
Foreign minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla spells out Cuba's new revolution

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The commercial embargoes have been falling one after the other.

The official visit of Raul Castro to France talked about a new reality between [Cuba](#) and Europe. Between Cuba and the World. Symbols were in evidence.

In August 2015 there was another very iconic image: the US flag was raised again in Havana. Eight months before, Barack Obama and Raul Castro announced the normalisation of US-Cuba relations.

Now the revolution is heading for a new stage, gradually, and at two speeds.

There will be daily flights to Miami, a new middle class has started to emerge, licenses can be obtained to start a private business, buy and sell cars and houses, even if the vast majority of Cubans cannot afford them.

But the political system still depends on an elite linked to the Armed Forces and the Communist Party remains the only player.

The new economic reality, for now, does not appear to translate into a substantial improvement in human rights and liberties.

To know more about this crucial moment in Cuba's history, we have interviewed the Foreign Affairs Minister, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla.

euronews: “Foreign affairs minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, thank you for accepting our invitation to talk to us. The President Raul Castro has chosen Paris for his first state visit to the European Union. Why? Is France going to get privileged treatment because it’s willing to restructure the Cuban debt?”

Foreign Affairs Minister, Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “Since the French Revolution, France has had a very special influence in Cuba. There is a strong relationship, confirmed by decades of recent history with a very positive development of bilateral ties. We recognise the leadership of France in Europe. I feel that this visit marks a special perspective for the development of our bilateral ties. This is definitely an historic visit. Circumstances led President Hollande to visit Havana months ago, which was a decisive step. And now President Raul Castro Ruz has reciprocated the gesture by coming to Paris.”

euronews: “This visit is very much about economy but has the issue of human rights in Cuba been on the agenda of the talks with the French authorities?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “The visit is very versatile, not exclusively economic. We have had exchanges on numerous issues of a political nature. France and Cuba share many similarities in the international agenda. So, our links are diverse and, therefore, the exchanges have also been diverse. The issue of human rights was not central but we exchanged views on that and also about some other concerns that are important for both our countries.”

euronews: “The European countries, less sensitive to the ongoing changes in the island or let’s put it this way – more demanding with the situation of human rights on the island – are they going to lose business opportunities in the new Cuba?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “The European Union and Cuba have had a political dialogue at the highest level for years, which includes various topics. And more recently, we initiated a bilateral dialogue on human rights based on a process that began in 2010 under the French presidency of the European Union. French companies have had a major presence in Cuba for years. But it is also true that other members of the European Union are, equally, our traditional partners in trade and investments. Or they are major providers of tourism to Cuba. We shouldn’t be mixing up political issues with mutually beneficial relations.”

euronews: “In December 2014, Barack Obama and Raul Castro announced the start of the normalisation of US-Cuba relations. Since then there have been many symbolic gestures but perhaps not so much real progress. Expectations were too high maybe?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “I don’t think so. The announcement of December 17th was surprising and certainly important. It was unusual for the world to hear the President of the United States of America recognise that the policy of the past 50 years had failed, a policy that has caused humanitarian harm to our people. This actually marked the beginning of the discussions that led to the restoration of diplomatic relations and the reopening of embassies, which happened last summer. I feel that there has been progress in dialogue and cooperation, in numerous bilateral issues of common interest. But, although some positive measures have been adopted, there has been a very limited progress in relation to the modification of the blockade. This is where we do not see tangible progress.”

euronews: “Has Washington given you a precise date for the end of the sanctions? Is it going to be announced before Obama quits the White House?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “Hard to say. The blockade is the big issue. The manner in which the [embargo](#) will be modified regarding its elimination will determine the meaning and scope of the ongoing process between the United States and Cuba. There will be no normalisation, obviously, without a complete termination of the blockade, which requires a decision by Congress. However, the US President retains very extensive executive powers, that used with determination, could change the embargo very substantially.”

euronews: “This is an election year in the United States. The coming handover in Washington could affect the Cuban thaw? Which candidate is better for Cuba?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “In a functional democracy, any candidate who is elected would have to follow the dictates of the voters, the wishes of the voters, the will of the people who pay taxes. Nobody contests that there is a very large majority in the American society – in all its sectors- in favour of ending a policy rooted in the Cold War, which has not brought any results apart from causing considerable humanitarian damage to all Cuban families. However, we should admit that there are differences between the different candidates but every one of them, will certainly have to deal with a new and unprecedented situation in the relations between the United States and Cuba.”

euronews: “Do you fear that the end of the embargo will bring a “North Americanisation” of the Cuban culture that will endanger the quiet transition wanted by the Havana?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “This will not be possible. Cuba was a colony of Spain and then emerged as a nation with a strong identity. Cuban culture has a considerable strength and originality. Cubans are Cuban. A normal relationship, though, with the United States would be totally natural. There are cultural ties, there has been a traditional relationship between the American and Cuban people despite the conflicting relations between the two governments. Clearly our culture will protect our identity because it would not make any sense for, after a long struggle of 50 years, Cuba to finish with an economy controlled by US multinationals or by any other country.”

euronews: “The other big diplomatic front for Cuba is the European Union. The negotiations for a cooperation agreement opened in 2014. Cuba is the only country in Latin America and the Caribbean with which the EU has not signed a bilateral agreement. How are the negotiations going?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “They are going well, at the usual pace in negotiations of this nature. I feel that some progress has been accomplished, I feel there is a better understanding in Europe on how the EU-Cuba relations could develop. I regularly hear EU officials say that negotiations could be completed in the short term. But the European Union, obviously, should make its own decisions with regard to some old policies which have no real impact anymore, but are irritating from a legal point of view. I feel that if we manage to find a common ground in some issues then things could move quickly.”

euronews: “Do you think this understanding with Europe will arrive before the end of the embargo? Will this agreement lead to the end of the so-called [Common Position](#)? Let's explain briefly what this is: the EU policy adopted in 1996 that links the dialogue with Havana to improvements in human rights and liberties.”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “It is difficult to know when the US blockade against Cuba will end.”

