

# Cuba: Prospects for a Peaceful Succession and Democratic Transition

Vojko Senker\*

Original paper  
UDC 321.7(729.1)  
Received in November 2005

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*In the last fifteen years Cuban economy has been in crisis. Social tensions have been rising. The health condition of Fidel Castro shows some signs of deterioration. What is the real strength of Cuba's internal opposition? Will succession and transition after the President Castro develop in a peaceful atmosphere or not? Are there prospects for a peaceful succession and democratic transition?*

**Keywords:** Cuba after Castro, Transition

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## 1. Introduction

In the last few years, as the health condition of Cuba's President *comandante en jefe* Fidel Castro began to show signs of an inevitable deterioration, international attention has been focused on possible scenarios of the succession and on perspectives for a democratic transition. Some important questions emerge. Will succession of power take the course devised by Fidel Castro? Will the succession be accompanied by a political transition or will it be only later followed by a transition towards democracy? What is the real strength of the internal opposition and their strategy? Will succession and transition develop in a peaceful atmosphere or would they be marred by violence? How the Cuban community in Miami will react? What will be the policy of the United States and of some other relatively important players, the countries with large economic interests in today's Cuba, such as Canada or Spain? What importance has the growing number of democratic left and radical leftist governments in Latin America for the transition in Cuba?

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\* Vojko Senker, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Croatia, Athens.

The views expressed herein are the personal views of the author and are not intended to reflect the views of the Ministry of foreign affairs.

It is difficult to answer those questions since we do not know the conditions at the time of President Castro's demise and after that. However, it is certain that the development of the political situation in Cuba after F. Castro will primarily depend on the internal factors (such as the strength and unity of the political elite and their capacity to survive and to control the situation), on the economic situation, internal opposition groups and organizations, and reactions of the people. In addition to internal factors, the course of events in post-Castro Cuba will be significantly influenced by the policy of the United States in the critical moments of succession, and on the way Cuban immigrants in the US will act.

## 2. Internal political, social and economic situation in today's Cuba

In the last fifteen years Cuban economy has been in crisis and social tensions have been rising, as a direct consequence of the fall of the Soviet bloc, because the conditions that enabled the Cuban political and economic system to function rather smoothly for decades changed drastically, and the ruling elite was not prepared to introduce bold re-

forms to adapt to the changed environment. Together with the worsening of the economic and social situation, repression was tightened in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, for the first time after the 1970s.

After the integration into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), Cuba was focusing on increasing the production of sugar in exchange for Soviet oil. The bulk of raw sugar was exported to the USSR, which paid prices several times higher than those prevailing on the world market, and almost 100% of Cuba's needs for crude oil were satisfied by importing cheap oil from the USSR. In addition, the USSR regularly granted credits to Cuba under favorable conditions. The Soviet assistance contributed up to 21% to Cuba's GDP. As the direct benefit of these subsidies Cuban GDP growth was quite stable, so that considerable achievements were accomplished in education, health, social security, employment and distribution. On the other hand, the increasing production of sugar distorted Cuba's economic development and limited the national economy's ability to produce other goods and services.

From the late 1970s to the mid-1980s some modest market reforms were implemented such as opening of farmers and crafts free markets, wage incentives, productivity increase, or foreign investments. Those reforms were soon abandoned, because Fidel Castro has always been strongly against any form of "market socialism", so that short periods of inevitable reforms were always followed by ideological campaigns of "rectification".

After the collapse of the USSR, Cuba's GDP fell 33% between 1989 and 1993<sup>1</sup>. A "Special Period" (*Periodo especial*) was proclaimed. The crisis reached its peak in 1993, with almost all social indicators worsened. For example, 31% of the capital Havana's population was considered poor in 2002.<sup>2</sup> The system of health care deteriorated, employment shrunk and subsidized monthly food rations were reduced.

In order to halt the further decline of the economy and prevent social unrest, President Castro was again forced to implement some economic reforms (1993-1996) which included promoting foreign investments, very limited forms of private initiative, encouraging remittances from Cuban community abroad by legalizing the circulation of US dollar ("*dolarización*"), development of tourism, revival of agriculture and reforms of state corporations. Some results were encouraging. Emigrants' remit-

tances reached 1.3 billion US\$ in 2003. Foreign investments in the period 1991-2002 totaled 2 billion US\$, especially in tourism, basic industry (nickel, oil explorations) and construction. Most investments came from Canada and Europe (Spain). Around 1.8 million of foreign tourists visited Cuba in 2001.

