

## “PERIPHERAL IDEAS THAT WON’T FLY”: EU FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS ON CUBA AND US INFLUENCE (2008–2010)

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Present-day Cuba finds itself yet again navigating the volatile waters of international politics. In his book *The Cuban Revolution (1959–2009): Relations with Spain, the European Union, and the United States*, published in 2009, J. Roy already drew attention to the fact that Cuba’s international relations are one of the most complicated, especially those with the EU. This is due to the lack of a coherent, consequent, and united EU approach on foreign policy.<sup>3</sup> From the outside, the United States constantly pressured the EU to isolate the island. From the inside, Spain often acted more benignly based on historical and social ties with its former colony. These tendencies are set to change with the significant current political changes within Cuba, Spain, the EU, and the US. Therefore, an examination of an earlier episode of political changes surrounding Cuba’s international relations may yield interesting insights into its dynamics.

The year after Roy published his book, Spain was set to be the first country to hold the EU presidency after the Lisbon Treaty came into effect at the beginning of 2010. In the preceding year, the Spanish government had already been giving off signals that they

intended to review the EU’s foreign policy towards Cuba, much to the dismay of the Obama administration. Interestingly, classified US diplomatic communications from the years 2009 and 2010, made public by the website WikiLeaks, shed a very interesting light on internal EU dynamics and Spain’s lobbying from the US government’s perspective. These leaked diplomatic cables form a historical source to which scholars normally only get access after many decades.<sup>4</sup> The leading question of this essay will be whether the EU made foreign policy decisions on Cuba free from US influence in the years 2008–2010.

### THE SPANISH CONTEXT

Regarding Cuba, Spain has been the EU’s most active and influential member state. Some authors even are bold enough to speculate that without Spain, the EU might never have paid any attention to the island at all. Therefore, this section of the paper briefly sketches out the Spanish context running up the 2008–2010 period.

Historical and societal bonds between Spain and Cuba ensured that even during the dictatorship of

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1. Editor’s Note: This essay was awarded First Price in the 2017 ASCE Student Prize Competition for graduate students.

2. Words spoken in private by the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs on Spanish overtures within the EU during the Spanish Presidency. Large parts of this essay are part of a master thesis titled ‘No es Fácil; Relations Between the European Union and Cuba since 2008’ written for the master of International Relations at Utrecht University, The Netherlands.

3. J. Roy, *The Cuban Revolution (1959–2009): Relations with Spain, the European Union, and the United States* (New York 2009) 165–173.

4. To my knowledge as of this writing (05–05-17) these materials have not been used for academic research.

Francisco Franco (1937–1975) relations between both countries were amicable.<sup>5</sup> The Spanish transition to democracy was followed by a reign of socialist cabinets during which bilateral relations had their hiccups but were generally in good order. The regime in Havana was not merely engaged economically by Spain, but Spain also made efforts to promote peaceful democratic change in Cuba.

The conservative party led by Prime Minister Aznar came to power in Spain in 1996. The conservatives favoured a new hard line which aligned with the US for the first time in history. Confrontations soon followed and resulted in several diplomatic clashes. The EU's Common Position, which conditioned normal relations on democratic reforms, was Aznar's idea and the pinnacle of this period. Due to this Common Position, bilateral relations between Cuba and Spain were more strained than under Franco. After Cuba's crackdown and imprisonment of dissidents in 2003, the EU imposed further diplomatic sanctions, and during the so-called "cocktail wars," EU embassies in Havana actively invited dissidents to attend functions they held.

The Spanish socialists won the elections in 2004 and reinstated their policy of engagement. After 2005, the EU followed suit as it thought engagement might lead to better results and the next years slowly but surely saw the easing of tensions. The socialist cabinet of Prime Minister Zapatero actively sought to change the way conservatives had conducted foreign policy on Cuba along US lines. Spain maintained a less US-centric approach in general: The socialists won the elections largely because of their promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq supporting US initiatives. Within the EU, Spain asserted itself more than ever in policy towards Cuba. During these oscil-

