

VACLAV HAVEL'S LEGACY AND THE FUTURE OF CUBA¹

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In this text, I will start out from two basic points. First, the role that Vaclav Havel's legacy has played in the formation of foreign policies of Czechoslovakia (and later the Czech Republic) after the Velvet Revolution and how it has influenced the formation of current Czech position in the on-going debate taking place in the European Union about the future relationship with Cuba.

And second, that primarily as a result of the activities of Czech non-governmental organizations (such as People in Need Foundation² or Forum 2000³), Václav Havel has become a symbolic figure for the community of Cuban dissidents, and the political ideas connected with his name and life-story have become an important source of inspiration within their own political discourse.

This text consists of four parts. First, I will comment on the origins of foreign policies of the Czech Republic towards Cuba. Second, I will focus on the role of Vaclav Havel in this area through the People in Need Foundation after he had left the Prague Castle in 2003. Third, I will comment on Cuba's current international relations with the liberal democracies—the United States and the European Union—and in the regional context of Latin America. And fourth, I will conclude with some comments

concerning the current Cuban democratic opposition, operating today in a changed and still rapidly changing international environment.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CUBA AFTER 1989

Czechoslovakia's, and after the Velvet Divorce⁴ Czech foreign policy towards Cuba, came into existence after the collapse of communism in 1989. The relations between the new Czechoslovakia, and later the Czech Government—formed after the Velvet Revolution with the principal goal to set the country on the path from totalitarianism to democracy—and the Cuban Government—where Fidel Castro was still firmly at helms as “el líder máximo” of the Cuban Revolution, struggling at that moment with the enormous economic problems of the “Período Especial,” in which Cuba found herself in thanks to the collapse of European communism—simply could not have remained as “harmonious” as they had been during the Cold War. The spirit of “socialist internationalism” faded away with the fall of Berlin Wall⁵, and all sorts of tensions replaced the previous “fraternal cooperation” between two countries building communism, marching—with the “Soviet Union for Ever”—to their “radiant futures.”

1. This paper was written in December 2016. Its last part, reflecting on the state of the debate on Cuba in the first half of 2017, was added in the weeks before the ASCE Conference in late July 2017, where it was presented.

2. <https://www.clovekvtsni.cz/en>

3. <https://www.forum2000.cz/en/homepage>

4. The split of Czechoslovakia into two independent states—the Czech Republic and Slovakia—happened on January 1, 1993.

5. It happened on November 9, 1989.

The diplomatic representation of Cuba in the United States, administered by Czechoslovakia since 1977, was terminated in 1991.

The economic assistance that Czechoslovakia provided to Cuba during the previous era also stopped with the disintegration of the “socialist camp” and with the arrival of post-communist “politics of transition.” In contrast, the question of unpaid Cuban debt has been raised, instead, in a framework of changing bilateral relations.

Czechoslovak diplomacy opened new channels of communication with the Cuban-American National Foundation and other organizations of Cuban exiles in the United States and started to discover the hitherto unknown historical dimensions of the Cuban question to be factored in its new Cuba policies.

Not only the media, but also the Czechoslovak post-totalitarian politicians with Václav Havel at their head, were ready to speak up without restraint about the persistent pattern of human rights violations in Cuba. The Czechoslovak Embassy in Havana was instructed by Foreign Minister Jiří Dienstbier, a former dissident and political prisoner himself, to communicate not only with their official counterparts, but also to lead a dialogue with the Cuban “dissidents” who tried to voice their discontent with the current state of public matters on the island and initiate a public debate among all Cubans about the future of their country.

All these steps were obviously observed with great dismay and growing concern by the Cuban Government, and resulted in a number of diplomatic skirmishes throughout the 1990s. What was, however, perceived in Havana as the culmination of this trend—as an open “unfriendly act” in the sense of international law and a blatant interference with Cuban “internal affairs”—was the decision of the Czech Government to present a resolution criticizing the Cuban human rights situation at the 55th Session of the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva in 1999. It was exactly the moment when the proverbial Rubicon in the relationship between the Czech Republic and Cuba was crossed, and as a result of that, the Czech Republic was moved by the Cuban Government from its position of a country that for de-

CADES participated in a number of projects important for Cuba’s economic development and industrialization, to its black list.

