



Cuba and the European Union

Interregional Cooperation and Global Insertion

Susanne Gratius and Raynier Pellón Azopardo (eds.)

CIDOB

BARCELONA
CENTRE FOR
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS



FORO
EUROPA-CUBA
Jean Monnet Network

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CIDOB edicions
Elisabets, 12
08001 Barcelona
Tel.: 933 026 495
www.cidob.org
cidob@cidob.org

Print: Prodigitalk
ISBN: 978-84-18977-01-5
Legal Deposit: B 6636-2022

Barcelona, March 2022

Cover photo: Jeremy Bezanger. Vedado Mercados-Cuba. February 2021

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission (project number 600478-EPP-1-2018-1-ES-EPPJMO-NETWORK). The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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Cuba-EU-Spain: The worthwhile path to a respectful, stable, long-term relationship

Raynier Pellón Azopardo

This chapter assesses the challenges and possibilities facing Cuba, the EU and its members if they are to build a mutually beneficial, respectful, stable, long-term relationship that can contribute to the island's international insertion and accompany the economic, political and institutional updating of the Cuban socialist system. The analysis identifies key variables and actors in the evolution of Cuba–EU relations and the prevailing perceptions in the European institutions that either contribute to or hamper their constructive development.

Cuba in the Caribbean: Post-Cotonou scenarios

Dr. Katarzyna Dembicz, Dr. Tomasz Rudowski

This chapter aims to set out the possible scenarios for Cuba's inclusion in the Caribbean agenda following the post-Cotonou agreements. To do so, it considers the socio-cultural and political geographical specificities of the parties to the new agreement, along with their international relations and historical legacy. The individual conditions in which the Cuban government might sign up to the new agreement are identified by using a SWOT analysis, which takes in Cuba's strengths and weaknesses and potential opportunities and threats.

EU–Cuba bilateral cooperation: Challenges and opportunities

Eduardo Perera Gómez

Despite being a constant battleground since bilateral relations were established, EU–Cuba cooperation has managed to avoid some of the risks predicted after the signing of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA). And yet, it faces several threats and multiple challenges: an unfavourable international context; the internal situation in Cuba, exacerbated by COVID-19; and the reactions of the EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament (EP). But there are also opportunities – cooperation has increased, along with Cuba's needs and the EU's commitment. Ultimately, cooperation, which has coexisted with conflict throughout EU–Cuba relations, must prevail.

Post-PDCA Cuba–Italy bilateral relations in the context of Euro-Atlantic politics and COVID-19

Claudia Sánchez Savín

Relations with the European Union are important to Cuba, but within them it gives particular priority to its ties with Italy, due to the role the country has played in various areas of Cuba's social development. This chapter aims to explain the expressions of Cuba–Italy bilateral ties in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the changing international context, the balance of powers and the post-PDCA (Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement) landscape.

Cuba between Latin America and the Caribbean: A sui generis model of international insertion

Susanne Gratius, Anna Ayuso

The relationship between Cuba and the EU plays out within a specific bi-regional context. Cuba retains a special status in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) due to its one-party system and ongoing conflict with the United States. This in turn conditions its relationship with Europe. Fitting somewhere between the “second and third worlds” during the Cold War, Cuba has a dual Caribbean and Latin American identity. This has allowed it to participate in initiatives in both geographical areas, despite its bilateral conflict with the United States and its exclusion from much of the inter-American system. This chapter explores the particular characteristics of Cuba's regional insertion that help explain the issues it has faced with regard to inclusion in integration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean and the only partial progress made on returning it to the inter-American system. It analyses how its US-independent integration model has conditioned the relationship with neighbouring countries and the costs and benefits this has entailed. It also studies how Cuba's relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean during and since the Cold War has influenced its relationship with the European Union. Finally, the prospects for Cuba's full continental integration are examined in a context of crisis and the overhaul of Latin American regionalism.

The OAS and the repoliticisation of the Cuban question in the Americas

Marie Laure Geoffray

This chapter addresses the way the issue of Cuba is dealt with at the OAS General Secretariat. Since Luis Almagro's election as Secretary General in 2015, scholars and experts alike have noted a shift in the role of the OAS General Secretariat, as Almagro's politics have become very much attuned with those of the White House and State Department under President Donald Trump. This was not what was expected, as Almagro's candidacy was strongly promoted by former Uruguayan president José Mujica and was even supported by Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. This chapter aims to understand the Secretary General's newfound policy direction, which I will analyse as a form of repoliticisation of the institution and of the function of the Secretary General.

After the protests and the pandemic: Reassessing the international profile of post-Castro Cuba

Bert Hoffmann, Laurence Whitehead

As Cuba enters 2022, economic crisis and social tensions loom large. This chapter reviews the external difficulties that interact with and reinforce the island's domestic issues. Looking beyond the immediate situation it reflects on underlying international pressures and constraints that will shape the options for the Cuban nation over the next decade. Its analysis encompasses Cuba's relations with the US and with the EU, as well as those with Venezuela, Mexico, China, Russia and Canada, and it asks to what extent Cuban-made COVID-19 vaccines can re-boost the country's soft-power projection. Putting the Cuban case in comparative perspective, the island's regime – and its international profile – are in many ways still unlike any other, and predictive schemas based on false analogies risk being misleading.

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK

Susanne Gratius and Raynier Pellón Azopardo

Europe-Cuba Forum, Jean Monnet Network

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.

PART I: CUBA-EU INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION

- CUBA-EU-SPAIN: THE WORTHWHILE PATH TO A RESPECTFUL, STABLE, LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

Raynier Pellón Azopardo

- CUBA IN THE CARIBBEAN: POST-COTONOU SCENARIOS

Katarzyna and Tomasz Rudowski

- EU–CUBA BILATERAL COOPERATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Eduardo Perera Gómez

- POST-PDCA CUBA–ITALY BILATERAL RELATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF EURO-ATLANTIC POLITICS AND COVID-19

Claudia Sánchez Savín

CUBA-EU-SPAIN: THE WORTHWHILE PATH TO A RESPECTFUL, STABLE, LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP

Raynier Pellón Azopardo

International Policy Research Centre (CIP)

1. Introduction

The Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between Cuba, the EU and its member states, in force since 2017, established the conditions for developing stable and long-term ties between the parties.

The new instrument, which formally replaces the Common Position established in 1996, discontinues the policy of imposing inefficient unilateral conditionalities on the conducting of bilateral relations and the achievement of the goals the parties set within the framework. It achieves a better fit between EU policy and the level of relations its member states have maintained with Cuba in the economic, political and cooperation fields.

However, Cuba's foreign integration is taking place in an extremely complex international political setting, determined above all by the tightening of US sanctions against the island, which worsened the severe impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, conservative forces in the European Parliament (EP) question the PDCA's effectiveness and seek to present the Council with a familiar dilemma: whether to accompany the updating of Cuba's economic, political and institutional model and its international insertion based on *constructive engagement*, or to undermine the framework agreement and return to unsuccessful unilateral policies and pressure.¹

This chapter assesses the challenges and possibilities facing Cuba, the EU and its members if they are to build a mutually beneficial, respectful, stable, long-term relationship that can contribute to the island's international insertion and accompany the economic, political and institutional updating of the Cuban socialist system being led by Cuban society and its authorities. The analysis identifies some of the key variables and actors in the evolution of Cuba–EU relations and the prevailing perceptions in the European institutions that either contribute to or hamper their constructive development.

1. *Constructive engagement*: understood as cooperation without prior conditions (Ayuso and Gratius, 2020:104).

The PDCA is being implemented in a particularly dynamic socio-political and economic context in Cuba.

2. Updating the economic, political and institutional model: a key factor in Cuba's international insertion

The PDCA is being implemented in a particularly dynamic socio-political and economic context in Cuba, whose evolution is being led, autonomously, by society and its governmental authorities.

Although the reform process began in 2007, as Triana argues (2017: 11), there were really two key moments in its genesis. First, was the approval of the "Guidelines of the economic and social policy" in 2011,² which contained a diagnosis of the main problems and a programme of transformations. Then, in 2016, two other documents that defined the vision and strategic axes for the development were discussed, these were the "Conceptualization of the Cuban Economic and Social Model of Socialist Development" and the "Bases of the Economic and Social Development Plan until 2030", which was approved in 2017 (Communist Party of Cuba, 2017).

The changes initiated with the Guidelines issued by the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) in 2011 found expression in the approval of a new Constitution in 2019³ and continued with a legislative dynamic that has progressively revealed the depth and irreversible nature of the changes taking place in the Cuban socialist model. The popular debates raised around a new constitution, later approved in a national referendum with 86.85% of the votes also showed that the transformations in Cuba are an expression of popular will and a response not only to a set of circumstances, but to a long-term strategy.

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 (Communist Party of Cuba, 2017: 20). 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 (Consejo de Ministros-Banco Nacional de Cuba, 2021).

Other developments in the governing bodies brought greater decentralisation and autonomy to government management in order to encourage dynamism and the use of new powers at the provincial and municipal levels (Constitución de la República de Cuba, chapter IV, 2019). The new electoral law approved by the Cuban Parliament in July 2019 was a key step in that direction (*Gaceta Oficial*, 2019),⁴ and the eighth Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) held on April 18th and 19th culminated in a historic handover of leadership to new generations within a framework of political stability (Communist Party of Cuba, 2021). US media speculation about possible family succession in Cuba's political power structures proved to be misplaced.

Even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, whose severe impacts were worsened by the tightening of US sanctions against Cuban society, the legislative branch did not halt the processes that derived from the new Cuban Constitution.

2. <https://www.tsp.gob.cu/sites/default/files/documentos/1%20lineamientos-politica-partido-cuba.pdf>
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&ct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjmsoG1zOX1AhWQtqQKHU1GDxEQFn0EAgQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ohchr.org%2FDocuments%2FIssues%2FDevelopment%2FSR%2FFinancingDevelopment%2FStates%2FCuba_NV_EN.docx&usg=AOvVaw1jigdkalJdvYhb2vzv4MPV
3. <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/constitucion-de-la-republica-de-cuba-proclamada-el-10-de-abril-de-2019>
4. The law stipulates that provincial governors and deputy governors are to be chosen by election. The *intendente* is one of the new figures that form this level of government.

In September 2021, the first 35 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with their own legal personality were approved, 32 of which were private and three state-owned. By October 21st, 217 had been approved, of which seven were state-owned and seven were non-agricultural cooperatives. The other applications are being processed and so far none have been declined. According to the Ministry of Economy and Planning of Cuba (2021) the creation of MSMEs is part of a process that aims to unleash the potential of all forms of management recognised by the Cuban model, which should contribute to the country's socioeconomic development.

Another step was also taken to create connections between Cuba and its emigrants, this time in terms of economic relations. The II Cuba 2021 Business Forum, which met on the first two days of December, included the panel Opportunities for Cubans Residing Abroad.⁵ Among the investment opportunities presented were as goods and service providers to Cuban entities, either via consignment contracts, leasing operations, as small machinery or mini-industry operators (particularly in the food processing and production sectors) and as clients for Cuban exports. For Cuban citizens living abroad who retain their Cuban residency, there was the additional possibility of participating in the creation of MSMEs. These foreign investment projects may take the form of a joint venture, benefit from wholly foreign capital, or use an international economic partnership contract (*Prensa Latina*, 2021a).

Within these legislative dynamics and in response to the constitutional requirements, in October 2021 the Cuban parliament approved a new Law on Criminal Procedure that strengthened the guarantees of the accusatorial system and the rights of victims. According to Toledo Santander, President of the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee, the draft Law on Criminal Procedure (Tribunal Supremo Popular, 2021), like the draft laws on the Courts of Justice, the Administrative Process and the Code of Processes, reflects the most up-to-date judicial and investigative practices at international level, are tempered to the Cuban reality and were drawn up based on constitutional principles and guarantees to the Cuban people (*Granma*, 2021).

In line with international treaties the draft Law on Criminal Procedure (Tribunal Supremo Popular, 2021: 3–4)⁶ includes an express declaration on the prohibition of enforced disappearance, torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment; as well as deprivation of liberty, with the exception of the circumstances established in law and in line with the necessary formalities. The principle of the presumption of innocence was bolstered and the burden of proof placed on the accuser. The bill expressly declares respect for the defendant's dignity and physical, mental and moral integrity and the right not to be subjected to coercion or violence to force them to provide testimony.

One of the expected pieces of legislation causing most debate in Cuban society is the new Family Code. The draft is being subjected to consultation by specialists prior to debate in the National Assembly of People's Power and in 2022 it will go to a popular referendum. The document considers the science of family law, judicial practice in Cuba and other legislative advances from other countries. Article 2 recognises the various forms of family organisation, based on affective relationships

5. This panel aimed to promote their participation in business and to explain how to enjoy all the privileges and guarantees established by the investment law.
6. Cuba is a state party to 44 international human rights instruments. In 2020, it was elected to the Human Rights Council for the fifth time, receiving 170 votes at the UN General Assembly.

The Cuban socio-political and economic context has shown significant dynamism over the past decade.

between relatives, whatever their nature and between spouses or unmarried partners (*Anteproyecto Código de Las Familias*, 2021: 2).

When analysing the updating of the Cuban economic, political and institutional model and its possible impact on Cuba's international insertion, it is essential to mention the internal and external obstacles the model faces in this new stage of its development. In economic relations, there are the delays in paying suppliers; the bureaucracy that prevents proactive business practice; and the inadequate training of entrepreneurs and members of the Cuban financial sector on how to make appropriate decisions about capital and within the framework of the different approved forms of foreign direct investment (FDI) (Minrex, 2018). In this regard, President Díaz-Canel continued the work begun by Raúl Castro, who urged that the excessive delays in negotiating processes should be ended and that the false fears of foreign capital should be shed in order to accelerate business approval processes and increase the flexibility of the mechanisms. As a result, the rules on foreign investment were updated in order to improve transparency on levels of approval and reduce the time needed to respond to investment, cooperation or commercial proposals (Pellón, 2020: 120).

While the proposed direct investment objectives have not been achieved – which also calls for internal analysis – it is worth noting that the foreign investment process in Cuba was not halted by the Trump administration's restrictive measures. In 2018 and 2019, businesses making investment commitments worth over €4.5 billion were approved, and in the first half of 2019 partnerships were signed worth over €1.3 billion (Malmierca, 2019).

Bearing in mind the analyses of Cuban and foreign experts on the practical effectiveness of the economic, political and institutional changes mentioned (Triana, 2017; Bacaria and Serrano, 2020; Botella, 2020; Hoffmann, 2021; Sánchez, 2021; Chofre, 2021; Alonso and Vidal, 2020; Anaya and García, 2021) it can be concluded that the Cuban socio-political and economic context has shown significant dynamism over the past decade. Its notable results include generational change at the top of the country's political leadership and greater economic plurality and decentralisation in government activity, which has acquired legal guarantees for its activity. At the same time, citizens' rights and guarantees have been strengthened by the protection granted by the new Constitution of the Republic and are expressed in multiple acts of legislation, a number of which stand out for their recency: the new Electoral Law, the Law on Criminal Procedure, the laws on the Courts of Justice, the Administrative Process, and the Code of Processes, the Decree-Law on Animal Welfare, the new Family Code, and the Migration Law.

The scenario described presents new possibilities for cooperation and economic relations between Cuba and the EU and its member states. The emergence of new economic actors on the Cuban scene and the development of new governmental competences at the municipal and provincial level increases the diversity of the parties on the island whose interaction could grow with the EU and its member states. Indeed, the PDCA addresses the participation of government institutions, local authorities, international organisations, member states' development agencies and even civil society in cooperative relations with Cuba and their management.

The transatlantic relationship and its impact on Cuba–EU cooperation

US aggressions against Cuba are the main obstacle to the international insertion of the country's model and test Europe's determination to maintain relative autonomy in its policy towards Cuba.

The Trump administration revived a stagnant Cold War discourse that was embodied in a package of unprecedented coercive measures against Cuba. That the Biden administration continues with this policy not only contradicts his campaign promises on Cuba, it also undermines the supposed rebuilding of the transatlantic alliance.

After years of tensions, at the 2021 Munich Security Conference Joe Biden claimed that the “transatlantic alliance is back” (Biden, 2021). As such, and hoping to start a new chapter in its relations with the EU, Washington returned to the Paris Climate Agreement and expressed its willingness to resume negotiations with Iran, both of which pacts Trump had abandoned, turning his back on US allies. Among the cracks in the transatlantic relationship is the application of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act (HBA), which increased the tactical contradictions between the US and the EU over Cuba and ignored the agreement they signed in 1998.⁷

The application of Title III of the HBA, the 243 coercive measures the Trump administration implemented against the Cuban people – and which President Biden has maintained – continue to make the European business and financial sector the target of sanctions that have no basis in European or Cuban laws, and that violate basic norms of international law (López-Levy, 2019; Pellón, 2021)

In September 2020, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly requested that the Secretary-General, in consultation with the relevant bodies and agencies of the system, prepare a report on the implementation of resolution 74/7, entitled “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”. The EU's response to the consultation by the Secretary-General lamented the Trump administration's decision to activate Title III and resume the application of Title IV: “We believe this clearly violates the 1998 Agreement between the European Union and the United States” (UNGA, 2020).

The EU also recalled that it has fulfilled – and continues to fulfil – the commitments it made in that agreement and called on the US to do the same. In view of the activation of Titles III and IV of the Helms-Burton Act, the report underlines the intention to use all available instruments and options to protect the economic activities of EU nationals and companies, including their investments. These issues are covered by Regulation (EC) No. 2271/96, the provisions of which may be invoked by EU operators adversely affected by the extraterritorial effects of the Helms-Burton Act. (UNGA, 2020).

Since 1962 – that is, over almost six decades – a number of provisions have determined the extraterritorial nature of this hostile policy. On March 24th of that year, the Treasury Department established a ban on the entry into US territory of any product made totally or partially with

US aggressions against Cuba are the main obstacle to the international insertion of the country's model.

7. At the EU–US Summit held in London on May 18th 1998, a set of measures was agreed, including the suspension of the application of Titles III and IV of the Helms-Burton Act (HBA), the commitment of the United States not to enact such extraterritorial laws in the future, and an understanding on disciplines to strengthen investment protection: taken together this is known as “the 1998 Agreement”. President Trump activated Title III in 2019 and it is maintained by President Biden.

US attempts to involve the EU and its member states in imposing coercive and unilateral measures against Cuba have occurred so often throughout history.

Cuban raw materials or products, even if they come from a third country. The measure had a major impact on trade with some of Cuba's most important partners, particularly the nations of western Europe. From that point on, they would be unable to use Cuban sugar or nickel in their export products for the large US market. In practice, this was one of the blockade's first extraterritorial measures.

The provision added to Washington's long list of sanctions against Cuba, which included banning US subsidiary companies from trading with the Caribbean nation from any other territory. The policy also restricted the exportation to Cuba of equipment, products or any technology with more than 10% US components and prohibited ships that trade with Cuba from entering US ports. Punitive measures were also taken against institutions and nationals from other territories involved in trade relations with the island. In October 2020, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez put the accumulated damages over almost six decades of blockade at over \$144.41 bn dollars.

In the name of the Monroe Doctrine (1823),⁸ Trump not only sought to undermine the Cuban system, he also wanted the EU to follow Washington's lead in both content and form. Since 2019, US citizens and companies have filed dozens of lawsuits against several European companies, including the Sol Meliá hotel chain. This activity conflicts directly with the PDCA successfully implemented by Cuba, the EU and its member states since 2017.

US attempts to involve the EU and its member states in imposing coercive and unilateral measures against Cuba have occurred so often throughout history that they cannot be considered coincidental. At least three unequivocal events show that the United States has constructed scenarios of confrontation with Cuba in order to demand a reaction from its ally and frustrate the paths of dialogue. As collateral damage they have limited the autonomy of European foreign policy.

First came the so-called "crisis of the embassies" in July 1990, which caused the failure of the first initiatives towards the signing of a framework agreement between the EC and Cuba between May 1989 and June 1990 (Perera, 2017: 63–64). The US Interest Section in Cuba organised a plot that began on July 9th in Havana, when five Cubans entered the Czech and Slovak Embassy to apply for asylum (Minrex, 1990).⁹ The aim was to create an image of instability, persecution and disrespect for human rights in Cuba.¹⁰ It resulted in the temporary suspension of Spanish cooperation and, at the request of the Spanish government, on July 20th the EEC also suspended cooperation actions with the island.

The second event led to the European Commission's decision on May 8th 1996 not to present a mandate for the negotiation of an agreement with Cuba. The downing of the Brothers to the Rescue planes on February 24th after they violated Cuban airspace on several occasions was the basis of the argument used by groups opposed to the negotiation within the EU. Thirdly, the Common Position proposed by Aznar in November 1996 also originally had an important US component. According to the newspaper *El País* of November 13th 1996,¹¹ US Special Envoy Eizenstat promised that if Aznar supported

8. Under which any act by Europeans to extend their system to America is seen as a danger to US security.

9. The statements by members of anti-revolutionary groups who participated in the origins of this plot, in which five citizens entered the Czechoslovak Embassy on July 9th, were revealing. In an interview televised in Cuba on July 19th they described the participation of US officials and the complicity of European diplomats in the events.

10. See: the speech by Fidel Castro (1990) at an event on July 26th 1990, where he gave a detailed explanation of the events associated with the crisis of the embassies.

11. See: Vidal-Folch, 1996.

the US approach to Cuba, Washington would grant successive semi-annual postponements to the application of the Helms-Burton Act, which tightens the embargo on Cuba and hounds European investments on the island. Eizenstat was referring to the application of Title III of that law (Pellón, 2015: 125). The unilateral sanctions applied by the EU against Cuba in 2003 were more of the same.

The signing of the PDCA between Cuba, the EU and its member states broke the chain of events that had time and again blocked the path of dialogue and opens up the possibility for the EU to accompany Cuba in updating its economic, political and institutional model based on a mutually beneficial, stable and long-term relationship.

However, once again, the demonstrations of July 11th 2021 in Cuba, whose genesis and development was instigated to a large extent from the United States, once again strained the political atmosphere between the EU and Cuba. First, the United States cut off the regular flow of migrants between the two countries, then it pressured all Cuba's foreign suppliers to stop goods reaching the country, it went after the fuel producers to cut off energy, it took advantage of the impact of the pandemic and, eventually, via USAID, and specifically the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), it used digital platforms to organise a communications operation employing supposed "opinion leaders" trained for years in a number of capital cities, including several in Europe (Cabañas, 2021).

The exceptional conditions imposed on Cuba by the pandemic and the tightening of the blockade were the context in which the events of July 11th took place. In 2019 and 2020, Washington approved 243 measures to tighten the blockade against Cuba, including 55 since the COVID-19 pandemic started, making it even clearer that the aim was to bring 11 million Cubans to submission through hunger and the denial of other needs (Cabañas, 2021). Closing the official channels for remittances to be sent from the United States was a significant aggravating factor for Cuban families in a socioeconomic context that was already complex due to the effects of the pandemic.

Alejandro Gil, the Minister of Economy and Planning, told the National Assembly of People's Power that the Cuban Economy lost 13% of its GDP in 2020 and so far in 2021, and it is expected that \$700 million less than planned will be recouped by the end of the 2021 financial year, including the lost income from tourism. The minister specified that \$1.35 bn dollars have been invested to buy food "well below the level of demand" in an international context shaped by rising prices for a range of products, such as fuel, food and even freight (Figueredo Reinaldo et al., 2021).

The demonstrations that took place on July 11th increased support in the European Parliament (EP) for unilateral condemnations of Cuba. The European People's Party Group (EPP), the parliament's largest force with 187 seats, has regularly questioned the effectiveness of the PDCA and obstructed constructive moves. Ideology remains a key component of its reading of Cuba's domestic context and the Cuba-EU bilateral framework. This biased view simplifies or distorts conceptions about the exercise of political power in Cuba, the true legitimacy of the existing system and the conscious commitment of the society to build a socialist model with its own characteristics.

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However, a comparative analysis of the most recent votes relating to the human rights situation in Cuba shows that, while the resolutions are ultimately approved, they receive increasing numbers of abstentions and votes against. This shows that there may be less resistance from the groups in the European Parliament who oppose dialogue with Cuba when the island's control of the pandemic is consolidated, certain services are restored and a path towards economic growth takes shape as borders open in a context of political stability. This stabilisation is already visible. The trend would not, however, prevent new resolutions being adopted in the short term, as conservative forces still predominate in the European Parliament and the customary double standards persist on human rights (Carrillo, 2021).

The European Parliament resolution of November 15th 2018 on the human rights situation in Cuba laid bare the divisions that this approach had already created between the political groups in the EP prior to July 11th 2021: it was approved with 325 votes in favour, 240 against and 44 abstentions (European Parliament, 2018). The greatest polarisation was between the EPP, which contributed 167 votes in favour, and the S&D with 146 against. Other groups exhibited greater internal divisions, such as the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), with 22 votes in favour, 14 against and 11 abstentions. The European Parliament resolution of June 10th 2021 on human rights and the political situation in Cuba (2021/2745(RSP)) was adopted with 386 votes in favour, 236 against, and 59 abstentions. No significant change was yet appreciable in the voting patterns.¹²

The July 11th demonstrations in Cuba changed the balance considerably. The resolution of September 16th 2021 received more votes in favour than that of June 10th, with 426 votes in favour, 146 against and 115 abstentions.¹³

However, in the resolution approved on December 16th 2021 there were more abstentions and votes against (RC9-0589/2021), with 393 votes in favour, 150 against and 119 abstentions, a sign of a trend that could grow in the short and medium term.¹⁴

The resolution approved by the European Parliament on December 16th 2021 perhaps inadvertently demonstrated an important trend that was crystallised on the same day in the US Congress and which favours the normalisation of relations between Washington and Cuba. The US Congress questioned the Biden administration about why it was copying its predecessor's policy towards Cuba, rather than developing its own agenda. Representatives James P. McGovern (D-MA), Barbara Lee (D-CA), Gregory Meeks (D-NY) and Bobby Rush (D-IL) submitted a letter to the Biden–Harris administration signed by 114 members of the US Congress on, among whose demands are:

- To suspend US regulations that prevent food, medicines and other humanitarian aid from reaching the Cuban people,
- remove all restrictions on family and non-family remittances,
- re-staff the US Embassy in Havana, taking the necessary measures to ensure the safety of US personnel,
- resume consular services in Cuba and revoke the Trump administration's measures restricting travel to Cuba, as they make it

12. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/RC-9-2021-0341_ES.html

13. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0389_ES.html

14. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es/press-room/20211210IPR19224/el-pe-reclama-a-cuba-la-liberacion-inmediata-de-todos-los-presos-de-conciencia>

difficult for Cuban-Americans to visit and reunite with their relatives on the island, particularly those who have family outside Havana,

- remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, as this designation is another obstacle in the road to improving relations and creates additional difficulties for purchasing or receiving humanitarian supplies (WOLA, 2021).

The participation of a wide range of civil society organisations was also crucial to increase normalisation and outreach work in Congress. Organisations and networks such as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the Center for Democracy in the Americas (CDA), the Latin America Working Group (LAWG), the ACERE alliance, Massachusetts Peace Action, Cuban-American groups including Cuban-Americans for Engagement (CAFE) and religious groups such as the Presbyterian (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, among many others, engaged in activities to provide members of Congress with key information demonstrating the value of re-establishing dialogue-based US policy towards Cuba. WOLA's Assistant Director for Cuba, Mariakarla Nodarse, emphasised: "Hitting pause on the Cuba policy review in the name of democracy and human rights is not achieving either. On the contrary, it is prolonging the suffering of the Cuban people when it is clear that there are ample opportunities to improve the situation on the island by breaking the inertia and acting constructively" (WOLA, 2021).

While the Biden administration continues to implement Trump's policies, EU action towards Cuba is likely to follow the line of its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020–2024, which focuses on the protection and empowerment of individuals, support for human rights defenders, monitoring of cases of violation of freedom of association, assembly and expression – including artistic – support for the promotion of economic rights, particularly in the private sector, support for the abolition of the death penalty and the promotion of women's rights and gender equality.

4. The feasibility of autonomous EU policy towards Cuba

The EU's positions on the US blockade against Cuba have shown a coherent progression.¹⁵ In the last three years, notable actions include the EU Foreign Affairs Council's reiteration of its opposition to the application of extraterritorial measures on April 8th 2019¹⁶ and Federica Mogherini's two joint statements issued on April 17th opposing the application of Title III, alongside the EU Commissioner for Trade and the Canadian foreign minister.¹⁷ The governments of Spain, the United Kingdom, Portugal and France also issued statements expressing their opposition to it. The current EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, has urged US President Joe Biden to remove the economic and commercial blockade against Cuba and expressed his regret at the decision to include Cuba in the list of state sponsors of terrorism (*Prensa Latina*, 2021)

In contrast to the economic, financial and commercial siege by the US, the EU's participation in Cuba's development strategy continues to be

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15. Members have voted against the practice en bloc at the United Nations since 1992.

16. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/meetings/fac/2019/04/08/>

17. <http://www.acn.cu/bloqueo/43985-canada-y-la-union-europea-protegeran-sus-empresas-de-la-aplicacion-de-la-helms-burton>

The EU's participation in Cuba's development strategy continues to be significant, with concrete results achieved in terms of trade, cooperation and investment.

significant, with concrete results achieved in terms of trade, cooperation and investment. The European Union has consolidated itself as the main donor of development aid to Cuba and it also constitutes an important trading partner and the geographical area that provides most foreign investment to Cuba, which is concentrated in strategic sectors such as tourism, industry, transportation, energy, the food industry and mining.

Cuba and the EU have also reaffirmed their desire to cooperate on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in line with their respective capacities. They agree on the need to achieve balanced development in the economic, social and environmental spheres. Among the cross-cutting and strategic axes of cooperation are sustainable development, gender, national capacity building, good governance, human rights and knowledge management.¹⁸

The EU's status as key donor is based on the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) for the 2014–2020 period and the regulation establishing it. In April 2021, a memorandum of intent was signed approving the Financing and Cooperation Projects Agreement between the Republic of Cuba and the European Union (EU), which is worth €61,500,000 (*EFE*, 2019).

The Multi-Year Indicative Programme (2014–2020), shaped in accordance with Cuba's priorities, focusses on three key sectors. A fund of €19,650,000 was allocated to the first – food security and sustainable agriculture; the second, renewable energies, was assigned €18 million. The third, meanwhile, targets Cuba's economic modernisation and, in this sense, the €4 million donated on June 21st 2019 for the development of a single window of foreign trade in Cuba was instructive. The instrument aims to achieve greater dynamism and efficiency in the management of trade and investment.¹⁹ Planning the next cooperation cycle (2021–2027) brings new challenges. New synergies will need to be built between the different priority sectors and interventions that have significant impact on local communities, contributing to their development, as set out in the Economic Social Strategy for boosting the economy and tackling the global crisis caused by COVID-19, which was recently approved in the National Economic and Social Plan of Cuba 2030.

Other areas also receive EU cooperation, including disaster prevention, digitalisation and e-government, and there is support for civil society, where exchanges of experts and university cooperation are increasing through the Erasmus+ programme.

Under the PDCA, the parties institutionalised dialogue in five specific areas: human rights, unilateral coercive measures, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, control of conventional weapons, and sustainable development. Its implementation on the basis of mutual respect, sovereign equality and non-interference in domestic affairs has improved the understanding of the parties' respective realities and positions. All the political dialogues were preceded by meetings with Cuban and European civil society (Navarro, 2019). This helped demystify skewed visions of Cuban civil society held in the EU by showing a broad and diverse range of civil actors whose legitimate participation in Cuba's economic, political, social and cultural destinies is both significant and

18. Initial statements by Cuba in the Third Subcommittee on Cuba-European Union Cooperation (online). [Accessed on 07.02.2022]: <https://www.mincex.gob.cu/index.php/site/data/?lang=es&location=Noticia&title=Declaraciones+iniciales+de+Cuba+en+el+Tercer+Subcomit%C3%A9+de+Cooperaci%C3%B3n+Cuba-Uni%C3%B3n+Europea#>

19. Donation reported by the EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development at the Cuba business forum held in Havana.

growing. Under the PDCA umbrella, the spaces and forms of interaction for the societies on both sides are invaluable sources of consensus, mutual learning and exchanges of best practices.

The dialogues also reveal areas of harmony and potential for cooperation. These include combating the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs; security and environmental protection; confronting racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; and gender and children's rights. On October 8th 2018, the first seminar of its kind took place, at which representatives of Cuban and European NGOs exchanged views, particularly on gender equality and LGBTI issues.

Despite US pressure, the link between the EU and Cuba shows that progressing towards a mutually beneficial, stable and long-term relationship is possible. However, the imperatives of the EU's internal policy and the urgencies of its foreign policy have caused Latin American to fall down the list of its external priorities. When analysing the prospects for EU-LAC relations, an essential factor is the priority that LAC represents for the EU. While the European Parliament's Motion for a Resolution on the implementation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy - Annual Report 2020 proposes that recognising the relationship with LAC is fundamental to the EU's geopolitical strategy in the world,²⁰ this is not consistent with the omission of any mention of the region among the European Commission's priorities for 2019–2024, while explicit mention is made of other regions of the world.²¹

Cuba also shows a desire to diversify its international partners, with China and Russia key figures. China is the island's second-largest trading partner and has granted significant credit lines to the country, while Russia is also increasing its investments and trade relations, particularly in the transport, energy and metallurgy sectors. Political and diplomatic relations take place with both actors at the highest level and there are signs of broad levels of coordination and cooperation in international affairs (Pellón, 2021: 118). The Cuban government has also shown significant interest and given priority to the Eurasian Economic Community. Amid the multisectoral impacts resulting from the pandemic and the strengthening of the US siege, the solidarity shown by these actors has been highly important for Cuba, along with that of countries like Mexico, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Vietnam and solidarity groups from various regions of the world, including several European countries (*Granma*, 2021b).

On March 23rd 2020, several associations of Cubans residing in Europe published an open letter to the presidents and prime ministers of the countries of the European Union asking them to intercede with the US government over the lifting of the blockade of Cuba. They also condemned the reinforcement of this policy since Donald Trump reached the White House and pointed out that the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic made it doubly genocidal to maintain the blockade. On March 28th 2020, the UK-based Cuba Solidarity Campaign (cuba-solidarity.org.uk) published an open letter calling for the US blockade against the island to be lifted in return for the Caribbean island's support for the global fight against COVID-19. As of April 7th 2020, it had registered around 12,667 signatures in support of the request, including 24 members of the UK parliament.²²

Under the PDCA umbrella, the spaces and forms of interaction for the societies on both sides are invaluable sources of consensus, mutual learning and exchanges of best practices.

20. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0266_ES.html

21. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world_es

22. <https://www.granma.cu/mundo/2021-07-29/aumenta-solidaridad-con-cuba-ante-tiempos-dificiles-29-07-2021-23-07-02>

Objective possibilities opened up for investment, cooperation and the sale of Cuban medical products and services.

Cuba's health system and biotechnology emerged as international leaders during the difficult context of the pandemic. Cuba was the first Latin American country to have its own vaccine (Vicent, 2021) and the first in the world to develop a COVID-19 vaccination programme among children. Cuba is the country with the highest percentage of its population vaccinated in the Americas and the highest rate of daily inoculation in the world, supported by a primary healthcare system that reaches every municipality and neighbourhood in the country (Guerra, 2021). Its COVID-19 fatality rate of 0.85% is well below the averages of 2% in Latin America and the rest of the world. Its international prestige grew when, as the world was suffering high levels of contagion, Cuba sent 57 medical brigades abroad, to territories including Italy, the principality of Andorra and several of the so-called European overseas territories located in the Caribbean Sea.

It would be irrational to question the results of this: objective possibilities opened up for investment, cooperation and the sale of Cuban medical products and services. The worthwhile question is whether international actors with interests in these areas will manage to circumvent the threats of the US or will wait for Washington's permission to explore the possibilities that open up in Cuba.

In Europe some are taking definite steps to embrace what they see as a promising sector. Indeed, through the Franco-Cuban Counterpart Fund, the French Development Agency will invest €45 million in Cuba's Finlay Institute. The French Ambassador to Cuba, Patrice Paoli, highlighted the importance of this collaborative project and stressed that the qualitative and quantitative increase in meningitis and pneumonia vaccine production capacities will directly benefit the people of Cuba and developing countries (*AFP*, 2021).

In December 2021, the Spanish company Meliá Cuba formalised a mutually beneficial pact with the Cuban Medical Services Marketer, which aimed at enhancing quality of life and well-being options in accommodation facilities. Francisco Camps, representative of Meliá Cuba, and Yamila de Armas, president of the Cuban Medical Services Marketer, signed a document setting out the advantages of the agreement for both companies and for the restoration of tourism to Cuba (*Expreso*, 2021).

5. Spain's Cuba policy and the worthwhile path of dialogue

Spain plays a significant role in Cuba's international insertion and has a larger network of economic, political and social relations with the island than any other EU state.

In the current context, and as a result of greater political polarisation in Spain, Cuba is once again gaining prominence as a domestic political issue, with the opposition using it to question the government's management. Accurately addressing Spain's policy towards Cuba and its effects on EU policy means stepping back from the political rhetoric and acknowledging that broad consensus has existed on a number of important issues, as socio-historical praxis shows.

This practical history shows that bilateral consultation based on mutual respect, as deployed by governments of both the Spanish Socialist

Workers' Party (PSOE) and the People's Party (PP), has been the only instrument that has contributed to achieving each sides' shared and respective objectives.

The Agreement between The Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Cuba on the Promotion and Reciprocal Protection of Investments signed in 1994 during the PSOE administration showed a strategic commitment to Spanish–Cuban economic relations that paved the way to the negotiations over another major agreement aimed at avoiding double taxation, which was signed in 1999 under the government of José María Aznar. Spain's economic presence in Cuba and its continued development is an expression of a degree of autonomy. That is not to say that it has been immune to political considerations or ignorant of the imperatives of the transatlantic relationship or Spain's shared principles with the United States. Notwithstanding tactical differences – related, in the economic field, above all with cooperation and credit policies – the PSOE and PP have tended to agree that, as well as their intrinsic value, economic relations with Cuba create the conditions for promoting the market economy, greater economic pluralism in Cuban society and the structural reforms they see as necessary for developing democracy in Cuba.

Both forces have engaged in political dialogue with the Cuban authorities at the highest level, which is the only tool for channelling matters of common interest and in practice the most effective. The legalisation of the Association of Spanish Entrepreneurs in Cuba (AEE) in 1994, the only organisation of its type in Cuba, the short-lived agreement for the creation of the Spanish Cultural Center in Havana in 1995, the incorporation in 1996 of a defence attaché with residence in the Spanish Embassy – making Spain the first EU country with a military attaché in Cuba – all came about following respectful dialogue and agreement with the Cuban authorities, and there are other examples. Both sides have also recognised Cuba as a full member of the Ibero-American Summits. They have opted for dialogue and agreement in line with the 1991 Declaration of Guadalajara, which reaffirmed the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, recognising each people's right to build their political and institutional system freely in peace, stability and justice.²³

Meanwhile, the first Spanish state visit to Havana in 2019 was replete with symbolism, but also showed evidence of a strategic and long-term vision. According to a report by Radio Televisión Española (RTVE, 2017), the subject of the visit was raised when Mariano Rajoy's government hosted the Cuban Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bruno Rodríguez, at the Moncloa Palace during an official visit to Spain in April 2017. The Cuban Minister was also received at the Palace of Zarzuela by King Felipe VI and later at the foreign office by then Spanish minister, Alfonso Dastis, who confirmed the desire for Felipe VI and Rajoy to visit Havana "as soon as possible". The king and queen of Spain eventually visited under the mandate of Pedro Sánchez after the PSOE took the presidency of the Spanish government in 2018 following a vote of no confidence against the PP.

The Cuban state's stance towards the Spanish government has remained constant: it favours a relationship based on mutual benefit, non-discrimination and interference in internal affairs and the preservation of socio-cultural and family ties. It is a position shared by large swathes of Spanish and Cuban civil society.

Spain's economic presence in Cuba and its continued development. That is not to say that it has been immune to political considerations or ignorant of the imperatives of the transatlantic relationship or Spain's shared principles with the United States.

23. See: Cumbres Iberoamericanas (1991–2016).

The path of agreement, dialogue and cooperation facilitated by the PDCA continues to be the most effective instrument for developing stable and long-term ties.

In parallel, the interventionist and coercive policies against Cuba conceived in Spain and the EU have visibly failed, such as the attempts in 1995 and 1996 to promote reform of the Cuban penal code using conditionality; the Common Position of 1996; and the 2003 sanctions, which were ultimately eliminated and gave way to the PDCA in 2016.

However, in accordance with national interests, in harmony with the Cuban socialist model and retaining a full commitment to national sovereignty, some of the changes Spanish and European forces demanded in the 1990s are today a reality. The opening up to self-employment, the emergence of small and medium-sized private enterprises and the reform of the Cuban penal code have all taken place. The path of agreement, dialogue and cooperation facilitated by the PDCA continues to be the most effective instrument for developing stable and long-term ties, for achieving the common objectives identified by the parties, and as the clearest expression of a degree of autonomy in Spanish and EU policy towards Cuba.

Conclusions

Cuba's capacity to update its socio-economic model within an effective framework is a key factor in its international insertion and its relations with the EU.

The EU institutions house a range of views on the development of these processes. The crucial thing is to identify the prevailing position at all times. Underlying these patterns are the stances of key players in the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament and the manifestations of those stances, which have fluctuated between pressure policies and the constructive engagement that predominates today.

The current strength of constructive engagement is attributable to two objective factors. First, the past and present failure of the conditionalities and unilateral sanctions used against Cuba to increase influence and promote interests on the island. Second, there is the continuing determination of Cuban society and authorities to update the economic, political and institutional model, which simultaneously impacts all the island's social relations, inter-institutional ties, property relations, mentalities and civic culture. This is the context that encourages the EU's presence and the effort to generate as much interaction as possible between EU actors and wider Cuban society from a position that is constructive and based on mutual respect.

