
EU and Cuba hold Human Rights Dialogue

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On 9 October, the EU and Cuba held their fourth Human Rights Dialogue in Havana. It was the first time it was formally held under the EU-Cuba Agreement on Political Dialogue and Cooperation (PDCA), which is being provisionally applied since 1 November 2017. This was also the first among a number of political dialogues, whose launch was agreed at the 15 May 2018 in the EU-Cuba Joint Council meeting.

The two sides had an extensive discussion on legal guarantees in criminal proceedings in the EU and in Cuba. The EU underlined the importance of safeguarding the rights of the defence and the principles of due process, as laid down in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Discussions also covered the topic of racism and xenophobia. The two sides exchanged best practices and discussed common challenges. In this context, the EU explained the Union's legal framework to address discrimination, racism, xenophobia and hate crimes in all Member States, and emphasised the positive role of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in developing recommendations.

In the area of economic and social rights, the EU and Cuba addressed the promotion and protection of cultural rights, where the EU stressed that freedom of artistic expression and entrepreneurship were key for a viable and vibrant cultural sector that can create jobs, develop cultural industries and revitalise cultural heritage.

Moreover, they discussed the promotion and protection of the right to health. The results achieved by Cuba in developing an universal health care model were recognised, as well as its international solidarity in the area of medical philanthropy and education.

In following up to the last high-level discussion on human rights, held in May 2017, the parties also addressed the topic of citizens' participation in public affairs, including in the context of recent electoral processes, as well as freedom of association and expression, and the possibility of human rights defenders and other civil society to freely associate, express their views and participate in public life.

Finally, opportunities were explored for closer EU-Cuba cooperation in multilateral human rights fora, such as on the UN Resolution on a death penalty moratorium, and exchanged views on recent Universal Periodic Review processes at the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The talks reconfirmed the wish of the EU and Cuba to deepen their dialogue and understanding in the area of human rights, with a view to developing cooperation to attain the objectives of the EU-Cuba partnership.

This Dialogue was preceded by a civil society seminar on 8 October - the first of its kind - where representatives of Cuban and European NGOs exchanged views in particular on the topics of gender equality and LGBTI issues.

The EU delegation was headed by the Deputy Managing Director for the Americas of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Hugo Sobral, and included Ambassador Alberto Navarro, the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Cuba, as well as other representatives of the EEAS and the EU Delegation. Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez, Director General for Multilateral Issues and International Law of the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Affairs led the Cuban side, and was accompanied by Cuban Ambassador to the EU Norma Goicochea Estenoz, as well as other officials of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For the first time, representatives of EU Member States also participated in the Dialogue as observers.

Background

High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini and the Foreign Minister

of Cuba Bruno Rodriguez agreed in April 2015 to start EU-Cuba human rights consultations, anticipating on the negotiations of a bilateral Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement. Three rounds of annual consultations were held since then.

The Agreement, which was signed in December 2016 and is being provisionally applied since 1 November 2017, opens a new chapter in EU-Cuban relations and contains detailed provisions on the promotion of human rights, an essential element of the bilateral partnership.

It notably establishes a structured Human Rights Dialogue, whose inaugural session was held in Havana on 9 October. The Dialogue allows both sides to share experiences and best practices, build capacities, and provide training or technical cooperation to address specific issues.