lations in political bilateral relations between Spain and Cuba, Spanish trade and investment in Cuba kept growing until Spain became its most important economic partner. It must be kept in mind that like in the US, Cuba is a domestic political topic in Spain. Simultaneously, relations with Cuba are seen as symbolic for Spain's relationship with the whole of Latin-America.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst still under the leadership of the socialist party, Spain took over the EU presidency in 2010. A large part of the presidency was devoted to putting the Lisbon Treaty (2007) into practice. The treaty entailed a loss of influence for the country holding the presidency; its prime minister no longer chaired the European Council and more importantly, its foreign minister no longer represented the EU in international affairs. This task instead became the responsibility of the high representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the diplomatic arm of the EU. Nonetheless, it soon became apparent that Madrid sought a reconsideration of the EU's Common Position towards Cuba, although the messages coming from different cabinet members and officials varied. The Spanish government faced strong domestic criticism on its way of handling its domestic economic crisis. At the same time the Spanish government had to underline that its own economic difficulties did not disqualify it from leading the EU. Therefore, many officials did not want to completely hinge the presidency on the issue of Cuba. Nevertheless, while Prime Minister Zapatero was somewhat more moderate, it was certain that Spain's Foreign Minister Moratinos would actively seek better bilateral relations.<sup>7</sup>

Regardless, in December 2009 the president of the European Parliament did not expect any change in

5. Amongst other examples: under Franco, Spain ignored the US embargo, despite US pressure. Cuba never acknowledged the Spanish Republican government in exile and declared three days of national mourning when Franco passed. Both Castro's and Franco's families were from the Spanish region of Galicia.

6. Roy, *Cuban Revolution*, 91–159; C. Paetzold, "Spanish-Cuban relations, 1990–2003," in H.M. Erisman and J.M. Kirk, *Redefining Cuban Foreign Policy: The Impact of the "Special Period"* (Gainesville 2006) 233–259.

7. M. Pérez-Stable, *The United States and Cuba: Intimate Enemies* (New York 2011) 137–138; R. Dominguez, *EU Foreign Policy towards Latin America* (New York 2015) 147–148; C. Doleac, *Will the U.S.-Cuban rapprochement affect the relationship between the European Union and Cuba?* (23-02-2015) 2–3. Available at: <http://www.coha.org/will-the-u-s-cuban-rapprochement-affect-the-relationship-between-the-european-union-and-cuba/>

policy towards Cuba in the near future. He would be proven right. The death of a hunger-striking Cuban dissident in February of the following year put an early and abrupt end to Spain's agenda to improve relations with Cuba.<sup>8</sup> The outrage following this incident made it impossible to persuade European member states with a tougher stance on the island to agree to policy changes.

### RAÚL CASTRO'S ELECTION

Diplomatic communications from 2008–2010 leaked by the website WikiLeaks shed light on internal EU relations and the Spanish government's actions from the US government's perspective. These communications have not been used in any of the literature identified during this research. Regrettably, the database stops after the first two months of 2010. Irrespective, the documents that have been released still form an invaluable primary source on such a recent subject. These leaked diplomatic cables form a historical information source that scholars normally only get their hands on after decades.

The cables show the ongoing unease between Spain and the US with regard to Cuba, as illustrated by words exchanged during a meeting between Cuban-American senator Melquíades Martínez and Moratinos in the US embassy in Madrid. Martínez was also asked on other occasions by the Obama administration to deliver messages to Spanish government officials. In one instance, Moratinos reacted as if irritated: "*Questioning the U.S. continuing demarches about Spanish engagement with Cuba, Moratinos said, 'Are you going to criticize Lula<sup>9</sup> for going to Havana? I guarantee he won't see any dissidents during his visit and yet you crucified me when I went to Havana.'*"<sup>10</sup> This displays US annoyance at Spanish overtures with Cuba

and at the same time Moratinos' opinion that a constructive approach would yield better results.

