

In a first, European Parliament approves EU-Cuba cooperation pact

05/07/2017



The European Parliament overwhelmingly approved on Wednesday a first-ever cooperation deal between the EU and Cuba.

Lawmakers in the eastern French city of Strasbourg approved the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement, signed in December 2016, which is widely seen as a European riposte to US President Donald Trump's hardline stance against Havana.

"Europe has a great opportunity to demonstrate to the United States, which intends to withdraw, that it is possible to maintain the highest level of expectations on Cuba" and normalise relations with Havana, said MEP Elena Valenciano, the rapporteur of the agreement.

With the deal, Cuba joins other Latin American countries with similar agreements with the EU, whose relations with the island had previously been conducted within the so-called Common Position that linked ties to improvements in human rights.

In an effort to placate opponents of the deal, the European Parliament adopted a non-legislative resolution on Wednesday in which MEPs urged the EU to assist "the economic and political transition in Cuba" including towards "democratic

standards".

With the vote, the agreement, which also lays the basis for trade relations, will enter into force provisionally in the coming months.

Full implementation will require ratification by the EU's 28 member countries in a complex process that can take years.

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