Human rights remains an area where the stances and approaches profoundly diverge. Handling the issue in an effective, constructive and non-discriminatory way is an essential prerequisite for progressing on bilateral and multilateral cooperation and, above all, this can help create a climate of mutual trust, which is indispensable in bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, US aggression continues to be the fundamental obstacle to Cuba's international insertion and its commercial, cooperative and investment relations with the EU.

In an international arena affected by the pandemic, President Biden has clearly rejected the path of dialogue and eschewed his campaign promises on Cuba – and not in order to promote greater political or economic plurality on the island and much less to defend human rights. He aims to thwart the progress made in transforming the Cuban model, to frustrate the advance of a process that is autonomous and does not place US interests first. The goal is to ensure Washington is a key player in Cuba's domestic processes. The essence of the conflict between the United States and Cuba remains domination versus sovereignty.

In the context of renewed cooperation, Cuba–EU relations face a complex internal, bilateral and international scenario. The PCDA has proven to be a suitable tool and indispensable foundation for fulfilling both sides' shared and respective objectives. It is a path that is undoubtedly strewn with challenges, but also with opportunities for developing a stable and long-term relationship.

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Katarzyna Dembicz

Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies, University of Warsaw

Tomasz Rudowski

Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies, University of Warsaw

Introduction

The European Union's relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific states are an example of the formation of new ties in international economic and political relations that date back to the genesis of the colonial era. The institutional framework of these relationships is constantly evolving to adapt to a greater or lesser degree to the economic and political realities. As a research subject it is, thus, both important and – owing to recent developments – relevant (Whiteman, 2017; Montoute, 2017; Kennes, 2018; Boidin, 2020).

Above all the chapter seeks to outline the potential scenarios for Cuba's inclusion in the Caribbean agenda following the agreements made to replace the Cotonou Agreement, which was signed on June 23rd 2000 by the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) on the one hand and the European Union and its member states, on the other. With the Cotonou Agreement expiring in 2020, negotiations over a new agreement began in 2018 and concluded at the beginning of 2021. The final document, bearing the title "Partnership agreement between [the European Union/the European Union and its Member States], of the one party, and Members of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, of the other part" (EC, 2021a) was "published for information purposes only and may undergo further modifications" and "will be final upon Signature by the Parties". It is not, therefore, definitive. Nevertheless, the debate over Cuba's role in the Caribbean agenda should be addressed in terms of the context determined by the post-Cotonou agreement, of which Cuba will form part. The document officially published by the European Commission lists the following Caribbean countries as signatories: Antigua and Barbuda, the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the Republic of Cuba, the Commonwealth of Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the Republic of Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Republic of Suriname and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Despite being the largest island state in the region, Cuba was not part of the ACP–EU agreement signed in Cotonou. The post-Cotonou document

The socio-cultural and politico-geographical specificity of the parties to the agreement, their international relations and historical legacy are crucial factors in creating scenarios for Cuba's possible inclusion in the Caribbean agenda in post-Cotonou conditions.

proposes a number of new solutions, among other things reformulating the problems to be faced and solved jointly, with the environment and climate change gaining importance. Meanwhile, recognising that each geographical region requires specific strategies, it includes Regional Protocols for that purpose. The new proposal thus has a regional and local perspective. It includes the cultural dimensions of the different topics and areas of work and recognises the contribution that first and indigenous peoples can make in building bridges for dialogue and problem-solving. Specifically, these subjects are addressed in article 37 on "Culture and sustainable development" and article 38 on "Cultural diversity and mutual understanding" (EC, 2021b: 29).

We are convinced that the socio-cultural and politico-geographical specificity of the parties to the agreement, their international relations and historical legacy are crucial factors in creating scenarios for Cuba's possible inclusion in the Caribbean agenda in post-Cotonou conditions. This chapter is therefore structured around the following themes:

1. The Caribbean: the difficulties "taming" its diversity within a regional integration process
2. Cuba and Caribbean integration: history and challenges
3. Lomé, Cotonou and the new post-Cotonou agreements
4. The Caribbean in the post-Cotonou landscape
5. SWOT analysis of Cuba's inclusion in the post-Cotonou Caribbean agenda
6. Possible scenarios for Cuba's insertion in the post-Cotonou Caribbean agenda.

We start from the assumption that contemporary critical thinking on traditional development and economic growth models was taken into consideration when formulating the proposed new agreement, making the vision set out in the document much better suited to the challenges of the environmental crisis and the UN's SDGs. Meanwhile, US – Cuba continuous political conflict makes the Island a special case and raises doubts about whether it can fully participate in the process of Caribbean integration and intergovernmental collaboration. First, we will examine regional integration and dialogue, which the Caribbean Regional Protocol emphasises as a key issue, and we will refer to the experiences of Cuba and Caribbean to date. We aim to show the possible scenarios for Cuba's inclusion in the Caribbean agenda and the challenges to be faced, paying attention to Cuba's historical relationship with the Caribbean region and the EU. A SWOT analysis will be used to consider the significant factors for Cuba's possible incorporation in post-Cotonou, showing the individual conditions behind any decision the country makes in the context of strengths and weaknesses as well potential opportunities and threats. This will help us construct possible scenarios.

1. The Caribbean: the difficulties "taming" its diversity within a regional integration process

Latin America has a long tradition and great experience of regional integration, but the processes cannot be said to have been fruitful in terms of achieving their goals. Worthy of note among the most effective

and efficient agreements are the OECS (The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States) and CARICOM and its CSME (CARICOM Single Market and Economy). These Caribbean regional organisations unite countries whose economies may be similar but which are in other ways less compatible. Yet, common problems and similar historical backgrounds have created favourable conditions for uniting the community, which hopes that building regional alliances will strengthen its international negotiating position. However, after more than 50 years experimenting with integration, the Caribbean countries have not been able to advance in the creation of a de facto union to encompass the entire insular Spanish-, French, English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. Geographical features, the island nature of most of the states and high levels of fragmentation all stand in the way of the effective movement of people and goods. Meanwhile, the idea of Caribbeanness¹ (*caribeidad*) – and the correspondence and identification with it – is an important factor to consider, just as identification with the idea of Europeanness is in the case of European integration.

The Caribbean countries have not been able to advance in the creation of a de facto union to encompass the entire insular Spanish-, French, English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean.

As with its predecessors, in the post-Cotonou agreement the term Caribbean describes the geographical location of the signatory countries in a region considered to be in development. Since Lomé, the perceptions of the regions that form part of the ACP Group and their relationship with the EU have changed. What was seen as a vertical North–South relationship has become much more horizontal, with greater emphasis on the individual characteristics of each side. Nevertheless, the post-Cotonou agreement's Caribbean Regional Protocol gives only a small degree of prominence to the Caribbean's complexity and its multifaceted character. The signatories to the protocol include Caribbean island and continental states that are often rivals, as Jean Casimir accurately describes in *La invención del Caribe*, presenting us with a vision of the Caribbean both as a Balkanised region and one that is self-centred. The Balkanised Caribbean is formed of disparate units, a kind of Babel (Mori, 2003: 69) in which Caribbean identity is reduced to geographical and perhaps geopolitical ties. The self-centred Caribbean, meanwhile, is self-defined and has its own characteristics (Mori, 2003: 69–70). For Casimir, this vision is oriented towards the full development of local potential and its internal dynamism. It is the postcolonial Caribbean that has managed to establish its own regional structures and is aware that, despite their differences, its components form part of a single nature or follow the same interests (Mori, 2003: 69–70).

To be able to talk about the Caribbean and the scenarios for Cuba's participation in regional integration processes, the term "Caribbean" must be defined. The starting assumption must be that the complexity of the Caribbean region and the multiple interpretations of "Caribbean" are important factors in constructing interstate relations. From a geographical perspective, we can confirm that the Caribbean is a space of small dimensions, extremely complex, and of historical and contemporary geostrategic importance. As Nuñez Jimenez (1995) points out, it is a region with a young identity that is in the process of construction and crystallisation, and where influx factors have played a paramount role.

As a subject of international relations the Caribbean was emancipated very late, with the process beginning in the 1960s. The creation in 1965

1. We will use this term following Andrzej Dembic (1979), rather than Caribbeanness.

The ACS is the essence of the self-centred Caribbean – it is the mature fruit of the ideas around constructing a regional identity.

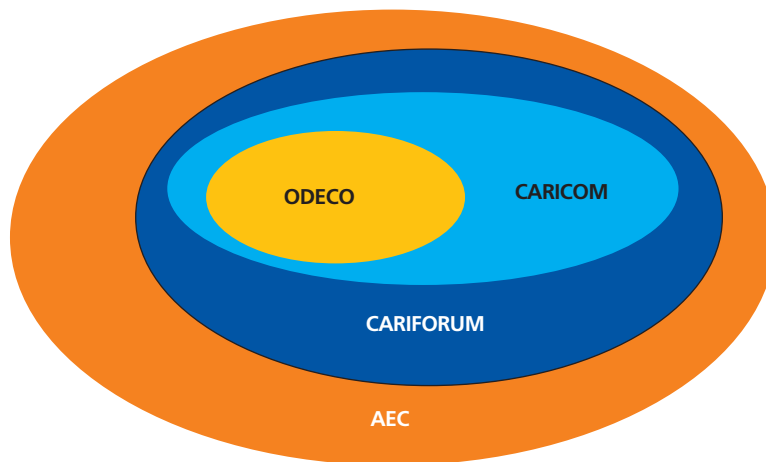
of CARIFTA (The Caribbean Free Trade Association), the subsequent founding of CARICOM - Caribbean Community in 1973, and finally the modification of the name of ECLAC in 1984 (according to resolution 1984/67), to include “Caribbean” in the UN body’s name (making it the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) were significant events that enabled the Caribbean as a region and community of states to become part of international relations. This process culminated in the creation in 1994 of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).

The ACS has helped establish the term Greater Caribbean (*El Gran Caribe*) in the international nomenclature, with the continental states bordering the Caribbean Sea becoming part of the region’s collective imaginary. Although the ACS is an institution of a consultative nature and has in recent years been fairly passive, it aims to “identify and promote the implementation of policies and programmes designed to: (a) harness, utilise and develop the collective capabilities of the Caribbean Region; (b) develop the potential of the Caribbean Sea through interaction among Member States and with third parties; (c) promote an enhanced economic space for trade and investment ...; (d) establish, consolidate and augment, as appropriate, institutional structures and cooperative arrangements responsive to the various cultural identities ... within the region” (ACS, 1994). In Casimir’s terms, the ACS is the essence of the self-centred Caribbean – it is the mature fruit of the ideas around constructing a regional identity.

The definition of the Caribbean has changed over time. Descriptions once focused mostly on cultural elements, while in other cases they were closely linked to the region’s experiences with slavery and plantations. Eric Williams, the historian and politician, was in the latter group, and tended to describe the Caribbean as the group of islands surrounded by continental countries where a plantation economy developed with the use of slave and cheap labour from Africa and other parts of the world (Williams, 1978). Meanwhile, Shirdath Ramphal helps us understand the current state of regional integration in the Caribbean. To paraphrase, the Caribbean should be understood in terms of ever-widening circles. The narrowest includes the ex-British and ex-Dutch territories and those still suffering from colonial domination. The second is wider and covers the islands of the “old” Caribbean, which shared the early experience of colonisation and freedom: the islands of Hispaniola (originally Haiti, which contains the states of Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and Cuba. Finally, in a wider circle, the margins of Caribbean identity become blurred or confused: this is where the states of Central and South America lie, stretching from Mexico to Venezuela and the Guianas. Inspired by Ramphal, Andrzej Dembiczy, one of the earliest scholars to address the issue at hand, made the visionary proposal in 1979 that this “wider Caribbean” was the circle of kinship that had in many ways been forging a real political economic future, as well as becoming a region of study (Gaztambide, 2006: 16).

This last description of the Caribbean is undoubtedly reflected in the integration and cooperation scheme proposed by Iván Ogando who, like Shirdath Ramphal and Andrzej Dembiczy, uses the concept of circles of influence, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Scheme of the Caribbean Integration and Cooperation



Source: Iván Ogando Director of FLACSO - RD Caribbean integration and the EU in the Post-Cotonou context (online). (Accessed on 08.13.2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i9bCF0bX4jQ&t=4121s>

The correlation between the size of the circles and the level of integration of the structures should be underlined: the broader the regional circle, the weaker the ties and integration progress. It is a process Joseph Nye (1964: 54–55) defined in the following terms: what constitute parts in a whole or create interdependence can be separated into economic integration (formation of a transnational economy), social integration (formation of a transnational society) and political integration (formation of transnational political interdependence).

We will analyse the three pillars of integration in an attempt to answer the question of whether it will be difficult to carry out an effective regional integration and cooperation process in the “wider Caribbean”, a region of antagonism, disparity and disharmony.

Transnationalism, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, is an economic, political and cultural process that extends beyond the boundaries of nation-states. Transnationalism can therefore be understood as the creation and maintenance of multiple ties across borders and boundaries. Political, economic and social transnationalism are associated with the loss of some national sovereignty, a very important factor for regions in the process of building their identity. As a region in the midst of political formation and identity crystallisation, the deep attachment to sovereignty and national sentiments in the Caribbean may hinder the creation of a close intergovernmental union. It should be noted that among the 25 members of the ACS (excluding associates) figure territories that obtained their independence both very early, such as Haiti in 1804, and very late – Belize in 1981. Political instability also affects the sense of sovereignty. Various governments in the region have experienced multiple coups and their societies have suffered dictatorships and political military interventions. Territorial conflicts undermine sovereignty, as several ACS members can attest. Belize is one example of a country involved in a territorial dispute (with Guatemala), but there have been others, and still more remain.

In the case of the Caribbean region, achieving transnational political interdependence that encompasses the Greater and Lesser Antilles or the Greater Caribbean will be difficult.

In short, in the case of the Caribbean region, achieving transnational political interdependence that encompasses the Greater and Lesser Antilles or the Greater Caribbean will be difficult. This is because different political historical factors exist that affect the sovereignty-building process, create splits and resentments and cause colonial memories to resurface in Caribbean peoples' collective memory. The associate members of the ACS are the clearest evocation of this, as all are overseas territories of European Union member states.

European colonisation influenced the Caribbean's economic formation and gave it a common characteristic – the slave and plantation economy. The different administrative and trade formulas the empires applied carved out different development paths. Out of the great ethnic and cultural variety and the formation of local identities, it is possible to distinguish distinct routes towards socio-political and economic development: the paths of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, the English Caribbean, the French Caribbean and the Dutch Caribbean. Amid this diversity there are peoples who feel greater attachment to Europe and their island homeland than to the project of a Caribbean patria. This may be seen in the words of the Trinidadian writer V.S. Naipaul that “nothing was created in the West Indies ... and these small islands will never create”, and the way some Francophone Antilleans consider themselves “French people of colour” (Mori, 2003).

Creating a Caribbean transnational economy will be a difficult, but not impossible, process, as shown by the functioning of CARICOM and the OECS (Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States), in which integration is advanced and monetary unification is in place. However, in both cases the member states belong to the narrowest circle, in Ramphal's terms, which includes former British, French and Dutch colonies and the territories that remain under domination. As well as co-creating a transnational economy, the member states of these two organisations are part of an extra-regional transnational policy, as Commonwealth members or overseas territories of European powers.

The social framework is the third space of change Nye (1964) identifies in an integration process. In general, it seems reasonable to call Caribbean societies transnational because they have experienced intense migration flows and because multiple ties have been formed and maintained across borders and boundaries. Intra- and inter-regional migratory movements, the creation of diasporas outside the islands and their strong socio-economic connection with island societies forge this process. As Jorge Duany (2010: 269) has written, transnationalism entails imagining communities beyond the nation-state, transforming social relations and generating practices that challenge the stationary models of physical and cultural space. The mass dispersal and resettlement of people beyond their places of birth disturbed the links established between territories, states and citizenships. Caribbean diasporas maintain a strong sociocultural bond with their places of birth and help support local economies in their country of origin. A good example is the Dominican Republic, which has a diaspora of over 2 million people in the US and which received remittances worth over \$8 billion in 2020 (Banco Central de la República Dominicana, 2021). Beyond the economic data, a society's transnationality can be analysed by looking at the place the country of origin occupies for its citizens

residing abroad. In his studies on Caribbean transnational corporations, Jorge Duany (2010) paints a rather complex picture, indicating the obstacles a society may face before achieving full convergence between the home population and those who have emigrated, and concludes that despite the pressures of globalisation, most people's daily lives continue to be framed by nation-states, even those who live outside their native country (Duany, 2010: 278). Thus, despite their increasing irrelevance to cultural practices and identities, in the contemporary world state demarcations retain importance and, in short, migrants transnationalism depends largely on the pre-existing political and economic links in place between states of origin and reception.

This brief regional overview of the three dimensions of integration explains the atomisation of this process in the Caribbean. The region's history shows that it is a space that is seeking out alliances, and that global dynamics and the globalisation process favour this process. As Serbín (2018b) points out, the global governance that has prevailed until now has been constructed around Western-promoted values. But the criticism it is now facing has prompted new proposals that involve different international actors and leaders. This is what lies behind the Dominican Republic's alliance with SICA, the Caribbean states' cooperation within the ALBA and PetroCaribe frameworks, and the changed view of the partnership with the EU. The Caribbean side remains mired in strong divisions between the Global North and South, which continues to endure the economic and political domination of the former colonial empires and the United States and is constantly seeking to crystallise an identity and original path of its own. All of this will make it a difficult counterpart for the EU. The need to respond to social demands, to look inside the states and finally find a strategy that allows advantage to be taken of the region's great diversity and the system it represents are major challenges. As long as the integration bodies – many of which include the same actors – remain numerous and increasingly fragmented, establishing a shared Caribbean agenda will be difficult. In an area formed of small nations, this is somewhat inevitable.

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2. Cuba and Caribbean integration: history and challenges

All integration processes – whether political, social or economic – require flexibility among the parties in the process and the capacity for consensus. Obviously, the wider the range of political objectives, historical experiences and cultural diversity, the greater the possibility of hostility breaking out and, as a result, the cooperation processes finding obstacles and gaps. The Caribbean region contains such heterogeneity. As Gérard Pierre-Charles notes, few of the world's regions have experienced a shock of the magnitude and duration of the European colonisation of the Caribbean. The rivalry between European empires made the Caribbean politically and linguistically fragmented, and almost without exception the islands evolved with scant contact with the others. This lack of connection with each other led them to be connected almost exclusively with the metropole. As time passed, the region evolved within the US's field of attraction (Pierre-Charles, 1981: 14, 20–21), remained politically and economically dependent on the West and functioned on the margins of international relations. It

The Soviet bloc's disintegration required the objectives and assumptions of Cuban foreign policy to be redefined.

was in these historical circumstances that the Cuban Revolution broke out, which not only radically changed Cuban society, but drove change for the Caribbean region and Latin America as a whole. From 1959 onwards, Cuba's new foreign policy was based on a revolutionary and anti-imperialist nationalism. Through secessionist endeavours, Cuba sought autonomy and sovereignty in its relations with the US. This policy left the island isolated within the inter-American system and in 1962 its government was excluded from the OAS. As a result, in 1964 American countries agreed to sever diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba as well as suspending trade, except for food and medicines (Domínguez, 1989: 115–116). From 1959 to 1989, Cuba based its policy on three pillars: membership of the group of socialist countries (from 1972 it formed part of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, CMEA); active participation in the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (founding member) and solidarity with the countries in what was then called the Third World; and strengthening ties with Latin America and the Caribbean. It was an extremely active policy and in the mid-1970s, the OAS sanctions against the island were lifted (Arrighi, 2009). In 1975, for the first time since 1959, Cuba joined a regional cooperation organisation – the Latin American Economic System (SELA).

The Soviet bloc's disintegration required the objectives and assumptions of Cuban foreign policy to be redefined. Even today, the political regime's survival is the main aim of any action taken, with economic and social issues secondary. Other important issues are: the lifting of the US trade blockade; sustainable economic development based on fair integration with the world economy, avoiding additional dependencies; deepening of South–South cooperation; development of unity and cooperation with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and solidarity with nations that oppose the US. Medical diplomacy and humanitarian aid are examples of the use of soft power that has helped Havana acquire a symbolic capital that earns it international support and extends its autonomy (Feinsilver, 2008: 273–285; Kruijt, 2019: 293).

Cuba has demonstrated its capacity for cooperation within regional international organisations (it forms part of ALADI, ACS, CELAC and the Summits of the Americas). While it also plays a key role in ALBA, which can be seen as an attempt to create its own regional structure (Preciado Coronado, 2011; Serbín, 2018a).

During the Cold War, Caribbean countries' policies towards Cuba reflected their stances on US domination of the region. In the early 1970s, the four largest countries in the region (Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados) established diplomatic relations with Cuba, and over time the Caribbean became the advocate for lifting the economic sanctions against the increasingly influential island. After the revolution in Grenada in 1979, Cuba became the country's main partner and when the US intervened militarily in Grenada in 1983 Cuba's relations with the region cooled (Martínez Reinosa, 2011: 206–215). The change in Cuban policy in the 1990s made relations with regions such as the European Union and the Caribbean more of a priority. This was the point at which Cuba ceased to be a regional threat and a "Trojan horse" for the USSR in the minds of the small Caribbean countries (Servín, 2004: 11–12). From that moment on, Cuba could count on greater support from Caribbean countries when engaging with

the EU and fighting the Helms–Burton Act, as well as gaining support for its denunciations of the US blockade.

To recap, beginning in the 1990s, Cuba undertook a full reactivation of its relations with the Caribbean and entered a stage of building collaboration towards new proposals and forms of integration. In 1994, it was one of the founders of the ACS and consolidated its bilateral ties with CARICOM. From 1990 onwards, CARICOM decided to cooperate with Cuba but did not grant it observer status. In 2000, the Protocol to the Trade and Economic Agreement between CARICOM and Cuba was signed, followed in 2017 by the Second Protocol as a way to strengthen existing trade links. Starting in 2002, every three years Summits of Heads of State and Government are held within the framework of the CARICOM–Cuba mechanism (Martínez Reinososa 2011: 216–221). The 7th CARICOM–Cuba Summit took place in 2020 in a context shaped by the acute global crisis. The meeting analysed the challenges facing the Caribbean due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures needed to contain it. Rogelio Sierra, Cuba's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, stressed that the ties that unite Cuba and the Caribbean are based on principles like mutual respect and independence, and values such as solidarity, friendship, fraternity, gratitude and full support for the Caribbean, all of which, he says, were proposed by the historic leader of the Cuban Revolution (Serna Duque, 2020).

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The ACP Group is not excluded from Cuba's international activism. Since 1997, Cuba has been emitting signs of interest in joining the organisation's work, as well as the Lomé Convention. The Caribbean and African countries that had maintained good relations with Cuba for years supported the idea. Another significant element in the maturing of Cuban relations with CARICOM is its participation since 1998 in CARIFORUM (Caribbean Forum), with the permission of the foreign ministers of the EU member states. CARIFORUM is where relations between CARICOM and the European Union are managed – including, since 2008, free trade agreements (FTAs) – and as a subgroup of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), it provides the basis for economic dialogue with the EU (Silva, 2014). In October 2008, the EU signed an Economic Partnership Agreement with CARIFORUM, with the inclusion of 15 Caribbean states. The agreement has been in provisional application since December 29th 2008. Cuba is an observer member of CARIFORUM but does not participate in the Cotonou Agreements (Trillard, 2012: 13–14). The stubborn insistence of countries like Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK made full membership conditional on advances in democratisation and human rights protection. Cuba has repeatedly declared its willingness to join the EU–ACP agreement and on February 8th 2000 asked to join the Cotonou Agreement, only for the request to be withdrawn on April 26th of the same year after the Netherlands, Sweden and Great Britain had proposed to use their veto in the Council of the EU. Cuba nevertheless became a member of the ACP Group on December 14th 2000, but without joining the Cotonou Agreement it is unable to benefit from it. However, since 2007 it has benefited from EU regional and thematic funding outside the EDF (Kennes, 2018: 5). In December 2002, when Fidel Castro again declared his willingness to join the Cotonou Agreement the CARICOM countries supported him and asked the EU to initiate a procedure to involve Cuba in the agreement without

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preconditions. However, the largescale repression against the opposition movement on the island in March and April 2003 led the European Commission to suspend the procedure on May 1st of the same year. The Cuban government once again withdrew its request to join the Cotonou Agreement, while also rejecting all aid from the EU, accusing European governments of complicity with the United States in the invasion of Iraq (Ojeda Revah, 2012).

Having closed its doors to Europe at the beginning of the new millennium the government in Havana needed to seek new alliances, including in the Caribbean. It thus became an enthusiastic participant in building new initiatives like CELAC and ALBA. Cuban researchers tend to write in highly apologetic tones about ALBA, calling it the epitome and model of new anti-liberal integration (García Lorenzo, 2012; Fernández Tabío, 2014). Several Caribbean countries have been members and have benefited from PetroCaribe, the energy cooperation agreement largely financed by Venezuela and aimed at Caribbean states, including those in Central America. Cuba was a very active participant in both initiatives.

The crisis in Venezuela and the political weakening of progressive left-wing governments in the region affected Cuba's position in the international arena and reduced Latin American investment on the island. Despite these obstacles, Cuba continued to collaborate with the ACP Group and the Caribbean countries. Indeed, many of these states have on several occasions expressed their gratitude to the island for its solidarity and contributions to the anti-apartheid movement, to work on reducing illiteracy and the fight against diseases within the framework of health cooperation, and in the fields of sport and natural disaster risk mitigation. Roberto Azevêdo, Director-General of the ACP, said that the "eradication of poverty, the confrontation and adaptation to climate change and the promotion of social policies that generate equality, should be central axes to develop cooperation among our nations". As of 2019, over 190,000 Cuban aid workers have provided services in ACP Group countries and 30,000 young people from these countries have been trained (Prensa ACP, 2019).

Various obstacles and constraints stand in the way of Cuba's integration within the Caribbean. The Cuban scientist Jacqueline Laguardia Martínez (2018) has listed the key factors:

- Unstable regional economic climate;
- High indebtedness ratios of Caribbean SIDS, shortage of FDI, rising unemployment and low productivity;
- High intra-regional transport costs;
- Ignorance in the Caribbean about the business opportunities in Cuba and its economic, institutional and legal specificities;
- Cuban ignorance of the opportunities and attractive elements of stronger economic ties with the Caribbean;
- Dominance of "competition" over "complementation";
- Historically determined economic ties with other partners;
- Insufficient financing and credit mechanisms;
- Language barriers;
- US blockade on Cuba;
- Fear of Cuba's size and potential.

In her work on Cuban–Caribbean relations, Martínez (2018) also lists the crucial interventions to improve such a process:

- Identify spaces for complementation, rather than competition;
- Promote economic links between Cuba and the rest of the Caribbean;
- Promote trade in services and multi-destination tourism;
- Continue to increase transport options, especially maritime;
- Capitalise on positive experiences in joint cooperative economic relations (trust, ability to work together);
- Interest the business sector in exploring interregional markets;
- Deepen knowledge about the region;
- Think about “the Caribbean” from a socio-economic development perspective that looks beyond its historical and cultural significance.

3. Lomé, Cotonou and the new post-Cotonou agreements

The ACP was formed in 1975 as a result of the signing of the Georgetown Agreement, which established the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States. In the same year these countries reach an agreement with the European Community and signed the first Lomé Convention. The signatories were nine members of the European Economic Community (EEC) and 46 of its former colonies in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The signatories from the Caribbean were: the Bahamas, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Over time, the ACP Group grew to 79 countries. The first five-year agreement (Lomé I) was followed by others: Lomé II (1980–1984), Lomé III (1985–1989), Lomé IV (1990–1994) and Lomé IV bis/revised (1995–1999). The Lomé Conventions were based on three pillars: trade, development cooperation and political dialogue. And while the instruments and procedures were modified in several ways, the basic configuration remained the same, despite the different agreements having different mechanisms and objectives. Among the hallmarks of the Lomé agreements were the unilateral trade preferences granted by Europe to the ACP countries and the European provision of development aid through the EDF. Both provided incentives for ACP countries to maintain and strengthen the relationship (Montoute, 2017; Whiteman, 2017). One point worth emphasising is that customs duties were abolished for almost all industrial products and lifted or reduced for agricultural products.

Certain difficulties emerge when evaluating the Lomé agreements. Despite the advantages ACP products obtained in the European market and the development aid granted, this preferential treatment did not significantly affect the socioeconomic development levels of the former European colonies. Indeed, ACP countries’ share of European trade fell significantly – from 6.7% to 3% – during the 1976 to 1998 period. Another problem that remained to be resolved was the low diversity of the export basket, with only ten products accounting for 60% of total exports from ACP countries. The Lomé Conventions reflected the whole framework of North–South cooperation, but over time they evolved into a very complicated instrument of relations, with too many objectives, instruments and procedures. Commonly, the outcomes of EU–ACP cooperation are seen as actions with long delays, high levels

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of bureaucracy, reduced efficiency and low impact on a somewhat questionable development (ECDPM, 2001: 3).

After 20 years of cooperation experience, the European Commission used Lomé as a heading beneath which to undertake a comprehensive review process that covered the agreement's three pillars: trade, political dialogue and development cooperation. The idea was to set up a renewed and improved cooperation structure for the 21st century (Kennes, 2018: 3). This process led to the writing of the so-called *Green Paper* (EC, 1996) and laid the groundwork for the negotiations over the successor agreement (1998–2000) signed on June 23rd 2000 in Cotonou, the capital of Benin.

The Cotonou Agreement consists of a preamble, a substantive text divided into six parts, six annexes and protocols with annexes. The first part contains general provisions on the objectives, principles and parties in the agreement, with non-governmental institutions and organisations also invited (see article 4). The second part consists of institutional provisions and the third refers to economic cooperation and development strategies. The fourth part covers the provisions on financial cooperation. The fifth deals with the least developed countries, islands and enclaves, while the sixth and final section refers to the final provisions.

The Cotonou Agreement's main objectives are reducing poverty in order to eradicate it definitively, supporting the sustainable economic, cultural and social development of the partner countries and facilitating the progressive integration of their respective economies into the world economy (article 19). The tasks meant to contribute to implementing these goals must be carried out according to the following principles:

- the partners in the agreement are equal;
- ACP countries determine their own development policies;
- cooperation is not only between governments – parliaments, local authorities, civil society, the private sector and economic and social actors also play roles; and
- cooperation agreements and priorities vary according to certain factors, such as countries' levels of development.

The Cotonou Agreement was based on four pillars:

1. **A strengthened political dimension:** political dialogue, conflict prevention and resolution by peaceful means, respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. It is important to highlight that the violation of the democratic clause (article 9) allows consultation mechanisms to be activated (article 96) and the consequent potential suspension of cooperation. As early as the first year of the agreement, the article 96 procedure was applied to Zimbabwe, Haiti, Fiji and Côte d'Ivoire. Since 2000 this article has been used 15 times. It is likely that even if Cuba were part of the agreement it would struggle to obtain economic benefits from it, among other reasons due to civil liberties limitations and the persecution of the opposition in 2003, as a result of which the EU took measures against the Cuban government within the framework of the Common Position;

2. **Greater participation:** participation in cooperation between civil society and the private sector to use aid funds more effectively, via initiatives to aid the region's economic development, such as private sector development, investments, sectoral policy, reforms, social and cultural development and regional cooperation and integration;
3. **A more strategic cooperation approach** focused on reducing poverty; new economic and trade associations, new trade agreements and EPAs (article 36), protection of intellectual property (article 46), protection of the environment (article 49), compliance with labour standards (article 50);
4. **Improved financial cooperation:** suspension of Stabex (the export income stabilisation system) and SYSMIN (the mining sector support programme), the possibility of offsetting export income losses involving raw materials and agricultural goods; EDF project and programme financing.

Under the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement, development cooperation aims to implement and advance local economic, cultural, environmental and institution-building strategies.

Under the provisions of the Cotonou Agreement, development cooperation aims to implement and advance local economic, cultural, environmental and institution-building strategies. ACP–EC/EU cooperation development policy strategies will aim at:

- a) achieving rapid and sustained job-creating economic growth, developing the private sector, increasing employment, improving access to productive economic activities and resource [sic], and fostering regional cooperation and integration;
- b) promoting human and social development helping to ensure that the fruits of growth are widely and equitably shared and promoting gender equality;
- c) promoting [sic] cultural values of communities and specific interactions with economic, political and social elements;
- d) promoting institutional reforms and development, strengthening the institutions necessary for the consolidation of democracy, good governance and for efficient and competitive market economies; and building capacity for development and partnership; and
- e) promoting environmental sustainability, regeneration and best practices, and the preservation of natural resource base" (*Official Journal*, 2000: article 20).

A Western vision of civilisation prevails in the Cotonou Agreement, when it comes to understanding development, economic growth and, above all, the correlation between civil society and the market economy (article 1). Cotonou installed a European vision of development as a universal standard. Gerrit W. Gong, the US International Relations researcher of Chinese origin, has written about these "standards of civilisation" non-European countries were required to meet to join the family of civilised nations (Gong 1984: 92–93; cf. Rudowski, 2018). Article 20 promotes a traditional "top-down" development model, which contrasts with today's alternative proposals. Then, in the guise of promoting sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals, article 10 of the Cotonou Agreement stresses the importance of market economies, industrialisation and competitiveness in the fight against poverty, at a time when the majority of these countries are feeling the effects of a climate catastrophe. Another oddity lies in article 24, which deals with tourism's importance and major role in the sustainable development of the ACP states. Suffice to say that the present global pandemic

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has demonstrated the profound economic and social dependence of various ACP countries on the tourism sector and confirmed that services need to be diversified in order to combat poverty and technological backwardness – with Cuba a clear example.

Foreign investment and private sector development were an important issue in the Cotonou Agreement. At national and/or regional level EU–ACP cooperation should support the necessary economic and institutional reforms and policies. But, at the same time, in order to create an environment that is conducive to private investment and the development of a dynamic, viable and competitive private sector, it was required that cooperation should include:

- a) the promotion of public–private sector dialogue and cooperation;
- b) the development of entrepreneurial skills and business culture;
- c) privatisation and enterprise reform; and
- d) development and modernisation of mediation and arbitration systems” (*Official Journal*, 2000: article 21).

When the Cotonou Agreement was revised in 2005 new elements were introduced, such as the political dimension, development strategies, investment mechanism and management procedures (Serrano Caballero, 2012: 178). In 2007 a focus was also placed on issues such as: climate change, food security, HIV/AIDS, sustainable fishing, strengthening security in fragile regions and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (replaced in 2016 by 17 Sustainable Development Goals) (EC, 2020a).

On December 3rd 2020, the EU and the OACPS reached a political agreement on the Cotonou Agreement’s replacement, which was signed on April 15th 2021. The post-Cotonou agreement establishes common values and principles for the EU and OACPS in the following priority areas: democracy and human rights, peace and security, human and social development, sustainable economic development and growth, climate change, and migration and mobility (article 1, paragraph 3) (EC, 2020b). It may be said to represent a major philosophical change in EU–ACP relations. In the “old” agreement, the goals focused on the economic and social development of the ACP Group and cooperation was constructed within the North–South relations paradigm. The post-Cotonou agreement manages EU–ACP relations in a more horizontal and reciprocal manner, giving greater emphasis to the strengthening of multilateral spaces and alliances. The new “3+1” structure that characterises the post-Cotonou treaty serves to strengthen the EU’s relations with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, while retaining all the benefits of the OACPS–EU association. The new structure of the post-Cotonou Agreement is thus formed of two parts:

1. the foundation agreement (for all parties) establishes common values and principles, defines priority areas and strategies for joint work; and
2. the complementary regional protocols determine the specific approach for joint actions based on the needs of each region.

The “new” agreement changes the funding mechanism for cooperation – which has no specific fund in place. The EDF has been integrated into the EU budget and there will be programmable funds

within the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework. EU-ACP cooperation will be financed through the EU budget and the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).² The NDICI promotes the strongest initiatives that encourage development and intra-regional projects and is formed around three key pillars: geographical, thematic and rapid response. Other components of this instrument are monetary aid; external action and common security; and cooperation with overseas territories. EU external development aid is valued at €79.5 billion (Morgan, 2021). The advantages of the new financing mechanism include the multiannual financial cycle, the possibility of transferring interannual funds, including various mechanisms within the same instrument, ease of disbursement procedures (simplification), greater coherence in cooperation, less fragmentation of cooperation and greater complementarity. There has also been criticism of the changes, with several weaknesses raised, such as the lack of co-management of programming, less predictability of available funds, lack of intra-ACP allocation, and competition for funds with least developed countries (LDCs) (Ogando, 2020).

According to the European Commission, one of the main advantages of the new agreement is that it undoubtedly helps form a more modern association in which to seek solutions to global issues, such as the environment and climate, migration and mobility, and peace and security, as the new agreement may be a tool for implementing the Paris Agreement and promoting the UN's 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Another important point the EC highlights is the specific focus on sustainable growth – including job creation – and private sector investments and development (EC, 2021a). Among the most difficult topics for negotiators to reach agreement on were health, gender, sexual and reproductive rights and migration (EP, 2021).

The trade provisions of the post-Cotonou agreement are strikingly asymmetric. According to Iana Dreyer, founder editor of Borderlex.eu: "the asymmetry in terms of whose interests and whose discourse has prevailed in this negotiation is glaring. We all know the background of the Cotonou framework is a legacy from the colonial era. But it's high time we all move into the 21st century" (Dreyer, 2021). Unfortunately, the colonial legacy is evident in the language of the agreement, which at times takes a moralising tone, as is notable in article 41 on "Mobilisation of sustainable and responsible investment". In article 42, paragraph 3 on "Investment facilitation and protection" it is easy to see whose interests are the more protected: "The Parties, in line with their respective strategies, agree on the importance of providing legal certainty and adequate protection to established investments the treatment of which shall be non-discriminatory in nature and shall include effective dispute prevention and resolution mechanisms. In that regard, they reaffirm the importance of concluding international investment agreements that fully preserve their sovereign right to regulate investment for legitimate public policy purposes." The negotiating process was fraught with obstacles and difficulties, which have impacted the final text, as the chief OACPS negotiator and Togolese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Robert Dussey, admitted, saying that if more solidarity had been shown a better outcome could have been achieved: "We did not agree with each other. But the EU knew very well what it wanted" (Wilhelm, 2021).

The trade provisions of the post-Cotonou agreement are strikingly asymmetric. The colonial legacy is evident in the language of the agreement.

2. The instrument is intended for all countries, not just the ACP.

The basis of the new agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States appears much more general than its predecessor.

4. The Caribbean in the post-Cotonou world scenario

The work on the replacement for the Cotonou Agreement took place in far from ordinary circumstances, with the global health situation not the only conditioning factor. First and foremost, the European Union was facing new internal challenges, such as Brexit and the new appointments in the European Council, as well as the growing number of global problems and the increasing multipolarity of the international arena. The text of the new post-Cotonou agreement contains traces of all of them.

The basis of the new agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, which represents the shared values and principles of all the signatory countries, appears much more general than its predecessor. The specific issues on which each of the ACP regions should take action can be found in the regional protocols, a novel element in the ACP–EU agreements. The regional protocols are a product of the parties’ geographical diversity and highlight the specific challenges for each area. The Caribbean Regional Protocol includes the following:

- a) strengthen their [regional] political partnership;
- b) deepen economic relations, promote transformation and diversification, support inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development through trade, investment, private sector development and sustainable industrialisation;
- c) improve environmental sustainability and climate resilience, pursue the sustainable management of natural resources and strengthen disaster management;
- d) build inclusive, peaceful and secure societies, with a special focus on advancing human rights, gender equality, justice and governance, including financial governance, and citizen security;
- e) invest in human and social development, addressing poverty and growing inequalities, manage migration, leveraging the diaspora’s ... investment, and ensuring that no one is left behind (EC, 2021b: 119).

While the first two points – calling for greater integration, including economic – repeat the goals of the “old” partnership, those that follow set out contemporary concerns, focusing on the human being, its economic activity and legal conditions, well-being and relationship with nature. The human rights mentioned include third and fourth generation rights, meaning the document reflects the changing times and responds to the expectations of the Caribbean’s new generations, several of whose states have young demographic structures (e.g. Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica), or are ageing (e.g. Cuba and Barbados). Part of article 32 of the Caribbean Regional Protocol is relevant in this regard (EC, 2021b: 139):

The Parties shall contribute to the protection, promotion and fulfilment of human rights in compliance with international law. They shall promote and contribute to the universal ratification and implementation of international human rights instruments, implement those instruments which they subscribe to, and consider accession to those to which they are not yet party. They shall apply in full the non-discrimination principle as set out in Article 9 of the General Part

of the Agreement placing a priority on adopting and implementing comprehensive equality and anti-discrimination laws.

Like the entire first chapter of the protocol, this aligns with the values presented in the main part of the agreement and should have implications for the expansion of the rights of minorities, including LGBT+ people, who face discrimination in various countries across the region and where homosexual practices may even incur prison sentences. This is the case in Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Dominica and Saint Kitts and Nevis, all of which have laws in force that criminalise sexual relations between people of the same sex as crimes of “sodomy” or “gross indecency”, while Grenada’s legislation uses the category of “unnatural crime” (Pascali, 2021). Interestingly, Antigua and Barbuda and Saint Lucia only consider homosexual relations between men illegal (Pascali, 2021).

The text’s level of generality gives Caribbean countries significant flexibility.

The Caribbean Regional Protocol calls for economic activities in Caribbean countries to be transformed and rebuilt in line with the SDGs and the green and blue economies. The text’s level of generality gives Caribbean countries significant flexibility. And it should be recalled that this is a region that depends on oil supplies and bases its economy on tourism and income from favourable tax laws for non-resident individuals and companies. It is an area where major needs exist for new technologies to be applied in the energy sector, for economic diversification and to fight the effects of natural disasters. These issues are acquiring vital importance, as article 30 of the protocol mentions (EC, 2021b: 137).