Unfortunately, the reforms, particularly those related with the private initiative were slowed in 1996 and stopped in 2003. Today, a re-centralization of the state sector is obvious, as well as the reduction of the small and weak private sector: from 200,000 in 1997, the number of micro-enterprises dropped to 150,000 in 2001.<sup>3</sup>

After 2001 a drop in tourist industry in the world (after S-11) affected Cuba too. New period of stagnation of the Cuban economy became visible as of 2003. The sugar cane harvest in 2003 was the worst in 70 years. Around 70 sugar mills were closed and 200,000 workers lost their jobs, although remaining on the state payroll. The living standards of Cuban population still have not reached those of 1989.

In spite of this negative development, Castro continued his opposition to any significant economic reforms, in his pursuit of a "moral" socialist economy. "Evidently, within the current political system, it is impossible to foresee a radical transformation capable of putting the Cuban economy on the path of sustainable growth."<sup>4</sup>

The political situation in Cuba during the last several years, as compared to the 1980s, is characterized by an increased repression aimed both at discouraging attempts of popular unrest or massive uncontrolled emigration, as well as at intimidating internal opposition.

There were two major uncontrolled emigration incidents in Cuba in the last ten years that could have evolved into a popular unrest. In July 1994 a group of Cubans sequestered a ship in order to immigrate to Florida. Cuban security forces intercepted and sunk it (41 persons died). In early August thousands of people gathered in the Havana port waiting for announced embarkations that would transport them to the US. Since the ships did not appear, anti-government demonstrations began, but the regime did not react violently. Instead, temporary free emigration was permitted and 35,000 people left Cuba on improvised rafts. In September an agreement was reached between Cuba and the US, introducing an annual quota of up to 20,000 Cuban emigrants. In spring of 2003 another wave of attempts of Cubans

to leave their country in rafts or sequestered ships and aircraft occurred. This time the reaction of the government was drastic: three Cuban citizens that sequestered a ferry in Havana were arrested, sentenced to death and fusilladed.

During the late 1990s the regime seemed to tolerate the obvious strengthening of the dissent and some sort of an independent civil society. During the Iberoamerican Summit in 1999 in Havana several dissident leaders were even permitted to meet foreign political leaders. Such policy of Cuban government led to a temporary improvement of the relations with the United States (with the Clinton Administration), in spite of the Helms-Burton Law being adopted by the Congress in 1996, and with the European Union. However, at the same time, the Law on Protection of National Independence and Economy of Cuba was enacted in 1999, prescribing severe sentences for the expression of opinions "contrary to national interests and sovereignty of Cuba", preparing grounds for a decisive blow against the opposition. During that period some political opposition organizations were formed. President Bush's Administration started supporting them. The most dangerous challenge to the regime appeared to be "The Varela Project" (*El proyecto Varela*), led by Oswaldo Payá, because the *varelistas* opted for political and legislative initiatives within the existing political system. In the beginning of 2002 they prepared an initiative for a constitutional change (full guarantees of the freedom of expression and association, amnesty for political prisoners, right to establishment of private enterprises and new electoral law). Using the possibility offered by Cuban Constitution, they gathered more than 11,000 signatures of Cuban citizens on a document proposing a referendum on constitutional changes and presented it to the National Assembly in the beginning of May. Few days later former President Carter visited Havana in an attempt to promote an improvement of the American-Cuban relations and to re-affirm the values of democracy. In his speech at Havana University, transmitted live by the Cuban TV, he appraised the "Varela Project's" recent initiatives.

The government's reaction followed. In June 2002 the government launched a huge popular mobilization, with massive manifestations supporting constitutional changes, but not those proposed by the Varela Project. The proposal of the Government was to add an amendment to the Constitution forbidding the National Assembly to enact any law that would challenge socialism. A campaign of signing the "popular initiative" in favor of the amendment was

organized and as a result 98.97% of the registered voters signed the petition. By the end of June 2002 the Parliament adopted the constitutional amendment on the "irrevocability of socialism". Castro's intention was clear: to show that while the opposition can mobilize thousands, he still can mobilize millions of Cubans.