In the preceding years similar resolutions were sponsored by the United States—a move presented by Fidel Castro’s regime as one of many acts in the history of permanent hostility of the “Empire” against its small southern neighbor struggling heroically since 1959 for its freedom and independence. In 1998, however, Cuba scored an important victory in the field of multilateral diplomacy over the United States. The resolution criticizing the state of human rights on the island initiated by the United States at the 54th Session of the Commission for Human Rights in Geneva was rejected. The triumphant Cuban Government supposed at that moment that the troubling international criticism of the Cuba’s human rights record was put to rest once and for all.

A year later, however, the problem was back: the Czech Republic stepped in and reopened this question. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after consultations with President Havel, decided to react positively to the call of Cuban human rights defenders that the international community should not remain silent to the persisting human rights violations in Cuba. What decisively influenced the Czech decision to take on this case was the fact that four Cuban dissidents were at the time in jail for sending a document they had authored titled “La Patria es de Todos” to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, reacting to the economic stress of the “Período Especial,” trying to open the public debate about Cuba’s future and presenting their own modest plan of first steps of necessary reforms.

The arguments for the submission of the draft resolution on “Human Rights in Cuba” were certainly not based on the Czech “national interests” formulated by the proponents of political realism in international affairs. The arguments in the statement presented on behalf of the Czech Delegation at the 55th session of the Commission for Human Rights in March of 1999 were characterized by what French philosopher Pascal called “reasons of the heart” (*les raisons du coeur*):⁶

Ten years ago, the Czech dissidents (and one can easily add the Slovak, Polish, Hungarian and many other dissidents from East-Central Europe) were in a similar situation as many individuals are in Cuba today and they highly appreciated any expression of international solidarity. It is not only difficult to forget that, but what else but a true spirit of solidarity and cooperation can be recommended as the basic principle of action of the international community?⁷

When these words were pronounced in the Palace of Nations in Geneva in April of 1999, it was, indeed, hard to predict what would be the result of this motion, but in the ensuing roll-call vote that followed after the exhausting diplomatic campaign, launched both in Geneva and in the capitals of the current member-states of the Commission for Human Rights, it turned out that Czech diplomacy managed to prevail where the United States had failed a year ago. And the same result was achieved two times in row in the following years!

The lessons to be learned from this surprisingly successful diplomatic action are, in my view, still valid and should be remembered as a guide for any future efforts to assist free-minded Cubans finally to get rid of Fidel Castro's totalitarian legacy.

The first lesson learned by Czech diplomats in Geneva, was that Cuba was an extremely difficult opponent in such diplomatic "duels". Measured by its economic performance, the political system installed in Cuba by Fidel Castro in the beginning of 1960 was a plain disaster from the very start, and could never sustain itself without heavy subsidies of its international supporters. On the contrary, measured by its capability to operate effectively within the international system created in the atmosphere of the Cold War, Cuba under Fidel's leadership and first of all, thanks to his personal charisma and Machiavellian skills, managed to gain the impressive status of a small, but quite influential world power.

As a result of Cuba's successful military campaigns in Africa in the 1980s supporting "progressive" parties in their liberation wars, Cuba had many devoted ad-

mirers among the countries that gained their independence in the decades of de-colonization after WWII.

Cuba not only supported radical revolutionary movements in the Western Hemisphere, but was capable, even with respect to democracies, to exploit successfully the traditional negative feelings of "Latinos" vis-a-vis the presence of "Gringos" in their region. Thus, practically all of the Latin American countries were finding very difficult to respond positively to the Czech initiative.