Mutual disagreement also surrounded the 2008 ascension of Raúl Castro to the Cuban presidency. Spain hailed it as a welcome change in the regime, mentioning prospects of democratic improvements and new relations with the EU. The US saw it as the continuation of the dictatorial status quo and as only a superficial change. In its opinion Spain had fallen in into a Cuban trap to win support for renewed EU engagement.<sup>11</sup> Although the face of the regime might transform, its politics would not. But then again, the Spanish government probably realized this and instead knowingly used the change in leadership as a useful front to garner support for a change in EU policy. Luckily for the US, the EU remained as polarized as ever, according to the United Kingdom's Foreign Office's Director of the Americas. Much would depend on the 2008 Spanish elections, while "*(...) EU-Latin America Summits tend to be long on speeches and short on achievements.*"<sup>12</sup> Still the US asked the Spanish government to dissuade the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, from visiting Cuba during that period. The request was politely turned down. In a meeting between US and EU officials, the EU's commitment to dialogue with Cuba was reiterated. But more importantly, the US was reminded it: "*(...) should consider the EU as a united Europe and should discuss Cuba policy with all the EU and not just with the member states.*"<sup>13</sup>

This reprimand fell on deaf ears, however, as a month later the US embassy in Prague reported on the positions of the most important supporters of the US within the EU. The Czechs, for example, were wavering at the sight of growing support and pres-

8. N. Peñalver-García, *Cuba: between the EU's conditional engagement and US embargo* (Brussels 2010) 4.

9. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, president of Brazil from 2003 until 2011.

10. WikiLeaks "Cablegate" database (available at <https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/>). The organisation has named the database the "Public Library of US Diplomacy" (PlusD). References to individual messages will be done with the ID's assigned to them by the WikiLeaks organisation and their dates: (PlusD) 08MADRID159\_a (13-02-08), 08STATE18320\_a (24-02-08).

11. (PlusD) 08STATE18320\_a (24-02-08).

12. (PlusD) 08LONDON727\_a (11-03-08) (Director of the Americas Chris Wood).

13. (PlusD) 08USEUBRUSSELS378\_a (11-03-08).

sure to drop some punitive measures against Cuba. A US diplomat from the embassy in Prague commented in a cable to the Secretary of State and to embassies in the EU and Cuba the following: “While the Czechs are a key principled ally on Cuba, and they are particularly active on this topic within the EU, maneuvering [sic] and pressure from ‘influential member states’ over the next few days and weeks will be intense. We can expect the Czechs will hold the line for as long as they believe others are with them. If other key EU member states fold, we can anticipate the Czechs will negotiate for the best deal possible in terms of additional caveats or conditions in return for lifting the measures.”<sup>14</sup> On the other half of the playing field, Spain was hoping to use small democratic and human rights improvements in Cuba to gather support. Italy and France had already indicated to be on the Spanish side.<sup>15</sup> This was the reason for the US ambassador in Madrid to voice his disapproval to the Spanish. He also ensured the US Department of State that his embassy would continue its “aggressive engagement” on Cuba.<sup>16</sup> Only a few days later the embassy’s diplomats earned another reprimand. This time from the Spanish: “(...) made a point of saying during the lunch and again afterwards in private that Spain would strongly prefer the U.S. did not try to split EU opinion on Cuba.”<sup>17</sup>

However, opinions within the EU needed little splitting. The Czechs continued to report back to the US on their experiences in EU conferences. They were coming under intense pressure from a Spanish-led coalition. Meanwhile Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, and the United Kingdom were pushing a compromise. Ahead of the EU Foreign Ministers General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting in June the US Department of State analysed the playing field as follows: “Therefore, many in the EU are being

*swayed by the Spanish argument that the EU needs to engage the Cuban government. The French, the Italians, and the German MFA are squarely on the side of the Spanish, along with the Portuguese, the Slovaks, and the Austrians. The strongest holdouts are the British, the Czechs, and the Hungarians.*”<sup>18</sup> Behind the scenes, the United Kingdom was pleased at the manner it had secured “quite a victory”. Ahead of the meeting it had obtained agreement that continuing the dialogue with Cuba after one year would require affirmative consensus of all member states, instead of dialogue continuing unless a consensus ended it.<sup>19</sup> The Dutch meanwhile speculated that the Czechs stood on their own and did not expect them to block EU consensus.<sup>20</sup>

An analysis by the US Mission to the European Union provides an interesting insight into its views on EU unity in foreign policy. It has to be noted that it stems from before the changes of the Lisbon Treaty. The US Mission observed that the EU’s Common and Foreign Security Policy (CFSP) increasingly influenced the European foreign policy agenda, even if the outcomes of deliberations frequently ended in paralysis or a distorted outcome of each country’s wishes. Additionally, “mid-tier states” were gaining influence at the expense of the traditional trinity of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Spain’s orchestration of a change in Cuban policy demonstrated how a sole member could promote and gather support for change, despite significant opposition. Additionally, the requirement of unanimity meant that bigger states could threaten to withhold their support for proposals by smaller states on other issues, which was one of the reasons the Spanish were able to secure the abstinence of most Eastern European states. Over the years, the US Mission learned sev-

14. (PlusD) 08PRAGUE246\_a (21–04-08).