In the next few weeks the preparations for the Sixth Communist Party Congress (planned for the end of 2002) were halted. It was widely expected that the Congress would re-affirm the economic reforms carried on from 1991 to 1996 and introduce some political changes (creation of the position of prime minister, eventual change of the Party's name, etc). Some reformists, such as former foreign minister Roberto Robaina and former ideological secretary of the Party Carlos Aldana were expelled from the Party. The ideological campaigns, permanent mobilizations of the population and media propaganda were launched instead of necessary economic and political reforms. The campaigns and ideological "purification" of the Communist Party continue.

Since the activity of the opposition continued, especially of the *varelistas*, openly backed by the Bush Administration, which put the strengthening of internal Cuban opposition in the focus of its policy towards Cuba, Castro reacted with an unprecedented repression: 75 dissidents, human-rights activists, independent writers and journalists were arrested in March 2003 and sentenced to long imprisonment. They were accused of conspiring against the independence and territorial integrity of the nation, although all their actions were public and consisted of writing their ideas, defending human rights, and promoting the Varela Project.<sup>5</sup> In April and May another 16 dissidents were convicted. During 2004 fourteen of the imprisoned dissidents were released.

The executions and arrests in 2003 as well as intensifying of an anti-American campaign were clear message to all Cubans, to the "reformers" within the Party, to the opposition and to the US that Fidel Castro has no intention to permit any changes that would threaten the succession of power. The leadership wanted to show that the Revolution is still alive and strong and that they would do everything to ensure that post-Castro succession takes place only within the existing system and not outside it. The timing of this wave of repression coincided with the beginning of the crisis in Iraq, and Castro possibly calculated that international reactions to the events in Cuba will be weak. But, the immediate consequences of the executions and arrests were the in-

tensification of the US administration's preparations for the future non-communist post-Castro Cuba, the tightening of the US embargo and worsening of the relations with the E.U.

### 3. Key Players in Cuba's Future Succession

There is no doubt that the key internal factors which will influence the take-over of political power after Castro are the institutions of existing political system and the ruling elite around them, the Cuban people and the internal opposition, while the most important external players will be the United States and exiled Cubans in Miami. European Union, Canada and Latin America will also play a significant role.

The most important *institutions* of the contemporary Cuba are the armed forces and the Communist Party. According to a majority of analysts, the strongest institutions of Castro's regime are the armed forces (*FAR - Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias*). "A Castro creation, they have developed a large measure of professionalism, are thoroughly integrated into the political system, and enjoy an important role in the general management and control of the economy. Today, more than 65 percent of major industries and enterprises are in the hands of current or former military officers."<sup>6</sup> The Ministry of Interior and the whole security apparatus is under the absolute control of the military.

Within the Communist Party (PCC), the reformist officials were neutralized, as the preparations for the Sixth Congress were halted, and the opponents of the reforms promoted. Since 2003 significant personal changes at provincial level have been carried on, bringing younger leaders absolutely loyal to Castro to the key positions in the wake of succession.

The central organs of political power in Cuba are the Politburo of the Communist Party (24 members), the Council of State (31 members) and the Council of Ministers (38 members). Their structure is overlapping. The most powerful persons, who are members of all of the three organs are: Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, Carlos Lage (secretary of the Council of Ministers and vice president of the Council of State, *de facto* prime minister), General Abelardo Colomé (minister of the interior), General Pedro Miret and Jose Balaguer (minister of health). Other influential officials are Ricardo Alarcón, president of the National Assembly and Felipe Perez, minister

of foreign affairs. Fidel Castro (79) is the first secretary of the Communist Party and president of the Council of State (head of state) and the Council of Ministers (prime minister). His younger brother General Raul Castro (74) is the minister of defense, second secretary of the Party and first vice-president of the Council of State and Council of Ministers, designated by President Fidel Castro as his immediate successor.

As a result of recent economic reforms a new entrepreneurial class has emerged, working as managers in state corporations and joint-venture companies. Many of them came from the military ranks. They are situated out of the ruling political class, but closely linked to it.<sup>7</sup>

Within the context of the overall worsening of the economic and social situation, increasing signs of social inequalities within *Cuban people* are present. First of all, the ruling political, military and entrepreneurial elite traditionally live in better conditions than the vast majority of the population. Secondly, recent economic reforms, albeit limited, created a sharp polarization between those who receive dollar remittances and those who do not have dollars. People who have no other means to survive often engage in all kinds of illegal activities (black market, corruption). There are also other significant social problems in contemporary Cuba such as an alienated youth, or growing racial frictions.