For decades, Caribbean countries have been working together within the frameworks of international organisations such as CARICOM, the FAO and UN to mitigate natural disasters and epidemics that affect local agriculture. Climate change, environmental collapse and health security are now “hot” issues, and the successful experiences and best practices in formulating migration policies, international cooperation and human development can make the Caribbean a leader among ACP countries. The coming years will be crucial for the Caribbean region to prevent, anticipate and adapt to the effects of climate change, which has a severe effect on its lands and peoples. Equally important is to reap the benefits of the sustainable use of marine resources, also known as the “blue economy”, to harness the region’s growth potential and reduce inequalities.

The “new” agreement takes the Caribbean’s socio-economic heterogeneity into account and gives special treatment to Haiti, the region’s poorest country. It also underlines the need to strengthen relations with the EU’s overseas territories. Politically, economically and financially linked to Europe, they are detached from CARICOM and other regional organisations – although not from Caribbean reality. As a clear trace of the colonial legacy, their presence may be said to cast a permanent shadow over the establishment of a sincere and frank dialogue between Europe and the Caribbean, but they also produce conflicting interests that create divisions within the region.

In summary, as well as the mentioned subjects, the Caribbean Regional Protocol proposes several areas of joint work to respond to the pending challenges of achieving greater regional integration and cooperation.

It will be very difficult to reconcile the economic and environmental objectives.

They may be arranged into three groups: economic, such as the development of the private sector, investment, agriculture, tourism and the extractive and cultural industries; legal, by strengthening justice and institutions, decreasing crime and improving citizen security; and human development, through improved social services, education, health and housing.

Analysing the text of the protocol, we believe that it will be very difficult to reconcile the economic and environmental objectives. Caribbean countries' economies are highly dependent on mass tourism and on extractive agricultural, maritime and mining activities. All of these economic activities present environmental risks and make island societies vulnerable – the text of the agreement itself mentions this challenge. The pandemic and global lockdown laid bare the severely dependent position of the Caribbean states, and yet the post-Cotonou agreement seems to give no answer to these problems. The paths of development and action it emphasises for the Caribbean region list environment concerns alongside extractivism, tourism and economic growth. And while it includes a level of concern for the human being, the same is not true for nature – the good without which no human being can exist. This dissonance may turn out to be the main topic of discussion as the agreement awaits ratification – all the more so when its form of financing changes. Until now CARICOM and its members have been the programmes' main beneficiaries, but the incorporation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic altered the gravity within the system, something Cuba's inclusion will undoubtedly deepen. As well as being the largest territory in the Caribbean, Cuba is a leading actor in Latin American relations, with extensive experience of multilateral work and South–South dialogue. But that will not be the only factor that weakens the role of CARICOM. CARIFORUM's loss of purpose will be another factor, as will the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. The UK was a conservative influence, which opposed Cuba joining the Cotonou Agreements and safeguarded the interests of its former colonies. Its absence will create new opportunities for the Spanish-speaking territories and possibly increase CARICOM countries' independence of decision-making, as they will no longer feel obliged to support London's interests over those of the EU. This new international setting presents a major opportunity for Cuba to forge Caribbean alliances and ensure its entry to the post-Cotonou agreements is effective. The possible scenarios in which this kind of partnership could take place and the effects of it will be addressed below.

5. SWOT analysis of Cuba's inclusion in the post-Cotonou Caribbean agenda

With the precondition that it joins the EU–ACP partnership under the post-Cotonou agreement, various possible scenarios may be constructed for Cuba's incorporation into the Caribbean agenda. In order to do so various factors must be considered. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis will allow us to do this in a way that is both detailed and summarised. This methodological tool allows information to be organised and framed in a very strict categorisation structure, in which the first two factors – strengths and weaknesses –

correspond to the internal situation, while the other two – opportunities and threats – relate to the external environment (Matusiak, 2011). The SWOT analysis is also used to detect the possibilities for change in a region that is considered to be innovative or to possess the qualities to become so. With all this in mind, the crucial factors for and against the inclusion of Cuba in the post-Cotonou Caribbean agenda are set out below, accompanied by a brief comment.

A. Strengths of Cuba (endogenous)

- **Active Cuban foreign policy, especially in the Latin American region**

Cuba is sometimes described as a small country with a great power's foreign policy. The main objective of this policy is to guarantee the island's sovereignty. Closer relations with the countries of the Global South and the Latin American and Caribbean region form a key part of the current survival strategy, along with active engagement in international forums to develop multilateralism. Cuba's policy of solidarity has earned it prestige among the countries of the Global South, which gives it greater room for manoeuvre in international forums.

- **Cuba as a bridge to Latin America**

The situation whereby Cuba is the interlocutor between Latin America and the Anglo-Caribbean countries increases the island's regional importance. Cuban activism and its linguistic and cultural unity with Latin America bring the Caribbean islands closer to the American continent.

- **Well-trained, experienced diplomats**

Cuba has a good school of diplomacy, which assists in its active foreign policy to combat its international isolation and protect its interests. Cuba's diplomatic corps is skilled and well-trained, has experience of dialogue with authoritarian, military and liberal regimes and success in international dialogue forums.

- **Cuba's smart/soft power**

Multiple researchers have described how effectively Cuba uses its soft power, including in combined strategies with hard power (the advantage/predominance of the former is more apparent).³ Medical internationalism, literacy programmes and disaster relief bring positive results for the island on many levels, gaining it prestige and helping build international alliances (Feinsilver, 2008; Kruijt, 2019; Kruijt, 2020; Werlau, 2013).

- **The Caribbean's largest economy**

Cuba has both the Caribbean's highest economic potential (2020 GDP of \$103 bn at current prices; income level: upper middle) and population (over 11 million inhabitants) (World Bank, 2021). The Cuban regime updated the country's economic model to permit private property, real estate sales and the development of the private sector. Local SME entrepreneurs are ready and willing to develop their economic activity, as demonstrated by the boom in activities in the 2012–2018 period. Local entrepreneurs have connections to the

3. Cuban hard power mainly consists of providing military support to states engaged in revolutionary struggle.

Caribbean market, as shown by the private trips to Panama, Guyana and other destinations to acquire products that are then sold in Cuba. The agro-industry sector has great potential, but requires investment, as does the biomedical sector, which is competitive and open to collaboration.

- **A country with social freedoms and rights to a dignified life**
Cubans enjoy a spectrum of individual freedoms that are limited in other Caribbean states, where homosexual relations and abortion remain criminalised, while the rights of women and of older adults in Cuba also have greater importance. The Cuban Constitution also guarantees the rights to: water, a healthy environment, healthy food and the consumption of high quality goods.

B. Cuba's weaknesses (endogenous)

- **Political system**
As a one-party state dominated by the PCC, Cuba's lack of political pluralism is clear. It has little experience of local self-management and a stagnant bureaucracy (in almost all the country's sectors). Introducing reforms and innovation to this "fossilised" system will be no easy task, as shown by the slow pace with which domestic institutions and laws change. The new Constitution's archaic language also reflects this, with article 5 a good example: "The Communist Party of Cuba, unique, Martiano, Fidelista, and Marxist-Leninist, the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, sustained in its democratic character as well as its permanent linkage to the people, is the superior driving force of the society and the State. It organizes and orients the communal forces towards the construction of socialism and its progress toward a communist society" (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2019).
- **Lack of political freedoms**
Freedom of expression, including freedoms of the press and assembly, are limited.
- **Economic system**
Cuba's economic system is incompatible with the free market and capitalist system that dominate the world stage, as the 2019 Constitution states: "Cuba [is committed to] never returning to capitalism as a regime sustained by the exploitation of man by man, and that it is only in socialism and communism that a human being can achieve his or her full dignity" (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2019). The Vietnamese experience suggests that this need not be a hindrance, but the technological backwardness and ideological subjugation of the economy certainly are. Cuba's is an extremely politicised economy.
- **Monolingual, fearful entrepreneurs**
Cuba's entrepreneurial world is notably monolingual, which does not facilitate international cooperation. Meanwhile, Omar Everleny Pérez (González, 2020) says that Cuban institutions should change their attitude towards international cooperation, which is often seen as a dangerous concession that opens the door to subversion.

- **Exports**
Without an asymmetric transitory fix, the post-Cotonou agreement currently has questionable value for Cuba, as the weak performance of Cuban exports and the imbalance in the trade in goods with the EU demonstrate.
- **Lack of experience as a financial beneficiary of the Cotonou Agreement**
Cuba has no background as a financial beneficiary of the Cotonou Agreement (EDF, EPAs), but it does have experience of cooperation with EU countries and has received assistance from European programmes and national development agencies – especially French and German.

C. Opportunities (from external factors)

- **Advances in innovation**
Fulfilling the UN's recommendations on sustainable development will contribute to developing a regional innovation strategy that will have a positive impact on technological innovation in Cuba.
- **Deeper international cooperation with Caribbean partners and the EU**
The multidimensional nature of the activity in the agreement and the fact that the EU is Cuba's main trading partner will undoubtedly help strengthen Cuba's ties with the EU and the Caribbean, and it can probably consolidate a position as a regional leader. Meanwhile, the incorporation of the Caribbean's largest territory can help revitalise the process.
- **Support for Cuba's international demands**
All the signatory countries of the post-Cotonou agreement have so far voted in favour of ending the US blockade. There is, thus, support for Cuba's international position and activity, not only with regard to the embargo/blockade but also in terms of international solidarity in fields such as education and health.
- **Financial benefits**
European Union programmes focused on constructing a stable regional cooperation system undoubtedly represent a source of funding that will bring economic benefits to both Cuba and the entire Caribbean region. All the more so when the funds are allocated to specific issues in order to achieve the sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda.
- **Economic development and inclusion in the international market**
If progress is made in the mentioned areas, Cuba will have the opportunity to enact an economic transformation, activating sectors of the agro-industry, revitalising the pharmaceutical and biochemical sectors, and thereby diversifying its economy. At the same time, there will be more joint participation of foreign institutions in its territory, just like in the rest of the Caribbean.
- **Effective achievement of the UN's SDGs**
Joint action by Caribbean countries, the funding of environmentally friendly projects and the possibility of technological change will all be

factors in Cuba joining the countries working effectively to achieve the SDGs. All the more so now, when, due to its economic situation, Cuba is developing local investments in solar and wind energy in cooperation with China and the EU.

- **Greater regional and global importance**

At this stage of Caribbean–EU relations, Cuba could be like the Dominican Republic in Lomé IV or it could be much more. Its diplomatic capacities and relations with China, Russia, Venezuela, Mexico and Anglo-Caribbean countries would broaden both its own interests and South–South and South–North relations.

- **Decreased US presence**

Greater cooperation with the ACP and the EU can reduce the effects of the US sanctions imposed on Cuba.

D. Threats (from external factors)

- **US sanctions imposed on Cuba**

The political, economic and financial framework of the US sanctions can be considered a set of barriers that limit Cuba’s effective inclusion in the Caribbean Agenda, cooperation with the EU and the other ACP countries.

- **Mutual distrust within the countries of the region**

Distrust of the Dominican Republic grew among CARIFORUM countries when it became part of ACP–EU cooperation. Cuba’s entry may also create suspicion, on the one hand for being the largest territory and having the profile of a leader, but also because it maintains relations with countries that some Caribbean states see as political economic adversaries.

- **Potential limiting of the Cuban state’s sovereignty and autonomy**

The agreement alludes to the sovereignty and autonomy of the signatory parties, but every integration process requires some degree of sovereignty and decision-making autonomy to be delegated. With Cuba firmly committed to defending both values, it may become passive within the organisation, while at the same time separating the Cuban state from the main currents of change.

- **Decline in international acceptance of the Cuban model**

Article 1 of the Constitution tells us: “Cuba is a democratic, independent and sovereign socialist State of law and social justice, organized by all and for the good of all, as an indivisible and unitary republic, founded by the labor, dignity, humanism, and ethic of its citizens for the enjoyment of liberty, equity, justice, and equality, solidarity, and individual and collective well-being and prosperity”, but many organisations and institutions question its political system and define it as an “authoritarian regime”. A report by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), which measures the state of liberal democracy using an index of 0 to 10, ranks Cuba second-bottom in Latin America, with its score of 2.84 placing it 140th of the 167 countries studied. Regionally, only Venezuela ranks lower (2.76; 143rd place)

(EIU, 2021). Its failed economy and fossilised political system makes Cuba less and less attractive to foreign investors.

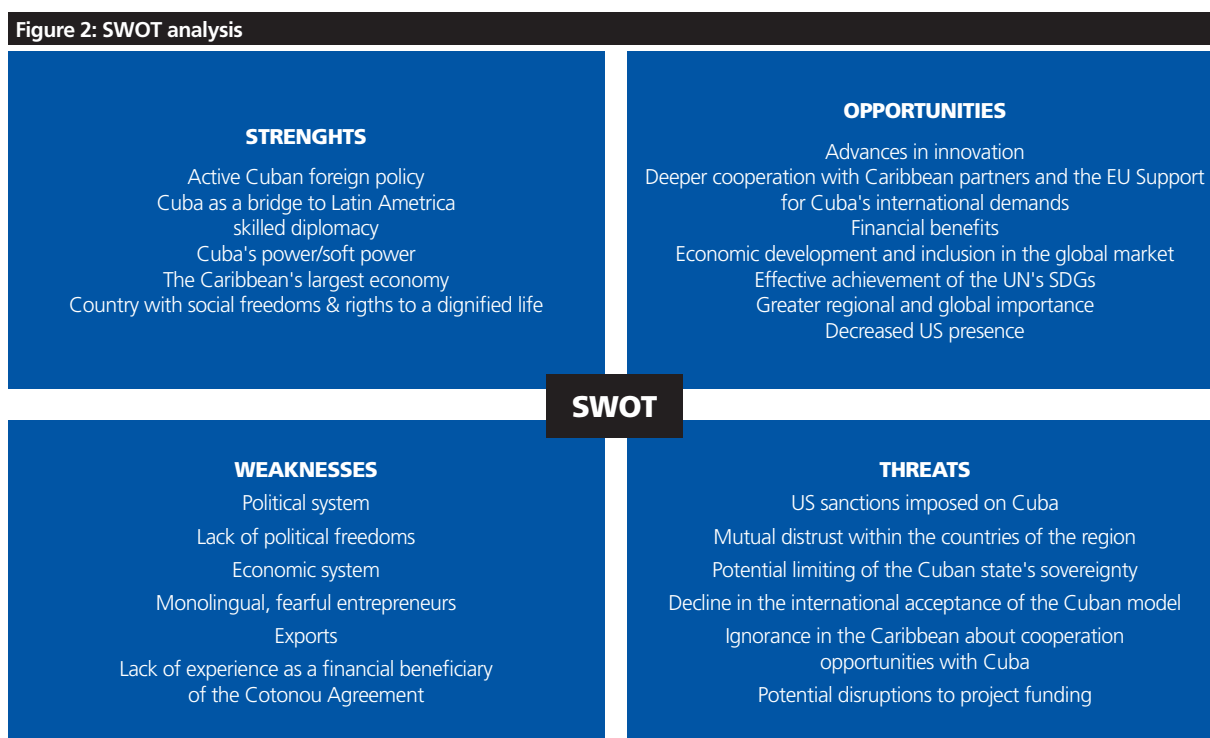
- **Ignorance in the Caribbean about cooperation opportunities with Cuba**

Caribbean businesspeople and officials have little knowledge of Cuban business opportunities and institutional and legal specificities, which may negatively affect the development of cooperation and weaken Cuba's position in the region.

- **Potential disruptions to project funding**

The elimination of the EDF and financing for programmes through the "Global Europe" Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) mean that fluctuations may occur in the levels of financing, alongside the decreasing predictability of the funds allocated to Cuba and the Caribbean – despite the Economic Partnership Agreement the EU signed with CARIFORUM in October 2008.

The summary of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is presented below:



Source: Compiled by the Authors.

6. Possible scenarios for Cuba's inclusion in the post-Cotonou Caribbean agenda

Taking the strengths and weaknesses to be internal conditioning factors and the opportunities and threats to be exogenous (from the external environment), the literature proposes four strategies for

action depending on the correlation of these factors. In other words: Will the strengths allow the opportunities to be taken advantage of? Will the strengths allow the threats to be balanced or reduced? Will the weaknesses reduce the chance of taking advantage of the opportunities? And will the weaknesses increase the risk of the threats?:

Aggressive: strengths predominate and are positively correlated with the opportunities emerging from the environment.

Conservative: the subject of analysis operates in an unfavourable (hostile) environment but its strengths are correlated with any threats, allowing it to respond decisively to them. However, there is no prospect for development as the strengths do not match the opportunities.

Competitive: weaknesses prevail over strengths but the subject of analysis operates in a friendly (favourable) environment, enabling it to maintain its position. However, endogenous weakness prevents it from taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the environment, leading it to focus on eliminating internal weaknesses.

Defensive: weaknesses are closely linked to external threats and there is a consequent high possibility of collapse. This strategy focusses on the entity's survival.

We have based the SWOT analysis on the answers to the questions above, correlating each of the factors and elements defined and mentioned and evaluating their level of influence on a scale from 0 to 2, where "0" means no influence and "2" is the maximum correlation of the factors. By doing this, we obtain the score within the framework for the four areas of values, from which it is clear that the competitive strategy is the most likely:

Figure 3. Results of the SWOT analysis

	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
STRENGTHS	50 POINTS (Aggressive strategy)	31 POINTS (Conservative strategy)
WEAKNESSES	53 POINTS (Competitive strategy- most likely)	38 POINTS (Defensive strategy)

Source: compiled by Authors.

Cuba's formal incorporation into the European Union–ACP cooperation structures will have multiple repercussions. At international level it undoubtedly represents a step towards recognition and acceptance of Cuba's current policy and the changes that have taken place on the island over the last decade. At the same time, it will be a clear signal to the world that certain global problems require the abandonment of singular foreign policies that aim to punish and isolate countries whose visions of political and economic development differ from those of the EU. The direct effects of Cuba's entry into the post-Cotonou system will first be felt at national level, followed by the effects on the Caribbean area and its integration system. The region thus receives a new member

that has been isolated until now, but whose demographic, territorial, military and political weight exceed those of its counterparts. Cuba's post-1959 international activity may be characterised as both open and aiming to fully preserve its national sovereignty. We may wonder then, what positions Cuba is likely to take within the framework of the Caribbean agenda, without giving up the fundamental principles of its socioeconomic and political regime.

The SWOT analysis shows that Cuba is operating in a favourable environment that provides it with support and the possibility of acting aggressively or opting for a competitive strategy.

Cuba undoubtedly possesses internal strengths that are correlated with opportunities, especially within the framework of the new agreement. Its incorporation seems likely to be successful, as long as its neighbours are able to act without distrust and without fear of the stances of third countries (like the United States), and as long as Cuba is able to overcome or limit the effects of its greatest weakness (its current political system). In this happens, Cuba can become a regional leader and a key Caribbean partner for the European Union. It is, however, possible that its internal weaknesses may acquire great significance and make it impossible for Cuba to take full advantage of the opportunities that emerge from the post-Cotonou partnership and the Caribbean region that will take shape.

The competitive strategy, potentially the most likely scenario for Cuba in its Caribbean relations, requires internal obstacles to be removed in order to fully take advantage of the internal strengths and opportunities offered by the environment. The analysis clearly indicates that internal factors (considered to be weaknesses), such as the current political system, the lack of political freedoms, the economic system in place and the timidity of entrepreneurs are threats to the possible financing of projects resulting from the post-Cotonou agreement. This helps explain Cuba's extremely cautious approach to the association: in short, this type of change could cause the dismantling of the domestic political economic system. At the same time, Cuba faces certain internal issues that favour its inclusion in the Caribbean agenda. If the projects in these fields do not receive funding the consequences could be grave, and a two-speed Caribbean could emerge: one that benefits from EU funds and a second that is denied these advantages. This would widen the divide that already exists, which Casimir (1996) describes in terms of antagonisms. It is a pessimistic scenario that can be avoided if Cuba broadens and deepens its strategic relations with the countries of the Global South, either within the post-Cotonou framework or outside it.

In our opinion, the most likely scenario is that, after taking some time to understand the possible benefits and threats and having been able to negotiate some important issues, Cuba will eventually sign the post-Cotonou agreement. It is worth recalling, in this regard, that above all the Cuban authorities seek to ensure the survival of the political regime. The EU is aware of this, which is why the EU ambassador to Cuba, Alberto Navarro, has said that to safeguard the bilateral relationship Cuba could use a protocol to ensure that where contradictions, confusion and differences arise between post-Cotonou and the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement, the PDCA

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always prevails (González, 2020). This would give rise to possible negotiations and suggests that the EU takes Cuba to be the main actor in its relations with the Caribbean.

Cuba is actively working towards regional integration and will certainly not want a two-speed Caribbean to emerge. It should also be mentioned that the island has for many years had a strategic patron: first it was the US, and then following the Cuban Revolution came the USSR and Venezuela. But the situation in Venezuela means that Cuba will be forced to seek a new partner, such as the European Union. Closer relations with the EU may help limit the negative effects of the US embargo and make better use of relations with China and Latin American and Caribbean countries. Meanwhile, the potential for political change in Brazil in the next presidential elections means future cooperation between the two countries should not be ruled out.

Acceding to the post-Cotonou agreement will be no easy decision for the Cuban government, but as Carlos Alzugaray, a former Cuban diplomat, says, Cuba should take advantage of this new situation (González, 2020). He believes that enough experience and critical mass have already been accumulated to be able to take better advantage of the economic advantages of Cotonou. Meanwhile, US aggressiveness forces Cuba to be more proactive in seeking out alternatives that reduce the harm done by the blockade. Alzugaray adds that it would also be beneficial to both parties for Cuba to play a full part in the negotiation processes alongside its Caribbean, African and Pacific friends. The conditions are propitious, given that the European Council and Commission generally look favourably on the development of cooperation without restrictions of a political nature. On the new ACP–EU agreement Alzugaray has said that the experience of many ACP Group governments shows that, while certain political conditions exist, there is capacity to negotiate with European counterparts without making concessions that limit sovereignty (González, 2020). Cuba's strategy will thus probably focus on eliminating internal weaknesses in order to take better advantage of opportunities in the environment in the future, with political factors likely to play the key role in the Cuban government's position on post-Cotonou.

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Eduardo Perera Gómez

University of Havana

Introduction

Between the establishment of relations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Cuba in September 1988 and the signing of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) in 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2016), cooperation was the main source of friction on the bilateral agenda. This was due to the political conditions the European institutions imposed in return for cooperation, both in terms of implementation and its fit within an institutionalised relationship.

The adoption of the current framework agreement solves this issue by establishing a contractual framework for permanent financial, technical and economic cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Cuba. Unlike the fourth-generation instruments that currently regulate the EU's links with almost all Latin American states, political concerns – a key EU interest – and cooperation – a key Cuban interest – are given precedence over trade liberalisation. In other words, cooperation is not only an important part of the agreement, it is central to the relationship itself¹.

There are a number of possible reasons for this, but two are particularly relevant.

On the one hand, development cooperation with the specific political goals of democratisation and human rights is a key EU foreign policy tool in its relations with the “third world”, and one with specific and major global impact. Some internal hesitancy notwithstanding, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century the established consensus in the EU was that the conditionality imposed on Cuba for over 20 years – a reluctance to negotiate an agreement due to the “lack of conditions” (Perera Gómez, 2017: 66), the Common Position (Council of the European Union, 1996) and diplomatic sanctions (Perera Gómez, 2017: 151–173) – had reached a dead-end without showing results, and an about-turn was needed. Cuba thus qualified for the EU to try out a new tactical approach with the same political objectives and strategy: a more pragmatic policy with a sense of opportunity seemed likely.

1. This is the reason why the author makes permanent reference to the PDCA, as the legal instrument that regulates EU's cooperation with Cuba as a whole, and refers to it or to the cooperation indistinctly, except for specific clarifications.

The thaws and advances in cooperation, both temporary and more permanent, have been connected to the economic reform processes launched in Cuba.

On the other hand, Cuba's economy and society have faced major and recurring needs for cooperation funding, as unresolved structural and cyclical issues have led to resource scarcity. Cuban foreign policy has always seen the EU as a priority partner. Indeed, in spite of the democratic conditionalities the EU has imposed for granting international cooperation since the so-called third-generation agreements first adopted in the 1990s, it remains an attractive donor due to its international heft in this field and the fact that it contains various member states with which Cuba has maintained commercial, diplomatic and cooperation relations that may be complemented by European Commission funds. Then there is the political value the Cuban government has attached since the 1990s to no longer being one of the few countries in the world not contractually linked to the EU.

1. EU-Cuba cooperation: a brief historical overview

A historical view of the European Union's cooperation with Cuba shows two trends taking shape over time.

First, the thaws and advances in cooperation, both temporary and more permanent, have been connected to the economic reform processes launched in Cuba. This was the case in 1995: the Cuban government promoted a series of reforms in response to the crisis produced by the transition in eastern Europe, and a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament was issued, which proposed opening negotiations on the signing of a framework cooperation agreement with Cuba (Commission of the European Communities, 1995). It was also the case at the start of the second decade of the 21st century when, following Raúl Castro's rise to president of the Councils of State and Ministers, the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines (*Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social*) were approved by the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) (Communist Party of Cuba, 2011), and other conceptual, political and social issues were addressed in the decisions of the PCC's First National Conference (Communist Party of Cuba, 2012).

For the EU, these reform processes have been the spur to boost its presence and participation in the Cuban market and have provided an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy goals using its economy – its main strength – as a foundation, while gaining influence and making the most of its competitive advantages over the United States.

But, with greater or lesser degrees of certainty and accuracy, these processes have also been perceived by the EU as precursors of political change towards the proposed "peaceful transition" to democracy in Cuba (Perera Gomez, 2017: 82). In 1995 the Commission's calculations tended in this direction (Commission of the European Communities, 1995), as they did in the process that led to the signing of the PDCA, following the novel and significant decisions taken by the PCC Conference, such as limiting tenure in key roles in the party, state and government to a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms.

Secondly, the main institutional advances leading to the adoption of regulatory instruments in EU–Cuba cooperative relations – which coincide

with the two key historic moments in relations since they were formally established – merely codified already-existing practices. This was the case with the 1996 Common Position, but also, essentially, with the PDCA.

Until relations between the EC and Cuba were established in 1988, the island had no access to the financial and technical cooperation designed for the developing countries of Asia and Latin America (LDC-ALA) created in 1976. Cuba benefitted only from the limited trade facilities agreed under the EEC's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), which it had been using since 1973, barely a year after its establishment.

As well as a lack of reciprocal knowledge in both the EEC and Cuba, perceptions were skewed by the Cold War and limitations arose from Cuba's membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the historical dispute with the United States, a strategic ally for the EEC and its successor. Indeed, ideologically speaking, all EEC member countries were antagonistic towards Cuba while the Cold War bipolar order was in place. But unlike the United States, they maintained relations in several fields: economic, diplomatic (with the exceptions of Germany pre-1975 under the Hallstein Doctrine² and Ireland until 1999) and cooperative, especially before Cuba joined Comecon. There were multiple reasons for this, such as the liberal tradition, more or less independent foreign policy positions within the dominant global order, shared cultural and historical heritage, usually associated with strong ties remaining from the colonial era, Latin cultural connections and philosophical objections to the embargo as an instrument of pressure, which meant that political conditionalities were never applied to trade. Then there is the predominance of negotiation as a resource in the EU's external projection.

Cuba ranked even lower among Europe's external economic priorities than a Latin America historically placed in a second tier due to a system structured around member states' individual foreign relations policies – with Spain and Portugal having only recently joined. By the time the EEC established diplomatic relations with Cuba around the time the Cold War ended, its institutionalised ties with Latin America were just over 15 years old, having initially materialised in 1974 in several political dialogue and cooperation platforms: the Parlatino–European Parliament Inter-parliamentary Conferences (1974); the San José Dialogue (1984); and the European Union–Rio Group meetings (1987) institutionalised in 1990; as well as the spaces created for negotiated peace processes to emerge and develop in Central America (Sanahuja, 2000). These platforms were essentially political and had been supported by the implementation of European Political Co-operation (EPC) in 1970 – the forerunner of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) signed in 1992.

Incipient EEC development cooperation towards the region was also emerging, through the signing of first- and second-generation cooperation agreements with most of the countries in the area. Interparliamentary conferences aside, Cuba was excluded from the mechanisms in place between Europe and Latin America, which were characterised by a notable mismatch between the political commitment of EPC and their economic content, as well as by a level of development assistance well below that granted to other geographical areas.

Cuba was excluded from the mechanisms in place between Europe and Latin America.

2. Named after Walter Hallstein, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from 1951 to 1958. This foreign policy doctrine was in force from 1954 to 1969 and established that the FRG should not maintain diplomatic relations with any state that recognised the German Democratic Republic, except the USSR.

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Cuba was also left out of the EU's cooperation with the Caribbean, the other region of which the island forms part. This was not addressed until 1998, when the Cuban government decided to join the negotiations over the Cotonou Agreement (1998–2000). Its participation had been insisted upon by the Caribbean countries associated with the then applicable Lomé Convention, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and some European figures (Perera Gómez, 2017: 133–135). For political reasons, the Cuban government showed much greater interest in signing a bilateral agreement with the EU than in multilateral participation. Its reticence derived from the perception of the Lomé system as a model of collective neo-colonialism and from some political risks, such as the commitment to a particularly constrictive democracy clause and Cuba's negotiating identity being "dissolved" by the large and heterogeneous ACP group (Perera Gomez, 2017: 136).

That official EEC–Cuba relations were established at almost the same time as socialism collapsed in eastern Europe contributed to the extreme politicisation of the bilateral atmosphere: as the end of the Cold War brought the supposed triumph of liberal ideology and the de-ideologisation of international relations, Cuba preserved the political, economic and social orientation of its system (Fukuyama, 2011; Huntington, 2015).

This politicisation formed the basis of the system of the conditions the EEC insisted on for constructing contractual ties with Cuba via a framework cooperation agreement. It was reflected in the tone of resolutions such as those adopted by the European Parliament on December 15th 1988 and February 15th 1990, as well as in statements by senior European officials (Perera Gómez, 2017: 63–66). Negotiation of a cooperation agreement thus became the main point of disagreement on the bilateral agenda.

Until 1993, bilateral relations suffered from poor definition and continual setbacks and little progress was made in the field of cooperation. The EEC's action towards Cuba veered from snubs and the adoption and suspension of specific cooperation initiatives to demands and expectations of change. In both the EU and Cuba the prevailing conceptions showed a degree of inertia compared to the pre-1991 era, with schematic ideological considerations placed before the pragmatic needs induced by a changed world. Thus, until 1993, less than 1% of all funding granted to Cuba by the EEC and its member states came via European Commission cooperation (Perera Gomez, 2017: 106–107).

However, from 1993 onwards – and as early as the previous year in some fields – the EU's policy towards Cuba showed signs of changing. Activity increased in areas of cooperation through the implementation of specific initiatives and humanitarian aid, through a flow of resources that grew progressively over subsequent years.

Official data shows that in the mid-1990s the European Commission became Cuba's main source of international cooperation, particularly when the country was granted access to EU regional cooperation programmes for Latin America (Tvevad, 2015: 20). Nevertheless, this amounted to annual volumes donated of around €20 million, whose modest size is clearly shown by the fact that in the same period the

Dominican Republic received around €150 million per five-year period within the framework of the Lomé Convention. Tvevad points out that between 1993 and 2003 the Commission provided €145 million in assistance to Cuba, mainly in the fields of humanitarian aid, food security, NGO co-financing and economic cooperation (Tvevad, 2015: 20–21). For a ten year-period, in the fields mentioned the resources represented by this figure were frankly minimal.

The €145 million mentioned is the entire sum granted to Cuba by the European Commission for the specified period. As such it includes several categories, with cooperation funding, in a strict sense, added to the resources granted for humanitarian aid, which were particularly high at that stage.

Cooperation was scarce because it was neither regulated by ad hoc financial protocols nor covered by any agreement. While the European Commission's cooperation commitments did not surpass \$750,000 (0.43% of the total) between 1980 and 1993, humanitarian aid reached around \$63 million (35.85%) and official development assistance (ODA) from the EEC countries that were members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) amounted to \$112 million (63.72%). All this added up to a total of \$175,770,000 for the period in question (Perera Gomez, 2017:106).

Significantly, however, funds from the EEC/EU and its member states never completely dried up: the Commission provided funds for specific projects and one-off initiatives, while member states contributed ODA. The exception was the 2003–2008 period, after Fidel Castro announced in July 2003 that Cuba would reject official cooperation from the EU and its member states (Castro Ruz, 2003) – an unprecedented countermeasure in response to the diplomatic sanctions adopted by the Council following the imprisonment and lengthy custodial sentences handed to leaders of the illegal opposition during the so-called Black Spring. These sanctions – limiting high-level government visits; a lower profile for member states' participation in cultural events; inviting Cuban dissidents to member states' national day celebrations; and re-evaluating the Common Position every six months – were suspended in 2005 and definitively abolished in 2008. Even between 1996 and 2002, when the Common Position was in force, certain cooperation resources were allocated to Cuba.

Humanitarian aid, which, as mentioned, is not strictly speaking development cooperation and should not be considered as such, rose significantly between 1993 and 2003, supported by the opening in Havana of a delegation of the European Communities Humanitarian Office (ECHO). In this period, over €45 million of resources were mobilised, according to the data available (Perera Gómez, 2017: 150), with the aim of contributing to alleviating the consequences for the island of the collapse of European socialism, health issues (the neuropathy epidemic), climatological catastrophes (the so-called Storm of the Century) and a whole series of events related to the downturn in the economy. Despite not being properly speaking development cooperation funds, at times they effectively played their role, to the extent that certain funds in this category were used to

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remedy emergency situations in sensitive sectors such as the national production of medicines. Indeed, in 1993 Cuba received 60% of all EU humanitarian aid to Latin America: of the 12,245 billion ECU granted to Latin America for this purpose that year, Cuba received 7,805 billion (Commission of the European Communities, 1994) – not enough to boast about, but an indication of the significant deterioration of the situation on the island.

Humanitarian aid was also affected by the conflictive state of Cuba–EU relations at the time, while the volume of funding allocated by the European Commission for this purpose was gradually reduced as the situation in Cuba showed signs of improvement from the mid-1990s onwards.

Also significant was the activity of a broad and unusual movement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that managed to activate previously unexplored or little explored mechanisms of insertion into European cooperation policy, with a view to obtaining financing for specific development projects at local level. Even after the Cuban government suspended all cooperation with the EU and its member states in 2003, non-governmental cooperation continued for a short period of time. The accusations that Cuba indirectly received cooperation funds from the EU and its member states via this channel – presented as hypocrisy and double standards – prompted change on the Cuban government's part. While it did not completely suspend them, it did begin to very closely examine the source of the funds mobilised through NGOs for cooperation projects carried out on the island.

The sanctions and diplomatic measures adopted by the Council in June 2003 were no more effective than the Common Position was in its day. On the one hand, certain member states, like Belgium and Luxembourg, did not comply with them to the letter and so cooperation was not suspended with these countries. But when the Cuban government responded by restricting the access of diplomats from the EU and member states who invited Cuban opposition figures to their national days to all levels of party, state and government the 27 had evidence that the policy agreed in the Council at the behest of José María Aznar's Spanish government had compromised their bilateral relations without achieving its goals.

Despite being suspended in 2005, the diplomatic measures remained in force and provoked another impasse until their definitive lifting in 2008.

That this stage was ultimately left behind, EU policy was unblocked and bilateral relations were relaunched was related to the global context determined by the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks and the behaviour of some concomitant variables: Spain–US and EU–US relations, the EU's internal process, its expansion to the east, the changes in the Latin American regional situation and domestic changes in Cuba

After the impasse of 2003–2008 – probably the most infertile period in the history of EU–Cuba relations – bilateral cooperation was gradually restarted with various member states. Intense diplomatic activity by the sectors involved on both sides took advantage of the Cuban, Latin American, European and international contexts of the time to build a

new consensus that became the germ of the current stage. The never-interrupted cooperation with Belgium and Luxembourg was joined in 2007 by the resumption of collaboration with Spain. Later, Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands followed, with over half of EU member states collaborating with Cuba today.

As discussed, member states' cooperation was already significant prior to 2003, with no definite consequences for the establishment of wider cooperation with the EU. However, in this new phase, the accumulation of bilateral state-state cooperation instruments with over half of EU members became a factor in deconstructing the Common Position, as this contradicted its binding nature and showed the disjuncture between the policies implemented at the different levels of sovereignty (state and supranational), despite both ultimately involving the same actors.

2. The prospects for EU-Cuba cooperation: Challenges and opportunities

As the PDCA's signing drew closer, some of the risks the instrument faced became apparent (Perera Gomez, 2017: 224–226)

On the one hand there was what might be seen as the institutional risk stemming from the results of the process of ratifying the agreement, whose "mixed" (EU and member state) nature required it to be submitted for the approval of the legislative bodies at both levels. The first and most important of these was achieved relatively quickly and easily, with the EP approving the PDCA with Cuba on July 5th 2017 (European Parliament, 2017a). However, its assent was accompanied by the adoption of a non-legislative resolution (European Parliament, 2017b) that showed that, after a period in which the EP had seemed to join the general EU consensus in support of the change of policy towards Cuba, the predominance of conservative forces in the chamber meant that it would remain a particularly active critic of the Cuban government.

With Lithuania's vote in favour still outstanding, full ratification by the 27 national parliaments remains pending. But the institutional risk has been greatly minimised by placing 90% of the agreement's provisions within areas of EU competence. With ratification by the European Parliament achieved, this whole broad section of the PDCA entered into force on a provisional basis in 2017 and there it has remained.

There was also the risk of inaction – unlikely due to its absurdity, but not impossible if the parties or any single one of them regarded signing the PDCA as a goal achieved rather than a means of pursuing specific objectives. In practice so far the agreement has operated as a functional means for Cuba's development strategy in sectors that are also important for EU cooperation: food security, energy and climate change, culture and social inclusion, disaster preparedness and higher education, among others. It also suits specific political interests on both sides: for Cuba, the very existence of the agreement itself; for the EU, an institutionalised political dialogue and the possibility of influencing the situation on the island more directly than by previous means (the Common Position).

While the agreement is designed to evolve and provides a basis for working on its own upgrading time will be needed, along with the proper deployment of the current instrument, which has yet to be rolled out to its full potential.

Another foreseeable risk was that the PDCA would become a sort of status quo in the EU–Cuba bilateral relationship without evolving to a higher level. The situation remaining as it is would certainly not be a desirable outcome. In parallel to the agreement’s implementation and in line with its results, a path of evolution must be drawn up to put EU–Cuba relations in their rightful place – in other words, at least as strong as relations between the EU and all Cuba’s neighbours. While the agreement is designed to evolve and provides a basis for working on its own upgrading that depends on the EU and its member states, on Cuba, on all the actors involved and on how the possibility is used, time will be needed, along with the proper deployment of the current instrument, which has yet to be rolled out to its full potential.

Finally, though the possibility may seem remote, the history of EEC/EU–Cuba relations makes it necessary to consider the risks of regression. Included among these risks are inaction and non-evolution, which would amount to stagnation in the period of strongest and fastest progress in EU–Cuba relations. It would be a great shame if the road was to become tortuous again, but it is also true that many challenges await, including not missing the opportunity to use the current momentum generated by the implementation of the agreement.

The EU’s cooperation with Cuba faces a range of threats and challenges.

The first is an unfavourable international context. Conditions today differ substantially from those in place when the agreement was negotiated and signed and the period immediately after its entry into force. While Ayuso and Gratius (2017) warned of this, the hemispheric situation they reviewed has only worsened: the ideological profiles of the region’s governments have changed, the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated and Joe Biden has made little alteration to US policy – indeed, relations may even be more hostile. In this sense, EU policy on its relationship with Cuba seems still to be going against the grain (Ayuso and Gratius, 2017).

These factors are added to the period of domestic crisis Cuba is going through, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pace of the reforms envisaged in the 2011 Guidelines has slowed significantly, where it has not stopped,³ and many of the government’s measures aimed at alleviating the crisis – opening the so-called “freely convertible currency stores”, monetary and exchange unification – have worsened its effects on the economy and on major swathes of the population, exacerbating the effects of the fall in tourism, the US limitations on the sending of family remittances and the impacts of shortages.

In addition to the various ways the United States exerts real influence over events in Cuba, the situation described above has generated public discontent, particularly among the most disadvantaged groups. This was reflected in civil society protest movements of varied nature and scope, led to the demonstrations of July 11th 2021 and is likely to emerge in other forms. The repressive aspects of the Cuban government’s response to these events have brought negative repercussions. On the one hand, they undermined the backing for the government at international level. On the other, the existence of a legal framework that binds the parties and establishes penalties for non-compliance

3. The 8th Congress of the PCC adopted an agreement on the state of the implementation of the Guidelines and their updating for the 2021–2026 period. According to the available information, of the original Guidelines approved in 2011, 30% were implemented, 40% are being implemented and the remaining 30% are at the proposal and approval stage. In the updated version, of the 274 previous guidelines, 17 were maintained, 165 were modified, 92 were deleted and 19 were added, bringing the total to 201.

or violation of its provisions could be problematic for the sectors in the EU that are most committed to bilateral cooperation. The Cuban government's reaction has, thus, been reflected in the EU's institutional outreach, which had been considerably nuanced and even somewhat diluted since a new stage in bilateral cooperation began around 2010.

A Declaration by the European Union's High Representative on the events of July 11th in Cuba calls "on the Cuban government to respect the human rights and freedoms enshrined in universal Human Rights Conventions", as well as urging it to "to release all arbitrarily detained protesters, to listen to the voices of its citizens, and to engage in an inclusive dialogue on their grievances", adding that "[a]ddressing the Cuban people's grievances requires internal economic reforms" (High Representative, 2021a).

Meanwhile, paragraph 14 of a European Parliament resolution from September 16th 2021

Recalls that the PDCA contains a human rights clause – a standard essential element of EU international agreements – which allows the agreement to be suspended in the event of violations of human rights provisions; [and] calls on the European Union to trigger Article 85(3b) to call an immediate meeting of the joint committee in the light of the breaches of the agreement on the part of the Cuban Government, which constitutes a 'case of special urgency' (European Parliament, 2021b).

