

A new chapter of relations between Cuba and the EU

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• CUBA and the European Union opened a new chapter in bilateral relations after the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between the two parties provisionally entered into force, this November 1.

In a press release, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that "the ties between Brussels and Havana have reached a level more in line with relations between Cuba and the member states which make up the community bloc, which have experienced significant progress over recent years."

Meanwhile, in a statement by the EU, the organization noted that the agreement shows that the bloc is moving closer to Cuba, a nation that is currently undergoing a process of "economic, political and social modernization," according to the document.

Negotiations to establish a Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement began in April 2014 and concluded in March 2016; with the document signed in Brussels, on December 12, 2016, by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Cuban Foreign Minister, Bruno Rodríguez.

The signing also marked the end of the EU Common Position, in force since 1996, during which time relations between the two parties practically froze.

Regarding the provisional implementation of the PDCA and what it means for both Cuba and the European Union, **Granma** spoke exclusively with the Head of the EU Delegation to Cuba, Alberto Navarro.

The official began by recalling that relations between Cuba and the EU were established in 1988, but were restricted for over 20 years (1996-2016) due to the so-called Common Position.

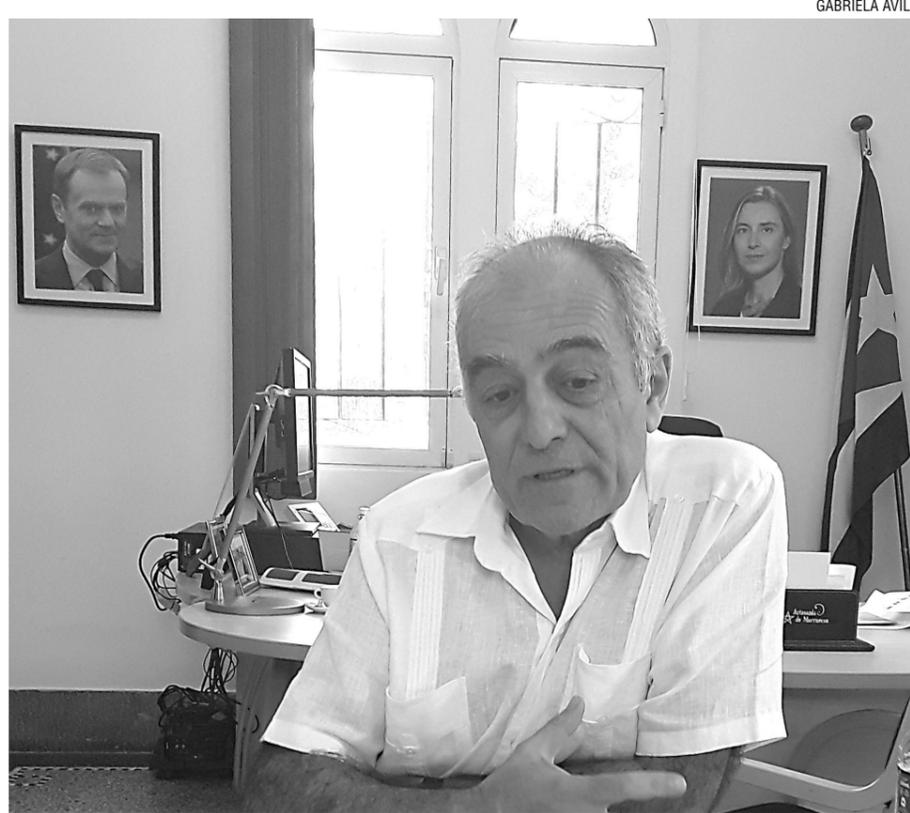
Nonetheless, he noted that in 2008, political dialogue was re-launched, as well as bilateral cooperation with the island, which received a significant boost after the Agreement was officially signed on December 12, 2016.

Now, with the provisional application of the agreement, both parties have a legal framework to formalize political dialogue and strengthen cooperation in various spheres.

In short, the agreement represents the start of a new and beneficial chapter for Cubans and Europeans, as the agreement will allow us to establish a more serious and mature relationship, stated the EU official.

Navarro went on to explain that the document is being applied on a provisional basis and will be definitively implemented once it is approved by the Parliaments of the bloc's 28 member-states.

So far the document has been ratified by Germany, Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, while the remaining 22 nations are expected to do so over the coming months, although this kind of process usually takes about two years, he noted.



The Head of the European Union Delegation to Cuba talked about the provisional application of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement between the island and the EU.