As it usually happens in all revolutionary regimes that become totalitarian, in Cuba the initial enthusiasm and support of the youth began to vanish. This process started in the late 1970s when exiled Cubans were permitted to visit the country and young Cubans saw the possibilities of a different life. It continued in the 1980s when Cuban young generation received Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* with interest, while Castro strongly opposed them. Naturally, with the worsening of the economic situation after 1989 the youth became even more alienated, and mostly are "disaffected and disconnected from politics",<sup>8</sup> facing austerity, repression and unemployment.

Blacks and mulattos make up more than 50% of Cuba's population. Their proportion rose due to interracial marriages and emigration of a million and half mostly white Cubans. After 1959 the new revolutionary government strongly promoted racial equality, outlawing all forms of discrimination and improving the economic position of the poor (high percentage of the poor were Afro-Cubans). When a good

part of Cuban middle class (almost entirely white) left Cuba, employment and housing opportunities were opened for blacks and mulattos. So, they became the most enthusiastic supporters of the revolution.<sup>9</sup> But some racial inequalities have persisted. Blacks and mulattos still live in the poorest areas. The percentage of Afro-Cubans in the ruling elite is still low. After 1989, blacks and mulattos became poorer because they receive fewer dollar remittances from abroad.

It is difficult to assess the degree of support for the regime among Cuban population, since there are no opinion polls. Although the revolution did not fulfill the promise to establish full political liberties and democracy after the fall of Batista dictatorship, some of its achievements were received with full support within the majority of the Cuban population: the defense of national sovereignty and dignity in the relations with the US, social justice for the poor and marginalized, free education for all, advanced health services and full employment. It is possible that the increasing repression, social inequalities, and poverty have increased the popular discontent and shrunk the popularity of the revolution.

*The internal opposition* has strengthened in the recent 10-15 years with growing international support. According to A. J Hidalgo, a former Cuban diplomat and journalist, almost 300 opposition organizations existed in Cuba in the moment of the repressive crackdown in April 2003, majority of them very small.<sup>10</sup> They began a process of integration towards three main streams: the Assembly for the Promotion of the Civil Society, the Progressive Arch and the Christian Liberation Movement, which includes also the Varela Project. In spite of the repression, they continue their activities. Oswaldo Payá, the initiator of the Varela Project, in December 2002 informally released his "Transitional Program", where he outlined his ideas on the transition in Cuba, and in 2004 he launched a document "National Dialogue", which calls for a national political debate. The main problems of the opposition are the fragmentation and their relation with the exiled Cubans' political organizations, as well as the intimidations and harassment of the state security, which have destroyed or discredited several opposition groups. The reaction of the government in 2003 demonstrates that their strength became intolerable for the regime, although they still do not represent a serious threat.

*The United States* has imposed economic sanctions and travel restrictions and severed diplomatic relations with Cuba soon after the victory of

Fidel Castro's revolution. The nine presidential administrations in the US since 1959, both Democratic and Republican, have been consistent in their strategy toward Fidel Castro and have had the only objective: to create economic collapse and provoke the fall of the regime, abstaining from any form of the military intervention. This is probably the longest trade embargo in the modern history.

The Helms-Burton Law (1996) and the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba's Report (2004) represent a road map of the US policy toward Cuba. The Helms-Burton Law tightens the economic embargo and establishes the conditions for the normalization of relations with Cuba. Among the main conditions are the settlement of the claims for the confiscated property, and the free elections in Cuba. The Law also imposes sanctions against foreign enterprises that have business with Cuba under certain conditions.

On 10 October 2003, President George W. Bush announced the creation of a *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba*, with a mandate to report to the President with recommendations on developing a comprehensive program to:

1. "Bring about a peaceful, near-term end to the dictatorship;
2. Establish democratic institutions, respect for human rights, and the rule of law;
3. Create the core institutions of a free economy;
4. Modernize infrastructure; and
5. Meet basic needs in the areas of health, education, housing and human services".<sup>11</sup>

Commission members are top representatives of the Government agencies. In addition, an office of "Cuba Transition Coordinator" has been established in the Department of State and Caleb McCarry named Coordinator in July 2005.