In spite of her dire economic situation, Cuba was, and actually still is, sending tens of thousands of physicians and other medical specialists to a number of developing countries. This quite unique example of South-South co-operation obviously gained their gratitude: Cuba has achieved the recognition throughout the Global South as one of the leaders of anti-imperialist, anti-Western global movement; as a brave, outspoken voice on the global scene for the poor and oppressed peoples of the world.

To satisfy Fidel's worldly ambitions, Cuba has built a dense network of embassies around the world, staffed with well trained diplomats, capable of using public international law "creatively" for the benefit of Cuban causes, disseminating effectively the revolutionary propaganda of the Cuban government and being quite effective in information battles with all its "enemies".

The second lesson learned from the Czech diplomatic operation in Geneva concerned the potential allies whose support had to be won. First, there was the indispensable role of the United States here. Let us put it straight: without the US often heavy-handed approach in the bilateral communications with their partners around the world, the task of the Czech team would have been simply a "mission impossible" and obviously, there were no diplomatic Tom Cruises at its disposal to turn to for miraculous perfor-

6. Statement by Deputy-Minister Martin Palous, Head of the Czech Delegation at the 55th Session of the Commission on Human Rights, pronounced in Geneva, on April 23, 1999.

7. Ibid.

mances in the Palace of Nations to reach “mission accomplished.”

At the same time, however, too much US. input into the Czech initiative could derail it. After all, it was the US. proposal that was rejected in Geneva a year earlier. The cornerstone, and possibly stumbling block, of the Czech resolution were the critical parts of the draft “Human Rights in Cuba” that the United States adamantly opposed, but all “significant others” wanted as *conditio sine qua non*, if we wished to get them on board to support the initiative.

To be concrete: for the United States any reference to the state of Cuban economy in the text of the resolution was unacceptable (both Democratic and Republican Administration had the same position here!), because it could have created the causal chain between the U.S. embargo laws imposed on the U.S.-Cuba economic relations as a reaction to Fidel Castro’s hostile policies, and the state of human rights on the island under his leadership. The firm stance of the U.S. Government was that the United States could not be made responsible under any circumstances for Cuba’s economic troubles—not only with regards to the troubled history of the U.S.-Cuba bilateral relationships, but for reasons of principle. Any country, Cuba included, could not to be allowed to use its dire economic situation as an excuse for its non-fulfillment of its human rights obligations under international law and there could not be any compromise in this matter!

On the contrary, for both Latin American and European countries that were asked to support the proposed motion, a reference to the economic situation of Cuba was perceived as an indispensable part of any human rights discourse in general, and in the Cuban case in particular. At least some “economic language” was their minimal requirement for their consent.

The Czech diplomats in Geneva quickly realized that their “small boat” was finding itself in a kind of “perfect storm” in the middle of a “Bermuda Triangle”—formed by the United States, Europe and Latin America—and that the only way forward to secure

victory for their operation, was their maneuvering inside of it; to do anything possible not to lose any one from three major players, looking for a magic formula that would calm the stormy sea and finally bring all the essential parties together, in spite of their seemingly unsurmountable disagreements.

And here is **the third lesson** learned in Geneva. It concerns the Havelian approach to human rights, stemming from the Czech experience with totalitarianism in the 20th century, an approach based on Havel’s deep conviction that those who are fortunate to live in free societies now have moral duty to support those who are still resisting tyrannies anywhere in the world; that it is international solidarity with them that points to the central spiritual problem of our times; that the free-minded Cuban dissidents opposing Fidel Castro’s dictatorial regime not only deserve our assistance, but that it is their voice that can help us—as Havel put it in his speech in Geneva, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—to “build a better world, and also to be more true to ourselves, in other words to put into practice the values that we proclaim in general terms.”⁸