15. (PlusD) 08 MADRID467\_a (24–04-08), 09HAVANA683\_a (10–11-09).

16. (PlusD) 08MADRID493\_a (05–05-08).

17. (PlusD) 08MADRID518\_a (09–05-08).

18. (PlusD) 08STATE62450\_a (10–06-08).

19. (PlusD) 08LONDON1623\_a (13–04-08).

20. (PlusD) 08THEHAGUE516\_a (13–04-08).

eral things about advocating on EU foreign policy. Concisely summarized:

- First, refrain from spending time and resources on trying to achieve concrete results or changes during official meetings with EU officials.
- Second, for each issue, a new congregation of potential allies had to be sought, outside of the common member states groupings.
- Thirdly, the example of successful member states and enter dialogue early and informally with potential allies should be followed. The latter had to be done proactively by US embassies in Europe.<sup>21</sup>

In this vein the US Department of State would send out a diplomatic cable a month later that ordered diplomatic posts to reach out to European governments and emphasize a common perspective on Cuba.<sup>22</sup> As shown above, with the Spanish EU presidency in sight, US embassies extensively reached out to EU member states officially and unofficially.

The Czech Republic would take over the EU presidency from France at the beginning of 2009. Before that would come to pass, the French were trying to get EU-Cuban dialogue underway, because of the hard line the Czechs were expected to take. If dialogue were already underway, the Czechs would find it difficult to bring it to a halt. An EU source told the US Mission that pressure on member states for a Cuban dialogue was not political, but instead commercial: “*He said European firms are anxious to get into the nickel and potential offshore oil markets in Cuba and want to leverage the EU’s political dialogue to get the GOC [Government of Cuba] to open the door to European investment.*”<sup>23</sup> As the document rightfully comments: the potential source of pressure was less important than the fact that dialogue would in all

likeness go ahead. In the long term this could lead to reconsideration of the Common Position. The end of 2008, the Cuban government accepted an EU offer for dialogue and consequently the diplomatic sanctions from 2003 were lifted.<sup>24</sup> Matters would be exacerbated the following year, as momentum for a change in foreign policy towards Cuba kept increasing.

### THE SPANISH PRESIDENCY

At the end of 2008, President Obama’s election eased bilateral relations between the US and Spain. The Spanish government soon communicated to the US that it was looking forward to working with President Obama.<sup>25</sup> During the 2009 Czech and Swedish EU presidencies the Cuban issue calmly lingered on. Until it dawned on all that Spain would take over the EU presidency in 2010. Ahead of the shift in presidency, the US embassy voiced concerns about the intentions they had picked up from Spanish officials and diplomats to change the Common Position. It highlighted a genuine US concern regarding possible future developments during Spain’s presidency, especially after Foreign Minister Moratinos declared in the Spanish Senate that no member state had spoken against the intentions to review the Common Position.<sup>26</sup> After meetings with high Spanish officials, a cable from the US Interests Section in Havana stated that “*(...) the Spanish are sounding much more resolute in their aims than they did just one months [sic] ago.*” The Spaniards made it clear their government saw the Common Position as a big obstacle that also had failed in its intentions, while adding that the only limited improvements in Cuban human rights had come bilaterally through Spain’s interventions. The Spanish ambassador in Havana underlined the differences with the US approach: confrontation opposed to engagement. He also expressed an interesting sen-

21. (PlusD) 08BRUSSELS943\_a (20-04-08).

22. (PlusD) 08STATE74378 (10-05-08).

23. (PlusD) 08HAVANA879\_a (02-10-08), 08BRUSSELS1540\_a (02-10-08), 08BRUSSELS1589\_a (14-10-08), 08BRUSSELS1661\_a (28-10-08).