This reiterates the warning previously made in the non-legislative resolution that accompanied the PDCA's ratification (European Parliament, 2017b) and was repeated in the resolution of June 10th 2021 (European Parliament, 2021a), which called for it to be activated.

These pronouncements are examples (among others) of how the issue of arbitrary detentions and political prisoners, as well as human rights, are being reactivated on the EU's agenda with Cuba. In truth, they had never completely disappeared, but had been channelled down other routes, such as the bilateral political dialogue on human rights included in the PDCA, which has given rise to three bilateral meetings whose specific content has not been revealed.

So far, the action–reaction processes present in the bilateral framework do not seem to have affected cooperation with the EU or had significant consequences for relations with it or its member states – the delegation in Havana has continued to work in a normal manner – but they still pose a challenge. Faced with the repercussions of the adverse domestic situation and pressures from abroad, the Cuban government has closed ranks and hardened its position and does not seem likely to soften its stance. The EU and its institutions, meanwhile, will respond to this and any possible repercussions by taking at least a declaratory position focussing on the subjects of the political situation and human rights in Cuba. The Cuban government finds this intolerable and it has soured the atmosphere and tensed the bilateral discourse (*Prensa Latina*, 2021a and *EFE*, 2021), which had already considerably relaxed since cooperation was resumed and in which allegations are being revived that the more recent state of relations seemed to have buried. In the European

The action–reaction processes present in the bilateral framework do not seem to have affected cooperation with the EU but they still pose a challenge.

The position of the European Council and Commission seems still to favour maintaining cooperation and dialogue with Cuba.

Parliament, at least, the rhetoric has been stepped up, something that is particularly noticeable in the difference in the language used in the non-legislative resolution (European Parliament, 2017b) and the more recent ones (European Parliament, 2021a and 2021b). This may be expected to go further if Cuba's domestic situation gets more complicated.

However, some factors must be considered that may mitigate the forecasts made above. The position of the European Council and Commission, as expressed through the High Representative, seems still to favour maintaining cooperation and dialogue with Cuba. In a speech to the European Parliament during the debate over the approval of the resolution adopted on June 10th 2021 the High Representative pointed out that the agreement has "has created new spaces for the participation of Cuban civil society" and added that "I cannot think of a better instrument", as it set out "a policy of critical engagement with that country". He gave assurances that the instrument "allows us to accompany the country in political, economic and social reform" (Brzozowski, 2021a). Borrell also criticised the US blockade against Cuba, highlighting the impact of escalating the economic siege on a private sector already hard hit by Donald Trump's decrees (*Cubadebate*, 2021).

The words of Josep Borrell's Declaration cited above are also worth consideration. It ends "The EU stands ready to support all efforts addressed to improve the living conditions of Cubans, **in the context of our partnership established under the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement**" (High Representative, 2021a).⁴ This position, along with the other terms of the Declaration, was reiterated in the plenary debate on the European Parliament Resolution of September 16th 2021 with the addition: "It is our belief that **we need to continue to talk to each other. Our previous policy, the common position of our [sic] 1996 did not reap results**" (High Representative, 2021b).⁵

Another element to consider is that article 85, paragraph 3 of the PDCA, which was invoked by the European Parliament in its resolution of September 16th 2021, states that "It is understood that suspension would be a measure of last resort" (Council of the European Union, 2016). It does, thus, appear to be an option on the agenda, at least for the time being.

The interinstitutional balance seems still to favour the European Council and Commission over the Parliament, which is expected to remain dominated by its conservative wing. However, the EP's resolutions, which constitute instruments of political pressure, often go against what might be considered the EU's established policy – although they are non-binding in nature. A European Parliament resolution could undoubtedly be used at certain junctures on an ad hoc basis by other EU institutions in order to endorse a specific action, but this does not look likely to be the case at the moment. It does not appear that any Joint Committee of the PDCA has yet been convened to settle the "case of special urgency" and decide on "appropriate measures", as the agreement establishes and the EP resolution of September 16th requires.

Finally, there has been a continuation of the trend in place since the new era of relations with the EU and the negotiation of the agreement began, whereby the bilateral rhetoric and communication models used

4. Emphasis added by authors.

5. Emphasis added by authors.

to conduct relations shifted from confrontation in the public arena to the diplomatic channels (Perera Gómez, 2017).

The more or less frequently inflammatory rhetoric and events that trigger action and reaction are either contained within diplomatic channels – High Representative: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; European Parliament: National Assembly of People’s Power – or they are expressed on social networks. Cuba’s official press occasionally relays the government’s reactions along with information on the political dialogue sessions held with the EU, meetings of the Council or the Joint Committee and the implementation of certain projects within the bilateral cooperation framework. Meanwhile, the alternative press and opposition media more often than not take such radical and confrontational positions – calling for the PDCA to be suspended or to discontinue not only cooperation, but also dialogue – that they tend to be given little consideration.

An additional challenge is the Cuban government’s capacity and political will to promote the reform process, given that, as noted above, such processes have previously had a direct and positive impact on the progress in EU–Cuba cooperation. Following the events of July 11th, the economic reforms have received a new but moderate boost. The combined pressure of shortages and social combustibility led to the temporary easing of the restrictions on medicines and food being brought into the country by international travellers, something broad swathes of the public had demanded. While this helps ease the acute shortages in these two areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has limited its effect. Greater in scope and part of what could be considered an economic strategy, the regulations on the constitution of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) were approved, expanding the private sector’s fields of activity, despite the limitations established in relation to foreign capital and the import and export trade. As well as being a condition for maintaining government legitimacy at the domestic level, continuing, extending and deepening the reforms will also be a significant factor in whether cooperation with the EU stagnates or progresses. The two statements by the High Representative cited above reflect this. Specifically, “We welcome the lifting of restrictions for travellers, allowing them to bring unlimited amounts of food and medicines, as a first step in the right direction” (High Representative, 2021a); and “Last summer, Havana outlined further steps towards market liberalisation. The EU has consistently offered to support the reforms”, before going on to list a series of sectors that benefit from European Commission cooperation programmes (High Representative, 2021b).

But as well as the challenges and threats mentioned above, there are also opportunities for EU–Cuba cooperation to develop. Twenty-five years without cooperation established an inertia that made a dramatic reversal of the direction of travel difficult, but networks have been woven, commitments have been established and projects of mutual interest are already underway.

One of the key opportunities is the current state of cooperation itself and the progress made since it was structured into the wording of a framework agreement. Since 2008, the EU, which is Cuba’s main development cooperation partner, has committed over €200 million to supporting the country’s development in three priority sectors: sustainable agriculture and food security; the environment, renewable energy and

Continuing, extending and deepening the reforms will also be a significant factor in whether cooperation with the EU stagnates or progresses.

Since 2008 the EU is Cuba's main development cooperation partner.

EU–Cuba cooperation seems at times to follow its own dynamics, relatively independently.

climate change; and economic and social modernisation (European External Action Service, 2019). In November 2017, when the PDCA entered into force, the cooperation portfolio amounted to less than €40 million, which was mobilised based on the thematic lines of the EU budget for projects in specific areas of priority interest (food security, disaster prevention and mitigation and heritage) (Perera Gomez, 2017).

The most recent data published on bilateral cooperation appears in the brochure *Cooperación de la Unión Europea con Cuba. Contribuyendo a la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible*, produced by the EU delegation in Havana. It notes that at the end of 2019 the value of ongoing projects exceeded €139 million, more than four times the average over the previous ten years, thanks to the funds committed to the sustainable food security programme, renewable energy contracts and the mobilisation of complementary regional funding for investments in various sectors and areas of climate change and culture. At the same time, Cuba began to participate in more multi-country programmes. More difficult to quantify economically, these relate to exchanges of public policy experiences in Latin America (Eurosocial, ElPacto, Euroclima+, Alinvest and Adelante) and programmes in the fields of higher education (Erasmus+) and research (Horizon 2020) (European Union Delegation to Cuba, 2019: 18).

By September 2021, EU cooperation with Cuba had reached €155 million, 2.5 times its previous volume and the largest proportional increase in cooperation among recipients in the Caribbean region.⁶ This is significant given the particular features of the EU–ACP link in the Cotonou Agreement, which includes a financial protocol, and the existence of an economic partnership agreement with the area, neither of which mechanisms includes Cuba. Thus, as well as increasing participation in multi-country programmes as a partner, Cuba currently has access to all the regional cooperation instruments for the Caribbean from which it was previously excluded.

The PDCA is largely responsible for this growth, providing the general framework for the necessary contacts between the parties at different levels, as well as for the creation and implementation of projects and the performance of specific activities. Indeed, its very existence has encouraged high-level visits to take place within the bilateral framework: Federica Mogherini visited in January 2018 and September 2019, Pedro Sánchez in November 2018 and the king and queen of Spain in November 2019, to give a few examples. But EU–Cuba cooperation seems at times to follow its own dynamics, relatively independently of both the PDCA and the circumstances of both partners, as well as from their respective contexts. Although the PDCA provides the framework and is the basic condition that facilitates the roll-out of bilateral cooperation, the everyday and ongoing dialogue between the EU delegation in Havana, the government and civil society organisations are the most important and necessary vehicle.⁷

What is more, cooperation involves specific key issues that are sometimes more strategic than the sectors to which the cooperation itself is directed. Since the summer of 2020, for example, over €10 million has been allocated to collaboration to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Programmes have been adjusted in the circumstances created

6. Data provided in a Whatsapp conversation with Juan Garay, Head of Cooperation at the European Union's Mission in Cuba, September 13th 2021.

7. Ibid.

by the pandemic. Of the €10 million mentioned above, €2.5 million have been channelled through civil society, managed by a European NGO and involve Bio Cuba Farma and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). At the same time, a 2021–2027 dialogue group has been created to provide €14 million support for Cuban biotechnology.⁸

As well as the above, the Combiomed Digital Medical Technology Company received consumables for the production of intensive care monitors and pulse oximeters with support from “Salvando vidas y mitigando el impacto en salud de la emergencia de COVID-19 en Cuba”, a European Union (EU) project in the country, developed jointly with the office of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) to respond to the pandemic (Pan American Health Organization, 2021).

In parallel, major cooperation is taking place with the member states. One example is the announcement in September 2021 that France will grant Cuba funding of €45 million to increase the island’s capacity to produce vaccines against meningitis and pneumonia, particularly for use in Africa (*AFP*, 2021) – a clear example of triangular cooperation.

At present, Cuba urgently needs all the cooperation it can get, including from the EU. In fact, EU cooperation may be preferable because it is institutionalised, stable, secure and has been stripped of the imperatives – sanctions and the Common Position – that previously bound it, while the EU also continues to distance itself from the commitments and pressures emanating from its transatlantic connections – a major influence at other times. The EU thus makes a visible commitment to the agreement that seems to follow the high-political interests established in the field of EU–Cuba bilateral cooperation, making it possible to smoothly overcome the potential obstacles that have and continue to emerge (attacks on the PDCA from a range of media outlets, European Parliament resolutions, political statements by the High Representative for CFSP).

This could also be due to a degree of inertia that is characteristic of how the EU institutions function. Given the number of years it took for the consensus to build in the Council of the EU that led to the lifting of diplomatic measures in 2003, as well as the negotiation and signing of the PDCA and the resulting discontinuation of the Common Policy, it seems logical that reversing it should take just as long, if not longer. It also seems unrealistic, as it would be unprecedented. No EU cooperation agreement with Latin America has yet been suspended by the EU or denounced by any of the parties, while the suspensions that have taken place under the Cotonou Agreement involving certain countries have been partial, and have basically related to the implementation of the convention’s financial protocol.⁹

Such suspensions occur when the EU considers that the fundamental principles underpinning the cooperation agreement and its democracy clause in particular have been violated. Hence the requirements to that effect in the EP resolutions adopted on June 10th and September 16th 2021 cited above. Still, as approval depends directly on the Council, where different member state governments have different positions, it seems

Cuba urgently needs all the cooperation it can get, including from the EU.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Applies to the following countries from the dates indicated: Comoros: 31/12/2016; Gabon: 23/07/2016; Equatorial Guinea: 30/06/2001; the Solomon Islands: 09/10/2012; Kiribati: 16/09/2015; Madagascar: 31/12/2018; Micronesia: 25/02/2010; Mozambique: 31/01/2015. <https://www.google.com/search?channel=crow5&client=firefox-b-d&q=acuerdos+suspendidos+por+la+UE>

The entry into force of the part of the agreement involving the member states is important but not decisive for the future of cooperation.

impossible to establish a common pattern for 27 such dissimilar actors with such diverse interests – a product of the hybrid nature of the EU and its structural deficiencies (Perera Gómez, 2017). This diversity was visible in the member states' varied reactions to the events in Cuba of July 11th 2021 and to the aborted march called for November 15th, as well as in the fact that the EP's demands have found no echo in the Council.

This connects to the subject of cooperation with member states. The PDCA is in provisional operation because it remains unratified by Lithuania, a country subjected to the renewed US interference in European politics under the Donald Trump administration, as revealed in early March 2020 when a letter became public from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis asking him not to ratify the EU–Cuba agreement (*Deutsche Welle*, 2020). Similar revelations have not emerged during Joe Biden's presidency, but his policy towards Cuba has not differed greatly from that of his predecessor.

In any case, the entry into force of the part of the agreement involving the member states is important but not decisive for the future of cooperation. The PDCA's largest and most important parts concern relations with the EU, which means, as noted above, that over 90% of the agreement is being provisionally implemented. The question is: for long can it remain provisional? No institutionally established limit appears to exist. Failure to definitively enter into force in its entirety could in practice lead to something like the inverse of the situation before the PDCA was signed: whereby institutionalised relations existed with the EU but not with the member states. The majority of member states, including the most important among them, have had agreed and operational bilateral channels in place since cooperation ties were re-established with Spain in 2007. It is the integrated institutionalisation of bilateral cooperation with the member states that would be called into question and excluded. As regulated in the agreement, this would involve a quantitative and qualitative leap focused, for our present purposes, on "sectoral policies" and accompanied and complemented by their own dialogues.

Member state ODA was always considerably higher than European Commission funding, contributing around two-thirds of the total. This has been a constant throughout the history of European integration. Above all it is because member states allocate a proportionately greater volume of resources to their own cooperation interests – countries, regions and areas of traditional influence – than they pool for EU activities in this field. The PDCA did not change this, and it does not seem likely to be affected by the fact that not all member states have ratified the agreement.

Each state seems likely to continue with its own cooperation outside the agreement or even to take advantage of the broad and advantageous framework it establishes for cooperation relations with the EU, free from the obstacles posed by the Common Position. That the CP was not fully respected by the member states either established a precedent and demonstrated that their own bilateral cooperation interests might be placed before those of the EU. However, even in the current climate, member states support the agreement and EU cooperation based on the

approval given in the Council, while continuing their own cooperation without needing the corresponding part of the PDCA to enter into force.

The PDCA's generality as an instrument for guiding current cooperation and the somewhat elastic nature of the cooperation it promotes and covers (breadth of actors, sectors, purposes, means, etc.) can continue to provide an adequate platform for highly diverse ways of achieving it and alternative routes when others are blocked. This may be a handicap, to the extent that the opportunities to effectively implement all the commitments and guidelines contemplated in it may be scarce or limited, but it could also be considered its principal virtue – or one of them.

In short, the EU's cooperation with Cuba has the potential to continue developing, but it also faces challenges and threats that can and should be overcome with political will on both sides. Efforts should be made to surmount the adverse conditions of their respective situations and find solutions to them, as well as to those facing the international environment. In practice, cooperation must prevail over conflict.

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Claudia Sánchez Savín

International Policy Research Centre (CIP)

Introduction

In its foreign policy, Cuba has given high priority to relations with the European Union (EU) and historical evidence suggests that the Italian Republic is among the states given highest priority.

However, academic work on Cuba–Italy bilateral relations has been lacking, with the exception of minimal contributions focusing on past decades. This chapter aims to explain the development of Cuba–Italy bilateral ties within the context established since the signing of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA), the global COVID-19 pandemic and the changes on the international scene and in the balances of power, using a critical International Relations perspective.

The chapter will be structured into three main sections. The first briefly addresses the background to Cuba–EU relations in order help understand the state of these connections. The second section gives a historical overview of Cuba–Italy relations from the 1990s onwards. Finally, in order to achieve the chapter's overall objective the third section addresses the key strands of work within the countries' relations, which will be defined and expanded within the sub-sections: Cooperation, Solidarity, Economy (divided into Trade, Investments and Tourism) and Political Relations.

1. Development

1.1. Essential background to Cuba–EU relations

Cuba–western Europe relations have always been triangular, with the United States (US) at the apex (Perera Gómez, 1997; 2006; 2017; Gratius, 2009; 2010; Pellón Azopardo, 2015), and in Cuba–EU ties changes and continuities have emerged over time. Among the variables that have influenced them are the nature of the political forces within the governments, the historical conjuncture (in the Braudelian sense,

1. Historical conjunctures and the political forces present in the government are closely connected and are essential to the configuration of Cuba–EU ties and those between Cuba and certain member states. This was evident around 2003 when several highly conservative administrations emerged onto the transatlantic electoral landscape at around the same time (George W. Bush in the US, Aznar in Spain and Berlusconi in Italy). Along with the events of Cuba’s so-called “Black Spring”, this led relations to deteriorate. The form the links took was also related to EU policy decisions (the application of sanctions with reference to the political conditionality imposed for cooperation, the suspension of exchanges at the highest level, the priority given to relations with opposition groups and the return of the old practice of inviting them to the celebrations of national holidays, which became known as the “Cocktail Wars”) and to Cuba’s reaction (mass protests at the embassies of the countries in question and an understandably reluctant attitude to dialogue, given the conditionalities whose spearhead was respect for human rights and democracy).
2. The “events” category includes events and one-off incidents and is one of the variables that conditions the development of a state’s foreign policy, its activity towards another state and the behaviour of a relationship between various subjects and actors from the international community (Rodríguez Hernández, 2017).
3. For two decades this was the framework for Cuba–EU relations: conditionality when it came to development cooperation and exceptionality, in the sense of making Cuba, in formal terms, the only country in the region without a cooperation agreement with the EU. The Common Position was signed at a time when the US blockade against Cuba was tightening and was a clear attempt to take advantage of the collapse of Soviet socialism and the close alliance between the US government and the conservative leadership of the Spanish People’s Party, led by José María Aznar when it reached power. It should, nevertheless, be recalled that relations between Spain and Cuba had been deteriorating for years, even during the mandate of Felipe González’s Spanish Socialist Workers Party, which had shifted to the right

understood as the state of the societies in question, meaning domestic and foreign policy and the effects of global affairs on the countries in the medium term – in other words, a period of decades that contain a number of profound changes) and, above all, the interactions between the two actors. These interactions go hand in hand with mutual perceptions, which can contribute to modifying interests, actions and outreach towards the counterpart (Perera Gómez, 2017; Alzugaray, 2015 in Perera Gómez, 2017: 72; Navas Morata, 2015 in Perera Gómez 2017: 72; Portocarero, 2015, in Perera Gómez, 2017: 72; Mujica Cantelar, 2015 in Perera Gómez, 2017: 94).¹

Similarly, certain events² and their consequences in the short and medium term conditioned the ups and downs of the ties and established certain patterns. Among them were the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9th 1989), the creation of the EU with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (February 7th 1992), the shooting down of the Brothers to the Rescue planes (February 24th 1996), the adoption of the Common Position (December 2nd 1996),³ the events that became known as the “Black Spring” (March–April 2003), the various Congresses of the Communist Party of Cuba,⁴ the changes in the presidency of the Cuban government,⁵ elections on both sides of the Atlantic (Pérez Benítez, 2017; Perera Gómez, 2017; Mujica Cantelar, 2015 in Perera Gómez, 2017: 125; Fiffe Cabreja, 2018) and, more recently, the events that occurred in Cuba on July 11th 2021.

However, the most important event was the announcement on December 17th 2014 that diplomatic relations would be re-established between Cuba and the United States. And, despite subsequent changes like the rightward shift on both sides of the Atlantic, Cuba–EU relations have since reached unprecedented levels. The maturing of the ties is palpable, with old quarrels being gradually overcome and conciliation in spite of the differences that remain. The most visible signs of this were the repealing of the Common Position on December 12th 2016 and the signing of the PDCA, which entered into provisional force on November 1st 2017. The great triumph of the negotiations over a new stage of bilateral relations was to remove the political conditionalities on cooperation and instead reach an agreement that facilitates dialogue and joint work to achieve the foreign policy goals each holds towards the other.

The advent of a left-wing decade in Latin America saw Cuba’s regional involvement rise – in contrast to the isolation others had attempted to force on it. Meanwhile, a number of EU countries decided to increase trade and bilateral cooperation, as awareness grew among the European establishment that their hostility and the Common Position were nonsensical, both for achieving the goals set out and for their own foreign policy interests. Combined, all of these factors led relations to thaw and the commitment to dialogue and negotiation to emerge (Gratius, 1998; Roy, 2015; Perera Gómez, 2017; Allende Karam, 2015, in Perera Gómez, 2017: 211; Tvevad, 2015: 27, in Perera Gómez, 2017: 210; Alzugaray, 2015, in Perera Gómez, 2017: 211, Portocarero, 2015, in Perera Gómez, 2017: 181, Ayuso & Gratius, 2017, Ayuso, Gratius & Pellón Azopardo, 2017). As Gratius (2016: 2) has pointed out, “change for trade” – the European foreign policy tradition which was resumed and which the Obama administration later assimilated – tends to be the most effective way to use such tools, as was later generally accepted.⁶

Analysing contributions made by the most prominent authors on the subject (Eduardo Perera Gómez, Anna Ayuso, Susanne Gratius, Raynier Pellón Azopardo and Joaquín Roy)⁷ shows a level of consensus about the characterisation of these links and their historical development. In short, Cuba–EU relations have been difficult, controversial, vulnerable and highly conditioned by a third actor (the US). They have undergone multiple realignments, due to the clear and obvious inconsistencies, uncertainties, biases and above all whims of both sides.

2. Overview of Cuba–Italy relations

When discussing its relations with Cuba, Italy's consideration as an individual state comes after its position as an EU member state, as the configuration of its links with Cuba have been determined by its central place in the bloc in general. It is not the EU state with the largest role in Cuban and Latin American politics, but it is among the most important.⁸ Above all, this is due to the significant role Italy played in redirecting the Cuban economy in the 1990s and its longstanding and continuing importance in the fields of trade, investment and tourism, as well as other sectors (Roque Valdés, 1997; Perera Gómez, 2017; Allende Karam, 2008; 2015; 2017). Over the past 30 years, Italy has been Cuba's eighth-largest trading partner worldwide and second of EU member states (*Prensa Latina*, 2021a) (although occasionally it ranks third, as in 2017) (Ayuso, Gratius & Pellón Azopardo, 2017). From 1995 to 2019, exports from Italy to Cuba grew at an annual rate of 5.97%, from \$81.3 m in 1995 to \$327 m in 2019 (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2020).⁹ Since 2014 it has been the ninth-largest source of tourists to Cuba, with numbers increasing more or less steadily until the pandemic (reaching a high of 227,829 visitors in 2017) (ONEI, 2019).¹⁰ These facts have shaped their links.

It should be clarified that addressing relations between Cuba and Italy covers more than just bilateral ties at governmental level and traditional diplomacy as the only infallible tool. The widest possible links are included – between government agencies at all rungs of the political hierarchy, and between them and non-state actors.

Of course, bilateral interests have never been equal in proportion (Perera Gómez, 2017). While Cuba has not been a priority for European or Italian foreign policy, the Caribbean country has attributed great importance to the EU and specific countries, including Italy (Hernández, 2015; Pérez Benítez, 2017). Nevertheless, Cuba–EU and Cuba–Italy ties have clearly strengthened as mutual interest has grown.

Until the 1990s the bilateral relationship between Cuba and Italy was modest. The pattern of exchange was imbalanced and, despite Cuba's gradually more active role, this has remained the case. When Cuban trade and foreign policy was reoriented, which inevitably translated into an opening up to trade, foreign investment, tourism and the resumption of ties with its emigrants, Italy was among the European states most involved in the range of opportunities offered. Cuba's need for cooperation with these developed countries was undeniably felt more than ever and it was logical that the first steps were taken by those

(Pellón Azopardo, 2009; Allende Karam, 2017; Moré, 2018). Given the leading role Spain had always played in European positions on Cuba and the difficult circumstances on the island, there was consensus over the Common Position, even if certain states, including Italy, had reservations or more nuanced views (IRELA, 1996; Perera Gómez, 2017).

4. The PCC Congresses that drew interest for the clues they provided to Cuba's future prospects were those from the fourth Congress onwards, as this was the first to be held in the post–Cold War period (1991). The 5th to the 8th congresses took place on the following dates: October 8–10th 1997; April 16–19th 2011; April 16–19th 2016; April 16–19th 2021.
5. The handover of power from Fidel Castro Ruz to Raúl Castro Ruz was announced on February 24th 2008 and from the latter to Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez on April 19th 2018.
6. It is worth noting the release of those arrested during the events of March 2003 and the reaction to it. This step taken or concession made by Cuba led to the adoption of diplomatic measures, which shows that certain specific decisions made by both parties, both in practical terms and in terms of the image projected, can contribute to making advances (Perera Gómez, 2017: 185).
7. The contribution should be recalled of Carlos Rafael Rodríguez (1981) on the foreign policy Cuba should follow with the countries of the European Community and his accurate vision of the need to develop these links and the risks Cuba ran of lapsing into “infantilism” due to ideological mediation, ignorance and ideas about Europe copied automatically from opinions of the United States.
8. Italy is among the European countries with significant interest in the Latin American and Caribbean region. However, Spain constitutes the historical bridge par excellence, as by general consensus it is seen as its natural space. European countries follow unwritten rules that divide up their spheres of influence and interest in the region (Pellón Azopardo, 2009; Karam, 2017). For Italy, the area above all comprises the large South American countries (Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) (Allende Karam, 2017; Roy, 2006; Ayuso, 2019). However, Cuba's dual political and cultural importance, both for the project of rescuing *Latindad* (consider the internationally certified Italian language and culture teaching centres and complementary study programmes such as the

Dante Alighieri Society and the Academia Leonardo da Vinci) and as the region's leading anti-hegemonic and unifying country, aroused Italian interest in rapprochement with the Caribbean island for a number of years. To this must be added Italy's importance as one of the main destinations for Cuban migrants, another factor that raises the bilateral interest, especially for Cuba.

9. Import statistics justify the importance Cuba assigns to Italy, with the European country the third-largest source of goods to the Caribbean island (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2020).

10. With the pandemic, it moved to seventh place (ONEI, 2021).

11. Zealous defence of its sovereignty is of paramount importance to Cuba, as is international recognition of that fact. In foreign policy terms it is the source of its greatest pride, as recognised by figures working in the field from or for Cuba, and by scholars (Hernández, 2015; Declercq, 2016: 127, in Perera 2017; Pérez Benítez, 2017; Allende Karam, 2017; Perera Gómez, 2017).

Meanwhile, much of western Europe's activity reproduces the role of the old metropole. Logically, following the loss of its colonial spaces and its place as the main centre of global accumulation its myths and pride began to consist of flaunting the potential for new ways of inserting itself and gaining presence in former colonial spaces – its own or those of others. The interconnections entailed by modern globalisation have only strengthened this.

12. By 1995, it was third in the list of countries by number of economic partnerships, behind Spain and Canada. These countries worked in strategic sectors such as telecommunications, light industry, the food industry and tourism. In turn, the various economic reforms carried out in Cuba since 1993 and the investment protection and promotion agreement signed that same year with Italy – the first of its kind between Cuba and another state – undoubtedly contributed to Italian investors' growing interest in Cuba and the increase of economic partnerships seen from that year onwards. The largest investment at the time was that of STET (part of the IRI public industrial group), which owned 49% of the mixed company ETECSA, alongside a Mexican co-investor (Roque Valdés, 1997: 78).

13. These shows of solidarity with Cuba continue to this day, as

that had most interest in Cuba (Roque Valdés, 1997; Gratius, 1998; IRELA, 1997; 1998).

In the 1990s, Italy–Cuba relations began to acquire the shape they have today, being characterised by respect, cordiality and discretion despite the political differences. According to Roque Valdés (1997: 88), Italy has managed to maintain a respectful distance, avoiding the extreme and variable positions typical of other deeper historical and cultural linkages, where passion generates conflicting attitudes. Roque Valdés adds another essential element for good relations with Cuba, given its foreign policy principles and certain crystallised characteristics of greater importance even than “high politics”: respect for sovereignty and non-interference in its internal affairs.¹¹ In fact, although relations at this stage were fundamentally conditioned by economic interests (promotion of Italian investments, tourism, renegotiation of Cuban debt),¹² the significant state presence in both nations' economies made fluid political relations a necessary condition for the functioning of economic ties (Roque Valdés, 1997: 88–89). Comparatively low levels of intolerance and aggression – a feature of Italian foreign policy (Norman, 1963) – explain why it has become one of Cuba's main economic partners and one of the EU countries with the best bilateral relations portfolio.

At this stage areas of common interest also began to be identified and trade, investment and cooperation agreements were signed that remain in effect today. These years represented a milestone and sustainable guidelines for bilateral ties were put in place that have endured. One successful and necessary practice Cuba established with Europe in general – and with prioritised countries in particular – was to further increase its ties with local governments, parties, unions, associations, organisations and artists, as well as other groups, to provide stability against any electoral ups and downs in Europe that could risk the achievements made, because, ultimately, a country transcends a government (Hernández, 2015; Pérez Benítez, 2017). So, whenever a social group, a set of emigrants or a party, for example, showed sympathy for Cuba, it presented an opportunity for solidarity, cooperation or trade, or to pressure their governments to support Cuba's battles, especially the end of the blockade.¹³

The groups that traditionally promoted solidarity with Cuba in Italy followed this line and began to promote decentralised solidarity. This envisaged a more direct link between regions and provinces in Italy and provinces and localities in Cuba in order to achieve specific cooperation goals agreed between both parties, taking into account the needs and priorities of the different Cuban areas (Roque Valdés, 1997: 87).

Hence, during the hard years of the Common Position, the 2003 sanctions and the thawing process, Italy was one of the countries leading the calls for a good relationship with Cuba.¹⁴ Susanne Gratius (2018: 6) lists France, Italy and Portugal as the countries that most clearly support constructive engagement with Cuba. Their approach and opposition to unilateral sanctions are related to their more distant relationship with the US and the low level of importance given to promoting democracy in their foreign policy, which tends to favour

cooperation, dialogue and economic relations. That the influential High Representative of the EU, Federica Mogherini, comes from a country that has traditionally looked more favourably upon constructive commitment without political conditions should come as no surprise.

Another specialist on the subject, Ambassador Isabel Allende Karam (2015) argues that the European Union still tends to see Cuba above all as “Latin”, adding that it is no coincidence that the first attempt at dialogue with the EU occurred when the troika was formed of Spain, France and Italy (Perera Gómez 2017: 86). Added to this is the fact that Italy has always been resistant to US diplomatic interference aimed at halting the agreement with Cuba (Perera Gómez, 2017).

Thus, despite the contradictions it contains, the Cuba–Italy bilateral plan has become among the most favourable, stable and balanced.

3. Bilateral relations in the post-PDCA landscape and the context of COVID-19

3.1. Cooperation

Within the bilateral cooperation framework, the three priority sectors for intervention have been: 1) culture, heritage and the creative economies; 2) sustainable agriculture, natural resource management and agri-food systems; and 3) local development and territorial innovation (AICSA). At the start of 2020, the recorded budget was €21 million and there were 11 engagements in projects in Cuba, some of which remain ongoing (AICS, 2019).¹⁵ The Italian cooperation strategy prioritises support for small farmers and their organisations, promoting the sustainable intensification of agricultural practices, and gives particular attention to applied research and technical dissemination to achieve higher production targets in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Italian activity also prioritises the connection between local food production and consumption, supporting the municipal self-sufficiency strategy (AICSA).

One of the major interventions carried out in the area of cultural heritage conservation – and a way of renewing mutual collaborative relations – was the support programme for the comprehensive restoration of Old Havana’s “Plaza del Cristo”, launched via an operational alliance between the Office of the Historian of Havana/OHCH and the IILA (AICSb).

Where development cooperation takes place, opportunities for future joint ventures may emerge, and vice versa. The two nations have been working since 2019 to promote sectors such as agriculture through the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS, 2019). One example was the participation of three farmers in the “Macfrut 2021” fair in Italy in September of that year, which was presented as an opportunity for Cuban exports. Participation in the event was one of the “CubaFruta” development cooperation initiatives, and was supported by the Italian trade promotion agency (ICE) and the AICS office in Havana (La Demajagua, 2021).

Where development cooperation takes place, opportunities for future joint ventures may emerge, and vice versa.

each year several groups in Italy (Organizzazione internazionale italo-latino americana [IILA]; Agency for Cultural and Social interchange with Cuba [AICEC]; Cuba Va; Coordinadora Nacional de Cubanos Residentes en Italia [CONACI]; Asociación Nacional de Amistad Italia–Cuba [ANAIC]; Italian General Confederation of Labour [CGIL] speak out against the blockade and above all call for an end to the sanctions that most affect Cuban citizens, such as the restrictions on remittances, travel and consular procedures (La Demajagua, 2016; 2020; Cubaminrex–EmbaCubaltalia, 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b).

14. While it backed the Common Position, Italy was one of the countries that fought most for the more “gradual” version of the first Spanish draft (Perera Gómez, 2017:108). Consulting it was therefore a priority for aligning Washington’s and Brussels’ interests on Cuba (Roy, 2002: 50).

15. A figure of €7,013,699 was allocated to the field of “Culture and Heritage”, with around six projects. Meanwhile, “Sustainable Agriculture and the Environment”, the highest priority area, included another six projects and €9,085,830. For its part, “Territorial Development” was allocated €3,400,000 and two projects (AICS, 2019: 15).

Various exchanges have taken place at government level to confirm ongoing projects or cooperation opportunities in the mentioned areas or other new ones.

Meanwhile, the Plataforma Articulada para el Desarrollo Integral Territorial (PADIT), co-financed by the Italian government and managed on the Cuban side by the Ministry of Economy and Planning, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment (MINCEX) and by ten provincial governments, has been active in Cuba since 2014. It aims to strengthen local skills in planning and managing integrated territorial economic development in line with the aims of the country's National Plan for Economic and Social Development (PNDES), the 2030 Agenda, and seeks to strengthen Italy's contribution to localising the SDGs (MAECI, 2020a).

In fact, going back to 2017, when the approval and implementation of the PDCA were in the air, an agreement for a Livestock Cooperatives Development Project in the Central-Eastern Region (PRODEGAN) was signed in Rome by Alba Soto Pimentel, then Cuban Ambassador to Italy and Permanent Representative of the Rome-based United Nations agencies, and the President of IFAD, Kanayo F. Nwanze. This was the second project launched since Cuba rejoined IFAD in 2014 and succeeded PRODECOR, which also sought to complement government efforts in the field of developing the Cuban agricultural sector (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2017). Similarly, in 2018, Cuba's Ministry of Energy and Mines (MINEN) and the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the use of safe and clean energies, in response to the commitment to reduce fossil fuel dependence and the increased importance of environmental sustainability (La Demajagua, 2018).

Various exchanges have taken place at government level to confirm ongoing projects or cooperation opportunities in the mentioned areas or other new ones and, alongside them, requalification, technical and professional advice and the granting of scholarships to Cubans to study in Italy (La Demajagua, 2021). One project the Cuban foreign minister discussed with members of the IILA was "Ciudades verdes" (Green Cities), an initiative to support cities' transition towards a circular economy, with sustainable tourism and agriculture (ACN, 2020a).

More recently, and of a different nature, was the signing of a memorandum of understanding on April 12th 2021 by the Italian Ambassador to Cuba, José Carlos Rodríguez Ruiz, between the Cuban Institute of Radio and Television (ICRT) and the Italian public broadcaster Radiotelevisione italiana (RAI). The agreement aims to promote and develop cooperation in the media sector and will be in effect for three years from its signing and may be renewed based on written agreements (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021c).

Meanwhile, the Cuban Ambassador to Italy thanked the Director General for Cooperation at the Italian foreign ministry for giving approval in March 2021 to the HAB.AMA programme for food self-sufficiency and the development of sustainable economic initiatives in Havana. Aided by Italian government contributions, it aims to strengthen local food self-sufficiency capacity in five selected municipalities in Havana province. The HAB.AMA programme figures among the lines approved by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for working with Cuba (*Prensa Latina*, 2021a).

3.2. Political relations, trade, investment and tourism

Cuba and Italy have confirmed the good state of their bilateral ties, as well as the shared desire to strengthen their economic, financial, commercial and cooperative relations. In general terms, a fundamental factor has been the mutual aid that both countries provided in 2020 and 2021, during their respective COVID-19 peaks. What is more, multiple meetings and exchanges have taken place to identify opportunities for cooperation, trade and relaunching tourism (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020a; 2020c; 2020d; 2020e; 2021b; 2021d; 2021e; 2021f; MAECI, 2020b).

Added to this are the calls for the end of the blockade and internal interference in Cuba. The clearest expression of which was motion 238 of April 14th 2021 in favour of lifting the blockade, which was approved by the Senate of the Italian Republic after being presented by senators Paola Nugnes and Loredana de Petris, both from the Mixed Group - Free and Equal Party (LeU) (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021g).¹⁶ Closely related to this, the Center for Research and Elaboration for Democracy/ International Legal Intervention Group (CRED/GIGI in its Italian acronym) criticised the debates on Cuba in the European Parliament that ultimately resulted in a resolution being approved, with certain positions appearing to favour a regression in EU–Cuba relations, including the suspension of the PDCA (*Prensa Latina*, 2021b). Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio made certain clarifications that turned out to be important on the non-acceptance of a resolution presented by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) calling for the removal of the use of sanctions as a tool (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020f). Di Maio said that they were not intended to target Cuba and reiterated his traditional stance against the US blockade, while nevertheless insisting that they were necessary. While this constituted a point of political dissent, it was not compromising.

The Italian government also contributed €120,000 in August 2021 to support the World Food Programme's (WFP) food assistance work in Cuba. The funding turned out to be considerable, as it began a process that led to the purchase of 50 metric tons of beans and oil intended to bolster the diet of some 2,300 people in hospitals in Havana and Matanzas (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021h).

Another example that shows the level of bilateral relations and their good state was the hosting of the Cuban Ambassador to Italy by the new President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Piero Fassino. The Cuban diplomat expressed the desire of Cuba's legislative body (the National Assembly of People's Power [ANPP]) to promote inter-parliamentary relations and cooperation with the Italian parliament in various fields, as a way to contribute to developing ties between the two countries and for the benefit of both peoples (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020a).

The virtual exchanges with migrants should not be overlooked, and neither should the statements about the new opportunities the approval of SMEs and the continuing development of the Mariel Special Development Zone offer to both migrants and Italian investors, or the updating of draft laws to combine renewing the economic model with

Cuba and Italy have confirmed the good state of their bilateral ties, as well as the shared desire to strengthen their economic, financial, commercial and cooperative relations.

16. However, at the same time a second agenda was approved whose first signatory was the leader of the Brothers of Italy, Luca Ciriani. It called instead for selective sanctions against Cuban political leaders and a general review of the sanctions system to better protect the activity of Italian companies in international markets (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021i).

projecting an image of a country in the process of adapting to global trends. The same applies to the face-to-face and individual exchanges conducted by both Cuba's foreign minister, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, and its Ambassador to Italy. The latter has worked unstintingly to promote "*Producto Cuba*", particularly in the light of the 2030 Agenda and the favourable current circumstances for rapprochement with Cuba (Cubaminrex- EmbaCubaltalia, 2020d; 2020e; 2021b).

There is no doubt that the prestige earned from the medical collaboration in Italy opened the doors for Cuba to engage in other projects, not only in terms of cooperation and solidarity, but also trade, investment and exchange. Indeed, meetings have been held between the Piedmontese authorities and the Cuban Embassy in Italy with the aim of promoting business connections between Cuba and the Piedmont region – especially the provinces of Matanzas, Cienfuegos and Villa Clara. This is part of a business offensive towards various Italian regions undertaken by the Cuban Embassy in coordination with Cuban organisations such as MINCEX, the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Cuba and ProCuba (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020e). As part of this strategy, the Cuban Ambassador was hosted on May 25th 2021 by the Mayor of Florence, Dario Nardella, at the city's emblematic town hall, the Palazzo Vecchio (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021e).¹⁷

17. Among the resolutions reached at the meeting, the City of Florence promised to support the sending of a Florentine trade mission to Cuba by the end of 2021 to be organised by the business and investment-promotion body "Emprendedores por Cuba", which is led by businessman Claudio Cardini. Florence's chamber of commerce will support the trade mission.

18. At the meeting held on June 26th 2020, Cuba's attractiveness to the Italian market was recognised, and it was clarified that Italian travellers favour tour routes. Both parties confirmed their desire to continue promoting tourism to Cuba, recognising its multiple values – historical, heritage, cultural, natural and social – its safety as a destination and its health security, as reflected by the successful handling of the COVID-19 pandemic in Cuba itself and the fact that over 60 countries received the cooperation of Cuban medical personnel, including Italy (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020g).

19. The Binational Committees met to approve the associated internal regulations and establish the mechanisms for accessing the counterpart funds and the criteria for defining the eligible projects for the committees. In particular, in accordance with the provisions of the debt management agreements, the counterpart fund resources (in the commercial and cooperation areas) may be used to subsidise (in local currency) expenditure made in Cuba on investment and industrial or development projects approved by the two respective committees (MAECI, 2020b).