And surprisingly—against the beliefs of political realists—this lesson was a positive one. Practically all potentially like-minded partners in the Geneva deliberations in 1999–2001 were listening and weighting carefully the arguments presented to them by the Czech diplomats; maybe disagreeing, but trying, at least for a moment, to look at the Cuban case through the lens of its Havelian interpretation. The governments they represented might have already sent them their instruction not to support the Czech initiative under any circumstances, but at the same time, remarkable conversations about the future of our world and the role of human rights questions in it were taking place. Unsurprisingly, Fidel Castro’s loyalists didn’t move an inch, but the world scene we all were operating on was somehow affected by the very fact of these on-going human rights debates. It was the Havelian “idealistic” message, and not just “realpolitik” as practiced routinely by the world pow-

8. <http://www.vaclavhavel-library.org/en/vaclav-havel/works/speeches#yr1998>

ers, that in the end was the greatest winner in these diplomatic battles.

**THE PEOPLE IN NEED CUBAN PROGRAMS:
THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR
DEMOCRACY IN CUBA**

In February 2003 Vaclav Havel retired as President of the Czech Republic, after serving two terms in office, and left the Prague Castle. The human rights situation in Cuba, however, remained high on his agenda during his post-presidential years. The main partner was a Czech NGO, People in Need Foundation (PiN) that launched its Cuban programs in the late 1990s.

What offered a strong impulse in the context of this co-operation was the Cuban “Black Spring” of that year, when a large number of Cuban dissidents were arrested and sentenced to long jail terms. As a response to this draconian act of the Cuban Government, Vaclav Havel—evidently inspired by his own experience from the times of human rights struggles in the 1970s and 1980s—hosted a big international conference in Prague whose major outcome was the creation of the International Committee for Democracy in Cuba (ICDC), a body composed of important political personalities from Europe, Latin America and the United States, with the PiN acting as its Prague Secretariat.⁹ It was this body that in the next years became the real center of international action supporting the struggle for the respect of human rights in Cuba, promoting and assisting those on the island who have not resigned to the hope that one day also the Cuban nation will be able to get rid of totalitarianism and return to the path of freedom and democracy abandoned at the moment when the Fidel Castro’s military contingents entered Havana—now 58 years ago—and seized absolute power.

What are the lessons learned from here? Let us start with the positive side of the balance sheet. Assembling a group of former heads of state of several European and Latin American countries, members of parliaments, journalists, recognized public intellectuals, the ICDC brought really an authoritative voice

to the Cuban debate that was impossible not to hear. It was sending a strong signal of solidarity to the Cuban dissidents. It was a robust statement directed to the international arena, too: offering a unifying platform for all activists supporting free-minded Cubans in their struggle; demanding the Cuban Government to comply with its international obligations; calling on the international community not to be indifferent to the fact that the unlawful acts of Cuban Government against Cuban citizens were raising the question of its international responsibility *erga omnes*; thus asking all the members of international community to act accordingly, i.e., by taking appropriate counter-measures and to demand from the Cuban Government the immediate redress of its wrong-doings.

All the texts carrying the seal of ICDC—the proceedings, memoranda or other final documents of conferences, seminars, side events to the official meetings of inter-governmental organizations, the reports from the missions of the ICDC’s “virtual embassy” to Latin America, the op-eds signed by its members and published in the world media—were generating, indeed, a very powerful message at the time when they were produced and even today they offer highly relevant reading. They demonstrate the clarity of intention and commitment of all those involved and provide testimony for those who one day will be studying Cuban politics at the current historical crossroads: there was a vocal group of people in the first decade of the 21st century, both in Europe and in the Western Hemisphere, who rejected the complaisance of international society towards the Cuban dictatorship for reasons of principle; stood firmly on the side of those Cubans who cared about the unacceptable state of public affairs in their country; were ready to be engaged as their partners or advisors—peacefully and by means of dialogue—in the cause of Cuban freedom; identified themselves with this cause, because they perceived it—respecting the sovereignty of Cuban people at the same time—as their own cause in the global context of transformations the humankind was experiencing.