24. Roy, *Cuban Revolution*, 161-162, Dominguez, *EU Foreign Policy*, 149.

25. (PlusD) 09MADRID71\_a (21-01-09).

26. (PlusD) 09MADRID1146\_a (01-12-2009).

timement of defiance to US pressure: “*We have been traditionally ahead of you in engaging with Cuba,*’ he said, ‘*we can’t afford to fall behind.*’ He dismissed reports of new EU Foreign Minister Ashton’s comments on the need to wait for U.S.-Cuba developments as ‘*rookie misstatements.*’”<sup>27</sup> US officials expressed concern that the Treaty of Lisbon meant that unanimous consent was no longer required to change the Common Position despite the apparent determination from both the Spanish government and its foreign ministry not to pursue this avenue, as the Spanish ambassador added that his government placed EU unity above its Cuban policy.<sup>28</sup> Further reassurance by President Zapatero that Cuba would not form a priority during the Spanish presidency did not ease US discomfort. More so since his words soon appeared to be hollow as Moratinos actively went to work to abolish the Common Position. In a meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton he also had tried to lull US concerns, by saying that Cuba would not form a priority during the EU presidency. In this same meeting, a request by Raúl Castro to Moratinos for a secret communication channel to the US was discussed.<sup>29</sup>

In the beginning of 2010, tensions led to a warning from the US embassy in Madrid to the Spanish government that “*(...) such a Spanish initiative would not be well viewed in Washington.*”<sup>30</sup> A Spanish official tried to reassure the US ambassador that he did not foresee major changes. He added that the ambassador should not believe everything he read in the press. Pressure exerted by US diplomacy was without re-

sult, as the signals from the Spanish government during that period were clear in their desire for a better relationship with Cuba.<sup>31</sup> One has to keep in mind that this cabinet withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq in 2004, therefore it would have been used to handling US pressure. At the end of January 2010, the Spanish foreign minister even declared in the media that US policy towards Cuba had failed.<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Spanish opposition leader and future president M. Rajoy from the conservative party also paid a visit to the US embassy for a conversation about a variety of subjects, during which he expressed his appreciation for US policy on Cuba.<sup>33</sup>

Diplomatic cables from other US embassies in Europe show that the US government was preoccupied with gauging the amount of support Spain could muster within the EU. The US Department of State requested its embassies to elicit the opinions of each country on Spain’s intentions. Not all responses are available in the WikiLeaks database, but an interesting image emerges from the available cables. From countries with cables included in the database, Italy, Portugal, and Belgium were the most receptive to the Spanish plans.<sup>34</sup> The Netherlands, Slovakia, and Greece were in the middle, with Greece expressing indifference to the issue.<sup>35</sup> The Netherlands were purposefully holding a middle ground. The director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the Dutch foreign ministry<sup>36</sup> expected that the EU would continue its two-track policy of encouraging reforms and development aid. Furthermore, “*He acknowledged there was some concern about whether Spain would soften the*

27. (PlusD) 09HAVANA726\_a (05–12-2009).

28. *Ibidem.*

29. (PlusD) 09STATE129362\_a (18–12-09).

30. (PlusD) 09MADRID1146\_a (01–12-2009), 09MADRID483\_a (19–05-2009), 10MADRID21\_a (11–01-2010), 10MADRID25\_a (13–01-2010), 10MADRID181\_a (18–02-2010), 10MADRID195\_a (22–02-2010).

31. “Zapatero matiza a Moratinos sobre la política hacia Cuba,” *El País* (09–01-2010). [http://elpais.com/diario/2010/01/09/espana/1262991602\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2010/01/09/espana/1262991602_850215.html)

32. (PlusD) 10MADRID87\_a (27–01-2010).

33. (PlusD) 10MADRID67\_a (22–01-2010).

34. (PlusD) 10BRUSSEL\_1 (20–01-2010), 10LISBON8\_a (07–01-10), 10ROME56\_a (14–01-2010).