Tourism is a key sector for the bilateral relationship, with both countries participating in international tourism fairs to promote new modalities in the sector and travel to Cuba (Prensa Latina, 2019). The pandemic caused tourism to fall but, given the success of its vaccination programme, Cuba is at the threshold of the post-COVID era and the Cuban Ambassador has been engaging with Italian tour operators since 2020 over the island's relaunch as a destination and the projections for Italian tourism in Cuba (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020g).¹⁸

The Binational Committee meetings should also be mentioned. Italy was called upon to manage the counterpart funds provided for in the bilateral debt management agreement, and the committees provide a support tool for Italian companies interested in investments and projects with local counterparts in Cuba. The Cuban government undertook to convert some commercial debts (€88.6 million) into a fund in local currency to be allocated to financing strategic projects for the country's development in which Italian companies participate – by preference small and medium-sized companies, and Italian–Cuban joint ventures (MAECI, 2020b).¹⁹

3.3. Solidarity

Lastly, there is the mutual solidarity the two nations have shown over the past two years of COVID-19. This has undoubtedly shaped the current ties and will condition those of the future. From April to November 2020, the active participation of the members of Cuba's Henry Reeve Emergency Medical Contingent was notable, as they provided emergency health assistance in Turin (Piedmont) and Crema (Lombardy). Based on the positive experiences, the first Italy–Cuba Medical Symposium: "Exchange on Covid-19" was held in Turin

in June 2020. From that event a generalised proposal emerged to maintain medical and scientific collaboration between Piedmont and Cuba, with future exchanges between professionals in the sector (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020h).

On July 21st 2020, in an initiative called “Una Luz Por Cuba” (ACN, 2020b) La Mole Antonelliana, symbol of Turin and one of Italy’s most emblematic buildings, was illuminated with the colours of the Cuban flag in a show of gratitude to Cuba and the medical brigade that collaborated in the fight against COVID-19 in Piedmont.

Similarly, La Villetta per Cuba, a Rome-based group promoting solidarity with the Cuban people, organised medical supplies to be collected and sent to Cuba in response to the United States’ blockade, which has been tightened during the pandemic and has even prevented the arrival of emergency medical supplies and equipment to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020b).

Similarly, the Associazione Italia-Cuba-Salerno sent a donation for primary school children (41kg) to the province of Santiago de Cuba as a gesture of gratitude for the presence of the two Cuban medical brigades of the Henry Reeve Contingent (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2020b).²⁰

In August 2021, the pandemic’s peak in the country, Cuba benefited from several donations from Italy. Among them, the shipment of medical supplies coordinated by the youth section of the Italian Association of Private Hospitality (AIOP) in the Lombardy region, which arrived on August 9th and was followed by another on the 23rd. Both were aided by logistical support from the international freight forwarding company Vector and the airline Neos,²¹ as well as the business groups in the health sector San Donato, Gheron and Mantova Salus. On the 26th of the same month, a medical donation arrived coordinated by the CGIL, AICEC, CONACI, ANAIC, the regional government of Piedmont, the Community of Sant’Egidio and La Villetta per Cuba. They were joined by the UNDP’s Articulated Platform for Integral Territorial Development, the Italian Recreational and Cultural Association of Umbria, Our America-Italian Chapter of the Network in Defense of Humanity and the Cambiando de Ruta youth organisation (€280,000, 150 respirators and medical supplies) (Fuentes Puebla, 2021). It should be added that since the pandemic began ANAIC has gathered over €144,000 to support the Cuban health system, research, the development of vaccines against COVID-19, protective equipment for the Pedro Kourí Institute of Tropical Medicine and the acquisition of cancer drugs for paediatric patients (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021a).

The Cuba–Italy Business Committee (CICI), meanwhile, sent a container full of donations “for our Cuban brothers” to support the COVID-19 prevention and control plan (Cubaminrex-EmbaCubaltalia, 2021f). ANAIC went on to show its firm rejection of the European Parliament’s resolutions against Cuba approved on June 10th and September 16th 2021, respectively. Voices from Italian society, Cubans residing in that country, the Communist Refoundation Party and other groups expressed support for Cuba in the difficult period when the epidemiological

20. In 2004 Emilio Lambiase proposed the twinning of the Province of Salerno and Santiago de Cuba from which multiple cultural, economic and social exchanges have resulted.

21. The airline has been highly active in these donations, with further services on October 4th.

The PDCA frameworks provided a positive framework for Cuba–Italy ties to grow from their usually favourable state to higher levels of consolidation and rapprochement.

situation was worsening, the blockade was tightened and defamatory campaigns were being generated with the help of social network algorithms (Puccio, 2021). In sum, then, Italian solidarity towards Cuba, which was always active, grew during the pandemic.

Conclusions

Historically, the framework of Cuba–Italy bilateral relations has shown the importance of the political will to achieve dialogue and of cordiality and mutual respect. It provides a good example of positive outcomes being achieved in spite of political systems.

The Cuba–Italy pairing – always bearing in mind the latter’s membership of the European Union – demonstrates the need for and effectiveness of placing common interests before differences and, above all, of opting for a foreign policy characterised by political non-conditionality towards counterparts. The principles of non-interference in internal affairs, of true respect for the self-determination of peoples and the avoidance of seeking to bring about changes in counterparts’ political systems are the keys to success, as Cuba–Italy relations have shown.

The links between the two states are extensive and demonstrate that countries transcend governments and ideologies, as broad swathes of the population, as well as various non-governmental or decentralised entities, provide niches of opportunity for states to increase their presence in their counterparts’ countries and benefit from formal or informal exchange with them. Hence, extending political horizons towards other areas of power and groups of people, using public and traditional diplomacy, are good practices for one state to achieve its foreign policy goals with regard to another.

The PDCA frameworks and the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, provided a positive framework for Cuba–Italy ties to grow from their usually favourable state to higher levels of consolidation and rapprochement.

Over the period analysed, the differences between the countries’ priorities remain clear. Looking beyond the good state of bilateral relations, from a governmental point of view Cuba’s more proactive stance is noticeable, as is the greater involvement of Cuban high politics, using diplomacy as its key foreign policy instrument, which contrasts with its Italian counterpart. The central role in Italy’s outreach towards Cuba is played by solidarity groups and regional governments, above all in areas where the Cuban medical brigades provided their services. This is a clear sign of the success of the Cuba’s diplomatic strategy of expansion and rapprochement with all locations and levels of power and beyond to achieve its objectives towards Italy.

The development of Cuba’s ties with Italy shows how, depending on the circumstances, cooperation and solidarity can be as important as high politics or more so in its relations with EU states, especially given the risks posed by the electoral and political fluctuations in these countries.

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PART II: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL INSERTION

- CUBA BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: A SUI GENERIS MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL INSERTION

Anna Ayuso and Susanne Grätius

- THE OAS AND THE REPOLITICISATION OF THE CUBAN QUESTION IN THE AMERICAS

Marie Laure Geoffroy

- AFTER THE PROTESTS AND THE PANDEMIC: REASSESSING THE INTERNATIONAL PROFILE OF POST-CASTRO CUBA

Bert Hoffmann and Laurence Whitehead

CUBA BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: A SUI GENERIS MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL INSERTION¹

Anna Ayuso

Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

Susanne Gratius

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM)

1. Introduction

Since the 1959 revolution, Cuba's high levels of human development have seen it ranked in an intermediate position among the countries of the Global North and South, on the one hand, and LAC, on the other. The 2020 Human Development Index placed Cuba 70th in the world and 6th in the region. It is listed among the countries with a "high level of development", ahead of Mexico, Peru, Colombia and Brazil,² and during the Cold War its development was similar to that of the socialist countries of the "second world". Within the Americas it has also served as a bridge between Latin America and the Caribbean island states. In spite of multiple setbacks and very limited resources, Cuba has managed its two positions in a way that has given it disproportionately large geopolitical influence for its small size and population, despite or precisely because of its dispute with the US.

The two conditions – North–South bridge country and dual Caribbean–Latin American identity – have been an advantage when it has come to regional integration. During the Cold War, being the only country in the Americas with a socialist regime and membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA or Comecon)³ stymied its full integration into the region. But when the bipolar confrontation vanished in the 1990s this ceased to be a problem, in fact it became an advantage, as it meant Cuba participated in and had presence, influence and recognition both inside and outside the region.

Cuba's closest neighbours in the region are The Bahamas, Haiti and Jamaica. Its special status between Latin America and the Caribbean allows it to play in both leagues: on the one hand, the island participates in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and CARIFORUM and, on the other, it is a founding member of the Ibero-American Summits and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Cuba's full acceptance in LAC and its active participation in a number of interregional cooperation forums and mechanisms has also facilitated rapprochement between Cuba and the EU, particularly since the creation

1. We are grateful for the comments and suggestions made by Elisa Botella Rodríguez, member of the Europe–Cuba Forum, which helped to improve the article.
2. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/CUB>; <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>
3. CMEA was created in 1949 from a socialist bloc of 11 countries to serve as an organisation for economic cooperation with the USSR at its centre. The organisation was dissolved in 1991.

of CELAC. Its presence in the Latin American and Caribbean and Ibero-American “communities” have been an advantage for Cuba when negotiating an agreement with the EU. In this context, it is worth recalling that the negotiations between Havana and Brussels had taken several different forms: in the 1990s (1994) they were conducted on a bilateral basis; after 2000 attempts were made to situate the relationship within CARIFORUM and the ACP group of countries; and from 2014 onwards a return was made to bilateral dialogue until the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) was signed in 2016.⁴

From this starting point, first the text investigates what development model Cuba represents out of a great range of international integration strategies in the region (Shifter, Binetti, 2019), giving consideration to the political and economic priorities. Secondly, it analyses the advantages, obstacles and limitations to Cuba’s full regional and international integration in the various different forums in which it has been active through the different stages from the Cold War to the present day. By addressing these two questions, the chapter analyses the possible alternatives to the regional integration model practiced by the government. Following this introduction, the questions will be addressed in four sections: a brief theoretical and empirical reflection on Cuba’s international integration model; an examination of the evolution of its gradual integration process in the Americas; an analysis of its active role in South–South cooperation from the 1959 revolution to the present; and a final evaluation that takes stock of the current insertion model and includes some prospects for the future in an uncertain context.

2. The Cuban model of international insertion: political and economic pillars

While debates have taken place on “international insertion” as a structurally dependent position for Latin America and the Global South (Chagas-Bastos, 2018), the concept has engendered little further academic development and barely any relevant academic literature exists. As an idea “international insertion” or the “international insertion model” combines Political Economy and Foreign Policy Analysis and generally refers to the search for spaces of agency in international politics (Chagas-Bastos, 2018: 10), particularly by the countries of the Global South. From a critical point of view, it also means a position of subordination and/or acceptance of the global rules defined by a small group of powerful countries (Chagas-Bastos, 2018: 15). When it comes to Latin America two strands have dominated: first, the structural asymmetries between core and periphery put forward in Dependency Theory; and second the international context that frames the region’s development problems, as gathered, from a trade and investment perspective, by ECLAC (Chagas-Bastos, 2018: 12).

Shifter and Binetti (2019: 77) provide a more pragmatic definition, arguing that an international insertion model means having a roadmap that indicates which countries and international institutions should be prioritised, which are the key markets and on which issues on the global agenda the focus should be placed. According to this definition, unlike its capitalist neighbours, Cuba has not prioritised insertion in regional

4. [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22016A1213\(01\)&qid=1647879493483&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22016A1213(01)&qid=1647879493483&from=EN)

or international markets. Its insertion model has been shaped by the importance given to preserving its political system, with strategic alliances favoured with ideologically similar partners – first the USSR and then Venezuela. This prioritisation of the political is a crucial difference from the other countries in the region considered in this chapter, with Cuba's socialist political system making it an outsider in regional terms. A second feature that distinguishes it from the rest of the region is the long-term vision and the search for political autonomy, which somewhat conflicts with the economic dependence when it comes to basic necessities such as food and medicine, as we will show below.

According to article 16 of its 2019 Constitution, “The Republic of Cuba bases international relations on the exercise of its sovereignty as well as on ... antiimperialist and internationalist principles” (Constitución de la República de Cuba, 2019: 8). This foreign policy principle confirms its status as a “rebel state” (Schenoni & Escudé, 2016), above all due to the longstanding conflict with the United States that gave rise to an insertion model that is autonomous and distanced from Washington, but dependent on other partners – first the USSR and later Venezuela. It should also be recalled that the US continues to impose sanctions on the government in Havana, a sign of the high economic and political costs of a foreign policy of “absolute autonomy”, as defined in Carlos Escudé's theory of Peripheral Realism (Schenoni & Escudé, 2016: 7). Its position of rebel against US hegemony forced Cuba to seek an insertion model of regional and international alliances with other “enemies” of Washington – first the Soviet Union and from 2000 onwards Venezuela – or with those who “challenged” the sanctions, including Canada, the EU and some of LAC. However, in a vicious circle, the strategic relations with these partners created new dependencies that replaced the previous ones: colonial dependency on Spain until 1898 was replaced by dependence on the United States until 1959 when, following the revolution, Cuba's development became dependent on trade with the USSR and since 2000 with Venezuela.

As well as a declarative statement of the anti-imperialist nature of its foreign policy, Article 16 d) of Cuba's constitution states that it “Reaffirms its will to integrate and collaborate with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean”. This process has led to the full normalisation of its relations with the region, albeit with fluctuations as the political leanings of the other Latin American leaders have changed, with much more favourable conditions between 2003 and 2013 during the mandates of the so-called Pink Tide presidencies of Lula da Silva in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Hugo Chávez and later Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, who forged close ties with the Havana government (Kruijt, 2019: 292).

Cuba's insertion in the region was achieved thanks to the pull of the soft power produced by the resilience or strength of its David versus Goliath image, the appeal of its special insertion model and its socialist political system. Cuba looked to strengthen its ties with LAC in order to gain allies in its dispute with the United States and because it needed to explore new markets after the dissolution of the socialist bloc. Losing the USSR as a strategic ally sunk the country into its deepest economic crisis since the revolution, with GDP falling more than 30%. Overnight, it was forced to seek new partners among capitalist countries, especially in its immediate surroundings.

Cuba has not prioritised insertion in regional or international markets. Its insertion model has been shaped by the importance given to preserving its political system.

Cuba weathered the storm thanks to cooperation with a few neighbouring countries like Canada, and with the EU. Although it was obliged to carry out some capitalist economic reforms (Alonso, Vidal, 2020; Gratius, 2021), it did not follow model that dominated in the region in the 1990s of neoliberal economic policy based on the “Washington Consensus”. Its period of greatest regional insertion coincided with the region changing model, as leftist presidents won elections in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and other countries between 2003 and 2013 and advocated a more autonomous and socially focussed form of regional integration based on South-South cooperation and fighting poverty and inequality. Within this bloc of countries with leftist governments that opted for a more autonomous type of insertion with their differing strategies and policies, Cuba represented the most radical wing, along with Venezuela. They joined forces in 2004 to create the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of our America (ALBA), an ideological initiative for South–South cooperation that included Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador (for a time) and several Caribbean countries, which benefited from cooperation with Cuba (technical assistance) and Venezuela (energy cooperation through Petrocaribe).

The commodity price boom of 2003–2013 also brought an acceleration of China’s penetration in the region. Ahead of its neighbours, Cuba was the first country to establish closer economic and political ties with Beijing and China became an important trading partner early in the post–Cold War period. It never reached the preponderance of the USSR in its day, but Havana in some ways served an important gateway for China into Latin America. One consequence of countries like Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Chile and Peru growing closer to China was that their relations with the United States cooled, which in turn facilitated Cuba’s regional insertion and helped overcome the isolation from its neighbours experienced during the Cold War (see Table 1).

Table 1: Cuba’s trade partners (% of total), 2020

Table 1: Cuba’s trade partners (% of total), 2020		
Imports	Exports	Total trade
EU: 36.6%	EU: 36%	1. EU: 36.5%
China: 13%	Venezuela 20.2%	2. China: 11%
Argentina: 7.4%	Russia: 9.3%	3. Russia: 6.1%
Mexico: 6.2%	Switzerland: 3.9%	4. Argentina: 6%
Russia: 5.4%	Bolivia: 3.3%	5. Venezuela 5.9%
Brazil: 4.7%	Taiwan: 3.1%	6. Mexico: 5.2%
USA: 4.4%	Hong Kong: 2.7%	7. USA: 4%
Canada: 3.9%	USA: 2.4%	8. Brazil: 3.9%
Vietnam: 3.8%	Turkey: 2.2%	9. Canada: 3.4%
Venezuela 2.7%	Dominican Republic: 1.9%	10. Vietnam: 3.2%

Source: European Commission, *European Union, Trade in Goods with Cuba*. Directorate-General for Trade, 2 June 2021.

In contrast to previous periods, data for 2020 (European Commission, 2021; ONEI, 2021) suggest that trade grew with partners that are not strategic political allies. Until 1989, Cuba’s economic insertion was enacted through relations with the USSR and CMEA (Pérez, 1983). From 2000 to 2014 the dominant relationship was with Venezuela, initially under Hugo

Chávez's leadership. But in recent years, the EU has been Cuba's largest trading partner, accounting for 36.5% of exports and imports. China sits in second place with less than a third of the EU's proportion (11%), followed by Russia (6.1%), Argentina (6%), Venezuela (5.9%), Mexico (5.2%) and the United States (4%). In terms of Cuban exports, Venezuela remained in second place in 2020,⁵ behind the EU.

The same trend is reflected in the strategic sector of tourism. According to data from the ONEI, Cuba's National Statistics Office, in 2020 (year of the COVID-19 pandemic) 1.2 million tourists visited the island from, in declining order, Canada, Russia, the United States, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. These figures also reflect the dissonance between an international insertion model that seeks ideological allies and the pragmatism of an economic insertion model that increasingly depends on actors that do not meet these criteria, particularly Canada and the EU and its member states.

Unlike the Cold War period, when almost 90% of the island's trade was with the USSR and its allies, and the first decade of the millennium, when Venezuela accounted for 40% of Cuban trade, the rest of Latin America currently plays a larger role in commercial relations. Thus, alongside Venezuela in the list of the main destinations for Cuban goods exports, is Bolivia in fifth place and the Dominican Republic in tenth. While among countries from which Cuba imports most Argentina ranks third, Mexico fourth and Brazil sixth (European Commission, 2021). First of all, this confirms the presence of a more pragmatic and reformist economic policy, while it also attests to the growing importance of LAC in providing a model of regional insertion into which Cuba is gradually incorporating itself.

In recent decades, the Cuban economy has been characterised by extreme dependence on foreign aid and a financing crisis that continually recurs despite successive debt cancellation and reduction agreements being reached in recent decades. These deficiencies are determined by both internal and external factors. The United States' embargo, which prevents Cuba from normalising relations with its neighbour and natural partner, is undoubtedly one of the key determining factors in the development of relations with the region. US–Cuba trade has taken place since 2000, when the embargo was partially lifted on the importing of medicine and food, with the Cuban government obliged to pay in cash. However, other limitations impede the full development of relations between Cuba and its neighbours, which are explained below.

3. From regional isolation to insertion

Despite the progress made, Cuba faces two barriers to its full insertion in the region. First, its exclusion from the Organization of American States (OAS), from which it was initially forced out, but more recently has been in self-imposed exile, prevents it from holding regular dialogue with 34 countries, from participating in continental initiatives and from accessing soft loans from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and other continental financial instruments. The root cause here is the US embargo. Second, its socialist development model prevents it from participating in regional integration processes that involve trade liberalisation.

In recent years, the EU has been Cuba's largest trading partner, accounting for 36.5% of exports and imports.

5. https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_cuba_en.pdf

3.1. Cuba and the OAS

Cuba's regional insertion and its complex relationship with the OAS (see Geoffray, 2021) and the inter-American system in general were made even more difficult, particularly during the Cold War, by the awkward fit of its socialist model in a US-dominated continent. Setting out to prevent a "second Cuba" in its hemisphere through diplomatic and even military means, the US excluded the island from continental initiatives like the Alliance for Progress, which was specifically designed to avoid communist governments taking hold. The effects of political isolation were augmented by the economic sanctions Cuba faced via the embargo and the extraterritorial sanctions that were even strengthened in the post-Cold War period, as, with the aim of toppling the Castro regime (Hoffmann, 1997), the Torricelli Act and Helms-Burton Act were approved in 1992 and 1996, respectively.

Cuba was a founding member of the OAS and participated in the organisation and in the wider inter-American system until 1962, when Resolution VI of the 8th Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Punta del Este (Uruguay) ruled that the Marxist-Leninist regime posed a threat to collective security, and a majority of countries, led by the US, decided to exclude Cuba not only from the OAS but from the inter-American system as a whole (Peña Barrios, 2021: 24). A second sanction prohibiting bilateral diplomatic relations with Cuba imposed by the OAS in 1964 was not lifted until 1975.

In the first phase of the Cold War, Mexico and Canada were the only two countries in the Americas that maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, and they remain the island's most enduring partners, despite both signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the US in 1994. Both use their ties with Cuba to challenge Washington's sanctions policy and show "solidarity" with the threatened Revolution (Erisman & Kirk, 2018) while demonstrating that their foreign policy is autonomous, despite their major economic dependence on the US. The historically good relationship with Mexico helped open the door to greater cooperation with Canada, a country that has always condemned Washington's embargo and was for many years a strategic partner for Cuba through what was called "constructive engagement" (investment, dialogue, tourism, development cooperation and trade), cementing a relationship of friendship (Legler and Baranyi, 2009) that has survived various changes of government.

When the OAS clause prohibiting relations with Cuba disappeared in 1975, the island's gradual political reintegration with all the countries in the region began. At first, the process towards full diplomatic normalisation was slow, but it accelerated, especially after the Cold War ended, when LAC ceased to be a secondary battleground in the ideological and military confrontation between the US and the USSR (Cuba's main ally until its dissolution in 1991). After the Soviet bloc collapsed, Cuba carried out its own constitutional reform in 1992 and began to consider the best way to approach its relations with the OAS.

Cuba's exclusion from the OAS in 1962 might have been due to its status as a Marxist-Leninist country, but this was not the only obstacle to its reincorporation. The democratic transitions that took place in

the region during the 1980s meant that the barrier to Cuba's return to hemispheric institutions shifted from being the socialist nature of the regime to the absence of plural elections (López-Levy, 2009). This was accentuated when the Inter-American Democratic Charter was approved in 2001,⁶ which explicitly states that one of the purposes of the OAS is to promote and consolidate representative democracy and that the member states have "the obligation to promote and defend it". But the Democratic Charter is not binding and it should be recalled that the Cuban government has had no hesitation in signing similar documents like, for example, the declaration of the VI CELAC Summit whose point 21 "reaffirms its commitment to guarantee full respect for democracy and citizen participation, the rule of law, as well as unrestricted respect for human rights".

During the 1980s the barrier to Cuba's return to hemispheric institutions shifted from being the socialist nature of the regime to the absence of plural elections.

Beginning with the 1998 election victory of Hugo Chávez, who established a close alliance with Fidel Castro, it was the rise of left-wing leaders to power in many Latin American countries from the late 1990s onwards that changed the perception of relations with Cuba and facilitated its partial incorporation first into Latin American regionalism and then also into hemispheric relations. The change of government in Brazil that followed Lula da Silva's victory in 2002 was decisive in facilitating Cuba's insertion in the region. It was the Brazilian president who promoted Cuba's inclusion in the Summits of the Americas and the lifting of the special clause that prevented its full membership of the OAS. In 2004, Cuba co-founded ALBA with Venezuela and four years later it joined the Rio Group, CELAC's predecessor.

Latin American pressure and the Democrat Barack Obama winning the US presidency in 2009 saw the clause that had excluded Cuba from the OAS annulled by the unanimous vote of all members.⁷ However, the Cuban government rejected its reinstatement, arguing that the organisation is an instrument of US domination. Instead, along with other governments from the so-called 21st century left, the Cuban government favoured making CELAC an alternative space for regional cooperation to the OAS, with the United States excluded.

Nevertheless, Cuba attended the 7th Summit of the Americas held in Panama in 2015, which was where Raúl Castro and Barack Obama met for the first time since the thaw in relations was announced on December 17th 2014. However, the rapprochement with the hemispheric forum was cut short when Donald Trump was elected president of the United States and reversed his predecessor's policy by opting for a return to confrontation. Neither he nor Raúl Castro attended the next Summit of the Americas, the 8th, which was held in Lima in 2018. During Trump's term and with Luís Almagro as Secretary General the OAS became an increasingly polarised forum (Geoffray, 2021), with the Venezuelan political crisis the focus of regional tensions. As Cuba's closest ally, it incurred harsher sanctions and pressure, and the prospects of further rapprochement between Cuba and the United States diminished.

In 2022, the United States is scheduled to hold the 9th Summit of the Americas, the first of the Joe Biden presidency. As host, it will fall to him to demonstrate whether greater priority will be given to hemispheric relations, as he has suggested. The Cuban regime's democratic deficit

6. https://www.oas.org/charter/docs/resolution1_en_p4.htm
7. AG/RES. 2438 (XXXIX-O / 09)

The island retains its power of attraction due to the Revolution's status as a symbol of resistance and soft-balancing or defiance of US hegemonic power.

continues to be an obstacle. Reincorporation would mean Cuba subjecting itself to the scrutiny of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, something the Cuban government has always opposed – though that hasn't stopped the organisation from preparing regular reports on the human rights situation on the island. The last such report was published in June 2020 and analysed the 2017 to 2019 period (IACHR, 2020). The attempt by the chair of the Permanent Council of the OAS to convene an extraordinary session on the human rights situation in Cuba after the July 2021 protests was opposed by several member countries allied to the Díaz-Canel government, who considered it an unfriendly move towards a non-member country.⁸ The priority Biden has placed on defending democratic principles in his hemispheric foreign policy limits the chance of advancing on Cuba's insertion in pan-American organisations, with the sole exception of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

3.2. Cuba's reinsertion in the region

Cuba's regional status is somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand it is not fully integrated into the region and, on the other, it has been the symbol and promoter of an autonomous Latin American regionalism that challenges the United States and its interpretation of democratic conditionality. While almost all Latin American and Caribbean countries accepted and agreed to this democracy clause, they did not demand that Cuba accept it before joining regional organisations and forums, and nor was there any debate on the issue. In this sense, the island retains its power of attraction due to the Revolution's status as a symbol of resistance and soft-balancing or defiance of US hegemonic power.

Today, Cuba maintains diplomatic relations with the continent's 34 countries. Its political reintegration into the continent has been a gradual process that began in the 1970s in the Caribbean and has lasted several decades. In 1972, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago decided to re-establish diplomatic contacts with Castroism and counteract the regional trend towards isolating Cuba. It was the beginning of a closer relationship with several non-Spanish-speaking neighbours and the transfer of Cuban human resources to certain Caribbean countries. However, the Dominican Republic and Haiti did not re-establish full relations with Cuba until 1998, with Costa Rica and El Salvador following in 2009 when Cuba joined the Summits of the Americas. Although Cuba maintained close ties with its Caribbean neighbours, its support for various attempts to establish socialist governments, such as the 1979 revolution on the island of Grenada that was thwarted by US military intervention in 1983, led to tensions with the region.

In the late 1980s, the disintegration of the socialist bloc forced Cuba to rebuild its relations with Western countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. After a long period of regional isolation and distance, in the post-Cold War setting new spaces for autonomy opened up, allowing full diplomatic insertion and partial integration into certain organisations and economic spaces. Thus, Cuba participated as a founding member in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which was created in 1994 in Cartagena de Indias to promote

8. <https://www.efe.com/efe/usa/portada/la-objecion-de-algunos-paises-obliga-a-oea-aplazar-una-sesion-sobre-cuba/50000064-4597006>

“consultation, cooperation and concerted action” among its 32 member and associated states. Because of its socialist or statist economy, Cuba does not form part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), although bilateral summits have been held since 2002.

These political ties also facilitated some Caribbean countries joining the ALBA initiative, where they benefitted from South–South cooperation with Cuba and oil from Venezuela. As well as opening up new economic opportunities in its neighbourhood, in political terms cooperation with the Caribbean provides Cuba with essential diplomatic support in regional (CELAC) and international (United Nations) forums when it comes to condemning US sanctions and solidarity with Cuba’s anti-hegemonic struggle. Cuba is also a member of organisations with an economic focus like the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) and the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), which it joined in 1996 and 1998, respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2: Cuba in the region

Organisation	Members	Objectives	Status of Cuba	Obstacles
OAS (1948)	34 (Caribbean, LA, North America)	Democracy, development, security	Did not request re-admission	Democracy clause
ALADI (1980)	19 LA countries	Technical harmonisation in trade	Full member since 1998	Socialist economy
ECLAC (1984)	33 LAC countries	Statistics and reports on the socio-economic situation	Full original member	Access to some economic data
SELA (1975)	19 LA countries	Consultation forum, in decline	Founding member	None
CELAC (2011)	33 (Caribbean, LA)	Political dialogue, summits	Full original member	Democracy clause
ALBA (2004)	11 LAC countries	South–South cooperation	Full original member	Financial resources
ACS (1994)	Caribbean countries, Venezuela	Cooperation between Caribbean countries	Founding member	None
Petrocaribe (2005)	Caribbean, Central America, Venezuela	Oil supply	Full integration	Financial resources (Venezuela)
CARICOM (1957)	14 countries	Economic and political integration	Not a member	Socialist economy
CARIFORUM (1970)	15 countries	Caribbean Group of the ACP-EU Group	Full member, but not of the Cotonou Agreement	ACDP Cuba and EU

Source: compiled by authors, updated from Gratius (2018).

Cuba was a founding member of CELAC upon its creation in February 2011 and even hosted the 2nd summit, which took place in Havana on January 28th and 29th 2014 and whose most important outcome was to declare the region a zone of peace. Despite the democracy clause CELAC inherited from its predecessor, the Rio Group, there was no regional debate on Cuba’s incorporation, among other reasons due to the predominance of left-wing governments in the region that promoted the island’s insertion into the intra-Latin American system and which, in passing, sent a message of autonomy to Washington and the OAS.

Backed by Brazil and with Mexico’s longstanding support, Cuba’s incorporation met no intra-regional opposition. This was an important

At present, the Cuban regime is fully recognised and participates in eight out of ten regional initiatives and organisations.

step for Cuba's relations with the EU because regionalism was followed by inter-regionalism and the EU–CELAC Summits automatically counted on Cuban participation without prior debate, as had been the case with previous summits at which the island was present, following the first edition in 1999 in Rio de Janeiro. As well as bringing regional recognition, participating in CELAC enabled Cuba to take part in the two EU–CELAC Summits (2013 and 2015) and the CELAC–China Forum which, unlike the EU–CELAC Summits, which have been halted since 2015, continue to be held every year. Hence, Cuba was fully integrated into the region without being part of the inter-American system. The island is also one of the original members of the Ibero-American Summits set up in 1991 under Spanish leadership. These have played a part in promoting South–South and triangular cooperation in the region and had significant Cuban participation.

At present, the Cuban regime is fully recognised and participates in eight out of ten regional initiatives and organisations. This number includes ALBA, the group the island spearheads with Venezuela, whose appeal grew in the region during the 2004–2014 period and which acted as a counterweight to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) promoted by the United States, which sought to create a hemispheric free trade zone and failed, among other reasons, due to resistance and pressure from the ALBA group, along with Argentina and Brazil (see Table 1). Cuba's participation in all these forums consolidated a successful regional recognition policy that bore fruit over 30 years after the 1959 revolution.

Today Cuba is fully accepted in the majority of LAC organisations and forums and, despite ideological differences, none of its neighbours questions its participation in ALADI, the ACS or CELAC for political reasons or invoking the democracy clause. That is why Latin American and Caribbean countries' reactions to the protests in Cuba in July 2021 and their violent repression were lukewarm, except in countries with centre-right governments like Brazil and Colombia. However, US coercion and the ongoing conflict continue to hinder Cuba's full political and economic insertion in the American continent, including access to soft loans from the IADB.

3.4. Relations with the Caribbean: cooperation without integration

While Cuba established diplomatic relations with a number of Caribbean countries in the 1970s, it was not part of the integration processes that took place in its neighbourhood. The island participated in neither the 1975 creation of CARIFTA (the Caribbean Free Trade Association) nor the 1973 founding of CARICOM (the Caribbean Community) –both free market-based economic integration processes that are incompatible with its centralised socialist economic system.

However, Cuba has played an active role in regional dialogue as a founding member of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and through its close bilateral relations with Caribbean countries via cooperation agreements. The Convention Establishing the ACS was signed on July 24th 1994 in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, with the purpose of promoting “consultation, cooperation and concerted action”

among all the Caribbean countries. It is formed of 25 member states⁹ and seven associate members.¹⁰ It is a consultative body that involves no transfer of sovereign powers and among whose objectives is to develop the potential of the Caribbean Sea through interaction between member states and with third countries and to promote an expanded economic space for trade and investment that provides opportunities for cooperation and dialogue.

Within this framework, Cuba was able to develop its relations not only with the Caribbean islands, but also with the Central American countries with Caribbean coastlines (Martínez Reinoso, 2015). The secretaries-general of CARICOM, the ACS and the Central American Integration System (SICA) meet periodically, but the ambition of achieving cooperation is hamstrung by the shortage of financial resources and the greater strength of other regional initiatives that emerged later. And yet some interesting projects have been set up, such as the Caribbean Sea Commission, which was founded in 2006 to promote and supervise the sustainable use of the Caribbean Sea, the Agreement for Regional Cooperation on Natural Disasters and the progress towards implementing a Caribbean Territorial Information Platform for Disaster Prevention.

The path towards rapprochement between Cuba and CARICOM was promoted from the 11th summit held in Kingston (Jamaica) in 1990, where it was agreed that a commission should be sent to Havana to analyse bilateral collaboration projects, particularly in the fields of biotechnology, human resources development, trade, tourism and the environment. In 1993, the Cuba–CARICOM mixed commission was created and in 1996 Cuba requested that an agreement be negotiated that was eventually finalised in 2000 when the CARICOM–Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed. The Second Protocol to the CARICOM–Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement was signed in 2017 and since 2002, Cuba-CARICOM Summits have been held every three years. In 2002, Cuba drew up a comprehensive plan for the Caribbean (*Plan Integral del Caribe*) that was implemented from 2003 onwards and which sought to bring cohesion to all Cuban actions towards the region and establishes the basic aims of Cuban foreign policy.

Laguardia (2015) gives several reasons why Cuba's accession to CARICOM is, however, unviable: the unique nature of its economic and political model, the transfer of sovereignty that participation in regional integration schemes requires and the exhaustive overhaul the Cuban economy would have to undergo as a prerequisite for admission (Laguardia, 2015). Trade between Cuba and CARICOM therefore remains relatively insignificant compared to trade with other countries. It is hindered by factors such as high transport costs, legal and institutional differences, insufficient financing and credit mechanisms and, manifestly, the United States' continuing blockade against Cuba (Laguardia, 2015). The declaration from the last CARICOM–Cuba Summit on December 8th 2020, which was held remotely and shaped by the impacts of COVID-19, underlines the "will to strengthen South-South cooperation as an expression of solidarity, for the promotion of bilateral and regional programs, as well as triangular cooperation for development",¹¹ especially in the areas of health and natural disasters.

9. Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela.
10. Aruba, Curaçao, France (French Guiana & Saint Barthélemy), Guadeloupe, the Turks and Caicos Islands (inactive), the British Virgin Islands, Martinique, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Saint Martin and Sint Maarten.
11. <https://caricom.org/final-declaration-of-the-7th-caricom-cuba-summit-meeting>

Without full membership of CARICOM Cuba was unable to sign up to the Cotonou Agreement, despite attempts to include it.

Without full membership of CARICOM Cuba was unable to sign up to the Cotonou Agreement, despite attempts to include it on several occasions. This means that EU policy towards Cuba treats it as part of Latin America. As such, cooperation funds are allocated in the percentage that corresponds to the region within the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). Meanwhile, it was not given access to the European Development Fund (EDF) for the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group, as ultimately Cuba was not included in that grouping (Dembicz and Rudowski, 2021). Nevertheless, the Caribbean's inclusion in the NDICI and the integration of EDF resources into the EU's general budget will facilitate EU regional cooperation with the Caribbean, including Cuba. What is more, since 2001, Cuba has been a full member of CARIFORUM, a group for dialogue and cooperation between Caribbean countries and the EU, although it has not joined the EU-CARIFORUM Economic Association Agreement, as it is a free trade agreement.

Petrocaribe was created in 2005, six months after ALBA was officially established in Havana in 2004. These initiatives boosted South-South cooperation in the Caribbean through the perfect combination of Venezuelan financial capital and Cuban human and technical capital (Martinez Reinoso, 2015). The implementation of initiatives such as *Operación Milagro* (to improve the eyesight of people with few resources) and the literacy project *Yo Sí Puedo* helped foster positive feelings towards Cuba among Caribbean countries and people. This helped ensure continued support in international forums such as the OAS and CELAC, where, due to their numbers, these countries provide strong backing. ALBA and Petrocaribe's cooperation has been weakened by Venezuela's political and financial crisis, although many Caribbean countries continue to give political backing in international forums. Petrocaribe has also contributed to funding some cooperation projects within the ACS.

By including several member countries from the Caribbean and having specific projects for the subregion, ALBA and Petrocaribe, led jointly by Cuba and Venezuela, have become the two main platforms for South-South cooperation. Alongside its petrostate ally Venezuela, Cuba took on prominent role in the Caribbean. This, and the fact that it is the largest island in the Antilles, explains Cuba's preference for a bilateral agreement with the EU and for being included in the programme with Latin America and not the EDF. As the latter was originally created to facilitate cooperation with the less-developed former European colonies, Cuba was never really a good fit.

4. Insertion via south-south cooperation: cuba between two worlds

Cuba's international status was exceptional until the Cold War ended, being located somewhere between the "second and third worlds" and isolated in its own neighbourhood for decades by the US policy of embargo and harassment (Alzugaray, 2015). To connect the two spheres of its foreign policy, Cuba engaged with the Soviet bloc and with developing countries outside of LAC. Following the revolution, Cuba took on international commitments, participating in the Non-

Aligned Movement (NAM), which was created in 1961, the G-77 three years later and the Buenos Aires Plan of Action I (1978) and Buenos Aires Plan of Action + 40 (2019), within the framework of the United Nations conferences and initiatives in this field (Ruiz Cumplido, 2015). With the backing of multilateral organisations, Cuban internationalism worked both in its own region – especially with Central American and Caribbean countries – and beyond its neighbourhood, above all in Sub-Saharan Africa, in a continuation of the support for the revolutionary or similar governments to which Cuba provided aid, military advice and medical assistance from the 1960s to the 1980s.

4.1. The first stage of South–South cooperation between the “second and third worlds”

Cuba has traditionally been highly active in South–South cooperation. It did not participate in the Bandung Conference in 1955 (before the revolution), which produced the NAM, but it was the only country from its region to take part as a member at the second conference in Belgrade in 1961, where the group was officially founded and at which most countries were Asian and African. From that point on, it took on a leadership role that led to it organising the 6th Summit Conference in Havana in 1979, in which 96 member states, nine observers and ten guests participated (Albuquerque, 2017).

Cuba has also been a promoter of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA) approved in 1978.¹² This laid the foundations for what is now known as South–South cooperation, whose regained momentum over the last decade was in evidence at the second High-level United Nations Conference on South–South Cooperation (BAPA + 40)¹³ held in 2019 in Buenos Aires. It was also a founding member of the Sao Paulo Forum created in 1990, which later became part of the World Social Forum.

On the other hand, Cuba was part of the socialist bloc and in 1972 joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) led by the Soviet Union. Until the USSR was dissolved and Russia gradually withdrew from 1990 onwards, the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Vietnam and other member states of the socialist bloc were Cuba’s main economic and political partners (Pérez, 1983). Within the CMEA framework, the island also formed close relations with countries such as the pre-unification German Democratic Republic (GDR), Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, which, after joining the EU in 2004 became, under post-socialist governments, harsh critics of the human rights violations of Cuba’s one-party regime in a reversal of their own recent history within the socialist bloc.

Whereas economic relations with that group of countries were very close and various exchange schemes were set up with the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), among other places, these bonds all but disappeared in the last days of the Cold War and when the first democratic governments renewed their countries’ political relations with still-socialist Cuba they were difficult and at times conflictive. Among other occasions, this was evident during the annual meetings of the

Cuban internationalism worked both in its own region – especially with Central American and Caribbean countries – and beyond its neighbourhood, above all in Sub-Saharan Africa.

12. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B-buqyoV0jpSMm1OVEZYU2hNTWc/view?resourcekey=0-vHSWEOfh9t7DRHmRvShVZQ>

13. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/066/47/PDF/N1906647.pdf?OpenElement>

South–South cooperation was a way to export the Cuban Revolution and win allies (against the United States) outside the Americas.

Council of the EU on the Common Position on Cuba approved in 1996, with Poland and the Czech Republic promoting diplomatic sanctions against the Cuban government and a hard political line.

During the Cold War, Cuban activism beyond CMEA and its immediate environment focused mainly on Africa (Angola, Mozambique), where there was more room for manoeuvre than in LAC, which was dominated by the US as hegemonic power. Cuba supported the struggles for independence in Algeria (1954–62), Mozambique (1964–74), Angola (1961–75), Guinea-Bissau (1963–4) and Cape Verde (1962–75), among other places, with military cooperation accompanied by social assistance (medical services and literacy campaigns). At the time, South–South cooperation was a way to export the Cuban Revolution and win allies (against the United States) outside the Americas and, among other reasons, to each year condemn the unilateral sanctions Washington imposed on the island.

4.2. The second stage of South–South cooperation with Latin America

Aiming to export the Revolution around the region, Cuba gave support to the armed struggles in Bolivia and Colombia and later Nicaragua during the Sandinista Revolution of 1979. This generated tensions with several countries in the region and within the OAS and, among other things, hindered its political and economic reintegration into the neighbourhood. Once the Cold War ended, relations became more cooperative. Cuba offered medical services to ideologically sympathetic countries and in 1999, under Fidel Castro's presidency, set up the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM), which to this day trains doctors and other health personnel from many Latin American and African countries (Kirk and Erisman, 2009). ELAM is part of the Comprehensive Health Program (PIS), which promotes Cuban health internationalism in Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. Its purpose is twofold: to export Cuban health services abroad in order to increase soft power while at the same time counteracting the capitalist model embodied by the United States – in Guerra Rondón's words, creating a counter-hegemonic tool (2020: 4).