9. <http://www.icdcprague.org/>

What is, however, on the negative side of the balance sheet of ICDC, particularly when we look at it from our today's perspective? I will be very blunt: it is the absence of any diplomacy on its side. Isn't it symptomatic that there is not a single page in the ICDC archives paying serious attention to the reactions of all the different addressees of the ICDC petitions and demands? That there is no single reflection in the documents of the ICDC on their way of thinking, *modus operandi*, the legal framework and its limits, their interests, their possible objectives and strategies? Should not have been more important for the ICDC than to declare again and again its rightful opinions—primarily shared by all its like-minded partners within the NGO community—to think strategically and try to learn as much as possible from the behavior of all the relevant international players in the Cuban debate, including the ICDC's adversaries or enemies?

To illustrate this point let us look at the situation around the first and the most actual of all demands raised by the ICDC—the immediate release of all Cuban political prisoners from the Black Spring. They eventually got out of jail—before they or some other dissidents got jailed again—but not because of the ICDC's demands! The deal with the Cuban Government concerning the release of political prisoners had to be always negotiated discreetly by someone else: the Spanish Government, the Holy See...

The result always was a kind of compromise among the parties, but usually based on the terms dictated by the Cuban Government, who insisted that the normalization of the relationship between Cuba and her international partners must be conditioned on the strict recognition of the principle of “non-intervention in the domestic matters” of the Cuban state; that the protection of the achievements of the Cuban Revolution against all the continuing intrigues of agents of American imperialism, constantly plotting, as the official Cuban propaganda argued, how to overthrow it—including in this category all free-minded Cuban citizens just asking for respect for human rights!—must be accepted by them as a *conditio sine qua non* for any progress in the negotiations. Cuba actually learned quickly how to use such a

“catch and release” strategy in these diplomatic games, in order to achieve her basic goals and to effectively neutralize those who were demanding—as the ICDC and all the associated NGOs—that the normalization of international relations with Cuba would require first of all a fundamental change of the behavior of the Cuban regime towards the Cuban people and a genuine transition in Cuba from totalitarianism to democracy. Unfortunately, nothing was done to counteract this skillful maneuvering of the representatives of the Cuban state; no international strategy was proposed by the ICDC to break this vicious circle.

And here is the second point on the negative side of the ICDC balance sheet: as the still existing ICDC post on the web page of People in Need shows, this initiative stopped, after its spectacular entry into existence in 2003, around 2010, leaving behind its unfinished tasks and unfulfilled promises. Its Prague Secretariat, evidently created as a kind of service unit for Vaclav Havel, started to diminish its activities when Havel's health situation was deteriorating, and its work was frozen after his death. It is hard to say what other members of ICDC are doing now, but the absence of the concerted efforts of this prestigious body is being felt today, despite the fact that People in Need and other NGOs, both European and Latin American, are still around, active as ever, doing a great job in Cuba, running their educational and advocacy programs on the island, offering aid to the families of Cuban political prisoners, assisting Cuban human rights defenders and Cuban civil society independent activists to achieve their goals.

WHERE IS CUBA GOING TODAY?

The situation in the world today is obviously very different from the 1990s, when liberal democracy—a form of government invented in Europe, based on the rule of law, the universal respect for human rights, parliamentary democracy and free-market economy—seemed to be triumphant after the collapse of communism in East Central Europe, and the idea of the “end of history” appeared in the discourse of both practitioners and theoreticians. What we observe today in the world—instead of the final victory of the West achieved in the Cold War—is a pro-

found redistribution of global power. A new era in the history of mankind is announcing itself through a growing number of symptoms and trends, all signaling that the age when Europe was the dominant power in world affairs is definitely over and that new times are here with the disquieting perspective of global clashes between “civilizations.”

It is clear that the debate about the possible futures of Cuba—obviously also including the question of to what extent the more or less successful transitions from totalitarianism to democracy in other parts of the world that took place in the past, can be used as relevant models for the current Cuban transformations—obviously cannot be separated from the larger questions concerning the fundamental metamorphoses we are experiencing in the world today.