The Commission's Report was presented to President Bush on May 6, 2004. Chapter 1 of the Report identifies means by which the US can "help the Cuban people bring about an end to the Castro dictatorship."<sup>12</sup> The strategy is multidimensional: adopting measures to empower Cuban civil society; breaking the regime's information blockade of the Cuban people; reducing financial flows to the regime; undermining the regime's "succession strategy" (i.e. from Fidel to Raul Castro) by increasing pressures on the ruling elite and its principal instruments of coercion/control; aggressively increasing public diplomacy efforts abroad to counter Cuban propa-

ganda; and encouraging multilateral efforts to challenge the Cuban regime.<sup>13</sup>

Chapters 2 to 6 represent a detailed survey of the areas in which the US Government can assist a free Cuba in all facets of its reconstruction and renewal.<sup>14</sup> According to some analysts, the Report "is a detailed program for the transition that, however, reflects low knowledge of the real Cuba – it says, for example, that all children, younger than 5 should be vaccinated - and involves the US in almost all the affairs that are fundamentally within the competence of the Cubans on the island, although always stating that the American assistance will be offered only if requested by a democratic Cuban government".<sup>15</sup>

The Commission had another meeting under the chairmanship of the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on December 19, 2005. Secretary Rice stated that by implementing recommendations in the Commission first report, "we have empowered Cuban civil society to better organize and advocate for democratic change; we have established measures that denied millions of dollars in revenue to the dictatorship; we are breaking the regime's information blockade on the Cuban people; and we have drawn greater attention the dictatorship's deplorable treatment of the Cuban people".<sup>16</sup> Some of the recommendations from the Report have already been implemented. For example, the visits of the exiled Cubans to their families on the island have been limited (one visit every 3 years) and the amount of money they can take from the US reduced. Sending of remittances has also been limited (one remittance every 3 months). It is highly doubtful whether these measures, as well as the whole concept of the embargo, affect only the regime, and not the people of Cuba. They also offer to Castro's propaganda a justification for the difficult economic and social situation and for the repression against the dissidents. Totalitarian regimes always need "foreign enemies".

A second report of the Commission is expected to be handed to the President in May 2006, with "both updated recommendations to hasten democracy, and an inter-agency strategic plan to assist a Cuban-led transition".<sup>17</sup>

The policy of the Bush administration, the most severe since the 1960s, does not accept any notion of a succession and is seeking a most rapid political transition. The following statement of the chief of the US Interest section in Havana demonstrates this position clearly. "Achieving such a total, durable transition to democracy and free market economy remains the unwavering policy of the United States...Mere 'stability' would not be an acceptable outcome; nor would any other outcome that fails to provide immediate, genuine freedom to the

Cuban people."<sup>18</sup> So, the motto of the US policy could be resumed in the following phrase: *succession – no, transition – yes*, while Castro's strategy is: *succession – yes, transition – no*.

The **Cuban community** in the US is large and influential, located mainly in Florida. In the beginning, since there was no internal opposition in Cuba, the exiled Cubans were the only opponents of Castro and many of them thought that only they, assisted by the US, could bring the change of the regime on the island, even by force if necessary. They approved the embargo and advocated the use of the US military force against Castro's regime.

Today, the Cuban community in Miami has been "in transition". Thousands of new immigrants that arrived from Cuba in the last 20 years have changed the exile. They are in favor of the US dialogue with Cuba and support the emigrants' visits to the island. Today, more than 30% of Cubans in the US are against embargo. The vast majority is now against the use of force and terrorism. Around 77% think that the democratization of Cuba is the sole responsibility of the Cubans and not of the US. Some 55 percent support a national dialogue among the Cuban government, the internal opposition and the exile. The majority of them now recognize the leading role of the internal opposition in Cuba and several exiled Cubans' political organizations are in close contacts with the dissent on the island and gradually accept the idea of a peaceful transition.

Cuba is the only country in the region that still does not have a cooperation agreement with the EU. The legal basis for the **EU relations with Cuba** is the Common Position, as approved by the Council of Ministers in 1996. According to the Common Position "the objective of the European Union in its relations with Cuba is to encourage a process of transition to a pluralist democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as sustainable recovery and improvement in the living standards of the Cuban people"<sup>19</sup>. On the basis of the Common Position and in order to facilitate peaceful change in Cuba, the Commission and the Member States may provide assistance to Cuba. Cuba rejects the Common Position as interference in its internal affairs.