35. (PlusD) 10ATHENS21\_a (14–01-2010)

36. Laurent Stokvis.

*EU approach toward Cuba, and noted the recent visit of Spanish FM Moratinos to Cuba during which some in the EU felt he exceeded his mandate. Still, after Cuba subsequently released two political prisoners, no one was objecting to Moratinos efforts.*<sup>37</sup> Slovakia favoured a balanced approach and did not support an extreme position either way.<sup>38</sup>

The majority of countries were opposed to replacing the Common Position with a bilateral agreement. These were Eastern, Baltic, and Scandinavian countries, joined by the United Kingdom. Comments made to US diplomats varied. Latvia expressed a lack of surprise at the Spanish intentions. The Czech Republic saw comments by the Spanish foreign minister as merely testing the waters. A Czech official noted that “(...) *the time has not come to move away from the EU’s common position (...) She also noted that the Spaniards will need to find balance within the EU, since they are at the extreme end of the spectrum on Cuba (...)*”<sup>39</sup> Bulgaria wanted to see dramatic improvements in human rights.<sup>40</sup> Estonia saw “(...) *Spain’s position, as the new EU President, both ‘strange and difficult to understand.’*”<sup>41</sup> Hungary thought it to be the wrong time for any change on a position vis-à-vis Cuba.<sup>42</sup> The Swedish minister of foreign affairs saw the Spanish intentions as ideas that “(...) *were peripheral and won’t fly.*”<sup>43</sup> The British foreign ministry department head found it silly to change de Common Position because it was hindering dialogue with the Cubans, adding that “(...) *If we have to scrap*

*Common Positions because a third country is annoyed, what is the point?*”<sup>44</sup> The United Kingdom did not expect that there was enough support within the EU to abolish the Common Position. Months earlier Germany had already expressed disappointment with the progress on human rights in Cuba.<sup>45</sup>

The overarching concern of all member states was the human rights situation in Cuba. The pragmatic approach from the Spanish, including their position as Cuba’s advocate in the EU, was excellently displayed during a bilateral human rights dialogue with Cuba in Madrid.<sup>46</sup> The US embassy realised a Cuban concession on human rights could have consequences for the likelihood of the Common Position changing: “*MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] contacts insisted the bilateral human rights talks had nothing to do with Spanish efforts to change the EU’s Common Position toward Cuba. If the Common Position were to have come up naturally, however, Spain planned to advise Cuban officials that if they were interested in replacing the Common Position, they would best be able to influence the EU by releasing all political prisoners.*”<sup>47</sup> In this light it comes as little surprise that the death of a hunger-striking dissident at the end of February put an end to the Spanish plans for Cuba.

## CHANGES IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

The failure to change the EU’s foreign policy towards Cuba was very quickly seen by journalists and academics alike as one of the failures of Spain’s presidency. Some criticized the EU for missing an historic opportunity to become a key factor in the Cuban

37. (PlusD) 10THEHAGUE44\_a (25-01-10).

38. (PlusD) 10BRATISLAVA12\_a (13-01-10).

39. (PlusD) 10PRAGUE20\_a (14-01-2010).

40. (PlusD) 10SOFIA25\_a (14-01-10).

41. (PlusD) 10TALLINN3\_a (06-01-2010).

42. (PlusD) 10BUDAPEST37\_a (25-01-10).

43. (PlusD) 10STOCKHOLM13\_a (14-01-2010).

44. (PlusD) 09LONDON2909\_a (30-12-09).

45. (PlusD) 09BERLIN708\_a (12-06-09).

46. The fourth round in series to “allow Spain and Cuba to move forward, building trust to achieve a higher degree of understanding and cooperation on the promotion of and respect for human rights.”

47. (PlusD) 10MADRID206\_a (25-02-2010).

transition to democracy.<sup>48</sup> While in previous years Spain had been continuously building momentum for change towards Cuba, it was not enough to meet its final goal, but it did bring change in an otherwise static situation.

Ultimately, the EU adopted a Country Strategic Paper on Cuba in May 2010. This type of unilateral document sets out the manner in which policy is set out and evaluated, mainly on humanitarian aid. The EU earmarked an indicative allocation of €20 million for the following three years. Three priority sectors were defined for cooperation with the Cuban government: food security, environment and climate change, and expertise exchanges, training and studies. The Common Position remained in place; the Strategic Paper made that very clear: “*Cooperation in these areas does not imply any changes in the EU policy towards Cuba.*” Moreover, concerns about the democratic and human rights situation in Cuba were underlined.<sup>49</sup> A normative approach in line with the Common Position continued, and Spain’s wishes for closer ties were not granted. Still, the fact that Cuba continued to be engaged for three years can be seen as a small victory.<sup>50</sup>

