
Effects of the Blockade on the Cuban Communications System

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This Wednesday, May 26th, at a Press Conference with the national and foreign media Wilfredo González Vidal, First Vice Minister of Communications; Ariadne Plasencia Castro, president of the Informatics and Communications Business Group, and Ailyn Febles Estrada, president of the Cuban Informatics Union, exposed the economic backlashes and losses caused to the Communications System, as a consequence of the unfair U.S. blockade against Cuba.

The economic damage and losses caused to the Communications System, as a consequence of the unfair U.S. blockade against Cuba are evident throughout the sector, in Telecommunications, Information Technologies, and Postal Services.

The blockade continues to be the main hinderance to a better flow of information and a wider access to Internet and ICT in general by the Cuban people. Connectivity is made more expensive, access to certain platforms and technologies is banned, and cyberspace is used to try to subvert the country's political system.

The Internet task force for Cuba, created in 2017 by the U.S. government, is an example of a mechanism created to subvert or influence the internal order of the country and determine the efforts in the development of the Internet, a matter which by its own and sovereign decision, the government of Cuba is promoting as part of the strategy of the process of computerization of society.

The economic setback in the period April-December 2020, are quantified at 65 million 493 thousand 280 USD. As in previous years, the Cuban Telecommunications Company (ETECSA) continues to be the entity with the greatest damage, more than 98%.

The main effects are given by three main concepts:

1. Limited supplies of technologies and equipment produced under license or using North American components, which implies that it's necessary to purchase in other markets, much more distant. This reason is the main

obstacle which impacts the most in the Communications sector caused by the blockade. They are quantified in more than the 90%.

There's an important limitation on this first concept, and that is that Cuba can't acquire articles that contain more than 10% of U.S. components. This measure was established by the U.S. Department of Commerce, effective since October 2019.

The aforementioned makes it impossible to access high-performance brands and / or equipment that are leaders in the Telecommunications and ICT market which are distributed or have patents from North American entities, including landlines, mobile phones, antennas, computer systems.

Some examples: companies like EMERSON ELECTRIC (energy system); WPT Western Pacific Telecommunications (hardware), and ERICO (ground systems).

Today the public telecommunications service, the technologies that support it, are at the expense of the supplies of companies located geographically very distant from our country and this undoubtedly has an impact on ETECSA's investments, and in being able to work at a faster pace than is expected. can, with direct effects on the users of the company, let's remember that the company also contributes to the development and sustainability of other sectors in the country.

2. The effects on income from the export of services, taking into account the limitation of foreign suppliers in signing contracts for fear that their company will be sanctioned and that implies having to assume financial and commercial risks.

As a consequence of the activation of Title III of the Helms-Burton Act, the American Airlines company decided to suspend the direct postal service between the United States and Cuba, the GECC had to look for an alternative to guarantee the Universal Postal Service and decided to route it through Panama, as a third country. This action increased the price of the rate, assumed by the postal operator (twice the price of the kg of the postal package), so as not to affect the population in the country, which represents losses to the Cuban postal operator and delay in delivery. of correspondence to the population.

This, among others, is an example that the blockade has a real impact on the lives of citizens, that it affects the quality of life of citizens.

3. Damage in the field of ICT, making it impossible to access computer platforms and tools, essential for training and content production as well as digital platforms, ideal for the development of products and services in the country.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been difficulties in participating in virtual meetings and events assembled by international organizations of the United Nations System, due to the impossibility of using videoconferencing platforms with restricted access from Cuba. Eg: Zoom, Webex. This has the consequence that Cuba is unable to participate on equal terms with the rest of the member states of the United Nations.

The country has also suffered from the blockade of the current information monopolies, due to the large social networks. On September 11th, 2019, while the President of the Republic of Cuba, Miguel Díaz Canel Bermúdez, reported on the causes of the energy situation in the country, the social network Twitter blocked the official accounts of the digital news media: Roundtable, Cubadebate, Granma, as well as that of the Ministry of Communications and other Cuban press and journalists.

The main objective of this action was to prevent the spreading of the President's message by this means and to prevent comments and debates on the subject by users of this social network. This event has been repeated in time, all coinciding with the delivery of important information for the country by its main leaders.

Despite the economic, commercial, and financial blockade of the United States government, intensified in the context of the pandemic, our country has continued with the expansion of telecommunications services.

Currently, more than 64% of Cubans access the Internet, and mobile telephony has 6.6 million users, 4G networks are growing and 76% of the population has digital television signal coverage.

Companies in the Communications sector maintain interest in expanding business with U.S. companies, with projects that are beneficial to both parties.

As our First Secretary of the Communist Party and President of the Republic of Cuba, Miguel Díaz Canel, expressed in the closing speech of the 8th Congress of the organization ... "Cuba wishes to live in peace and maintain relations with the United States, as with the rest of the international community, on the basis of equality, and mutual respect, without any kind of interference".

Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSí Translation Staff