In this second phase of post–Cold War South–South cooperation, Cuba's aims were both ideological and economic, as compensated solidarity (Guerra Rondón: 2020) or compensated collaboration (Ruiz Cumplido, 2015: 155) became a business with its own institutions and agency dedicated to collecting repayment for the human resources Cuba sent to many neighbouring countries and around the world. In 2019, the year before the pandemic, the island participated in 250 actions, projects and cooperation programmes, mostly bilateral South–South cooperation in the health and education fields (SEGIB, 2021: 156)

The alliance with Venezuela, which began with Hugo Chávez's first official trip to the island in 2000, led Cuba's presence in the region to grow substantially. The initial bilateral agreements signed were expanded and, in 2004, the two countries launched the ALBA South–South cooperation initiative, which sought to develop an alternative development model to the liberalism of the US-led FTAA project (Gratius

and Puente, 2018). The main goal of the ALBA alliance, which is made up of nine countries (Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela and five Caribbean nations) was to create a counter-hegemonic unit to oppose the United States (Toro, 2011). Much more effective in terms of visibility and as a “rebel countries” brand (Escudé and Schenoni, 2016) than as a South–South cooperation initiative, its main limitations have been a top-down governmental approach and the unfeasibility of many proposed projects, including the adoption of a common currency (impossible to achieve without transferring sovereignty to supranational institutions).

ALBA was most notable for its annual summits. At these events, leaders who were ideologically sympathetic to Cuban socialism demonstrated unity and cooperation that extended to ALBA member countries and particularly its strategic ally Venezuela. In its early years, the Cuba-designed, Venezuela-funded ALBA initiative increased the visibility, presence and soft power of the Castro regime among participating countries and the rest of the region, who either sought rapprochement or opposed the project (Benzi, 2016).

The ideological division of the region that occurred after ALBA emerged had both costs and benefits. On the one hand, the counter-hegemonic alliance led by Cuba and Venezuela demonstrated their ideational and material power, as well as their capacity to resist the United States, and at the Summit of the Americas in Bariloche, Argentina in 2005 it halted the FTAA project. On the other hand, ALBA brought an ideological polarisation to the region that ultimately led to the dissolution of UNASUR due to a confrontation between Bolivia and the countries with conservative governments. It also caused a crisis in CELAC that remains ongoing, although the summit on September 18th 2021 in Mexico may suggest a new, more autonomous political direction, in line with Cuban and Venezuelan foreign policy (Mansilla, 2021). The binational alliance was highly beneficial to Cuba, as it increased its presence on the continent and, in economic terms, allowed it to guarantee high income from reselling oil received in exchange for the Cuban human resources sent to Venezuela, an exchange that until 2013 made up 40% of Cuba’s total trade (Gratius and Puente, 2018).

ALBA brought an ideological polarisation to the region that ultimately led to the dissolution of UNASUR.

4.3. The fourth stage of South–South cooperation or its end?

Cuba has been exporting its professional services (mainly doctors and teachers) to third countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia for decades, and during the COVID-19 pandemic sent 3,800 healthcare professionals to 39 countries, including Italy (Guerra Rondón 2020: 2). However, Cuba’s prospects of continuing to play a leading role in South–South cooperation have been diminished by both the hardships the island has suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic and ALBA’s existential crisis, as its main funder, Venezuela, enters economic and financial collapse, making the organisation’s continuity unsustainable (Gratius and Puente, 2018). On the other hand, having developed its own vaccines, which it will commercialise in the Global South, opens up new horizons for the Cuban biotechnology and health sector, which, despite its decline in recent years, remains at the vanguard in LAC. Unlike many other countries in the region, Cuba has a universal healthcare system. Despite the continuing exportation of medical services reducing national

More diversified relationships with the region and third states are emerging as a survival strategy.

coverage, Cuba still had nine doctors per 1,000 inhabitants in 2019, while the average for the region is 2.1 doctors per 1,000 inhabitants (Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas, ONE, Cuba).

Cuba's active engagement in South–South cooperation has both advantages and disadvantages. In the first and second phases, it was a means of attempting to spread the Revolution to other countries, but above all to gain ideational and material power (through its alliances with the USSR and Venezuela). However, it was also a risky bet, as shown first by the USSR's sudden and unexpected disappearance and later by the political, economic and social crisis enveloping Venezuela. In both cases, Cuba's material dependence on Soviet and Venezuelan oil, which it resold on the international market in exchange for foreign currency, was highly significant: between 1972 and 1990, 90% of Cuban trade was with the USSR and between 2003 and 2013, 40% of Cuban GDP depended on the exchange of human resources for Venezuelan oil. Unsurprisingly, more diversified relationships with the region and third states are emerging as a survival strategy (Gratius, 2019).

5. Assessing the special insertion model

In 2021, Cuba is a country that is politically integrated in LAC but economically distant from regional integration projects due to its socialist system, which prevents it from participating in free trade agreements or economic integration processes. As such, Cuba is not part of CARICOM or any other regional initiative with these characteristics. Another peculiarity is its exceptional position in and partial exclusion from the inter-American system. Since 2009 it has been part of the Summits of the Americas, but it is not a member of the OAS and it does not receive credits and/or projects from the IMF, the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank. It does however participate in the PAHO, and has played an active and important role during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cuba falls between two stools: on the one hand, it is part of several continental initiatives (the Summits, PAHO), while on the other it denounces the US sanctions and democratic conditionality that prevent it from fully inserting itself into the inter-American system. It could, theoretically, be part of the OAS, but it prefers to avoid discussion and facing the opposition of the many countries led by the US on the subject of its one-party political system, which certainly neither meets nor aspires to meet the criteria of a liberal democracy. Until structural political changes take place on the island or the US lifts its embargo, Cuba will continue to occupy a *sui generis* place in the inter-American system.

Even so, it is a country that is wholly integrated in LAC and a full member of CELAC whose links with regional organisations in the Caribbean are growing. It is also among the most active countries with the largest number of South–South cooperation projects (SEGIB, 2021) in Africa and Latin America. Its active role in regional (ALBA) and global (Africa and other regions) South-South cooperation and its multilateral commitment, as a founding member of the UN and participant in the NAM, the G-77 and the São Paulo Forum, all combine to bolster its regional presence and give it a proactive foreign policy that other larger countries lack.

The key characteristics of Cuba's sui generis insertion model are its mix of political and ideological alliances based on the socialist system, a disproportionately large regional and international commitment for the small size of the island, and its resilience and marked anti-imperialism on the Latin American and global stage. The advantages are the island's regional and international presence and influence and its ability to forge alliances with countries of greater size and/or strategic weight that, while asymmetrical, have at least temporarily assisted the government in preserving its socialist system. South–South cooperation and resistance to US harassment have helped mould the island's international image of resilience in the face of a very powerful "enemy", which has incentivised other anti-hegemonic or anti-imperialist policies, as embodied, regionally, in the ALBA alliance.

Despite Washington's pressure, Cuba has achieved full diplomatic recognition from all the countries in the region. With the US ultimately isolated by its diplomatic breakdown with the island, then Democratic President Barack Obama decided to put an end to the policy and rekindle relations with Havana, an important step dramatised by a historic visit to Cuba in 2015. This important decision, which despite the additional sanctions imposed on Cuba was not reversed under President Trump, was primarily the result of Latin American pressure (particularly from Brazil). When the continent's electoral map underwent a conservative shift just a few years later the balance tipped against Cuba once again.

The politically driven commitment to regional and international insertion had great economic benefits while the alliances with the USSR and Venezuela lasted, but high costs were incurred when these strategic relations disintegrated. This has been reflected in a deep recession over the past eight years, with GDP falling in 2020 by a historic 10.9% and an inflation rate that, according to official ONE data, reached over 178% in October 2021 and an interannual rate of 66%.¹⁴ The political pillars of Cuba's insertion model (autonomy, South–South cooperation, anti-imperialism) appear to be somewhat contradicted by the economic pragmatism of trading with countries and entities that are not ideological allies of the Cuban Revolution. Nor are they consistent with extreme dependence on the outside world, as is the case with tourism forming the main source of GDP and the need to import 75% of food, conditions that Cuba shares with many of its Caribbean neighbours. Meanwhile, contrary to its discourse of autonomy, the alliances with non-socialist countries have forced Cuba to adapt its economy to the demands of global capitalism – albeit in a way that was controlled and tutored by the government – and take on new dependencies and asymmetries.

Despite these setbacks, Cuba shows that there is more than one path to regional insertion in the Americas. The route Cuba has taken combines capitalist instruments with alternatives like South–South cooperation, while also seeking out ideologically similar allies with greater material capacity in order to achieve insertion in its neighbourhood and the wider world without losing its own identity. In this sense, Cuba's regional insertion has been pragmatic. The socialist nature of the regime has not been renounced and political impositions with practical implications for its own political system have not been accepted. The insertion is

The politically driven commitment to regional and international insertion had great economic benefits while the alliances with the USSR and Venezuela lasted, but also high costs.

14. ONEI: <http://www.onei.gob.cu/publicaciones-tipo/Serie>

Cuba will need external cooperation to overcome a multidimensional crisis and the major difficulties it has accessing financial resources.

incomplete, sectoral and intermittent, in order – from the government's point of view – to avoid jeopardising the foundations of the Revolution: the one-party system, majority state ownership, control over society and the absence of foreign interference in domestic affairs. In the economic sphere, the need to survive has brought significant, but very slow concessions to capitalism (both internal and external), including long periods of adaptation and reflection that preserve the essence of a socialist or state-centric economy (Alonso and Vidal, 2020, link), and produce a complex interaction between state structures and private initiative wherever it is allowed to operate.

Any assessment of the success of Cuba's insertion model must therefore be mixed. On the one hand, it has acquired considerable soft power through the export of medical services and other human resources within the framework of South-South cooperation. This has helped preserve the reputation of the social pillars of the Revolution. On the other hand, its political system has brought costs in the form of the US sanctions that have forced Cuban governments to seek risky alternatives. A difficulty obtaining international credit is among them. This has been severe and is partially responsible for the public discontent that broke out in a wave of protests throughout the country on July 11th 2021, although there were many other factors, including the inefficient planning system and the dependence on imports for basic necessities (Welp, 2021; Whitehead/Hoffmann, 2021).

In the immediate future, Cuba will need external cooperation to overcome a multidimensional crisis and the major difficulties it has accessing financial resources to help tackle its growing fiscal deficit. Its greater integration into regional cooperation structures and the changes in the EU's international cooperation with the region may help it access previously unavailable funds and instruments. Meanwhile, due to its active role in South-South cooperation, Cuba is a privileged partner for triangular cooperation projects with the EU, particularly in Africa. It is also an important partner for greater bi-regional collaboration to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, Cuba's full participation in regional and interregional cooperation schemes continues to be held back by two of the political and economic pillars of the socialist regime that the Constitution declares untouchable. But there is room to increase flexibility and improve insertion to bring an end to the extreme dependence of previous eras.

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Marie Laure Geoffray

IHEAL-Sorbonne Nouvelle

Introduction

This chapter aims to show the extent to which the actions of Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), towards Cuba (and Venezuela and Nicaragua, although they will not be addressed here) since 2015 has led to the re-politicisation of Cuba as an issue and of the OAS as an organisation. Most literature on international organisations points out that they tend to tackle issues in technical ways, to avoid conflict and thus “manage” or “govern” the world order in a “depoliticized” way (Waltz, 1979; Keohane, 1989; Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). But recent scholarship has shown that international organisations in fact undergo processes of both politicisation and depoliticisation, just like other bureaucracies (Petiteville, 2016; 2017). I understand politicisation to be the crafting of a debate around an issue that generates collective mobilisation, polarisation and cleavage, and ideological controversies and conflicts (Petiteville, 2016). Politics are generally deflected by specific processes within international organisations: their technification and reliance on “objective” expertise or universal norms, their avoidance of conflict and dilation in time (Louis and Maertens, 2021).

The OAS is a specific type of international organisation, being dominated by one superpower in a continental context of great power asymmetry. Indeed, the US is both the provider of most of the organisation’s budget¹ and home to its headquarters. Because of the history of US military and political intervention on the subcontinent, the OAS has often been portrayed and perceived as a highly political and politicised organisation that advances the specific interests of the US. However, many scholars and experts have argued that US influence has diminished over the years (Boniface, 2002; Shaw 2004), especially in the 2000s, thanks to the emergence of left-of-centre governments in many South American nations and the creation of new regional bodies such as ALBA, CELAC and UNASUR, which excluded the US (and Canada) (Lopez-Levy, 2009; Gratius, 2018). These new organisations promote a more autonomous kind of regional integration based on cooperation and complementarity and they strongly support

1. 59% in 2020 according to Larry Luxner, “Nestor Mendez discusses OAS priorities in wake of Venezuela, migrant crises”, *The Washington Diplomat*, 29.08.2019 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://washdiplomat.com/nestor-mendez-discusses-oas-priorities-in-wake-of-venezuela-migrant-crises/>

the principle of national and regional sovereignty (Legler, 2013). Hence, all include Cuba, despite the ongoing political debates over the nature and legitimacy of its political system. It cannot be said that these new integration processes were not politicised – as they entailed a break from US domination and were often driven by leftist governments – but they were intended to overcome the historical polarisation of the Cuban issue on the subcontinent.

Since Luis Almagro was elected Secretary General in 2015, scholars and experts alike have noted that the role of the OAS General Secretariat has shifted as Almagro's politics have become much more aligned with those of the White House and State Department under President Donald Trump (Marcetic, 2019; Pensack, 2020). As such, the new Secretary General has, among other things, implemented a policy which consists of stigmatising and sanctioning the Venezuelan and Cuban governments. This was unexpected, as his candidacy was strongly promoted by former Uruguayan president José Mujica and was even supported by Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro. The objective of this paper is to try and understand the newfound policy direction of the Secretary General, which I will analyse as a form a repoliticisation of the institution and of the role of the Secretary General. The issue of Cuba and its interaction with the Venezuelan situation have been key to that process. Indeed, since 2015 OAS policy has regained the anti-communist undertones of the 1960s. It once again emphasises the need for a total institutional break, not only with the Cuban government, but also with those considered its allies in the hemisphere and beyond.

I will first outline the history of the OAS resolutions on Cuba to show the extent to which, at the turn of the 21st century, the Cuban question had been somewhat depoliticised, in terms of its management within the inter-American system. I will then show that Luis Almagro's election as Secretary General of the OAS has changed this situation and that his actions have led to the repoliticisation of the Cuban question, which has in turn contributed to the heightened political polarisation on the continent. Finally, I will mention some of the consequences of this position on how democracy is conceptualised in certain political and institutional circles on the subcontinent.

I will not discuss the authoritarian characteristics of the Cuban, Nicaraguan and Venezuelan governments and their violations of human rights, which have been thoroughly documented elsewhere. This paper rather aims at discussing the specific way the OAS is dealing with these political regimes (all of which are associated with the left), without giving the same attention to other forms of political crises and democratic backsliding in the Americas today. This is problematic, because in the very polarised contemporary American context (both north and south), the OAS will be unable to legitimate its mission in terms of human rights and democracy promotion if it does not apply the same rules and criteria everywhere. Indeed, research has shown that lack of consistency in the promotion of democracy and human rights leads to inefficiency (Pace, 2009) and can backfire (Tezcür, 2012). Meanwhile, powerful governments' actions are not trusted if they do not also enforce consistent democratic policies at home (Whitehead, 2016).

1. From anti-communist consensus to foreign policy pragmatism

From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, a shift took place and the anti-communist consensus against the Cuban government gave way to the implementation of pragmatic foreign policies on the subcontinent. The opening of archives and the publication of recent works on the foreign policies of the different Latin American states show that, despite the political differences in Latin America, only the United States has conducted a policy of exception towards Cuba for more than six decades.

An anti-communist consensus

The opening of these diplomatic archives in many countries and new historiographical work on the inter-American system shows that the “Cuban question” was actually less divisive among Latin American governments than had been thought (Keller, 2015; Karl, 2016; Harmer, 2019). While the literature (Lopez-Levy, 2009; Kornbluh and LeoGrande, 2015; Rabe, 2012; Grandin, 2006) seemed to pit governments that were relatively supportive of the Cuban Revolution (whose leaders saw the OAS as an imperialist weapon)² against those who wished to overthrow it through sanctions or an invasion led by US forces, recent work shows that, in fact, almost all governments in the subcontinent were opposed to the socialist turn taken by the leaders of the Cuban Revolution in 1960 and 1961.

The work of historian Tanya Harmer (2019) is particularly stimulating in this regard. She recalls that only three had not broken off diplomatic relations with the USSR by the mid-1950s. All the governments were then characterised by their anti-communist positions and largely aligned with the position of the United States in the East–West conflict. On the Latin American continent, even progressive leaders who had initially recognised the legitimacy of the Cuban revolution (such as José Figueres in Costa Rica and Romulo Betancourt in Venezuela) supported the Cuban exiles during the 1960s. Indeed, the policy of exporting the Cuban revolution by providing support to guerrillas and social movements in the region worried the political elites (Rabe, 1988; Harmer, 2019). The “communist threat” was, thus, understood both as an external threat (Soviet intervention) and an internal one (destabilising traditional political elites).

Harmer shows that while there was consensus on the existence of this threat, there were differences over how to deal with it. Some supported the principle of non-intervention, one of the pillars of the inter-American system, while others wanted to implement a policy of sanctions or even promote a military intervention by the United States. On the other hand, various governments (Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia) argued that punitive measures would be counterproductive, in the sense that they would promote a closer alliance with the Soviet bloc and generate even stronger support for the Cuban experience among social movements and opposition parties in Latin America. Still other governments were interested in developing economic and commercial exchanges with Cuba in order to benefit from the US embargo policy (Marques Bezerra, 2012).

From the 1960s to the mid-1970s, a shift took place and the anti-communist consensus against the Cuban government gave way to the implementation of pragmatic foreign policies on the subcontinent.

2. Fidel Castro called the OAS little more than a “Yankee Ministry of Colonies” in a Speech at the Second National Assembly of the People of Cuba on February 4th 1962 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/cuba-and-the-oas-story-dramatic-fallout-and-reconciliation>

All Latin American governments agreed with the US State Department's analysis that the circulation of communist ideas thrived on the widespread poverty.

In any case, it is particularly relevant to underline that all Latin American governments agreed with the US State Department's analysis that the circulation of communist ideas thrived on the widespread poverty among the continent's population (Harmer, 2019). At that time, there was consensus on the need to implement both development and redistributive social policies. All the countries in the subcontinent went on to welcome the launch of the Alliance for Progress (Rabe, 2014), including the most conservative forces (e.g., the pro-Batista Cuban exiles).³

These analyses make it clear that the policy of sanctions against Cuba – suspension from the OAS in 1962, the arms embargo and the suspension of the Inter-American Defense Board, followed in 1964 by restrictions on trade, the implementation of Article 6 of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) and the severance of diplomatic relations – was not solely the result of pressure from the United States, but rather of a common understanding of the threat posed by the Cuban Revolution at that time. The desire expressed by Latin American governments for Cuba's return to the inter-American system in 2009 cannot be seen to be solely the effect of a loosening of US hegemony on the subcontinent.

1975: A silent turning point

To account for the dynamics that led to Cuba's suspension from the OAS being overturned in 2009, we must return to the silent turning point of the mid-1970s. Ten years after the OAS implemented its sanctions policy, several countries had already re-established diplomatic relations with Cuba and others wished to do so. Most countries no longer considered Cuba to be a threat in the hemisphere. Thus, in 1974 the foreign ministers of Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela requested the suspension of the measures voted for in 1964. They did not obtain the necessary 2/3 qualified majority (14 votes out of 21). But it is interesting to note, nevertheless, that the 12 countries that voted in favour of lifting the sanctions asked for a statement of protest against the voting procedure and its consequences to be entered into the minutes of the meeting.

In this statement, they criticise the fact that a blocking minority (three countries) supported by the abstention of six other countries, led to the failure of the request for suspension. They therefore warn that they no longer feel bound by Resolution I of the 9th Meeting of Consultation of 1964 and are free to re-establish diplomatic relations with Cuba.⁴ They conclude by emphasising that their intention was not to devitalise the inter-American system, but rather to restructure it to respond to the pressing problems facing the subcontinent – “underdevelopment, poverty and violence” – while respecting the central principle of non-intervention. Although the signatories of the text did not explicitly denounce the OAS's double standards, since Chile, Uruguay and Brazil (the three countries in the blocking minority) were all governed by military juntas at the time, the text was a blow to the legitimacy of the inter-American system.

In 1975, Colombia, Venezuela and Costa Rica, accompanied by seven other countries, asked for a new vote on the “freedom of action” of member countries with regard to Cuba at the 16th Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in San José, Costa Rica. This

3. See *Patria*, the pro-Batista newspaper founded by Ernesto Montaner in Miami in the summer of 1959. Accessible at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami.

4. Proceedings of the 15th Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Quito, Ecuador, 8–12 November 1974 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%2015.pdf>

time they obtained the votes in favour of a majority of the countries, including the United States. Only Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay voted against, while Brazil abstained this time, along with Nicaragua.⁵ This vote allowed countries to choose whether to reinstate diplomatic relations with Cuba (Krepp, 2017). It should be noted that several countries (Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Panama, as well as several small Caribbean countries) had already resumed relations with Cuba without waiting for the vote (Kruijt, 2017).

The creation of the Latin American Economic System (SELA) in 1975 has already demonstrated the existence of an even greater desire for autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. This organisation included Cuba and excluded the neighbouring superpower, in a context in which military regimes remained in power in the Southern Cone. The organisation's headquarters were located in Caracas and Venezuela was its largest financial contributor (Balfour, 1999). Thus, under the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974–1978), Venezuela was already using its extraordinary oil resources to play a major role in the subcontinent's claims to economic and commercial independence. As can be seen, the normalisation of relations of all kinds with Cuba took place long before both the transitions to democracy and the so-called leftward turns in Latin America. It was a pragmatic normalisation as far as economic and commercial relations were concerned, which also benefited from the rise of "Third World" countries coordinating in the Non-Aligned Movement. Indeed, unlike the Cuban case, the OAS refused to take action against the Sandinista guerrillas in 1978–1979 and even issued a resolution advocating "for the replacement of Somoza and leaving the solution of the conflict in the hands of the Nicaraguan people" (Shaw, 1999). All these examples show that Latin American states had much more leeway in decision-making at the OAS than scholars had thought (Shaw, 2004).

The relative depoliticisation of the Cuban issue from the 1980s onwards

This pragmatic normalisation was in play until the 1990s. Before that, in the 1980s, Cuba had been involved in the negotiations conducted by the Contadora Group to find a way out of the crisis in Central America, thus partially bypassing the OAS (Heller, 2003). In 1994, it was César Gaviria, former centre-right Colombian president and then Secretary General of the OAS, who expressed the desire that the organisation take the Cuban question in hand and begin the process of fully reintegrating Cuba into the inter-American system (Gaviria, 1994). In 1996, the OAS General Assembly passed a resolution on "Freedom of Trade and Investment in the Hemisphere", which was a clear and unanimous rejection (except for the negative vote of the United States) of the Helms-Burton Act, which the US Congress passed that same year to strengthen the sanctions against Cuba (Heller, 2003). After joining the Association of Caribbean States in 1994, Cuba joined ALADI, the Latin American Integration Association, in 1998. Governments of both right and left were thus not only tolerating the existence of the Cuban communist regime, but building new regional cooperation organisations with Cuba (Heine and Weiffen, 2014) well before Hugo Chávez became president of Venezuela. Of course, this

The normalisation of relations of all kinds with Cuba took place long before both the transitions to democracy and the so-called leftward turns in Latin America.

5. Proceedings of the 16th Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, July 29th, 1975, San José, Costa Rica, (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%2016.pdf>

Latin American support for the principle of non-intervention is thus not a hallmark of leftward drifts.

process accelerated after Chávez won the presidential elections in 1998. He crafted an alliance with the Cuban government that resulted in the creation of ALBA in 2004, which made Cuba a member of eight of the continent's ten regional organisations (Gratius, 2018). The possibility of welcoming Cuba back into the OAS was also regularly discussed during José Miguel Insulza's mandate until the lifting of the 1962 suspension.⁶

Indeed, from the year 2000 onwards, there was bipartisan consensus on the failure of the policy of sanctions and isolation pursued by the United States (Griswold, 2009) and the OAS since the 1962 resolution on Cuba's suspension from the organisation (Gaviria, 1994; CIDH, 2006). The same consensus can also be found in the academic literature (Lowenthal, 2009; Legler, 2012; Kornbluh and LeoGrande, 2015). The 1990s and 2000s were also marked by a growing desire for autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. Latin American support for the principle of non-intervention is thus not a hallmark of leftward drifts. As early as 1992, Mexico and many small Caribbean countries opposed the Washington Protocol (which included the possibility of suspending a member of the organisation for failing to comply with democratic norms) for what they perceived as an intrusion in their internal affairs (Ribeiro Hoffmann, 2019). At the time, they were not yet benefiting from the oil subsidies granted under the Chávez and then Maduro governments as part of the PetroCaribe cooperation. It should also be underlined that the newly founded regional organisations like CELAC and UNASUR, which competed with the OAS and included Cuba, were supported by right-wing governments as well as by left-wing ones.

Thus, in 2009, when the members of the OAS voted unanimously to abolish the resolution suspending Cuba from the organisation, it was a decision that was as much the result of new power politics on the subcontinent, such as leftward turns, as of more long-term economic, political and diplomatic processes. Nonetheless, other long-term issues were still in play at that time. Long-term divisions persisted between the governments that continued to support the Cuban government (Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina) and others which were looking for a new strategy to promote democracy and human rights on the island. Engagement thus meant rather different things to different countries: support for the socialist experiment on the one hand and the implementation of non-coercive democracy promotion on the other (Merke, 2015). All in all, there was convergence over the need to adopt a more pragmatic and less polarising approach that would be based on dialogue, cooperation and negotiation.

2. Repoliticisation at the OAS General Secretariat after 2015

In this section I will show that since his election in 2015 the new OAS Secretary General has inaugurated a new era for the hemisphere's international regime (Legler, 2012): whereas the institutional design of inter-American democracy promotion is state-centric (Legler and Tiekou, 2010), Almagro has promoted civil society participation. This participation departs from the previously encouraged "insider civil

6. *CNN en español*, "Insulza: cuando llegué a la OEA no se hablaba de Cuba", 25 May 2015 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2015/05/25/insulza-cuando-yo-llegue-a-la-oea-no-se-hablaba-de-cuba/>

society” (Smith and Korzeniewicz, 2006) based around well-established knowledge-based NGOs and foundations focused on creating expertise that have connections to the political world. Although Luis Almagro also relies on this “insider civil society”, he has opened the door to “militant, combative civil society groups” (Legler, 2012), who work to provoke the demise of authoritarian governments through different means, some of them coercive and even violent. He has also relied on conservative executives to push his agenda within the OAS, especially at the Permanent Council. How can we explain this turn of events? Into what concrete forms has it translated? Finally, what does it tell us about the leadership of the Secretary General and the OAS as an international organisation?

The re-emergence of Cold War discourse

When Almagro was elected Secretary General of the OAS, few expected his mandate to become a crusade against certain Latin American governments. Almagro himself puts special emphasis on the need for dialogue and negotiation:

We are also living in a world of uncertainty in which power is expressed in the most diverse and increasingly less conventional ways, in which we must advance a positive agenda to help the OAS rise to the occasion and prevent the Hemisphere from relapsing into Cold War practices, which we must avoid by every means. To do so, we have to shore up the negotiation, mediation, and consensus-building skills of this OAS, which brings together all countries of the Hemisphere. (Excerpt from his swearing-in speech, May 26th 2015)⁷.

The new Secretary General even warns against “relapsing into Cold War practices” that may lead to violent confrontation at the expense of the people of the Americas. He presents himself as a diplomat intent on opening up dialogues and wary of the sanctions strategy. One of his objectives is to welcome Cuba back into the OAS;⁸ he even stresses Cuba’s capacity to bring its expertise to the continent’s development agenda. Where Venezuela is concerned, Almagro very clearly positions himself against the sanctions diplomacy implemented by the United States, as it hinders the necessary dialogue between different sectors of the society.⁹ He thus proposed to work with all countries “without exceptions” and “put an end to unnecessary fragmentations” (Gaudan, 2015).

Nonetheless, less than a year into his first mandate, the Secretary General started acting in a way which contradicted his early speeches. He put pressure on Nicolás Maduro’s government to allow OAS observers to attend the Venezuelan elections, which took place in December 2015. He openly supported the Venezuelan opposition. And he publicly insulted Maduro, calling him a “*dictadorzuelo*”. So marked was the change that his former mentor, José Mujica, sent him an open letter, making clear that their political paths had diverged too much to keep working together.¹⁰ Three years later, Luis Almagro was expelled from the Frente Amplio.¹¹ In 2017 and especially 2018, he began developing a new discourse about Cuba, reformulating some of the tropes of the Cold War era, especially those put forward by Latin American governments and which led to Cuba’s suspension from the OAS¹².

7. Luis Almagro, « Towards an OAS for the 21st century », May, 26th, 2015, Remarks by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro Lemes, on the occasion of his inauguration https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=S-009/15
8. *El País* (Uruguay) “OEA debe hacer mea culpa por haber expulsado a Cuba”, May 27th 2015 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://www.elpais.com.uy/informacion/almagro-oea-debe-mea-culpa-haber-expulsado-cuba.html>
9. See his interview “Luis Almagro: ‘Cuba puede aportar mucho a la OEA’”, *El Comercio*, March 21st 2015 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/entrevista-luisalmagro-cuba-secretario-oea.html>
10. See: subrayado.com.uy/pelea-almagro-y-mujica-provoca-renuncia-asesores-la-oea-n51064; the open letter can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/unetvhn/posts/1497046300424079>
11. *CNN en español*, “Luis Almagro es expulsado del Partido Frente Amplio en Uruguay”, December 15th 2018 (online). [Accessed on 09.02.2022]: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2018/12/15/almagro-expulsado-frente-amplio-uruguay-partido/>
12. I have selected all of Luis Almagro’s official speeches and press releases on the Cuban situation and I have added his more general speeches (general statements, statements on Venezuela, speeches on democracy and the inter-American democratic system) in which Cuba is mentioned, as they often mention Cuba’s negative influence on the hemisphere (29 speeches in total). I have taken into consideration both his official speeches (available on the OAS website) and press releases, as well as his speeches in other kinds of venue. Table 1 is a short synthesis of the ideas he develops in his speeches.

Table 1: Cuba's influence on the hemisphere according to the OAS Secretary General's speeches (2015-2021) (translated from the Spanish original)

How Cuba is defined politically	Its effects on the hemisphere	Need for action
<p>Authoritarianism/totalitarianism "Cuba is a perfect example of a captive nation. The communist dictatorship not only enslaves, tortures, murders, persecutes, intimidates and forces its people into exile, it also exports its totalitarian practices to the rest of the region"¹³ "stays in power through brute force and fear"¹⁴ "state terrorism against its citizens"¹⁵</p>	<p>Exporting authoritarian practices "Cuba today controls the Venezuelan civilian intelligence service, as well as the military intelligence service; it controls the Bolivarian National Guard, as well as <i>colectivos</i>, armed gangs, who are asked to do the government's dirty work, shooting and terrorising demonstrators"¹⁶</p>	<p>Need for confrontation "Unfortunately, those who look the other way, those who support these actions by the dictatorship, are supporting this violent solution, sometimes even while saying that they do not support a violent solution they are doing so. [...] Permissiveness won't solve anything, it has never existed in any part of the world where a dictatorship has ended, dictatorships end when they are confronted and they are ended by those who confront them and that is why we especially welcome the resolution that has been approved today"¹⁷</p>
<p>Human rights violations "Cuba is the longest-lived dictatorship in the Americas, the absence of rights is flagrant. They call themselves a dictatorship of the proletariat, but in reality it is a dictatorship against the proletariat and against the workers, where the basic right of independent unionisation does not exist and forms of forced labour persist, some of which we have denounced within the framework of medical missions"¹⁸</p>	<p>Creates polarisation and violence "When there is a dictatorship, it is completely dysfunctional in the rest of the hemisphere"¹⁹ "dictatorships are the origin and the root cause of polarisation in this hemisphere"²⁰ "Cuba is a "central lab" of "destabilisation"²¹ "their old methodology of exporting polarisation and bad practices to essentially finance, support and promote political and social conflict"²²</p>	<p>Need to fight back "In democracy, we still have the need to seek mechanisms to fight impunity, and to confront phenomena and bad practices that threaten the preservation of human rights, such as organised crime, drug trafficking and corruption"²³ "The responsible path for Venezuela is that of R2P, the irresponsible path is that of Hands Off Venezuela. Today, we have to ask for all hands on Venezuela, because we have to solve the most important humanitarian crisis that the continent has ever had"</p>
<p>Economic failure "the clearest and most pathetic example of political, economic, social and productive failure. Complete destruction of the productive apparatus, complete destruction of the economic variables and complete destruction of the full exercise of sovereignty by the people"²⁴</p>	<p>Use of Venezuela for Cuban purposes There is an "occupation army in Venezuela"²⁵ "The Cubans have been intervening in Venezuela for years. It is the only military intervention that has ever happened in that country. The Cubans are a parasite that keeps sucking on the carcass of Venezuela's dead economy"²⁶</p>	<p>Drive Cuba out of Venezuela "For too long the Cuban dictatorship has enjoyed impunity; the OAS is working to put an end to this state of affairs"²⁷</p>
<p>Organised crime and drug trafficking "The Cuban dictatorship was the first to make the state work according to the logic of drug trafficking. It came out of a very Cuban methodology, finding 6 or 7 scapegoats, including war heroes such as General Ochoa"²⁸</p>	<p>Organised crime and drug trafficking "Corruption, crimes against humanity and drug trafficking, that is the complete dictatorial combo of the Venezuelan dictatorship. It was not even invented by the Venezuelan dictatorship, the origin is the Cuban dictatorship, those old leftovers of the Cuban dictatorship were introduced into the logic of the 21st century in a process that we could call the "thousand steps", for the installation of the Venezuelan dictatorship"²⁹</p>	<p>Organised crime and elections "What does drug trafficking and organised crime mean in political terms? It means money, money that is pumped into the democratic system and then pierces it like gruyère cheese. If there is one thing I would like to do more than anything else in the world, it is to go after Bolivarian money in every campaign in the hemisphere, from Canada to Tierra del Fuego. It is what would clean up the political systems of the hemisphere the most, what would generate the best conditions for the functioning of democracy, to clean up that money pumped into campaigns and political activities for all those years"³⁰</p>

Cold war discourses about Cuba have been marked by five characteristics: 1. an emphasis on the Cuban government's ideology (Marxist-Leninist) and its incompatibility with representative democracy; 2. a focus on the violations of human rights and due process; 3. the

idea that Cuba was a Soviet proxy and not an autonomous communist regime; 4. the idea that the mere existence of the Cuban regime posed a security threat to the hemisphere, as the Cuban government was exporting its Revolution abroad and supporting Soviet-led communist expansion; 5. the fact that social policies were needed to steer state action towards reformism and prevent revolutionary dynamics (and especially to undermine Cuban communist propaganda and agitation). These views led to Cuba's exclusion from the OAS, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, but they also led to the promotion of the Alliance for Progress. Anti-communism and the focus on security went hand in hand with a reflection on the social roots of political upheavals and the need to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor.

Luis Almagro's speeches about Cuba only feature three of these five dimensions. Interestingly enough, those that are ignored are the ideological and social dimensions. Indeed, no mention is made of repudiating the Marxist-Leninist ideology and the social underpinnings of revolutionary warfare in Latin America are not addressed, meaning the political debates are ignored that took place at the time and which still have bearing on contemporary Latin American politics. On the contrary, the three other characteristics of Cold War discourses about Cuba (Cuba as a human rights violator, as a Soviet proxy and as a security threat) are reformulated and combined with new elements. In Table 1, I have arranged all the aspects of the Secretary General's speeches since he took office in 2015 into three categories: the way he defines the Cuban regime, the effects this regime is deemed to have on the hemisphere and the way to deal with them.

As we can see, the Cuban political regime is defined as "dictatorial", "authoritarian" and "totalitarian". It is relevant to point this out because the notion of authoritarianism has become hegemonic in social sciences and expertise because of the intense controversies, ideological inconsistencies and strategic uses of the notion of totalitarianism for Cold War purposes (Traverso, 1998; Guilhot, 2005). Cuba is singled out as a "perfect example of a captive nation", "the longest-lived dictatorship" and the first one to be based on drug trafficking.

The threat posed by the Cuban regime, another Cold War trope, is also put to the forefront. It builds on old discourses (Cuba as a threat to democracy, human rights and security) but with two new components. First, Cuba is deemed to be exporting bad practices that lead to social conflict, specifically repression and propaganda. From this perspective, the contemporary political polarisation of the Americas (stemming from many different dynamics, including fascist, racist, populist and religious ones) is simply and purely ascribed to Cuba. Secondly, the Cuban regime is now seen as a threat to security, not only because it is deemed to be exporting its know-how in terms of social repression, but also corruption, drugs trafficking and organised crime. From that perspective, only leftist regimes seem to be prone to having their states penetrated by these dark networks. Emblematic cases like Mexico under Enrique Peña Nieto, Colombia under Alvaro Uribe and Honduras under Juan Orlando Hernandez are simply disregarded. Thus, in this view, Cuba is not only defined as an authoritarian regime per se, but also as a regime with a strong and malign influence on other Latin American countries – it endangers the whole hemisphere and creates the need for a specific regional response. Particular emphasis is placed on the criminal nature

13. "Luis Almagro : 'Cuba es un ejemplo perfecto de nación cautiva'", Radio Television Marti, July 16th 2019 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/luis-almagro-cuba-sigue-siendo-una-amenaza-a-los-derechos-humanos/242744.html>
14. Speech at the United Nations about Cuban political prisoners, New York, Oct. 16th 2018.
15. <https://www.dw.com/es/almagro-acusa-a-cuba-de-terrorismo-de-estado-contra-sus-ciudadanos/a-57021304>
16. Speech at the inauguration of the new academic year in Santiago de Chile, June 9th 2020.
17. Speech at the Permanent Council on the political situation in Venezuela, Washington D.C., Dec. 9th 2020.
18. Speech at IDEA: presidential dialogue: "Latin America, now or never ?", Washington D.C., Nov. 17th 2020.
19. Speech at the presentation of the book *Derecho Internacional de la Democracia*, Washington D.C., Sept. 29th 2020 (online). [Accessed on 24.02.2022]: https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0061
20. Speech at the forum "Defensa de la democracia en las Américas", Miami, May 5th 2021.
21. Speech at the forum "Defensa de la democracia en las Américas", Miami, May 5th 2021.
22. Press release, 16 October 2019 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-081/19
23. Speech at the conference on organised crime, Miami, Oct. 23rd 2018.
24. Speech at the forum "Defensa de la democracia en las Américas", Miami, May 5th 2021.
25. This formulation has been heavily quoted by journalists in media outlets, by experts from think tanks and by activists. See, for instance, Infobae, July 19th 2017 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.infobae.com/america/eeuu/2017/07/19/luis-almagro-ante-el-senado-de-los-eeuu-venezuela-es-el-pais-mas-corrupto-del-continente-toda-la-estructura-del-estado-esta-tomada-por-el-narcotrafico/>. But the OAS transcript of Luis Almagro's speech at the Senate hearing does not mention it. See: Statement of OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro to U.S. Senate Hearing on Venezuela, July 9th 2017 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=S-020/17

of the Cuban government's activities and their exportation to Venezuela. The Cuban government is explicitly presented as responsible for the present political and economic crisis in the country, while the Venezuelan government is conceived as a puppet of the Cuban government, which recalls the Cold War trope that Cuba was a Soviet proxy.

As a result, political and diplomatic coexistence is presented as undesirable and strong action as necessary. At the core of this vision is the idea that you cannot negotiate with dictatorships, as this would be both immoral and inefficient (Clemens, 2011). In Luis Almagro's terms, coexistence is equivalent to "permissiveness" or "looking away".³¹ He argues that these policies fail to put an end to dictatorships and that "confrontation" is the only way to achieve this. In his discourse, confrontation is presented as a set of institutional solutions to put pressure on authoritarian regimes' elites, but he does not completely rule out the possibility of an external intervention, albeit within the confines of international law.³²

Interestingly, the Secretary General presents the policy of confrontation as the only legitimate path, even though these types of policy have been criticised for their inconsistency and inefficiency. Indeed, scholars and experts have shown that sanctions have often disproportionately hit the people, rather than the elite and the government (Kuntz and Jackson, 1994; AAWH, 1997; Napier, 2010). They have also demonstrated that sanctions and isolation do not lead to regime change (Fontaine and Ratliff, 2000; Borer and Bowen, 2007). Finally, they have pointed out that these politics have also had an adverse effect on security in the US and the wider hemisphere (Pape, 1997; Clemens, 2011; Russo and Haney, 2012). On the contrary, research has shown that a less ambitious strategy, focused on policy change rather than on regime change can achieve results (Jentleson, 2006; Bach, Espach and Rosenau, 2017). How can we then explain the Secretary General's confrontational stance and his emphasis on coercive diplomacy?

Explaining the Secretary General's newfound confrontational stance

Different explanations have been given for the Secretary General's unexpected change, but thus far none seem very convincing. First, Almagro has been accused of siding with Donald Trump in order to keep the US Congress funding for the OAS, as Trump wanted to slash funds for multilateral organisations (Shifter and Raderstorf, 2017). I believe this argument is misleading. Almagro's tougher stance on Venezuela began in autumn 2015, thus pre-dating Trump's election (November 8th 2016) by more than a year. However, Trump's policy on Cuba and Venezuela can rightly be seen as key in reinforcing Luis Almagro's stance on both issues *after* his first moves, with priority for dealing with Venezuela given to the OAS rather than to other regional institutions (Palestini, 2021).

