagro's mandate has caused a significant shift: pragmatic multilateralism has been replaced by rekindled debates over the Cuban government and stronger ties with the US-based exile community and civil society. In the author's opinion, the OAS should explore the spaces in which to develop a low-profile multilateralism, political commitment, dialogue and negotiation and strive to depoliticise the debate on Cuba.

Laurence Whitehead (Nuffield College, University of Oxford), and **Bert Hoffmann** of GIGA Hamburg focus on the acute domestic governance challenges now facing the Cuban system and the external difficulties that interact with and reinforce those internal issues. The authors identify short-term risks associated with both dynamics, but also highlight an underlying structure in Cuba that has survived for several decades and may well continue to generate stagnation and dysfunction over the coming years. The paper looks beyond the immediate challenges to reflect on the fundamental international pressures and limitations that will shape the Cuban nation's options over the coming decade.