Cuba's aging revolutionaries, led since 2008 by Fidel's younger brother Raúl, are actually well aware that the generational change cannot be delayed any more. Thus they are systematically preparing under Raúl's leadership their own version of transition, predicated upon the concept of both political and legal continuity of the Cuban totalitarian regime—with the Communist Party keeping the monopoly of political power and the “revolutionary” armed forces not only enforcing the public order on the island and fending off all its external enemies, but directly managing or controlling the bulk of the Cuban economy. According to them, Cuban socialism just needs to be “actualized” and “adjusted” to the conditions of the 21st century and surely not dismantled or abolished. Liberal democracy and open market-oriented capitalist economy do not have and will never have any place in the Cuban future in the framework of their outdated and still heavily ideological vision!

Can the so-called “biological solution” help Cuba on the current crossroads? No way, is the answer of all officials of the current regime. Despite the occasional clashes between “Fidelistas” and “Raulistas” in the Cuban leadership, Fidel's death must not be perceived, they have repeated again and again, as an opportunity to put also his ideas to rest. Fidel's funeral ceremony actually sent a clear message under Raúl Castro's watch: Cuba is not going to open up and

liberalize under any circumstances. Those who believe that the transition from totalitarianism to democracy is knocking at the door in Cuba with Fidel finally gone, are wrong and hoping in vain.

For sure, negotiations with international partners about the place of Cuba in the world in the 21st century represent an essential part of Cuba's current “post-revolutionary” policies. But it is obvious that it is not the West—the U.S., the EU or the liberal democracies in the Western Hemisphere—but the new world autocracies (among them China, Russia, Iran) or the Latin American preachers of Bolivarian Socialism for the 21st Century, who are recognized by the current Cuban government as its principal allies, potential new sponsors and guarantors of its survival.

Is it, however, a realistic proposition? I am convinced, it is not! For all sorts of reasons—historical, cultural and geostrategic—Cuba's principal future partners are and will be those who belong to the “Bermuda Triangle” the Czech diplomacy was struggling with in Geneva in 1999–2001 when initiating the Cuban human rights resolution. The countries that have natural disposition to work together in their policies towards Cuba—subscribing to the same basic values and principles of liberal democracies and to the basic norms, both customary and contractual, that today's international system is built upon—but divided at the same time by their specific historical determinants and pre-dispositions. Here lies, in my view, perhaps the greatest challenge as far as Cuba's future is concerned and one of the principal obstacles that has to be removed on the way from her totalitarian enslavement to her hopefully democratic future.

The most important partner here is, without any doubt, the historical patron of the modern Cuban state that was present at its very creation: the United States. There is no doubt that after the arrival of the new administration, the United States is going to make a thorough revision of their Cuba policies. The decision of President Obama to end the decades of open confrontation and replace it with the policy of active engagement and co-operation was surely a bold and principally positive move. And thankfully, it is highly unlikely that it will be entirely reversed.

What can be expected, however, from Donald Trump's presidency, is a significant change of strategy of communication with Cuba concerning the issues on the bilateral agenda. The opening on the U.S. side with the aim to intensify contacts between U.S. and Cuban citizens, to allow U.S. programs of development assistance in Cuba, to gradually develop new forms of mutually beneficial economic co-operation, will be surely tied—and rightly so—to certain conditions. President Trump, to use his own characteristic terminology, will simply want to make a “better deal” with Cuba as with any other international partner of the United States. Either the Cuban regime will really start leaving behind its old habits and set the country on the path from totalitarianism to democracy—the Obama administration's policies did not achieve anything in this respect—or the U.S. goodwill to open up to Cuba will decline, or disappear entirely, and the positive potential of pragmatic co-operation between the former ideological enemies for the future well-being of the Cuban people will be forfeited.