Another hypothesis suggests that Almagro comes from a rather conservative political background and has a tendency to change sides on certain issues (Marcetic, 2019). This would explain his recent repositioning. This is an interesting hypothesis, but it needs refining. Indeed, between 2010 and 2015, Almagro has generally acted in harmony with José Mujica's government. His record on human rights defence was already

26. "Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI", CASLA Institute, Washington D.C., June 9th 2020.
27. "Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI", CASLA Institute, Washington D.C., June 9th 2020.
28. Conference on the interamerican system of human rights (Boston University), Oct. 30th 2020.
29. Conference on the interamerican system of human rights (Boston University), Oct. 30th 2020.
30. Speech at the forum "Defensa de la democracia en las Américas", Miami, May 5th 2021.
31. "No es con permisividad, jamás ha existido en ninguna parte del mundo que se haya terminado una dictadura, las dictaduras se terminan cuando son confrontadas y son terminadas por quienes las confrontan y por eso saludamos especialmente la resolución que ha sido aprobada hoy": (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0081
32. DW, "OAS chief: 'Military intervention' in Venezuela cannot be ruled out", September 15th 2018 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.dw.com/en/oas-chief-military-intervention-in-venezuela-cannot-be-ruled-out/a-45496823>. After the media picked up his quote, Luis Almagro repeatedly said he had been misquoted and/or misunderstood. At the same time, another interview in *Americas Quarterly* revealed that he would not disagree with an intervention if it took place within the limits of international law: "Luis Almagro: Venezuela cannot become another Rwanda", *Americas Quarterly*, September 20th 2018 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.americasquarterly.org/article/luis-almagro-venezuela-cant-become-another-rwanda/>

notable at the time he became OAS Secretary General and he worked to confront the legacy of Uruguay's dictatorial past, advocating in favour of refugees and supporting the decriminalisation of marijuana, all moves associated with more progressive leanings. It is true that Almagro emerged from a rightist political tradition, as he first joined the Uruguayan Foreign Service as a member of the National Party (a broad centre-right to right-wing coalition). Further study would be needed of this early political socialisation to understand the extent to which it was downplayed during Almagro's mandate under the Frente Amplio and how it re-emerged when he became OAS Secretary General, but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

Rather, I argue that the Secretary General's activism in the Venezuelan case and then his interactions with Cuban exiles are key to understanding his new stance on Cuba. Luis Almagro's first involvement was in the resolution of the Venezuelan crisis. At the time, his stance on Venezuela was softer than the Obama administration's, which inflicted sanctions on top Venezuelan officials in order to protest against human rights violations in Cuba in March 2015.³³ He took a more active role at the end of 2015, when he voiced concern about the upcoming legislative elections, and then in 2016, after President Maduro manoeuvred to constrain and marginalise the new majority at the National Assembly after his party lost the December 2015 elections. Almagro's conflictive stance was surprising, given his former political credentials and the polarisation in Latin America over the Venezuela crisis, but his more radical approach aligned with the majority of OAS members. Stefano Palestini (2021) explains the unexpected 2017 OAS sanctions as the consequence of the alignment of preferences between MERCOSUR (and its two strongest states, Argentina and Brazil) and the US (Palestini, 2021). Palestini writes that threats to democracy posed by incumbents are rarely sanctioned, especially when they take place in powerful states like Venezuela. But in 2017 the political context had changed in the Americas. Indeed, some of the more powerful countries in the hemisphere had either elected or re-elected right-wing presidents (Enrique Peña Nieto in Mexico [2012], Mauricio Macri in Argentina [2015], Donald Trump in the United States [2016], Michel Temer in Brazil after Dilma Rousseff's impeachment [2016]), and the Lima Group had managed to build a wide coalition of countries: 12 at first (Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Peru), then 15 (with Haiti, Guyana and Santa Lucia) and finally 19 (with the US, Barbados, Jamaica and Granada). These countries supported the group's attempts to find a solution to the Venezuelan political crisis by trying to broker a deal between the opposition and Maduro's government. In this continental context, although Luis Almagro's activism was notable (open support given to Leopoldo López for instance), his position was in line with those of the majority of the governments of the hemisphere. However, this position progressively evolved and became much more confrontational as his discourse over Venezuela went far beyond a condemnation of the breach of the political order and began to stigmatise all progressive governments in the region.

I argue that this more confrontational stance correlates with the place Cuban exiles have managed to carve out for their perspectives at the OAS. Luis Almagro's first moves with regard to Cuba took place in a

The Secretary General's activism in the Venezuelan case and then his interactions with Cuban exiles are key to understanding his new stance on Cuba.

33. "'Deeply concerned' Obama imposes sanctions on Venezuelan officials", *The Guardian*, March 9th 2015 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/obama-venezuela-security-threat-sanctions>

Almagro's first official speech on Cuba, at the United Nations on October 16th 2018, specifically mentions that Cuba has been exporting methods of repression and specific political know-how to Latin America.

context in which exiled Cubans had built a new discursive framework for understanding the Cuban regime as the mother of all evils (i.e. as the force responsible for most political turmoil) in Latin America, and especially responsible for the Venezuelan crisis. This discourse builds on existing credible evidence that high-ranking Cuban officials are advising the Venezuelan government on many state issues such as defence and security, electoral matters and political institutions (see the reports and publications by CASLA, 2019; FHRC, 2019; and Werlau, 2019). This discourse is crafted so as to make the Cuban government the origin of the Venezuelan social and political crisis, thus stripping Nicolás Maduro of political agency and responsibility.

Despite being an interpretation that is highly contested, Almagro's first official speech on Cuba, at the United Nations on October 16th 2018, specifically mentions that Cuba has been exporting methods of repression and specific political know-how to Latin America.³⁴ In other speeches, Almagro states that witnesses have mentioned that they saw and/or heard Cuban officials during their detention – and sometimes poor treatment – following the 2018 protests in Nicaragua and on many different occasions in Venezuela.³⁵ He thus endorsed the interpretation provided by both Venezuelan and Cuban exiles, that is, that the Cuban issue is intrinsically connected to the Venezuelan one and more broadly that progressive governments all tend to become dictatorships. Evidence shows that this endorsement can be linked to Luis Almagro's regular interactions with the exile community and the lack of counter-discourse.

The role of the Cuban exile organisations at the OAS

Civil society had already carved itself a space at OAS before Luis Almagro's tenure. Canada and several other countries, including the US, were especially intent on opening the OAS up to civil society organisations and since 1998 they have been granted observer status at the Permanent Council and offered a space to share their perspectives at the new Summits of the Americas (Shamsie, 2000). As I underlined earlier, the civil society involved was mostly what Smith and Korzeniewicz (2006) have called an "insider civil society", in other words, civil society organisations with relatively strong connections to the political world and legitimate resources, expertise and know-how that are intent on co-building and co-implementing the guidelines delineated by the organisation.

Luis Almagro has inaugurated a new era for civil participation at OAS. Although he still relies on "insider civil society", he has opened the door to more "militant, combative civil society groups" (Legler, 2012). In the Cuban case the two are interconnected due the specific characteristics of Cuban American networks, which encompass both political actors (congressmen, senators, governors) and civil society actors (NGOs and foundations). Combative civil society groups are generally thought to be positioned towards the left of the political spectrum, but in this case they are mostly anti-communist think tanks and activists. These activists have been regularly invited to the OAS headquarters in Washington D.C. during Luis Almagro's mandate and he has also participated in events they have organised. He has also regularly commented on his appearances at such events on social media.

34. "Speech on Cuban political prisoners", October 16th 2018, United Nations. http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=18-0091

35. *Ibid.*

Table 2: Secretary General Luis Almagro's speeches, press releases and events relating to Cuba		
Events/Years	Speeches and public statements by L. Almagro	Civil society involved (including think tanks, foundations and parties)
2015	Tweets favourable to more opening up towards Cuba (April 12th, May 26th, June 16th) ³⁶	
2016		
2017 May 10 July 22	Meeting with civil society, including Cuban exiles <i>Message from Secretary General on anniversary of the death of Oswaldo Paya (PR)</i>	Justice Cuba (with Directorio Democrático Cubano)
2018 Feb. 10 March 8 Sept. 28 Oct. 16 Oct. 23 Dec. 7	Presentation of a documentary on Oswaldo Paya <i>Message from Secretary General about the Oswaldo Paya prize (PR)</i> Meeting with Cuban exile organisations <i>Speech about the crisis of political prisoners in Cuba (at the UN)</i> 3rd presidential debate (about organised crime in Latin America) Speech at the first Conference on Human Rights in Cuba	Voice of Communism Memorial Foundation, Cuba Decide Asamblea de la Resistencia Cubana, Justice Cuba IDEA, Catedra N. Mezerhane (Miami Dade College) Cubalex, Cuba Decide, M.A.R. por Cuba, Justice Cuba
2019 Feb. 7 May 6 May 14 June 5 June 26 June 27 July 16 Aug. 22 Oct. 16 Oct. 28 Dec. 18	Conference "The new Cuban constitution and the Inter-American democratic charter" at the OAS Conference on artistic freedom in Cuba Speech about the use of Cuban doctors and the exportation of the Cuban model Endorsement of US Treasury sanctions against the Cuban government Forum on crimes against humanity in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela Meeting with Cuba Decide Endorsement of "captive nation" description of Cuba Speech about the necessity to democratise Cuba and Venezuela Statement about the role of Cuba and Venezuela in destabilising Latin America ³⁷ Speech about the Cuban medical missions Signature of the Agreement on Democracy in Cuba Conference on the obscure reality behind Cuba's medical missions	Cubalex, Cuba Decide, Transparencia Electoral América latina Revista <i>La Hora</i> and artists Cuban Defenders (press conference on crimes against humanity in Cuba) Casla Institute, Cuban Defenders Cuba Decide, Fundacion x la democracia, JuventudLAC Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation ODCA seminar Cuba Decide, Directorio Democrático Cubano Cuban Defenders
2020 May 7 June 9 Sept. 17 Dec. 10	Interview with influencer A. Otaola on his show Speech about Cuban intervention in Venezuela "Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI" ³⁸ IDEA: 5th presidential dialogue: "Latin America, now or never?" Speech about the need to fight the spread of the authoritarian virus ³⁹	"Hola Ota-Ola" CASLA Institute IDEA ⁴⁰ Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (Conference on Human Rights and Democracy in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua)
2021 March 23 May 5	Press conference about repression in Cuba Conference on the defence of democracy in the Americas	Cuba Decide Interamerican Institute for Democracy, Radio y TV Martí, Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba

Scholars have already shown the critical importance of exile organisations on the crafting of US foreign policy. Quite a few studies exist on the Cuban case and testify to their importance (Haney and Vanderbush, 2005; Vanderbush, 2009; Badella, 2014; 2016). These organisations have also become very active at the OAS. Just as exiles have become regular figures at Congressional hearings, especially since the 1980s (Vanderbush, 2009), so they have become frequent attendees of the OAS General Secretariat. It is not the intention of the following section to question the right of Cuban exiles (or Venezuelan, for that

There are hundreds of organisations in the Cuban diaspora whose main objective is to promote a transition process in Cuba.

matter) to be heard in such an important venue as the OAS, the purpose is to stress that only specific organisations manage to be heard.

I have put together the most exhaustive list possible of speeches and events referring to Cuban issues in which the Secretary General has participated since he took office in 2015. The aim of this table is to objectify the networks with which he has been working so as to shed light on the particular political position he has sided with. Three elements are striking here: first, the lack of either discourse or action concerning Cuba during the first two years of Luis Almagro's mandate (May 2015–May 2017) and the subsequent importance the Cuban question has acquired; second, the Secretary General's regular participation in organised civil society events; and, finally, the notably limited circles with which he has been working on this issue since 2018.

There are hundreds of organisations in the Cuban diaspora whose main objective is to promote a transition process in Cuba. An extreme minority supports the legitimacy of the Cuban government and denounces US interference in Cuban affairs. As for the others, they are split into two major positions: an anti-communist position that favours a policy of sanctions, isolation and confrontation, and an anti-authoritarian position that advocates a policy of "engagement" on the grounds that sanctions and isolation are not effective and even counterproductive (Torres, 1999; Garcia, 1996). The anti-communist position is defended by longstanding exile organisations, which are both professionalised and politicised, and which have been joined by younger activists since the 2010s (Grenier, 2018). They enjoy significant political and institutional support, both in conservative think tanks (Heritage Foundation, Fundación Internacional para la Libertad, Voice of Communism Memorial Foundation) and in various political spaces (the city of Miami, the State of Florida, the US Congress and the State Department). The "anti-authoritarian" position is less well-represented in Florida, where it is regularly attacked and caricatured. It includes non-profit organisations (Cuba Study Group, Cuban Americans for Engagement), political parties in exile (social democrat and Christian democrat), more informal collectives organised around digital platforms (Cuba Posible, 23 y Flagler) and is upheld by think tanks such as the Brookings Institution.⁴¹

The popularity of these two positions among the Cuban diaspora has fluctuated depending on the period and the political and social events in Cuba and the United States (migration flows, diplomatic incidents, economic crises). While in the Miami enclave, anti-communism has generally remained the majority position, in spite of modulations in the 2010s the pro-engagement position was widely favoured by younger generations of Cuban Americans until the election of Donald Trump. While Trump's election led to a new degree of polarisation and a reclaiming of the anti-communist position, in general this has lost its hegemony over the past 20 years. And yet the OAS Secretary General has almost exclusively been interacting with representatives of the pro-sanctions position.

With the exception of the Cuban artists mentioned in the table and Cubalex (an organisation of lawyers who defend the rights of people under arrest or incarcerated),⁴² the other organisations in the table are all positioned towards the right of the political spectrum. Internationally,

- 36. Tweeted before and after he took office on May 26th.
- 37. Statement of the OAS General Secretariat, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-081/19
- 38. https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0039
- 39. Speeches and other documents by the Secretary General (in Spanish only), "Día de los derechos humanos, conferencia sobre derechos humanos y democracia en Cuba, Venezuela y Nicaragua" (online). [Accessed on 24.02.2022]: https://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0080
- 40. IDEA is a network of former Latin American presidents. It is presented as bipartisan, but active members almost exclusively belong to right-wing parties.
- 41. See FIU's list of Cuban American institutions and organisations: <https://cri.fiu.edu/cuban-america/org-institutes/>
- 42. Cubalex and the artists whose names appear are associated with this network, except in a more peripheral way, and their position on sanctions is less unanimous. The Cubalex association, for example, did not defend the embargo for the time it worked in Cuba and it has been inactive on this issue since the exile of 14 of its members to the United States.

they have supported or sought the support of political figures such as Donald Trump (United States), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil), Ivan Duque (Colombia) and Jeanine Áñez (Bolivia). In terms of relations between Cuba and the United States, they all promote a policy of isolation (embargo, sanctions) and confrontation. Some of them campaigned for a “humanitarian” intervention by the US following the repression of the July 11th 2021 demonstrations.⁴³ Most promote a model of transition based primarily on criminal justice and the building of cases to be presented in national or international courts, rather than the more traditional transitional justice process of uttering the truth, building memory and crafting reconciliation. Among their models are the International Criminal Courts created for Yugoslavia and Rwanda.⁴⁴

The point here is not to judge the relevance or otherwise of the position of these organisations, but to underline that they belong to the same conservative political world, with converging Cold Warrior views on handling the Cuban political situation: coercive diplomacy, lack of negotiation and a transitional justice based on criminal law. It is thus necessary to stress that despite the growing diversity of organisations and positions in the Cuban diaspora, the Secretary General has chosen to connect the OAS General Secretariat with one specific political line only. Even more surprisingly, the Secretary General has bestowed legitimacy on one of the most controversial of the Cuban exiles in Miami, Alexander Otaola, an alt-right social media influencer, by participating in his show in 2020. Otaola is particularly renowned for his histrionics, racism and systematic practice of denigrating those who do not share his positions, invariably calling them “communists”⁴⁵ and placing them on a “red list” (a blacklist of communists), all of which gives his show a McCarthyite air. It is also important to stress that the OAS’s connection with this single political line was reinforced by the nomination of Cuban American conservative Carlos Trujillo as US ambassador to the OAS under Donald Trump.⁴⁶ Indeed, Trujillo is a political ally of conservative Cuban American Florida Senator Marco Rubio, who has in turn consistently supported the most conservative leaders of Cuban exile civil society.

The relationship between the Secretary General and these exile organisations translates into very concrete consequences. As the OAS General Secretariat is prevented by the obstruction of the Cuban government from drafting reports on the human rights situation on the island, it often relies on evidence given by exiles to shape its discourse and policies on Cuba. As a result, the words they use to frame the political and human rights situation on the island are found in most of the Secretary General’s speeches (“captive nation”, “a state based on drug trafficking”, “state terrorism”, “slave labour”). Although most international NGOs (like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch) agree that Cuba’s record on human rights is problematic, their framing is quite distinct and they refuse to use those terms, which they deem false and counterproductive.⁴⁷

One can therefore question the support given by an OAS Secretary General to this single political line, which goes well beyond the OAS mandate of defence of democracy and human rights. Indeed, partisan politics have consequences for the framing of possible forms of action for dealing with Cuba as well as Venezuela. The discursive support and legitimacy given by

Despite the growing diversity of organisations and positions in the Cuban diaspora, the Secretary General has chosen to connect the OAS General Secretariat with one specific political line only.

43. Padgett, Tim. “Call for US military intervention amid Cuban protests sparks Miami exile debate, *WLRN*, 13 July 2021 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.wlrn.org/news/2021-07-13/call-for-u-s-military-intervention-amid-cuba-protests-sparks-miami-exile-debate>

44. See the online presentation of Justice Cuba, one of the main organisations, which intends to build cases prior to the fall of the communist regime, so as to anticipate the transition and steer the transitional justice process towards a criminal justice dynamic: <https://justicecuba.wildapricot.org/>

45. Padgett, Tim. “Can a racist demagogue be a serious defender of human rights”, *WLRN*, December 3rd 2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.wlrn.org/commentary/2020-12-03/hola-otaola-can-a-racist-demagogue-be-a-serious-defender-of-cuban-rights>

46. Klas, Mary Ellen & Patricia Mazzei “Carlos Trujillo named as US ambassador to the Organization of American States”, 26 October 2017 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/2017/10/26/carlos-trujillo-named-as-u-s-ambassador-to-oas/>

47. See for instance José Miguel Vivanco’s tweet (January 11th 2021) about calling Cuba a sponsor of terrorism and his “Written testimony to the US House Western Hemisphere Committee on Cuba”, July 22nd 2021, as well as Amnesty International’s call (2020) for a more balanced political vision at the OAS in the wake of Luis Almagro’s re-election.

The Secretary General's activism does not impact the way the Permanent Council of the OAS deals with pressing political issues in the hemisphere.

Luis Almagro – with all the social and political capital he enjoys as the OAS Secretary General – to hardline confrontational politics, sometimes verging on warmongering, once again raises questions about the autonomy of the OAS in relation to US power. Susanne Gratius (2018) has described this in her research,⁴⁸ and it seems all the more applicable when this same Secretary General asks for more US leadership in the organisation. But it also raises questions about OAS autonomy with regard to politicised organised interests and the ability of the General Secretariat to maintain a balanced and diplomatic position when it systematically sides with conservative political networks in the Americas and elsewhere.⁴⁹

3. Shaping the OAS General Secretariat into a political and moral authority

This third and final part will address one of the effects of the Secretary General's stance on Cuba – and more generally Venezuela and Nicaragua – in the Americas. Very recent research (Palestini, 2021) has shown that the Secretary General's activism does not impact the way the Permanent Council of the OAS deals with pressing political issues in the hemisphere. Indeed, this activism is “neither sufficient nor necessary” for the enforcement of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. This enforcement is rather inconsistent and depends upon “the preferences of the executives of the most powerful member states” (Boniface, 2002; Palestini, 2020; 2021). I thus argue that this activism serves another purpose: that of shaping the Secretary General to be a kind of political and moral authority in the Americas with the legitimacy to distinguish between good and bad democratic practices and between good democratic government and bad authoritarian rule, thus contributing to granting (partial) autonomy to the role of Secretary General and the action of the OAS in relation to its members states (Barnett and Finnemore, 1999; 2004). It also contributes to repositioning the OAS as the major regional organisation in the Americas and returning its leadership to the US.

The following interesting excerpt from one of Almagro's speeches formulates one of his objectives as OAS Secretary General: to shed light on Cuban and Venezuela human rights abuse *with a purpose*.

We at the OAS are intentionally illuminating the terrible tragedy that the Venezuelan dictatorship imposes on the people of Cuba and Venezuela. We want the world to see clearly the abuses committed by the Cuban regime on its own island, in Venezuela and elsewhere on the continent.⁵⁰

These few sentences are worth analysing. Here Almagro is being clear that he is putting special emphasis on Cuba and Venezuela (“intentionally illuminating”), for “the world to see”. He is also tying the two situations together: the Cuban and Venezuelan people are first presented as tragically affected by the Venezuelan dictatorship, and secondly the Cuban regime is given as responsible for abuse committed in Cuba, in Venezuela and in other parts of the continent. The Secretary General's objective here is first and foremost to expose what is presented as a tragic situation, to communicate it to the “world”. In doing so, he is also assigning responsibilities in moral and political terms to the Cuban and Venezuela governments.

48. For Susanne Gratius, the return to hostile relations shows the “still hegemonic position of the United States in (the) inter-American system”, in: Gardini, Gian Luca; Koschut, Simon & Andreas Falke (eds.), *Interregionalism and the Americas*, Lexington, 2018, p. 147.

49. Luis Almagro has been constantly working and debating with conservative parties and governments in the Americas and Europe (for instance FAES – José María Aznar's foundation – in Spain, ODCA – the Organization of Christian Democrats in the Americas, the new right-wing South American organisation PROSUR).

50. Author's translation from the Spanish: “En la OEA estamos iluminando intencionalmente el flagelo, la terrible tragedia que significa la dictadura venezolana para los pueblos de Cuba y de Venezuela. Queremos que el mundo vea claramente los abusos cometidos por el régimen cubano en su propia isla, en Venezuela y en otros lugares del continente”: “Cuba en Venezuela, la conquista del siglo XXI” CASLA Institute, Washington D.C., June 9th 2020 (online). [Accessed on 24.02.2022]: http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discursos_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0039.

Luis Almagro's purpose is twofold: he seeks both to delegitimise the Cuban and Venezuelan governments *and* to stage that delegitimation in order to steer the OAS towards a new role – as an arbiter of democracy and human rights in the Americas. The opposition between the way José Miguel Insulza understood his function as Secretary General and the way Luis Almagro understands it is very telling.

There is one thing that will not change: this is a body consisting of 34 states, not a supranational power. I am not the president of the OAS, nor the president of the Americas. I am the Secretary General that implements the resolutions of the Permanent Council, and this is something that no one will change.⁵¹

José Miguel Insulza presents himself as a kind of facilitator between 34 states and the legal embodiment of the decision-making process between them. He embodies the realist approach to international organisations, in which these organisations are perceived as having no autonomy of their own. On the contrary, Luis Almagro explicitly contradicted José Miguel Insulza's statement in an interview with *El País* in 2018, claiming that the Secretary General has "powers according to the OAS Charter, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, and Resolution 1080 for the defense of democracy, for the defense of security, and regional stability".⁵² He is promoting a wider and more normative interpretation of the Secretary General's mandate.⁵³

Moreover, Luis Almagro understands the OAS as an international organisation with its own norms and principles, above and beyond the governments that form part of it.

(...) democratic states must act more to support democracy and human rights. Governments come and go. Changes are inevitable. But principles remain and the OAS continues to defend those principles. The organisation is much more than an individual, than a member state, than diplomats, than officials. Let us not forget for whom and for what the OAS has existed all this time. For what and for whom it will continue to work in subsequent decades. The peoples of the Americas. The OAS will be what the people want the OAS to be.⁵⁴

In Almagro's view, the Secretary General thus embodies a kind of distinct, autonomous authority that gives voice to *the people*, not only to the member states. He thus becomes an interpreter of those voices. This justifies the occasional overlooking of internal procedures (Zamorano, 2017) in defence of a greater good, which the Secretary General, with the support of like-minded governments, must uphold.

We must never forget these principles. The geopolitical configuration formerly based on bullying and against wills has fallen apart. Today we are building a geopolitical architecture based on principles. Some will be on the side of principles, others will not. That is the logic that we have to face in the organisation and that we have been facing for a long time.⁵⁵

This quote is especially interesting for two reasons. First, despite the Secretary General's constant invocation of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and other pro-democracy instruments as the best ways to defend democracy, he actually states here that his policy on that matter

51. Quoted in Zamorano, Patricio. "The OAS and the crisis in Venezuela: Luis Almagro in his labyrinth", Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 28 April 2017 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.coha.org/the-oas-and-the-crisis-in-venezuela-luis-almagro-and-his-labyrinth/>

52. Naím, Moisés, "Sometimes failures can also bring progress towards democracy", *El País*, July 3rd 2018 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2018/06/29/inenglish/1530282967_359823.html

53. See: Kille (2013) on Secretaries General's leadership.

54. Author's translation from the Spanish original: " (...) los Estados democráticos debemos acentuar el hecho de actuar en favor de la democracia y los derechos humanos. Los gobiernos van y vienen. Los cambios son inevitables. Pero los principios permanecen y la OEA permanece defendiendo esos principios. La Organización es mucho más que un individuo, que un estado miembro, que los diplomáticos, que los funcionarios. No olvidemos para quién y para qué la OEA ha existido todo este tiempo. Para qué y para quién seguirá trabajando en décadas subsecuentes. Los pueblos de las Américas. La OEA será lo que la gente quiere que la OEA sea", http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=19-0013

55. Author's translation from the Spanish original: "Nunca debemos olvidar estos principios. La configuración geopolítica que antes se armaba con base a bullying y en contra de voluntades, se desmoronó. Hoy estamos construyendo una arquitectura geopolítica con base en principios. Unos estarán de lado de los principios, otros no lo estarán. Esa es la lógica que debemos enfrentar en la Organización y que hemos enfrentado durante mucho tiempo", http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discurso_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=19-0013

There is a clear imbalance in the importance given to democratic backsliding, which is conditioned by the political leaning of the governments concerned.

has much more to do with the building of power politics: “a geopolitical architecture”, with those who will “be on the side of principles” and “those who will not”. Moreover, he presents the struggle for democracy and human rights as a black or white set of two alternatives.⁵⁶ Here, the “principles” are presented as universal and the opposition between those who will defend them and the others as a moral divide between a good side (morally unquestionable) and a bad side (prone to “bullying”). This logic justifies ongoing action, which is presented as a kind of crusade that he proposes to carry out with or without approval:

We will not retreat an inch in our fight against dictatorships. If everybody likes it, fine, and if nobody likes it, fine too.⁵⁷

In that sense, there is a blatant contradiction between the will to create “consensus” and support “political dialogue” (terms used in the paragraphs just before this quote) and the statement that he does not care about those who disagree with his perspectives, methods and actions. Luis Almagro here seems to be considering his job as that of a truth bearer:

Our reports have always been based on facts, we do not issue opinions, we do not have political opinions, we cannot have political opinions, we are not ideological.⁵⁸

While at the same time he consistently rejects other approaches, like those that are habitual in most diplomatic activity, grounded in low-key negotiations between parties and behind closed doors.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, we must mention here that other events and processes might have prompted the concern of the Secretary General. Here is a small table of relevant cases of repeated human rights abuse and attack against democracies, which are either mentioned only “in passing” in the Secretary General’s communications (although they are generally addressed by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights - IACHR) or are not addressed at all, even though they have marred the American continent’s political record in recent years.

It is important to underline that the OAS Secretary General generally addresses most human rights concerns, like the Ayotzinapa murders in Mexico in 2014, the widespread social and political violence in Colombia and Peru, and journalists and community leaders’ murders in Honduras and Mexico. However, there are blatant exceptions, like George Floyd’s murder by the police in the US and the horrendous state of Brazilian prisons. His statements have a different weight depending on whether they are published as tweets or as Secretary General’s press releases. Social violence is generally addressed in tweets, while any political processes that are responsible for that violence are mostly downplayed or ignored. Moreover, attacks on democratic institutions are unevenly addressed: Brazil and the US, which have strongly supported Luis Almagro’s activism against the Cuban, Venezuelan and Nicaraguan governments, are almost completely spared from criticism. And, finally, there is a clear imbalance in the importance given to democratic backsliding, which is conditioned by the political leaning of the governments concerned. Right-wing governments (the US under Donald Trump, Brazil under Jair Bolsonaro and El Salvador under Nayib Bukele) are much less scrutinised than left-leaning governments.

56. Almagro used this dichotomy to describe his fight for human rights in this interview: Ordoñez, Franco. “Uruguayan diplomat makes OAS a player, again”, *McClatchy*, March 13th 2016 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article65423642.html>

57. Author’s translation from the Spanish original: “Nos vamos a ceder un ápice en nuestra lucha contra las dictaduras. Si les gusta a todos muy bien y si no le gusta a nadie, muy bien también”. Reelection speech, http://www.oas.org/es/acerca/discursos_secretario_general.asp?sCodigo=20-0030

58. Author’s translation from the Spanish original: “Nuestros informes han estado basados siempre en hechos, nosotros no emitimos opinión, no tenemos opinión política, no podemos tener opinión política, no somos ideológicos”. Speech at the presentation of the book *Derecho Internacional de la democracia*, Washington D.C., Sept. 29th, 2020.

59. “Almagro : Election would lead Venezuela to 6 more years of dictatorship”, *Miami Herald*, January 21st 2018.

Table 3. Relevant human rights abuse or attacks on democracy with less visibility		
Date & country	Event	OAS Secretary General's public response
Sept. 2021 Brazil	President Bolsonaro's policies on human rights and democratic institutions threaten the rule of law, endanger people's lives and the environment (the Amazon) ⁶⁰	No statement, no tweet. Constant praise of President Bolsonaro's support for the OAS policy on Venezuela
May 2021 El Salvador July 2021 El Salvador	Dismissal of the Attorney General and the judges of the Constitutional Chamber Deportation of Mexican journalist, harassment of the media and anti-transparency measures (on public information)	Statement (May 2nd 2021). No follow-up since then. No statement, no tweet
Jan. 2021 US	Mob attack on US Capitol & President Trump's attempt to organise an "auto-coup"	Statement (on the Capitol events only, no mention of President Trump's repeated attacks on the democratic process) ⁶¹
June 2020 US	George Floyd's murder (returning police killings in the US to the news)	No statement, no tweet
Oct. 2019 Bolivia	Violent repression of protesters during contested electoral process	No statement against violence (press releases and tweets on the electoral process and against the incumbent president)
Oct. 2019 Chile	Violent repression of protesters (including torture, sexual abuse and deaths)	Statement (Oct. 24 th) endorses IACHR's condemnation of human rights violation during protests in Chile while at the same time accusing the Venezuelan and Cuban governments of instigating the protest. ⁶² Later public speeches supported President Piñera's actions ⁶³
Oct. 2019 Ecuador	Violent repression of protesters	Statement (Oct. 8 th) calling for the protection of freedom of expression, but which at the same time condemns protesters' violence. ⁶⁴ No condemnation of police violence. Later public speeches supported President Moreno's actions ⁶⁵
May 2019 Brazil	Widespread violence in Brazilian prisons leading to more than 60 deaths	No statement, no tweet
March 2018 Brazil	Murder of activist and politician Marielle Franco	One tweet (March 15 th). No follow up despite evidence of involvement of President Bolsonaro's entourage
Jan. 2018 US	Donald Trump signs an executive order to keep Guantanamo Bay prison open despite well documented violations of human rights	No statement, no tweet (despite Feb. 23 rd 2016 tweet welcoming Obama's decision to close the prison)

The OAS Secretary General's newfound activism has not generated new forms of institutionalisation of the democratic norm, as occurred for instance under João Clemente Soares Baena, who played a leading role in shaping resolution 1080 in 1991. There are talks around making OAS instruments more effective for defending democracy and human rights but so far no concrete steps have been taken.⁶⁶ Luis Almagro instead relies on the reformulation of the debate about democracy and human rights in the hemisphere, opposing "dictatorship" with "democracy" and using the OAS General Secretariat as a political platform, together with the mainstream media and the social media, in order to name and shame. By doing so, Luis Almagro has crafted new discursive power politics that have put the OAS back in the spotlight.

Although we might rejoice at the liveliness of debates about democracy within regional organisations, the OAS Secretary General's stance has in fact led to an increased polarisation within the organisation and in the Americas more generally. Within the OAS, his activism has alienated quite a few countries at the Permanent Council and created mistrust, especially on the issue of Cuba (see: Sanders, 2020b; 2021). It led, for instance, to the adjournment of a meeting

60. See: Human Rights Watch, "Brazil : Bolsonaro threatens democratic rule", September 15th 2021 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/09/15/brazil-bolsonaro-threatens-democratic-rule>; as well as US senators' note: "Top senate democrats sound alarm on Brazil's democratic decline", September 28th 2021 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/chair/release/top-senate-democrats-sound-alarm-on-brazils-democratic-decline-and-creeping-authoritarianism-under-president-bolsonaro->

Institutional mechanisms remain in place that de facto limit the General Secretary's powers when the representatives of OAS member states reject the direction in which he is taking the organisation.

on human rights in Cuba in July 2021 after the social uprisings of July 11th and 12th were repressed by the Cuban government. Thirteen countries out of 34 sent a letter criticising what they saw as a divisive and conflictive policy that did not promote peace and cooperation in the hemisphere.⁶⁷ This shows that institutional mechanisms remain in place that de facto limit the General Secretary's powers when the representatives of OAS member states reject the direction in which he is taking the organisation.

Luis Almagro's broad interpretation of his role has been especially criticised by Caribbean states, who have repeatedly voted against his positions and his broad interpretation of his mandate, especially in terms of setting priorities (Sanders, 2020a). Beyond the OAS, Amnesty International (2020) has been very critical of the Secretary General's actions and tried to raise concerns to member states' when Almagro was seeking re-election in 2020. The organisation wrote to the representatives of OAS members to draw attention to the need to elect an impartial and independent representative to the position of Secretary General. Indeed, the NGO deplored the OAS's lack of consideration for the massive human rights violations committed in countries other than Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that the dispassionate, bipartisan and pragmatic policy towards Cuba pursued since the mid-1970s was quickly called into question after the election of Luis Almagro as Secretary General of the OAS. This reversal of the OAS position on the subject can be linked to several factors. First, the Secretary General's position on Cuba is correlated with his stance on the Venezuelan issue. Indeed, his activism on Cuba only intensified after the 2017 institutional crisis in Venezuela. The close relationship between the Secretary General and pro-sanctions organisations of Cuban exiles led him to endorse their narrative, which emphasises the role played by the Cuban government in the Venezuelan crisis and in supporting the Venezuelan government. This narrative frames the Cuban state as a thoroughly criminal agent, thus making it into an enemy with whom it would be morally questionable to negotiate. From that perspective, the Cuban government can only be part of the problem and not part of the solution, as other voices advocate (Zamorano, 2017; Rendon, 2020; Stuenkel, 2021). As these exile organisations have monopolised access to the Secretary General, despite the existence of other perspectives, their views have become hegemonic in his discourse.

Nevertheless, the influence of Cuban civil society actors needs to be understood in the new political context of the second part of the 2010s. From 2015 onwards, general elections (and the removal of a president) did indeed lead right-wing presidents to govern powerful countries, in both the US and Latin America. The role played by some of these new presidents, like Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, in defending the OAS's role in the hemisphere and Luis Almagro's activism on the Cuban and Venezuelan issues, reinforced the Secretary General's position on those issues, leading to an imbalanced focus on democratic backsliding and human rights abuses under left-leaning governments.

61. OAS press release, E-001/21, January 6th, 2021.
62. OAS press release, C-088/19, October 24th, 2019.
63. del Pino, José María. "El secretario general de la OEA defendió a Sebastian Piñera y acusó a Cuba y a Venezuela por las protestas en Chile", *El Clarín*, January 9th 2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: https://www.clarin.com/mundo/secretario-general-oea-defendio-sebastian-pinera-acuso-cuba-venezuela-protestas-chile_0_Y5-Wx_KL.html
64. OAS press release, E-078/19, October 8th 2019.
65. El Universo, "Luis Almagro felicita a Ecuador por aislar las protestas sociales", October 30th 2019 (online). [Accessed on 10.02.2022]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8A8DSxtVk4>
66. See the propositions mentioned in the introduction, for instance. Eduardo Gamarra, Professor of Political Science at FIU, also mentioned during that conference José Miguel Insulza asked for a report about possible early warning mechanisms that would allow better assessment of the threats and thresholds around democratic backsliding. But to his knowledge the report has never really been discussed or implemented.
67. <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/latin-americas-resurgent-left-caribbean-spurn-us-policy-cuba-2021-08-02/>

A third factor is the Secretary General's broad interpretation of his mandate, which allows him to push forward some of his priorities at the OAS Permanent Council and in other venues and to promote his sanctions-oriented perspective on Cuba, as well as on Venezuela and Nicaragua. This activism has been successful as it has also been supported by executives with an interest in the sanctioning of regimes associated with 21st century socialism, such as in Colombia and Brazil.

By upholding this non-compromising stance, the Secretary General has repoliticised the issue of Cuba and the role of the General Secretariat. He has also crafted a new public image for the organisation, which has regularly made it into the headlines of both mainstream and social media since Luis Almagro's election. This new discourse has given the Secretary General political prominence and enabled his re-election at the OAS Secretariat, mainly thanks to the support of right-leaning governments. But his activism has not translated into efficiency on the Cuban or Venezuelan questions. Both countries are facing deep crises and are confronted with ever-stronger polarisation in the hemisphere. We must conclude that, rather than flagrant declarations, there is a need for a lower-profile multilateralism that involves political engagement, dialogue and negotiation.

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AFTER THE PROTESTS AND THE PANDEMIC: REASSESSING THE INTERNATIONAL PROFILE OF POST-CASTRO CUBA

Bert Hoffmann and Laurence Whitehead

German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA, Hamburgo)

In 2021 the “Europe-Cuba Forum” concentrated on the acute domestic governance challenges now facing the Cuban regime, as the resulting volume on social policy and institutional transformation attests (Hoffmann, 2021). The final round in the project turns towards the tremendous external difficulties that interact with and reinforce these internal issues. Even before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine there were massive imponderables and unpredictable short-term risks attached to both these dynamics. But they also have an underlying structure that has persisted for several decades, and that may well continue to generate gridlock and dysfunctionality for years to come. Just as we explored the potential for a domestic course correction guided by the UN Sustainable Development Goals for 2030, so should our next contribution try to look beyond the immediate situation to reflect on the underlying international pressures and constraints that will shape the options for the Cuban nation over the next decade, however the current potentially “critical” juncture unfolds.

US–Cuba relations

Inevitably the starting point must be the dynamics of the US–Cuba relationship. While the Florida election of 2022 and the presidential contest of 2024 pose existential risks to the current fragile cross-straits equilibrium, there remain certain parameters that are predictable. While it may be an open question whether or not Puerto Rico becomes a US state, the Republic of Cuba will remain a separate sovereign nation with its own historical consciousness and a set of inheritances that diverge radically from the US worldview. For example, the healthcare system and its distinctive profile can hardly be scrapped and replaced by the fundamentally different US approach to such matters, at least not over the coming decade, whatever other realignments may occur. While it is conceivable that Washington might gain an opportunity to pour resources into the island on other fronts (tourism, for example, or real estate) the US Congress will never assume financial responsibility for social programmes in Cuba that it flinches from funding even for its own citizens (food stamps, for example, or unemployment benefits

Even at the moments of greatest conflict between the Castro regime and Washington, certain stabilising "back channels" were always kept open.

or pensions). On the security front, whether denouncing Havana as a source of terrorism or embracing its military as the essential partner for controlling refugee flows and the penetration of organised crime the Pentagon and Homeland Security will be operating on a state-to-state basis with Cuban counterparts that are highly professional and distinctly autonomous. This is why, as LeoGrande and Kornbluh (2014) documented so well, even at the moments of greatest conflict between the Castro regime and Washington, certain stabilising "back channels" were always kept open. This included coastguard communications and some collaboration over hurricanes and similar shared natural hazards.

Under current conditions the scope for co-operation on matters of common interest is much reduced and the hopeful opening of the Obama years is long past. However, even following the protests of July 2021 and heightened tension concerning Havana's ties with Moscow not all US-Cuban interactions are antagonistic. One significant line of bilateral dialogue is apparently channelled through the church hierarchy, as most recently illustrated by the visit of the Cardinal of Boston to Cuba on September 26th 2021 (see González, 2021). The White House still claims that it will in due course resume consular relations and family remittances.

But even before the July 2021 protests the Biden administration had resiled from its campaign promises to ease the sanctions on Cuba that Trump had tightened just before leaving office (LeoGrande, 2021). Following the street outbursts and their repercussions in Miami he went further, placing economic sanctions on Cuba's Defence Minister and the "Black Berets" unit of the Interior Ministry and promising to assist dissidents on the island whose social media access had been interrupted. In October 2021 the US Congress also unanimously adopted a "Helping American Victims Afflicted by Neurological Attacks Act" which was titled the "Havana Act" – notwithstanding the fact that such attacks had taken place in several other countries as well as Cuba, and that while their origins remain unknown it is quite implausible to assign main authorship to the authorities in Havana. Even more implausible is the State Department position that bracketed Cuba with Iran, North Korea and Syria as the world's four "state sponsors of terrorism" in 2021.

However, even on the US left, Havana's repressive response to the street protests made a mark. Both former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, whose friendly words for the Cuban government even in the thick of the 2020 presidential race horrified Cuban Miami, and the figurehead of the socialist left within the Democratic Party, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez, condemned state violence and called for respect for freedom of expression.

In any case, beyond bilateral relations, Havana's interactions with Washington are also mediated by various third parties, notably Canada, Mexico, the EU, and a range of regional and international fora that require separate analysis. The Cuban regime also possesses a complex and diverse network of external relationships with other powers that, far from any suspicion of acting as US proxies are now clearly aligned as potential counterweights – China, Russia, Iran - and of course the much degraded but still relevant player that is Venezuela.