THE AGREEMENT

The provisional application of the PDCA marks the beginning of new processes and the continuation of others. According to the EU representative, as part of political dialogue initiatives, an EU-Cuba Council will start to be held at least every two years, presided by Bruno Rodríguez and Federica Mogherini, with the bloc's 28 member-states acting as observers.

These meetings will discuss the state of relations between Cuba and the European bloc, their respective regional contexts, as well as shared challenges, including multilateralism, international law, climate change, and conflict prevention, among others.

Cooperation efforts meanwhile will include continuation of the process which was re-summed in 2008.

In this regard, from 2008 to 2017, the EU has provided some 120 million euros in funding for projects in the Caribbean nation, across sectors such as food security, renewable energy, specialist exchanges, and disaster preparation and response; all toward supporting Cuba's development.

As for commercial exchanges, the EU is one of

Cuba's top trading partners, and although PDCA doesn't establish free trade, it does feature an important commercial component, highlighted Navarro.

Regarding current projects, he mentioned a renewable energy initiative and another linked to sustainable agriculture and food security.

Meanwhile, he also mentioned the upcoming inauguration of the Reference Center for Adolescents in Old Havana; a collaborative project between Cuba, the EU, UNICEF and the Havana City Historian's Office.

Also in the cultural sphere, Navarro noted the opening of the Center for the Interpretation of Cultural Relations between Cuba and Europe, in Havana's Palacio del Segundo Cabo.

A SERIOUS AND MATURE RELATIONSHIP

The head of the EU delegation on the island highlighted Cuba's achievements in sectors such as health and education and stressed the importance of maintaining such accomplishments by incorporating new technologies in these areas.

He also noted the growing presence of the island at an international level, which despite its

small size, is continuing to gain recognition.

Meanwhile, Navarro noted that the EU has been supporting Cuba in recovery efforts following different natural disasters which have affected the country.

He also mentioned the annual UN vote against the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the U.S. on Cuba, and which coincided with the implementation of the agreement between the island and the EU.

The community's 28 member-states have repeatedly condemned this policy as a violation of the fundamental human rights of the Cuban people, stated Navarro, who went on to note that the blockade is an illegal and immoral policy, which goes against international law. "More can be achieved through dialogue than isolation... the European Union believes in building bridges, not erecting walls," he stated.

GROWTH IN MOMENTS OF CRISIS

The European Union is a unique organization in the world, which represents a legal community centered on the importance of community law and its direct application, stated Navarro.

Founded just 60 years ago, the bloc has achieved a great deal including the establishment of a common market founded on the principle of "four freedoms": the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons within the EU; it has its own currency (the Euro) and agreements with other countries worldwide.

However, as Navarro highlighted, the bloc is currently facing many internal challenges, including the negotiation of the United Kingdom's withdrawal (Brexit), which despite the negative impact it will have on both parties, should be able to be resolved amicably.

Meanwhile, reforms presented by French President, Emmanuel Macron, represent yet another challenge for the bloc. The European leader is proposing to establish a common budget for the Euro Zone and defense policy for the region, in what some analysts are describing as the re-founding of the EU.

However, despite these challenges and other global issues linked to achieving peace and stability, Navarro noted that "We have continued to grow in times of crisis." •

Cuba supports Palestinian self-determination at the UN

• UNITED NATIONS.-Cuba expressed its support for the two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

In a debate by the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the UN General Assembly, Cuban representative Humberto Rivero reiterated the island's support for the Palestinian struggle for a free, independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Rivero also defended the call for the capital of the Palestinian state to be East Jerusalem, corresponding to the boundaries existing

prior to the Israeli occupation of 1967, and the return of refugees.

"We reiterate our firm support and solidarity for the just cause of the Palestinian people, and the need to redouble efforts to resolve the plight of its refugees, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant UN resolutions," he stressed.

The Cuban diplomat acknowledged the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), despite its lack of financial resources.

According to Rivero, the report discussed in the Fourth Committee on this matter

accurately reflects the services provided by the agency to Palestinians in key sectors such as health and education.

"As mentioned in the report, despite the operational deficit that it (the UNRWA) faced once again to meet the requirements of its mandate, it was able to provide human development services and humanitarian aid quickly and efficiently," he insisted.

The Cuban representative called for greater support for this agency, responsible for assisting Palestinian refugees, and criticized those who for political reasons threaten to further reduce financial contributions to its operations. (PL). •

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