In June 2010, Moratinos announced the liberation of 52 dissidents from Cuban prisons after the mediation of the Catholic Church and himself. The Spanish foreign minister heralded it as a new stage in bilateral relations.<sup>51</sup> He would only be partly right. During a European Council meeting in October, an

exchange of views was held over lunch about the recent political and economic developments in Cuba. As a result, the High Representative was asked to explore the possibilities for a way forward in Cuban relations.<sup>52</sup> Email correspondence from US Secretary of State Clinton, released by the US State Department,<sup>53</sup> show that Moratinos and Clinton had contact on at least two occasions in the period running up to this decision. However, everything of significance has been classified in the emails.<sup>54</sup> One can only guess if these were merely courtesy calls or if they dealt with actual policy coordination. In the end, the High Representative did not explore possibilities for a way forward in Cuban relations without any sense of urgency. It would take until 2014 for a decision to be reached. Then the Commission opened negotiations with Cuba on a “Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement.”<sup>55</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Unsurprisingly, the US was suspicious and later displeased when it learned about Spanish-led dialogue within the EU on changing policy towards Cuba. Diplomatic cables show substantial US lobbying with individual EU member states. From this the question follows whether the EU was making foreign policy decisions on Cuba free from US influence in the years 2008–2010.

Spain very much wanted to push towards better ties and ideally a bilateral treaty between the EU and Cu-

48. D. Contreras, *La Unión Europea ante los retos de la democratización en Cuba* (Madrid 2010) 18.

49. European Council, *Republic of Cuba—European Union Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme for the period 2011–2013* (24–03-2010).

50. Dominguez, *EU Foreign Policy*, 147.

51. M. González & M. Vicent, “Moratinos: La liberación de los presos abre una nueva etapa en Cuba,” *El País*, (08–07-2010). [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/07/08/actualidad/1278540002\\_850215.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2010/07/08/actualidad/1278540002_850215.html)

52. European Council, *Press Release 3041st Council Meeting Foreign Affairs* (25–10-2010).

53. The State Department had to release emails from Clinton’s term due to the ‘Hillary Clinton email controversy’ in 2015. Clinton had used private email servers for her official duties.

54. The emails are available online at the US Department of State ‘Freedom of Information Act’ (USDOS) web <https://foia.state.gov>. They will be referenced by their corresponding case number, document number, and date.

(USDOS) No. F-2014–20439, Doc. No. C05775360 (07–07-2010).

(USDOS) No. F-2014–20439, Doc. No. C0577404 (24–09-2010).

55. M. Palouš, “Where Are We? The State of Negotiation of a New Treaty Between the European Union and Cuba,” *Cuba in Transition—Volume 24* (ASCE conference 2014) 1.

ba. During internal discussions between member states, the US put its diplomatic apparatus to work with great expedience to frustrate Spain's objectives. First, it warned the Spanish that their plans would not be well viewed in Washington. Spain was pressured severely to change its plans but without discernible results. Then, the US mapped the different positions of the EU member states and actively lobbied governments to prevent a change in EU foreign policy, as is evident from the annoyance displayed by Spanish and EU officials. On separate occasions, Spanish officials told their US counterparts to consider the EU a union and refrain from splitting opinions. In the end, the majority of member states was not receptive to big policy changes, especially after the death of a Cuban dissident. Thus, the US got its way at first glance. At the very least it had added oil unto the fire that was EU disagreement on foreign policy towards Cuba. The EU felt the US influence

on its decision making concerning foreign policy towards Cuba.

What did this all entail for Cuba? At first, it again showcased that the strict US stance towards Cuba had far reaching influence on the global attitudes towards the island. But that is not all. The door was left open by the Country Strategic Paper adopted by the EU. With it, the EU decided upon a policy of engagement. One can speculate if this influenced the US change of heart that led to the Cuban thaw in 2014. Regardless, it is certain that the decision by the world's biggest economic block to move towards a policy of engagement, irrespective of US pressure, was good news for an island actively isolated by the US. Additionally, and most importantly, it showed that Cuba's bilateral relations with the EU are indeed never truly bilateral, as the US will always be on the side lines push its policy views.