Canada

Although south Florida is seen as the key player in North American positioning towards the Cuban Revolution it is not the sole significant actor in that world region. Indeed the intense and personal animosity Miami directs against the Castro regime has elicited something of a backlash in some other parts of the “Free World”, including Canada. It was noteworthy that even the Conservative government of John Diefenbaker resisted pressure from the Kennedy administration to enforce sanctions against Cuba (see Molinaro, 2016). At a more personal level, in 1960 a rising young Canadian liberal politician from Quebec, Pierre Trudeau, was rescued in the straits of Florida while trying to paddle to Cuba. Diefenbaker taunted him in the House for conducting his “love affair” with the Cuban Revolution “by canoe”. Forty years later Fidel Castro travelled to Montreal to serve as a pall bearer at Pierre Trudeau’s burial. Sixteen years afterwards, in 2016, his son, the incoming Canadian premier Justin Trudeau, spoke at the University of Havana in the presence of Raúl Castro and Miguel Díaz-Canel, saying Canada would be a “steadfast and unflinching friend to Cuba. We disagree with the approach the US has taken with Cuba. We think that our approach is much better – of partnership, of collaboration, of engagement” (Trudeau, 2016).

Canada’s friendly disposition towards Havana reflects more than the personal inclinations of a handful of politicians. There is an underlying national interest at stake.

On July 15th 2021 the younger Trudeau’s government initially reacted mildly to the protests of July 11th, merely stating that “Canada supports the right to freedom of expression and assembly” (Dyer, 2021). Since that risked provoking an electoral backlash, however, Justin Trudeau soon condemned any official violence. As he was re-elected two months later, this moderate stance towards Havana seems destined to continue. Indeed in August 2021 Canada donated two million syringes to help with the COVID vaccination programme, which was being impeded by US sanctions; while tourist flows are expected to resume in time for the coming winter season (in 2019 a quarter of all tourists to Cuba – 1.1million entries – came from Canada).

Canada’s friendly disposition towards Havana reflects more than the personal inclinations of a handful of politicians. There is an underlying national interest at stake. Among other things, the Helms-Burton Act – were it to fully prevail – mandates a US-approved electoral system with the Fidelistas barred, which would once again leave Cuba subject to heavy supervision by the US Congress. This could have damaging implications for Canada’s scope for political independence – a sentiment that also sways nationalist opinion in Mexico and various Caribbean democracies. On the economic side, Canada’s significant investments in nickel mining and other areas would face massive competition from US investors. In cultural terms, Quebecois insecurities within a predominantly anglophone federation, and academic and intellectual identification with a proud and sophisticated nation subject to external intolerance tend in the same direction.

But there are definite limits to this friendly disposition. Ottawa can only go so far in diverging from Washington on questions considered to be of vital interest to the latter. Moreover, as a liberal democratic regime with a foreign policy that stresses human rights and political dialogue the acceptance of an avowedly communist one-party regime can only

The most striking evidence of Mexican sympathy for the Cuban cause surfaced following the Trump administration and the pandemic outbreak.

be sustained to the extent that Cuba appears to practice moderation. Canadian public opinion would not remain quiescent in the event of Hong Kong or Belarus-style open mass repression in Havana. Trudeau junior's government has not hesitated to take a tough line with Ortega's Nicaragua and Maduro's Venezuela, meaning Díaz-Canel's Cuba can be in little doubt about Ottawa's red lines.

Mexico

Mexican relations with Cuba reflect similar dynamics. Fidel Castro's 1956 Granma expedition was launched from Mexico and the Cárdenas wing of the ruling party viewed it as a parallel movement of national liberation. Although the higher reaches of the Mexican government were always ambivalent – and much of the elite disliked Cuban radicalism – Mexico was alone in the western hemisphere in maintaining diplomatic relations, and always opposed US sanctions against Havana. Ana Covarrubias (1996) explains this convergence in terms of a shared commitment to non-intervention (although the phrase might be narrowed down to non-intervention against anti-Monroeist regimes). The two governments worked to some extent in parallel over the Central American crises of the 1980s and the (in domestic respects quite conservative) administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari hosted the Salvadoran peace agreement of 1992, working in part with Havana.¹ Similar co-operation helped to advance the peace process in Colombia (the talks were hosted by Havana between 2012 and 2016), another progressive foreign policy offset endorsed by a domestically conservative PRI government. And in 2021 Mexico hosted a negotiation over the impasse in Venezuela, with Cuba again treated as a valid intermediary. Once again, the contrast is stark with the US State Department's continuing classification even under the Biden administration of Cuba as a "state sponsor of terrorism", alongside Iran, North Korea and Syria.

The most striking evidence of Mexican sympathy for the Cuban cause surfaced following the Trump administration and the pandemic outbreak. Within weeks of the July 11th protests the Mexican authorities despatched three shiploads of humanitarian aid – fuel, medicines and food – to help alleviate the immediate distress. More explicit signs of political solidarity soon followed. Cuban President Díaz-Canel was given a place of honour at the celebrations commemorating the 211th anniversary of Mexican independence on September 16th 2021. Receiving him at the Chapultepec Castle, President López Obrador spoke at length on Cuba: "We can agree or disagree with the Cuban Revolution and its Government, but to have resisted 62 years without subjugation is an indisputable historic feat [...] the country should be recognized as the new Numantia and I think for that reason it must be declared a World Heritage Site [...] [So we respectfully call] on the United States to lift the blockade on Cuba because no state has the right to subjugate another people, another country... it is wrong for the U.S. government to use the blockade to hinder the welfare of the Cuban people so that they, forced by necessity, have to confront their own Government. [...] If that perverse strategy were to succeed, which does not seem likely, it would turn into a pyrrhic, vile and despicable victory, one of those stains that cannot be removed even with all the water in the ocean. [...] Hopefully Biden, who possesses sufficient political

1. Salinas has published an extensive account of his efforts to mediate between Castro and Clinton in the mid-1990s. He devoted a full chapter to this in his massive *México: Un Paso Difícil a la Modernidad* (editorial Norma, Madrid, 2000), and expanded that into the full length *Muros, Puentes y Litorales: Relaciones entre México, Cuba, y Estados Unidos* (Penguin Random House, Madrid, 2018).

sensitivity will ... end the policy of aggravating Cuba forever" (cited in: Telesur, 2021). Like their Canadian counterparts, Mexican airlines are in the process of restoring flights to Cuba.

The position of the OAS towards Cuba has transformed dramatically since Luis Almagro was elected Secretary General in 2015. From an institution seeking the re-integration of Cuba into the hemispheric organisation it has become closely allied with Washington in attacking Cuba (and the left-wing governments of Venezuela and Nicaragua) for failing to comply with liberal democratic norms (see Geoffray, 2022). As John Kirk (2021) reports in his insightful account of international reactions to the July 11th 2021 protests in Cuba, Almagro's call for an OAS emergency session was roundly condemned by 13 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nations, showing the ongoing support for Cuba in the region. He then cites Sir Ronald Sanders, the ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the OAS and coordinator of the CARICOM group there, stating that "the OAS can enforce nothing on [Cuba]. Any discussion can only satisfy political hawks with an eye on US mid-term elections, where winning South Florida with the backing of Cuban exiles would be a prize. The task of the OAS should be to promote peaceful and cooperative relations in the hemisphere, not to feed division and conflict" (Kirk, 2021).

The lack of civil liberties in Cuba has always been a thorny issue in EU–Cuban relations.

Europe

Tourist flights from Europe are also in the course of being restored to normal, with Spain particularly interested in the reopening of the major hotels. As long as the Trump administration was in office and tightened US sanctions, European nations refrained from closing ranks with Washington. As the Biden administration took a wait-and-see attitude, so did Europe. However, the nationwide street protests on July 11th 2021 changed matters. The lack of civil liberties in Cuba has always been a thorny issue in EU–Cuban relations, but at the same time there was a foundation of goodwill within many western European societies (and governments) on the grounds of Cuba's social development, and a broad reluctance to sign up to the US's aggressive policies. Over the years this goodwill has been diminished by the accession of post-communist states in eastern Europe, and in the west it has also undergone a process of gradual erosion, as Europe's social democratic parties have waned, Cuba's domestic economic reform process came to a halt and civil society voices on the island were met with stiff responses from the government.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic Cuba gained a great deal of respect internationally by sending medical brigades to fight the pandemic in numerous other countries, most prominently Bergamo in Italy, the early epicentre of the pandemic in Europe. But this was soon obscured from view by Havana's hardline response to the July 11th 2021 street protests, and the strains in EU–Cuban relations became fully visible. Within the EU's institutional framework, it has above all been the European Parliament that has taken high-profile public stances criticising the Cuban government, as highlighted by the award of the Sakharov prize to the "Ladies in White" dissidents in 2005 and to Guillermo Fariñas in 2010. After the July 11th protests, the European Parliament

Moscow's approach reflects a national strategy that is hostile to the West's democracy promotion agenda and ready to weaken US global leadership in its Caribbean "backyard".

stepped up its position, not only condemning violence against protesters and human rights activists, but also calling on the 27-nation bloc to impose sanctions on those responsible for human rights violations in Cuba. The broad majority in favour of this move – with 426 in favour, 146 against and 115 abstentions – would have been unthinkable in the past.²

For Cuba 2021 not only brought a terrible slump in the economy. The island also saw COVID19 infection rates skyrocket from June when the highly contagious Delta variant entered the country following an ill-prepared opening to tourism. But once the vaccines developed on the island reached the stage of mass production, the vaccination process advanced at remarkable speed. As a result, Cuba re-opened the country to international tourism from November 15th 2021, just in time for the important winter season. As Spain has particularly significant investments in Cuba's tourism industry, this will also have a bearing on the country's policies towards the island. Flows of tourists from other European countries will also revive, but staying well below pre-pandemic levels.

However, in its bilateral relations with European countries the Cuban government will struggle. Germany will be a case in point. With the change of government and the Greens to head the Foreign Office, Cuba's notion of national sovereignty and its allergic reactions to anything it decries as meddling in its domestic affairs will be at odds with the Greens' traditional understanding of standing up for human rights issues anywhere. Even before the events of July 11th the failure to respond with more openness to the emergent bottom-up digital media and to enter into meaningful dialogue with critical artists and intellectuals has eroded some of the tacit support and goodwill Cuba retained among many in the social democratic and green social constituencies in the past. Meanwhile, a heightened ideological confrontation with China will not ease matters.

Russia

These days, another potential source of tourism is the Russian Federation. In April 2021 President Putin phoned President Díaz-Canel to congratulate him on his promotion to the leadership of the Communist Party and to propose what he termed a "strategic partnership" in the fight against COVID-19. The Russian Foreign Ministry promptly labelled the July 11th protests an "attempted colour revolution", with Moscow also sure to view them through the prism of similar events in Belarus. Evaluating this source of support requires a long historical perspective and a sharp focus on the geopolitics involved (see Loss & Prieto, 2012; Bain, 2015; Chaguaceda, 2019; and Simes, 2020). In contrast to the friendly democratic regimes discussed above, Moscow's approach reflects a national strategy that is hostile to the West's democracy promotion agenda and ready to weaken US global leadership in its Caribbean "backyard", provided the costs and risks involved are not too high. The Ukraine conflict casts this old relationship in an unpredictable new light.

For three decades, from the Cuban Revolution until the collapse of the USSR, Moscow provided the fundamental economic, military and

2. For a more detailed analysis of EU-Cuba relations from a Cuban perspective see Perera, 2021.

political backing that enabled the Castro regime to sustain its high international profile and ambitions. In exchange, Cuba delivered major strategic, symbolic and reputational benefits, although the partnership was obviously unequal and at times quite stormy. The three decades since the Soviet collapse are far less studied. Yet, Cuban–Russian relations are still a significant factor in the island’s affairs and their oscillations have a bearing on current circumstances and near-term prospects. The low point came just after Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev and the US Congress adopted the Torricelli Act. Moscow not only withdrew its troops and its aid, but went as far as abstaining in the 1992 UN vote condemning that legislation. Between 1992 and 1994 the Russian Federation actually voted with the US and against Cuba at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. But that changed in 1995 (at the time of the first Chechen War), and the following year Moscow joined the vast majority of states in condemning the 1996 Helms-Burton Act codifying and tightening unilateral US sanctions.

Moscow’s long engagement with the Cuban Revolution remains a relevant factor in the island’s security and continues to be driven more by Great Power considerations than by commercial logic.

It was in that year that the “Latina” Travel Agency was opened, paving the way for Russian tourism at a time when trade and investment flows also restarted. Among other things Cuba desperately needed to import spare parts for all the material it had acquired during the Soviet period. Once Putin came to office he was quick to visit Havana, where he signed an exchange deal for 2001–2005 involving sugar, rum, medicines and medical equipment from the island in return for oil, machinery and chemicals. Subsequently Cuban nickel overtook the supply of sugar. However, on the other side of the balance sheet, and to Havana’s displeasure, the Lourdes military listening post was closed.

Cuba was, however, unable to sustain a balanced trade relationship and by the time of the global financial crisis in 2009 it could no longer service its accumulated debts to Moscow. So, rather than commercial benefits, it was a new geopolitical event (Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014) that spurred further outreach from Moscow during the 2015–2020 period. First Moscow forgave 90% of the outstanding Soviet-era debt of \$22.2 billion, and then in 2017 (responding to the crisis in Venezuela) it resumed oil shipments to Havana for the first time since 1990 and committed to revitalise the island’s decapitalised rail system. Two years later, as the Trump administration stepped up its pressure, Russia offered help to maintain Soviet-era military equipment, and in June 2019 it despatched an advanced warship on a visit to Havana. Foreign Minister Lavrov visited in February 2020 and Putin twice phoned the new president in 2021. In short, Moscow’s long engagement with the Cuban Revolution remains a relevant factor in the island’s security and continues to be driven more by Great Power considerations than by commercial logic.

Venezuela

Ideological solidarity was more strikingly in evidence in Havana’s relations with Caracas, although the instability of the economic and commercial links was once again clear. It is important to be aware of the centuries-long prehistory and the initial convergence of the Cuban and Venezuelan rebellions in 1958/9, before Caracas and Havana became Cold War antagonists. The personal bonds linking Fidel Castro and Hugo

The scope for an early return to any kind of mutually beneficial exchange between Caracas and Havana is very slender.

Chávez also deserve attention, particularly after the failed coup against Chávez in 2002 that made his divorce from Washington complete and precipitated his regime's close security dependence on Cuba. Once oil prices surged the Cuban offer of healthcare and social mobilisation proved a spectacular success and the two governments (still quite divergent in their beliefs and practices) achieved a decade of partnership and international influence that temporarily promised a breakthrough.

But the foundations of the "Bolivarian" project to establish "21st Century Socialism" were always fragile and the death of Chávez, followed by the collapse of PDVSA gradually turned a honeymoon into a nightmare. The chimera of Venezuelan largesse as a substitute for Soviet aid has proved another illusion. But Havana has proved unable to disentangle itself from Caracas's failed experiment in "21st Century Socialism" and solidarity among progressives in the Western liberal democracies has also been undermined by its continuing endorsement of the Ortega autocracy's 2021 electoral charade in Nicaragua.³

It is the downswing in Cuba–Venezuela relations since about 2014 that most concerns us here (see Mesa-Lago & Vidal, 2019; Fonseca and Polga-Hecimovich, 2021). Perhaps Havana could have diversified its sources of support and reduced its exposure to the vagaries of the Maduro regime if the Obama administration's "normalization" of relations with Cuba had remained in place, but the arrival of Trump in the White House was followed by the rise of Juan Guaidó to head the Venezuelan National Assembly, with the resultant polarising consequences. As the crisis in Caracas spiralled downward, Havana scaled back its health and welfare commitments to Venezuela, but maintained its unswerving political support for Maduro and perhaps reinforced its security assistance. (Evidence on the latter point is much disputed, with implausible claims in abundance and few trustworthy sources). To the surprise of many observers Maduro has outlasted "maximum pressure" from the Trump administration, but by the time the pandemic arrived it was no longer able to meet Cuba's needs for imported energy. Although it is possible that negotiations promoted by Norway (and supported by Cuba) might broaden the base for a durable settlement of Venezuela's internal conflicts and help steer the country towards a slightly more stable oil economy, the scope for an early return to any kind of mutually beneficial exchange between Caracas and Havana is very slender. Nearly all the risks remain on the downside for Cuba – that the negotiations will fail; that US hostility will continue to besiege Maduro; and that Havana's commitment to a floundering regime will generate further problems and harmful consequences, instead of supplying the island with much needed relief.

China

The People's Republic of China might provide a much more solid, broad-based and long-term source of likeminded partnership – and even some short-term assistance – but it is doubtful whether the authorities in Beijing will judge this a sound move. Diplomatic relations were established in 1960, shortly after the Revolution, but Havana's embrace of Moscow was not to the PRC's liking and relations were erratic until the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the wake of the Special Period, Fidel Castro

3. It is telling that ahead of the "Marcha Civica" planned for Cuba on November 15th the most vocal advocates of popular protest in neighbouring Puerto Rico were on the colony's "progressive" wing – the Independence party (PIP) and the Movimiento Civico (MVC).

travelled to China and seriously examined whether the best solution for Cuban communism might be to learn from their model. However, he eventually reported back that this would be unfeasible, given the proximity and dominance of the US and the counter-revolutionary spirit of the exiles in Florida.

In 2011 Beijing agreed to write off \$6 billion of Cuba's old debt. This was an exceptional gesture – Beijing normally stretches out foreign debts, and has only rarely forgiven them (Iraq and Serbia are the only other instances so far). When President Xi Jinping visited Havana in 2014 he stated that “The two countries advance hand in hand (towards) construction of socialism with its own characteristics, offering *reciprocal support* on issues related to our *respective national interests*” (Xi, 2014, authors' italics). This led to a \$120 million Chinese bank loan to expand the Santiago container port and the establishment of biopharmaceutical and artificial intelligence enterprises in the Mariel Free Trade Zone. But a proposed \$300 million investment in Cuban nickel and a much larger (\$6 billion) project to upscale the Cienfuegos oil refinery fell through. China partly funded Cuba's ALBA-1 underseas cable to Venezuela, and Huawei has a contract to install fibre optic cables across the island. By 2017 it is reported that Cuban imports from China were worth \$1.35 billion (including new cars from Geely, trucks from SinoTruck and buses from Yutong), but in exchange it only exported \$379 million (mostly raw sugar and nickel) (Jiménez Enoa, 2019). In 2018 Cuba signed up to the Belt and Road Initiative to secure tractors, irrigation equipment and support for sugar and rice production. It also gained a computer assembly plant, renewable energy investments and a Confucius Institute was opened at the University of Havana. While China became a key trading partner for Cuba, the relationship was clearly very lopsided and even before the pandemic the prospects of repayment were poor. In 2022 the sugar harvest looks so poor that Havana will be hard-pressed to find the 400,000 tonnes it had promised to the PRC. Whereas China sold weapons systems to likeminded Andean partners it made no such commitments to Cuba.

The most significant security commitment may have been the technology provided by Huawei TP-Link and ZTE to ETECSA, the state telecoms company (US sanctions meant that Havana had no access to Western alternatives). It is alleged (Lazarus / Ellis 2021) that these suppliers provide the “key to the regime's ability” to shut off internet and telephone services in the wake of the July 11th protests. According to Sweden's Qurium, Huawei's network management software eSight was used to filter web searches. Indeed, on August 31st 2021 President Xi Jinping phoned President Díaz-Canel for the fourth time since the pandemic began. According to reports of the conversation (Xinhua, 2021), he said “China is willing to walk together with Cuba in building socialism and be good partners in pursuing common development” as well as “being good exemplars of anti-COVID-19 fight and good partners in strategic coordination”. But he also said: “*No matter how the situation changes* (our italics) China's policy of sticking to long-term friendship with Cuba will not change, and its willingness to deepen co-operation in various field with Cuba will not change” (Xinhua, 2021). It is worth underscoring the first six words, as they can clearly be read as saying that Beijing, ultimately, does not see its relations with the island as bound to the political status quo or the regime currently in power.

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At the onset of the COVID crisis Cuba was once again able to turn its medical sector into a key instrument of international soft-power projection.

Although Cuba hoped to rely exclusively on its own vaccines to suppress the pandemic, by mid-2021 it was clear that production bottlenecks were slowing this essential rollout and President Díaz-Canel appealed for humanitarian assistance. But President Biden was only prepared to allow external vaccines onto the island if they were distributed by an international organisation independent of the Cuban government – an intolerable infringement of sovereignty from Havana’s point of view. So at the end of August Cuba agreed to roll out China’s Sinopharm vaccine with a Cuban booster. Whether or not these were donated by Beijing has not been clarified, but the incident illustrates the scope for China to select strategic areas where it can usefully “deepen collaboration” with Havana, no matter how the internal circumstances unfold.

Cuban vaccines: Cuba's new source of soft-power diplomacy?

In its international relations, soft-power diplomacy has traditionally been of crucial importance for Cuba, be it the early campaign for literacy, cultural institutions such as Casa de las Américas and the Havana Film Festival, the sporting triumphs at the Olympic Games or the medical missions abroad. When Cuba entered a phase of rapprochement with the US in Obama’s second term in office, the island’s soft-power capital was once again key for the truly high levels of goodwill and sympathetic perceptions of Cuba in North America and Europe. Havana became the place to be and pop stars, politicians and businesspeople all flocked to the island. Politically, Obama’s presidential visit in 2016 and, culturally, the Rolling Stones concert became events that seemed to mark a new era. In hindsight, they marked the zenith after which things once again soured – not only in US–Cuba relations, but also with regard to the timid opening process within Cuba itself.

Trump brought the Cold War back to US–Cuba relations. While the island suffered from the economic fallout of sharpened US sanctions and a deteriorating image due to its domestic failures to reform, it could count on Trump’s bullying eliciting enough opposition throughout the Western world and within Latin America to perfectly maintain its traditional David vs. Goliath imagery. Even while other sources of soft power eroded, this consistently held firm to provide a baseline of (albeit defensive) international support.

At the onset of the COVID crisis Cuba was once again able to turn its medical sector into a key instrument of international soft-power projection as the island quickly sent its Henry Reeve Brigades of doctors and medical staff to numerous countries affected by the pandemic. Most notably this included the Italian city of Bergamo, the devastating images of whose collapsed hospital in the rich North became emblematic and put it at the centre of global attention. That help came not from European neighbours but from poor, distant Cuba was seen to underscore not only Cuba’s medical achievement but also the country’s humanitarian vocation.

Honing in on its reputation as an international medical power punching way above its weight, Cuba started to develop its own anti-COVID-19 vaccines (Drexler & Hoffmann, 2021). However, before they became available in sufficient quantity (with the names of Abdala and Soberana) in summer

2020 the island itself became an epicentre of the global pandemic as the Delta variant spread with such force that the health system – the pride of Cuba’s social achievements – was quickly overrun. The dramatic health crisis, combined with the dire economic situation, were the sombre background for the July 11th street protests. While the Cuban vaccines are not yet recognised by the WHO, once the island managed to mass produce the vaccines they proved their worth. The massive vaccination campaign in the second half of 2021 was key to bringing the pandemic under control, with daily case numbers falling from more than 9,000 at the peak in August to some 200 by the end of November. With Cuban vaccines being administered to children from 2 years onward, by February 2022 90% of the population has been fully vaccinated.

This success allowed Cuba to restart international tourism by mid-November without fearing a new wave of the pandemic hitting the island. (In fact, the entry of Omicron then pushed infection numbers up somewhat but with hardly any effect on the national health care system.) Moreover, as much of the Caribbean suffers from low vaccination rates, the mass roll-out of vaccines (which will also include vaccine updates becoming a routine healthcare provision over the coming years) makes Cuba stand out in a region where most neighbouring islands’ vaccination rates are low. This could give Cuba a competitive edge in marketing the island as a “safe” tourist destination. However, the worsening economic situation and the negative international image from the increased social and political tensions will outweigh this effect and will impede a speedy and strong rebound of Western tourism.

Cuban vaccines are not sophisticated mRNA or vector vaccines but “old-school” protein-subunit-based vaccines. As such, their great advantage is their comparatively simple production process and their ease of handling, which requires no deep-freeze storage. The lack of independent monitoring of their efficacy is a drawback, but their main issue is the absence of international recognition. Even with these limitations, though, Cuba’s home-grown vaccines have revived some of the soft-power diplomacy historically associated with its medical achievements.

Cuba also tied considerable economic hopes on the vaccine development that their export could become a new source of foreign exchange. Given the lack of international recognition of the vaccines and the greatly increased availability of other vaccines, initial ideas of vaccine tourism to Cuba have been shelved. But country-to-country exports to Venezuela and Vietnam and licensed production in Iran have begun. However, so far this is limited to a handful of countries. For the Cuban economy, the vaccines are good news, but they are far from being a magic bullet, and will be hardly enough to offset the island’s other economic troubles.

Conclusion

Cuba is a strategically located nation-state with a proud history, a strong cultural identity and a globally recognised political profile as an anti-imperialist revolutionary beacon. But it has only a modest population (the same as both Haiti and the Dominican Republic) and a crippled economy. It still projects an international presence far beyond the scale

Havana has progressively lost ascendancy over the domestic narrative as its capacity to deliver has faltered.

of its domestic base, and the success or failure of Havana's revolutionary endeavours matters to external opinion far more than its reduced capabilities would suggest. In short, the Castro regime offended US national pride and produced an unequal contest with Washington that still conditions international reactions to the fate of the island. The result is a precarious stasis with Havana and Washington both heavily invested in incompatible narratives and worldviews, while the rest of the world – from the most liberal of democracies to the most hardline of autocracies – all view the contest with a certain degree of incomprehension (even as they take sides on human rights issues or against the extra-territoriality of US sanctions under the Helms-Burton Act).

For the first half-century after the Revolution the Cuban regime was successful in separating external assessments of its affairs from the domestic sphere. It could rely on a wellspring of national sentiment and a controlled internal public opinion to support its assertions of sovereignty against the domineering “empire” to its north. Those islanders who doubted its message could typically leave, but then they would lose much of their access to their families and communities of origin.⁴

Over the past decade, however, Havana has progressively lost ascendancy over the domestic narrative as its capacity to deliver has faltered, while cautious liberalisation has led to more exposure to external influences (through tourism, remittances, foreign travel for nationals, social media advances and the effects of the 2014 Obama “normalization” programme). A more plural and more disenchanted citizenry has emerged. With *exit* blocked and *loyalty* to the regime fading, only the third pillar of Hirschman's trio of potential responses to poor conditions remains: *voice* (Hirschman 1970). When in the state-sponsored referendum of 2019 the people endorsed the reformed Constitution many may not simply have acted out of obedience to authority, but also have harboured hopes that the revised Magna Carta will allow for greater *voice* on key public issues.

For the most part external observers have little exposure to such glacial realignments of Cuban domestic sentiment. The varied reactions to the COVID pandemic and the July 11th protests surveyed in this chapter are not driven primarily by an informed appreciation of the changing attitudes and balance of forces within the island. As in the past, they largely reflect the assumptions and political commitments of the diverse external players engaged in the ongoing Cuban drama. The established pattern has been for such actors to project onto the blank slate of internal Cuban opinion the beliefs and expectations that derive from their own worldviews, ideals and pragmatic considerations. The real task of revising and adjusting those interpretations in the light of feedback emanating directly from the Cuban people remains a matter for future elaboration, rather than a process that is already under way. The three-stage programme of this Europe-Cuba Forum project, with shared participation and distribution both on and off the island, is one attempt from a European perspective to advance such dialogue and closer ties.

In the short run it remains difficult for outsiders to assess the scale and distribution of domestic opinion on post-pandemic Cuba's alternatives. Setting aside the impulses transmitted from outside the island, it seems clear that islanders have expressed some forceful views about family

4. To put this into comparative perspective, this clearly is different from, for instance, the Korean case, where the rupture was more absolute and the fate of internal dissenters was even more dire. In the Cuban variant of communism exile and domestic sanction are less decisive and a good deal of regime legitimacy has been gained through more positive means.

law, in addition to their protests over shortages and social hardships. Reassertions of local identities, and perhaps some revival of religiosity, may also be emerging. On the most directly political issues of policing, official censorship and redress for government errors polemics still crowd out trustworthy testimony and solid evidence. Past cycles of regime “*tira y afloja*” (tug of war) make it difficult to distinguish temporary clampdowns from major inflection points. Credible observers report that in contrast to previous periods, this time the regime’s intolerance of even quite moderate expressions of dissent may be proving unacceptable to major segments of the hard-pressed Cuban people, especially to many educated young people who make extensive use of the social media outlets that remain available. This chapter has focussed on external reactions to the 2021 protests, but even the relatively supportive responses from abroad are generally tentative and conditional on domestic calm. Such foreign partners could easily pull back if they reach the conclusion that a clear majority of the Cuban people are withdrawing their acquiescence to the prevailing dispensation.

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But external observers can also reflect on probable longer-term dynamics. Looking, say, a decade ahead, regardless of how the current emergency unfolds, Cuba will still be a highly organised and independent sovereign state. Biden’s latest references to “state failure” (CNN, 2021) may apply to Haiti, but sorely mischaracterise Cuba.

Even if the Díaz-Canel leadership remains in power, sooner or later this cohort will no longer be entitled to hold office, and one way or another the islanders will be called upon to consider the next stage in their national development. It remains to be seen whether the forces of continuity can prevail over pressures for accelerated change. (*Patria o Muerte* compared with *Patria y Vida*, to cite the current alternative slogans). Too much continuity would almost certainly accentuate the demographic decline and internal demoralisation of the past decade. Too reckless a course correction is likely to create cross-straits population flows and asset redistributions so violent that they destabilise the wider region, perhaps opening the way for an upsurge in organised crime and even armed confrontations. The international community therefore has a collective interest in supporting some intermediate path over the coming decade.

Various analysts have reacted to the events of July 11th and the sequels by observing that the myth of Cuban “exceptionalism” has been destroyed. It is true that the long-cultivated rosy official image of the Cuban Revolution was substantially dented, and that underlying currents of dissatisfaction and dissent have now surfaced in a manner that will be hard to disguise, let alone to reverse. It is still too early to be sure whether this marks a true breakpoint, or whether the regime can succeed in containing the shock and reconstructing its legitimising narrative. But, in any case, the core of the “exceptionalist” thesis was much broader and far less dependent on Havana’s self-description than this critique supposes.⁵ Scholarly attempts to explain the course of Cuba’s national development by shoehorning its long-term political trajectory into any of the standard formulae – authoritarian (or totalitarian) deviation; Communist Party takeover; Third World charismatic nationalist revolution; Soviet proxy; let alone historically inevitable exercise in building socialism – all these framing devices are more liable to distort or mislead about the history of the past six decades

5. For a broader discussion of the debate on Cuban exceptionalism see Hoffmann & Whitehead, 2007.

Cuba is now less “exceptional” than it was in the past, but even so it remains fairly sui generis, and false analogies with other political trajectories still need to be debunked.

than to illuminate them. There are still major anomalies in the unfolding of this experience that require careful Cuba-specific analysis. Although the Fidelista prospectus of voluntarist transformation unconstrained by any of the normal forces determining political possibility has been tested to destruction, the resulting regime is still fairly unlike what any of these predictive schemas would foretell.

Perhaps 2021 will be viewed in retrospect as the moment when the crushing pressures of social reality extinguished all the regime’s margin of manoeuvre, but that juncture has been falsely proclaimed on many previous occasions, and even in the current straitened circumstances it would be prudent to acknowledge that Havana still has significant defensive resources. This chapter has outlined the international assets it retains, and our previous volume highlighted the unusual strengths (as well as acute weaknesses) of its domestic policy inheritance.

So perhaps Cuba is now less “exceptional” than it was in the past, but even so it remains fairly sui generis, and false analogies with other political trajectories still need to be debunked. President Biden may think Cuba is a “failed state”, but a Washington policy that confuses Cuba with Haiti is unlikely to work well. In contrast to Puerto Rico, Cuba is not an unincorporated territory of the US under the ultimate authority of the US Congress, and it does not have the remotest prospect of being admitted as an additional state of the Union. Whatever else happens it will remain a separate sovereign nation, internationally recognised as such, and required to provide for its own citizens rather than to seek welfare handouts from Washington.

Unlike Venezuela, the Cuban nation has always been energy-short, and has had no alternative to relying on its human capital to generate any productive capacity it may have. Whereas the Bolivarian Republic has turned into a mismanaged electoral autocracy with very reduced internal legitimacy, Cuba has been consistent in resisting electoral contestation and in claiming patriotic unity on programmatic grounds. In contrast to the oligarchic democracy of Honduras the revolutionary regime has never allowed the US military presence in Guantanamo Bay to exercise the slightest influence over the internal affairs of the republic. Unlike the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Cuban communism did not degenerate into dynastic rule by a family, it is not bent on acquiring a nuclear weapons capability, and does not operate a gulag system of repressive control. In contrast to the German Democratic Republic, the Castro revolution was not imposed by the Red Army on one occupied zone of a defeated enemy, and its claims to nationalist authenticity were projected across the entire territory on the basis of its own internally generated legitimacy. Unlike the Soviet Union, Cuban communism was not continental in scale and Cuba’s “socialism in one country” signified a compact project with a restricted geopolitical potential that rested its survival on winning international goodwill through persuasion and alliances, soft-power projection and an ambitious foreign policy, rather than by projecting hegemonic dominance. The Yeltsin debacle inoculated various party regimes against perestroika and glasnost, with Cuba one of the first to resist that siren song. To sum up, even if Cuba is less “exceptional” than some previous authors imagined, it is different enough from all these comparators to require a separate evaluation based on its own reality, not that of any supposed counterparts.

From comparative experience as well as the evidence of domestic tendencies it would be prudent to assume that a substantial current of opinion will continue to value various key aspects of the “revolutionary” inheritance, while the strength of pressures for a different social pact will depend in large part on the influence (or otherwise) of the emigrant community, above all in Florida, and on whether any internal leverage it might obtain is used to bridge the gap in worldviews, rather than to attempt the extreme project of suppressing all traces of the past six decades. As indicated in the course of this chapter, such a “Plattist” (referring to the early years of Cuba’s independence under US tutelage) ambition may remain alive and well in Dade County, but on the international stage it would be greeted with widespread scepticism, if not indignation. On balance it seems more realistic to conclude that the last word will rest with the inhabitants of the island.

But following Moscow’s military assault on Ukraine a new caveat is in order. Ever since the 1959 Revolution Cuba has seen the defence of sovereignty against the encroachments of its powerful neighbour to the North as the nation’s ultimate value. This included, of course, the sovereign choice of its allies up to the point, in 1962, of stationing Soviet nuclear missiles just 90 miles off the US coast.

Russia has become a key economic partner of Cuba but Putin’s open disrespect for Ukraine’s sovereignty made Havana’s stance a diplomatic high wire act. While state media follow Russia’s wording and speaks of “special military operation” rather than war (e.g. Granma, 24 February 2022), in the United Nations vote of 24 February Cuba abstained⁶. The notion that a powerful country, if it judges its security to be at risk, can invade a neighbouring country with impunity sets most perilous precedents from a Cuban point of view. The long-standing history of US hegemonic policies towards the island, as embodied in the US-mandated Platt amendment of the early 20th century and the Helms-Burton Law of 1996, indicate that Havana is not immune to such risks.

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6. While Havana refers to “the use of force and non-observance of legal principles and international norms which Cuba strongly supports, and are, particularly for small countries, an essential resource in resisting hegemony, abuse of power and injustice”, at the same time it puts all blame for the war on the US and NATO and underscores that “Russia has the right to defend itself” (“Rusia tiene derecho a defenderse”) (MinRex, 2022).

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anna Ayuso

Doctor in Public International Law and Master in European Studies from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB). Senior Research Fellow on Latin American at CIDOB since 2002. Associate Professor of Public International Law at the UAB. Associate Professor at the Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI). Member of the Editorial Board of the *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*; of the advisory boards of the *Revista Mural Internacional* (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro) and the *Comillas Journal of International Relations* (Universidad Pontificia Comillas); and of the Scientific Committee of the magazine *América Latina Hoy* (University of Salamanca).

Katarzyna Dembicz

Latin Americanist, geographer (PhD) and political scientist (postdoc). Professor at the Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies, University of Warsaw. Visiting Professor: University of Panama (2016), IHEAL University Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3 (2017), Instituto de Iberoamérica USAL (2013, 2014 and 2021). Coordinator of various research projects: “Quo Vadis Cuba? Implicaciones para Europa y Polonia” (2011–2013), “Discourses and development dilemmas of Central American local communities” (2019–2023). Director of the scientific journal *Ameryka Łacińska* (University of Warsaw). Formerly General Secretary of REDIAL, and founder of the Fundación Profesor Andrzej Dembicz; currently a member of the board of directors of CEISAL. She is the author or co-author of six monographs and over 60 scientific texts and has edited 13 books. ORCID: 0000-0002-8023-088X

Marie Laure Geoffray

Received her PhD from Sciences Po. She is an Associate Professor in political science at IHEAL-Sorbonne Nouvelle. She has extensively published about Cuban issues, especially about civil society dynamics. Her latest publications include: « Less Velvet for the Cuban transition? Entanglements between Central European, Latin American and Cuban Transnational Networks », *Revue d'Etudes comparatives Est-Ouest*, *Revue d'Etudes comparatives Est-Ouest* n°2-3, 2020, pp. 185-224; « Mettre la peur à distance. Retour sur une expérience ethnographique en contexte autoritaire », *Critique Internationale* n° 86, 2020, pp. 141-164, and « Digital critique in Cuba », in Sara Garcia and Ted Henken (eds), *Cuba's Digital Revolution*, Coral Gables, Florida University Press, 2021.

Susanne Gratius

Professor and, since 2020, Head of the Department of Political Science and International Relations in the Faculty of Law at the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM). Associate Senior Researcher at CIDOB. Lectures on master's and undergraduate programmes on Foreign Policy Analysis, Globalization and International Regimes, International Relations Theory and Latin America in the International System. Her research and publications focus on Latin America (Cuba, Brazil and Venezuela) and its relations with the EU (foreign policy, political regimes, populism).

Prof. Dr. Bert Hoffmann

Lead Researcher at the GIGA Institute for Latin American Studies, Head of the GIGA Berlin Office, and Professor of Political Science at Freie Universität Berlin. As member of the Foro Europa Cuba network and recently edited the volume: *Social Policies and Institutional Reform in Post-COVID Cuba* (Opladen: Barbara Budrich); 2021. (Open Access, also fully available in Spanish.)

As a Principal Investigator in the German–Latin American Centre of Infection & Epidemiology Research and Training 8 (GLACIER) he is leading a comparative study of COVID-19 vaccination policies in Cuba, Mexico and Central America. ORCID: 0000-0001-7522-3610

Eduardo Perera Gómez

Bachelor's degree in International Relations from the Instituto Superior de relaciones Internacionales (ISRI) in 1982 and Doctor of Historical Sciences (University of Havana, 2016). Full Professor. Jean Monnet Chair (2015–2018). Researcher at the Center for European Studies (1985–2006). Advisor, Second Head of Mission at the Cuban Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and the European Union (2006–2009). Deputy Director of the International Policy Research Centre (CIPI) (2010–2012). Professor at the University of Havana (2012–2021). Specialist in European integration, Europe–Latin America relations and contemporary European history. Author of a number of works published in various magazines and books, in both Cuba and other countries.

Raynier Pellón Azopardo

Senior researcher at CIPI. Bachelor's degree in History (with honours) from the University of Havana (UH) (2006). Master's in Contemporary History and International Relations. Special mention in European Studies (UH, 2008). Researcher and Head of the Department of Global and Regional Affairs at the Center for European Studies (Havana, 2009–2010). Project Manager and Coordinator of "Escenarios de Política Internacional Europa" (CIPI, Havana, 2012–present). Member of the Jean Monnet Chair at the UH (2015–2018). Assistant Researcher, 2017. Member of the advisory board of the scientific journal *Cuadernos de Nuestra América*. Doctorate in Contemporary History (UH, 2022).

Tomasz Rudowski

Doctor of Social Science, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in International Relations, as well as a master's degree in Cultural Studies. Assistant Professor at the Institute of Iberian and Ibero-American Studies at the University of Warsaw. Participated in an exchange programme with the Autonomous University of Madrid as part of his studies, and in a research stay in Mexico within the Mexican Government Scholarship Program. Also undertook a research stay and internship at the University of Amsterdam (2016). Author of more than a dozen scientific publications, his research focuses on the socioeconomic development, economic history and international relations of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Claudia Sánchez Savín

Bachelor's degree in International Relations. Master's student at the Center for Hemispheric and United States Studies (CEHSEU) of the University of Havana. Professor of Public International Law. Currently a specialist museologist. Collaborator in the project "Relaciones Internacionales. Medios, Comunicación y Derecha Internacional: Interacciones e Impactos para Cuba hacia el 2025" for the Programa Nacional de Ciencia Tecnología e Innovación, and on the CIPI project "Relaciones Cuba – Unión Europea".

Laurence Whitehead

Senior Research Fellow in Political Science at Nuffield College, University of Oxford, and Research Associate at the German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA, Hamburg) as well as at the Transformation Research Unit in Stellenbosch University (South Africa). He has written extensively on the comparative politics of democratisation and governance in Latin America and the world, and has studied Cuban affairs for more than half a century. ORCID: 0000-0002-1088-9806

The relationship between Cuba and the EU still is conditioned by asymmetries, the different nature of political and economic systems, the costly strategic calculation imposed by the US policy against Cuba, as well as by the constraints resulting from the global crisis, now aggravated by the COVID pandemic and international conflicts. The sui generis model of regional and international insertion of Cuba as a socialist country and the one of the European Union itself as a process of integration under construction, represent another particularity of a relationship that has developed gradually, from its formalization in 1988 to the signing of a Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement in 2016. The latter made possible to broaden and deepen cooperation together with the political, social and economic relations between the two parties. To date, the island has implemented several reforms with the aim of enhancing its international integration, within a framework of effectiveness and in keeping with its national interests. With this work, European and Cuban academics, members of the Europe Cuba Forum Jean Monnet Network, provide an interesting analysis of the factors that hinder or enhance Cuba's insertion into the current international political scene and the EU's constructive support to this process, which is taking place within the framework of renewed bilateral, interregional and global cooperation.