It also remains to be seen what will be the role of Cuba in the regional context. With the dramatic economic decline of Venezuela, the position of radical socialist regimes in Latin America has weakened and instead liberal regimes seem to be ascending now in the region. Developments in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, and even in Mexico, in spite of the problems their democracies are experiencing today, are certainly not sending very positive signals to Havana and it might be that the death of Fidel Castro is being perceived not only by them, but throughout the whole Western Hemisphere, in a way contradicting the desires of those who are still in power in Cuba: their revolutionary heydays are now definitely over!

And finally the last, but not least, member of “Bermuda Triangle”: the European Union. A new bilateral treaty between the EU and Cuba has been signed recently and what will come now is the process of its ratification and then implementation. Human rights should still remain at the core of the relationship between the EU and Cuba. Development assistance, economic co-operation and trade are connected in a

single agreement with the political dialogue. The same questions that confront the architects of policies toward Cuba in Washington or in the Latin American capitals are being raised here, too: can such a dialogue take place between the two parties when one subscribes to fundamental values of human freedom and human dignity and the other is by its nature totalitarian? Can it be effective? Can the overall relationship between the EU, its member-states and Cuba fulfill its declared objectives with regards to such a discrepancy on the level of “ideology” and the basic objectives of the parties as far as the results of process of globalization taking place in the 21st century are concerned?

WHERE IS THE CUBAN DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION?

The members of Cuban democratic opposition are, for sure, observing attentively all that is going on, trying to accommodate their own demands and expectations to the new climate of ideas. Where actually are they finding themselves in the current volatile international situation?

First, it must be restated that the main role among the Cuban democratic opposition belongs to all brave individuals resisting oppressive Castro regime on the island. They have not only managed to stand firm against all forms of repression, but also have learned important lessons: communicating among themselves, with their supporters in the Cuban community in exile, and also with international NGOs assisting them in their struggle, offering them not only the necessary material or psychological support, but also their political weight in international arena, their own experiences with the anti-totalitarian struggle and their political ideas. One can say with confidence that Vaclav Havel's intellectual and spiritual legacy has been accepted in Cuba and is occupying now an important place in the nascent Cuban independent public space. Havel's “The Power of the Powerless” is well-known among Cuban dissidents. His authority in Cuba as an inspirational leader of non-violent opposition to the communist regime that culminated in its overthrow during the Velvet Revolution is indisputable.

How do Cuban dissidents perceive the current opening of liberal democracies of the world to the Cuban communist regime? As the current debates among them clearly demonstrates, they have welcomed enthusiastically the idea of U.S.-Cuba rapprochement as a sign of change, but they repeat again and again: the Cuban Government has not offered the smallest concessions on its side to show the appreciation for the new U.S. Cuba policy; the level of repressions against the activists of Cuban independent civil society has not diminished, but rather increased! What they would like to see is a more effective policy on the side of the United States—as well as on the side of other democratic international partners of Cuba—conditioning their willingness to cooperate with the Cuban government in areas of mutual interests by the real and measurable progress in the field of human rights. What should be presented to the Cuban side as a fundamental confidence building measure (CBM) is the recognition of the fundamental fact that it is the Cuban people and not the current government who is the sovereign in the Cuban state. That it is the Cuban independent civil society that must participate in the implementation of the international accords now on the table. That it is the Cuban nation who should decide in an open and fair democratic process about Cuba's future!

One would be inclined to say that the only positive thing of Raúl Castro's "reforms" in the past years from which the Cuban democratic opposition has benefited significantly is, quite surprisingly, the radical liberalization of issuing of travel documents by the Cuban authorities that took place in 2013. Now almost any Cuban can travel abroad and return to the island—including the majority of activists of independent civil society! And here is the greatest challenge and opportunity for Cuban democratic opposition. What one can observe now, first of all in Southern Florida, the home of almost two million members of the Cuban exile community, is the dramatic acceleration of a spontaneous process that can have a decisive impact on the future of Cuba. What is happening today is nothing less, in my view, than the reunification of the Cuban nation divided for decades by Fidel Castro's revolution. This is its most serious challenge and the biggest weakness of the plan

to pass power in Cuba to younger generation of pragmatic, but still ideologically correct leaders, that Raúl Castro has developed and is now implementing.