The issue of human rights has been the main reason of tensions in the relations between Cuba and the EU. The EU member states, represented in the UN Human Rights Commission regularly vote in favor of the resolutions on human rights in Cuba. After the arrest and trial of 75 dissidents in March 2003, the EU imposed diplomatic sanctions on Cuba on 5 June 2003 with the following measures: limit

high level government visits; reduce the profile of member states' participation in cultural events; invite Cuban dissidents to national day celebrations and proceed to an earlier re-evaluation of the Common Position. In response, Cuba announced on 26 July 2003 their refusal of all direct aid coming from the EU. Cuban government severed all official relations with the EU member countries' embassies in Havana.

As 14 dissidents were released during 2004, on 31 January 2005, the Council suspended temporarily all the measures imposed on 5 June 2003, and the suspension was confirmed in June 2005. The Council stated the willingness to maintain a constructive dialogue with Cuba, but also it decided to intensify contacts with the political opposition and civil society in Cuba. High political officials visiting Cuba should raise the issue of human rights in their talks with the Government and the civil society. In response, Cuban Government resumed formal relations with the EU member countries' ambassadors in Havana. Some EU member states, in particular former communist countries (Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) are not very happy about resuming relations with Havana. Several other countries have considerable economic interests in Cuba and it influences their positions.

**Canada's policy** towards Cuba is based on similar principles as the one of the EU. Some Canadian companies are among the biggest foreign investors in Cuba, especially in mining and oil explorations. Canadian companies built the new Havana airport few years ago.

Cuba's relations with the **countries of Latin America** have been normalized and continue to improve, although at a relatively low profile. The majority of the Latin American countries consider that Cuba, belonging to the region, should not be isolated, although they do not approve Cuban human rights policy, which is demonstrated in their voting in the UN Commission on Human Rights (some countries abstain, while others vote in favor of the resolution).

Cuba and Venezuela have developed close relations and a common anti-US front. Castro and Chavez share similar political and ideological ideas. The two countries' bilateral trade reached 1.2 billion US\$ in 2005. Venezuela exports 90,000 barrels of oil daily to Cuba with favorable terms (a part is paid in services or on credit, with preferential prices). In return, Cuba sends thousands of doctors and other technical cooperation experts to work in social projects in Venezuela. Castro's relations with new Bolivian President Morales are also very good.

#### 4. Cuba after Fidel Castro: Succession or Transition?

It is impossible to predict the course of events in Cuba after the demise of President Fidel Castro, since nobody knows when the succession will occur, who will take over and in what internal and external environment the changes will take place. The majority of analysts think that the immediate succession will take place within the institutions of the present political system, or in other words, that Cuba "will remain for some time under some kind of authoritarian control".<sup>20</sup> Some of them expect very limited reforms, while others think that Cuba will follow the Chinese or Vietnamese model, rather than that of North Korea. There are also some opinions that there will be no communist succession government (or a very short period of the communist succession), and that after Fidel Castro a democratic transitional government will take over.

The most likely scenario is that General Raul Castro will succeed Fidel Castro, of course if his physical conditions permit him to be politically active at the moment of the succession. In that case, he would be the first secretary of the Cuban Communist Party and the supreme commander of the armed forces. Whether the Council of State will continue to exist with Raul as its president, or the function of the President of the Republic will be introduced, remains to be seen. It is almost certain that the position of the prime minister will be created, as it was mentioned during the Fourth Communist Party Congress, with one of the civilian members of the ruling elite elected to this office (Carlos Lage, Ricardo Alarcon, Marcos Portal or Felipe Perez Roque could be possible candidates). The possibility of a civilian president of Cuba also cannot be excluded, in which case Raul Castro would retain the control of key institutions - the armed forces and the Communist Party. Raul Castro has no charisma and legitimacy of Fidel Castro (who became the undisputed leader of Cuba after the victory of the revolution), although he has strong institutional influence, developed during his service as his brother's deputy during several decades. Thus he would probably create some sort of a collective leadership, to maintain unity among the ruling elite. According to some writers, Raul Castro is more practical, focused and pragmatic than Fidel. He is able to permit different opinions and to discuss solutions with his collaborators.

Raul Castro, as an eventual successor, should create an image of internal and international credibility. To achieve the internal legitimacy, he would need the support of the military, party leaders and technocrats within the government, as well as to ini-

tiate economic and social reforms that would satisfy the population. To get the international credibility, the successor government should not be entirely military and this is why civilians should have to get some top positions. Thus, though it is highly probable that during the succession period the Cuban armed forces will have the most important role, as "guardians of the Revolution", a possibility of an entirely military government after President Fidel Castro departure, similar to General Jaruzelsky's government in Poland (1981 to 1989), mentioned by some analysts,<sup>21</sup> is unlikely, except in a situation of an internal political crisis in Cuba in the moments of the succession or if a foreign intervention occurs.