The United Nations General Assembly, the African Union, the agreements of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean countries and the European Union have demanded that the blockade be immediately and unconditionally removed. The developments in the American society will ultimately determine the pace of that process, so it is difficult to make any comparisons on this matter. Indeed, almost nobody remembers today the so-called Common Position. The preconditions established by this policy are clearly a thing of the past now, because from 1996, Cuba has signed agreements or statements with virtually all the governments of the European Union which just prove contrary to the unilateral sense and preconditioning intended in that old document, well known to have been produced hastily and with clear political motivations.”

euronews: “The [reforms have sped up since 2011](#). But only 21% of the 313 original measures have been implemented, the other 79% are still in progress. Why this slow pace? For example: [in 2015 fewer private sector workers were registered than in 2014](#).”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “I am not sure the source of this information.”

euronews: “It is a document of the Cuban Communist Party.”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “Yes, but this document does not say that 21 percent of policies have been implemented. It says they have been completed in a manner that has fulfilled the objectives that were proposed over that 21 percent of decisions of economic and social nature. It seems to me that the process is going well. I am not sure that your data in relation to the decrease in non-state workers is accurate. Actually there has been a significant growth of workers who work in small businesses or in other areas outside the state economy.”

euronews: “By the way, which model is inspiring Cuba to combine some capitalist measures and markets with a state planned system within a hermetic political status quo? Is it China or has Havana its own formula?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “There are different experiences in the world, different references. The Cuban model is and must be necessarily original. We pick up the best experiences, we study other socialist processes and also other development processes in other countries in order to make our own melting pot, our own model based on our own experience and our own priorities. So it is true that it is a model that considers some market economy elements, but preserving a socialist economy.”

euronews: “The dialogue opened with the US and the EU on internal reforms seems to have had a moderate impact in the human rights issue. Why are non violent Cuban citizens, like the Ladies in White not allowed to protest freely?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “The fact that we are developing a socialist economy does not imply in any way any restrictions on the possibility of working on the basis of common economic interests, developing economic partnerships through joint ventures.

“About the Cuban political model and the human rights it is true that there are different perceptions. But I have to deny that people like the ones you have mentioned can not protest peacefully, in fact they do it quite frequently.

“I should also add that it is true that we may have differences in our respective visions about human rights. For me, human rights are universal and indivisible. The human rights issue is

submitted to a high politicisation and the existence of double standards. Unfortunately this happens quite often in the debate on this matter around the world and some media also have biased views on this matter.

“For me, for example, the right to employment is a fundamental human right. What would half of the young people in Spain who have not access to a job think about this? For me it is a fundamental human right. I also think that economic, social and cultural rights are not merely a laissez-faire, but the governments are directly responsible to provide them. These rights are indivisible and can not be separated from the political rights and civil liberties.

“We have mentioned the American democracy in relation to the issue of the blockade and the real will of the voters. Anyway, I recognise that there are different political models and I feel very happy and comfortable with the Cuban democracy.”

euronews: “Your government has always denied the existence of political prisoners but many international NGOs, including some which are even tolerated inside Cuba, denounce that actually there are still prisoners of conscience. They also denounce that the campaign of intimidation and repression against the dissidence and opposition has not ceased. What do you have to say to these accusations?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “I simply refute them. First, we will have to agree on a definition of what a political prisoner is. If you believe that a person who receives payments from a foreign government to perform certain political activities is a political prisoner, then we have different opinions. In France or the United States those people will be considered as “agents provocateurs”. We know that some of these groups, that operate and are tolerated in Cuba, receive funding from European countries or the US government itself.

“Very serious violations of human rights are happening in the territory occupied by the Guantanamo Naval Base, a matter that you have not mentioned by the way. It is known that people have remained kidnapped there in a legal limbo for more than a decade, judged by military courts without any right to defence. They are even force-fed when they go on a hunger strike, under conditions that are widely recognised as systematic torture. It is known that some countries are somehow connected to these kidnappings by keeping secret jails or illegal prisons where these people were retained before being taken to Guantanamo. I could not mention any country that has reached perfection in the human rights issue. I do not know how the human rights would be in Europe if you had suffered the same conditions like those in Cuba with the economic, commercial and financial blockade. Or if a superpower- on the same scale as the US and Cuba- would try to force a regime change in Europe. Those are the circumstances in which my country has lived for five decades.”

euronews: “I would like to finish with a question about the ex President Fidel Castro. He's been retired for a decade now with very few public appearances. Is he still an inspiration for Cuba?”

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “He truly remains an inspiration for Cuba, a moral reference. A one in a million political and moral leadership. Deeply loved by our people. And he has a very active life, I am personally aware of his involvement in the study of some extraordinary problems such as food production under a global population explosion. He is also very concerned about climate change issues or nuclear dismantling. I have the privilege to be aware of his activities, his concerns and interest in Cuban foreign policy and count on his advice from time to time.

euronews: “Minister, our time is over. We have not been able to speak about all the topics but I think that we managed to touch the essentials. In any case, Foreign Affairs minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla, thank you for answering my questions.

Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla: “Thank you for this useful and pleasant moment.”