Can free-minded Cubans, struggling for decades now with the communist dictatorship, use effectively the fact that people from the island and from exile can meet now face to face, organize meetings, debates, congregate freely and search for solutions? Can the Cuban democratic opposition finally transform itself into a relevant, united and thus strong political factor that must be heard and not underestimated? Can it turn itself into a real voice of the new Cuban political nation, present a comprehensive and realistic political program to the Cuban people for the successful transition of Cuba from her current desperate situation and get the recognition of key players of international society? It remains to be seen.

But here, too, in my view, freedom-loving Cubans can seek inspiration in the political legacy of Vaclav Havel, connected with Charter 77, whose 40th anniversary we are just commemorating, and with the revolutions of 1989 which peacefully ended the era of totalitarianism in East Central Europe and set all the countries of this region on the path toward democracy. Their friends from this part of the world—those who, taught by their own encounters with totalitarianism in the "short" twentieth century, believe in and subscribe to the principle of international solidarity—have been at their disposal in the past decades and they will stay, for sure, on their side in the future as well.

CONCLUSION: A FEW REMARKS ADDED IN JULY OF 2017

In the first half of 2017, political debates with a potentially significant impact for Cuba's future have continued. In the United States, a thorough revision of the existing policies towards Cuba has started. The European Parliament has adopted, in the context of the process of ratification of the "Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Cuba", a non-legislative, but strong and indicative resolution demanding that the application of this treaty must follow general EU values and principles. The Latin American countries have been forced to react to the on-going political crisis in Venezuela—

the closest strategic ally of Cuba in the region—and the large majority of them have rejected the actions of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro—a keen, but rather incapable apprentice in the Cuban school of political thought and practice.

All these happenings confirm, in my view, clearly enough what is the challenge, but at the same time a historical opportunity, for the Cuban democratic opposition with respect to all freedom-loving Cubans struggling for their human dignity and political freedom. And it has only strengthened my conviction that Vaclav Havel's legacy can play an important role here—not being accepted as a kind of dogma, but perceived as a living, really spiritual inspiration.

The first and foremost goal before the Cuban democratic opposition is, as I have already said, the reunification of Cuban political nation, meaning the reestablishment of new effective communication between those who got separated by past historical events. Cubans at home and the Cuban exile community belong together and only their renewed communication and sincere dialogue between them about their common past and future can open new political horizons. Only if Cubans are able to stand united in the current turmoil, can the fundamental existential hope lost in the decades of totalitarianism be restored and reconciliation achieved. This is, in my view, a fundamental condition to get the process of real, and not only faked, political and economic transformation finally off the ground, and bring the whole Cuban nation, living at home and in exile, to its new beginning.

Seen from the international perspective, the biggest enemy of the cause of Cuban democratic opposition is not the cynical pragmatism of those who prefer to do business with the current Cuban government rather than to support its so far unsuccessful, weak and desperately fragmented democratic opposition; or resentments of certain left-wingers, still alive in Europe and in Latin America, wearing Che Guevara T-shirts and still dreaming in vain about the past glories of the victorious Cuban Revolution. It is rather indifference as a prevailing mood in today's democratic public; the lack of imagination of its members not only to understand the existential torments of totalitarianism somewhere out there, but to realize the real dangers connected with the on-going transformations of their own world; that it is the gradual weakening of that power, that even the powerless, as Vaclav Havel argued, still have: to resist evil, big or small, being spread around globally, and to exercise prudently one's own free judgment and responsibility.

Freedom-loving Cubans have today a chance not only to liberate themselves, but also to assist others in their own existential struggles. They can become their hope as a successful case of democratic transition in today's turbulent world. They can offer a living proof that democracy still has a chance in the case of a small nation that has been constrained for decades by historical misfortunes and geopolitical adversities. They can demonstrate that freedom, a *conditio sine qua non* for dignified human life, still matters.