The succession government in Cuba will face very delicate challenges: difficult economic situation, social problems, popular dissent and growing internal opposition, as well as the hostile policy of the United States.

If the succession takes place within the existing political system, with Raul Castro as the leader, or with collective leadership without him, the government will have to introduce economic reforms. Raul Castro seems to be in favor of them. During the Fourth Communist Party Congress in 1992, Raul Castro said that he was worried "what will happen if we don't make much-needed changes now, and if we don't make them under Fidel."<sup>22</sup> Since there is no chance, even a theoretical one, that Raul Castro and the rest of the succession leaders would permit reforms that go beyond the existing system under the rule of the Communist Party, it is likely that they would follow the examples of China and Vietnam. While Fidel Castro publicly praised the reforms in these countries, but refused to apply the concept of "market socialism" in Cuba, Raul Castro is said to be interested in reforms of Chinese and Vietnamese style. Such reforms would promote significant changes in the economic sector, maintaining the authoritarian character of the regime and the undisputed role of the Communist Party. Vietnam and China permitted the private initiative, attracted foreign investments, developed an export-oriented economy and liberalized trade, accomplishing increased and sustained GDP growth. "All of these endeavors have been carried out in a calculated method allowing growth, but not at the expense of the majority of the population, as was the case in other countries that hastily embraced reforms."<sup>23</sup> Whether the reforms in Cuba will be bold, or gradual and limited, remains to be seen.

The succession government would have to cope with social problems and popular dissent. If they introduce economic reforms, the population would approve them, if they promise to change their

social problems immediately. If not, people would not have much patience. Also, it is difficult to expect that people would show much understanding for any new sacrifices, waiting for the result of some painful reforms. The reforms should be carefully designed, so that they do not aggravate already existing social polarization. Racial problems should be carefully handled. Eventual mass jobs curtailing, which is inevitable in all economic reforms, could provoke social explosion with political consequences. That is why such measures should be coupled with self-employment and some degree of private initiative. Also, direct foreign investments should be promoted and effectively protected. If the government loosens the emigration controls, there is a danger of a massive emigration wave. From the other side, even if the government permits the return of the exiled Cubans, it is not very likely that many of them would return, especially if the communist system persists. Some of them would maybe opt for returning and investing in Cuba, if the private initiative is permitted, but then the question of return of the confiscated property would arise, and could provoke social and financial problems. If the succession government wants to introduce reforms related with the rule of law, it will face problems which are a common behavior today (corruption, black market, violations of laws in order to survive, etc). A change in the mentality of people would be necessary, and this is not an easy, nor a quick task.

The significant issue of the human rights, repression and totalitarian control over the society will also be very important, and it could be expected that the succession government will conduct a low profile "softened" repressive policy, except in case of heavy social disorders or anarchy. It is hard to imagine, however, that a communist-style succession government would permit the legalization of a multi-party system and free elections, since that would weaken their political control or even remove them from power.

It is likely that the succession communist government would try to improve the relations with the US, in order to attract the inflow of American tourists and investments, as well as to promote normal commercial relations. If the US continues with the full implementation of the existing policy of embargo or even tightens it, then the reforms of the succession government could not be as successful as in the case of the mutual overture. In that case also the policy of repression against internal opposition would continue. If the embargo is loosened, some degree of American investments is possible, together with liberalization of trade and the significant inflow of American tourists, and that would improve Cuban



balance of payments. The visits of the exiled Cubans and their remittances would increase. Of course, such an overture may bring problems: increased emigration of Cubans to the US and disputes over the claims for the return of the confiscated property of the American citizens and of the exiled Cubans.

It is difficult to predict massive popular mobilization in Cuba during the succession, like the events that brought down the communist regimes in East Europe, or even a revolution similar to that in Rumania that toppled Ceaucescu, but it is not impossible scenario either. Such developments are possible if the internal opposition will have enough strength to mobilize the masses (with some more or less subtle assistance from abroad), or if the new government increases repression and introduces policies that would worsen the economic and social situation. In such case, after a short-lived succession government, there would be a transitional government composed of the representatives of the internal opposition and, possibly, of the political parties of the exiled Cubans (it is unlikely but not impossible that some moderate politicians from the existing ruling elite be included in such government). The legalization of political parties, elections and constitutional changes would follow. New democratic government would certainly introduce substantial changes and reforms (change of the political and economic systems, privatizations, foreign private investments, etc). Such reforms would be welcomed by the population, but if the social consequences are costly, the reactions could turn negative.

In such scenario, the relations with the US would be immediately improved, the embargo revoked, the trade and tourism liberalized, and the investments would flow into the country. But, even in such case, the government should have to take into account the possibility that the people, living for decades in an environment of a communist society, would be afraid of quick and drastic changes towards market economy, especially if the important social benefits they enjoy now, although very limited because of the shortages, would be abolished (free education and health care, social insurance, guaranteed employment). Also, the people would oppose losing their property because it should be returned to the previous owners (American companies and citizens, or exiled Cubans). The problems related to deep and quick reforms, implemented by a transition government, would be very much the same or most probably even worse than those in the case of a succession government.

The transition government, especially if the representatives of the exile community participate in it, should take care that there is no revenge or even

violence (neither by the government agencies themselves nor by the emigrants that will have returned to Cuba) against common Cubans just because they previously have worked in the enterprises and institutions of the former regime.

It is certain, therefore, that the course of events in Cuba in all scenarios very much depends on the US policy. Washington is expected to avoid any notion of direct involvement or intervention in the internal issues pertaining to the Cubans (although some measures envisaged in the report prepared by the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba indicate that such things might happen). In the case that there is no transitional government, but only the successor one, a direct American military intervention is not probable, except in case of serious internal crisis in Cuba. The eventual intervention would not be supported internationally, and many Cubans would not accept it either. It is certain that the centre-left governments in Latin America would strongly oppose any form of foreign direct intervention in the Cuban internal affairs, but they would likewise oppose any form of totalitarian policy of the succession Cuban government.

## 5. Conclusion

The Cuban revolutionary experiment has survived the collapse of communism in Europe, but the ruling class has had no courage to undertake significant political and economic reforms to adapt the system to the changed international environment. In the last fifteen years Cuba's economy has been in decline and social tensions have been rising. The internal political opposition grew significantly. Although the opposition still does not represent a serious threat to President Fidel Castro, he has demonstrated that he is ready to persecute the political opponents even if this would bring about the worsening of Cuba's international position. The United States have tightened the embargo and started directly helping the internal opposition. With the eventual physical departure of President Fidel Castro Cuba will enter into a process of succession of power, which will probably start within the existing political system (General Raul Castro has been designated as the successor), but with inevitable economic reforms, most likely similar to those in China and Vietnam. When a democratic political transition will take place, it is impossible to predict.

During the period of the succession/transition, the international factor will be very important. It seems, however, that there is no common approach among the key players to the situation in Cuba before and after the succession.

The United States will favor only the rapid political transition in Cuba after Castro towards multi-party democracy and free market economy, without a period of the communist succession government. They maintain and tighten the embargo believing that a reactivation of the Cuban economy under a totalitarian regime would reinforce such a regime, while the embargo and newly introduced measures should, according to the US strategy, hasten the collapse of the regime and enable the political transition. It is only after the democratic changes that the US would support and promote the economic reforms in Cuba. However, it is likely that US would not do anything which would provoke anarchy or civil war in Cuba, since this would complicate the situation (a wave of tens of thousands of emigrants would pour into the US, a military intervention would be almost inevitable).

The policy of the European Union, Canada and the majority of the Latin American governments towards Cuba has been based on the assumption that economic changes and an end of Cuba's isolation (including the abolition of the American embargo) will lead to an overall opening of Cuba, to the im-

proved human rights record, to developing of civil society and, as a consequence, they would promote the democratic development and subsequent political transition. During the delicate moments of the succession in Cuba, the EU, Canada and the governments of the Latin American countries could have an important stabilizing role. From one side, they could encourage the peaceful succession (so as to avoid any chaos) and at the same time urge the economic and democratic reforms in Cuba, without interfering into its internal affairs, but offering an international support to the Cuban democratic opposition. In this respect, the role of the democratic centre-left Latin American governments might be of special importance. From the other side, they could work together with the United States so that any hastened solutions that might have difficult or even tragic consequences are avoided and that the pace and model of the democratization of Cuba is entirely left to the Cuban people and its political organizations. Finally, they should encourage the present strategy of the Cuban opposition to seek ways for a peaceful internal political transition. ■

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