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Introduction

Between the establishment of relations between the European Economic Community (EEC) and Cuba in September 1988 and the signing of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) in 2016 (Council of the European Union, 2016), cooperation was the main source of friction on the bilateral agenda. This was due to the political conditions the European institutions imposed in return for cooperation, both in terms of implementation and its fit within an institutionalised relationship.

The adoption of the current framework agreement solves this issue by establishing a contractual framework for permanent financial, technical and economic cooperation between the European Union (EU) and Cuba. Unlike the fourth-generation instruments that currently regulate the EU's links with almost all Latin American states, political concerns – a key EU interest – and cooperation – a key Cuban interest – are given precedence over trade liberalisation. In other words, cooperation is not only an important part of the agreement, it is central to the relationship itself[1].

There are a number of possible reasons for this, but two are particularly relevant.

On the one hand, development cooperation with the specific political goals of democratisation and human rights is a key EU foreign policy tool in its relations with the "third world", and one with specific and major global impact. Some internal hesitancy notwithstanding, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century the established consensus in the EU was that the conditionality imposed on Cuba for over 20 years – a reluctance to negotiate an agreement due to the "lack of conditions" (Perera Gómez, 2017: 66), the Common Position (Council of the European Union, 1996) and diplomatic sanctions (Perera Gómez, 2017: 151–173) – had reached a dead-end without showing results, and an about-turn was needed. Cuba thus qualified for the EU to try out a new tactical approach with the same political objectives and strategy: a more pragmatic policy with a sense of opportunity seemed likely.

1. This is the reason why the author makes permanent reference to the PDCA, as the legal instrument that regulates EU's cooperation with Cuba as a whole, and refers to it or to the cooperation indistinctly, except for specific clarifications.

The thaws and advances in cooperation, both temporary and more permanent, have been connected to the economic reform processes launched in Cuba.

On the other hand, Cuba's economy and society have faced major and recurring needs for cooperation funding, as unresolved structural and cyclical issues have led to resource scarcity. Cuban foreign policy has always seen the EU as a priority partner. Indeed, in spite of the democratic conditionalities the EU has imposed for granting international cooperation since the so-called third-generation agreements first adopted in the 1990s, it remains an attractive donor due to its international heft in this field and the fact that it contains various member states with which Cuba has maintained commercial, diplomatic and cooperation relations that may be complemented by European Commission funds. Then there is the political value the Cuban government has attached since the 1990s to no longer being one of the few countries in the world not contractually linked to the EU.

1. EU-Cuba cooperation: a brief historical overview

A historical view of the European Union's cooperation with Cuba shows two trends taking shape over time.

First, the thaws and advances in cooperation, both temporary and more permanent, have been connected to the economic reform processes launched in Cuba. This was the case in 1995: the Cuban government promoted a series of reforms in response to the crisis produced by the transition in eastern Europe, and a Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament was issued, which proposed opening negotiations on the signing of a framework cooperation agreement with Cuba (Commission of the European Communities, 1995). It was also the case at the start of the second decade of the 21st century when, following Raúl Castro's rise to president of the Councils of State and Ministers, the Economic and Social Policy Guidelines (*Lineamientos de la Política Económica y Social*) were approved by the 6th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) (Communist Party of Cuba, 2011), and other conceptual, political and social issues were addressed in the decisions of the PCC's First National Conference (Communist Party of Cuba, 2012).

For the EU, these reform processes have been the spur to boost its presence and participation in the Cuban market and have provided an opportunity to pursue its foreign policy goals using its economy – its main strength – as a foundation, while gaining influence and making the most of its competitive advantages over the United States.

But, with greater or lesser degrees of certainty and accuracy, these processes have also been perceived by the EU as precursors of political change towards the proposed "peaceful transition" to democracy in Cuba (Perera Gomez, 2017: 82). In 1995 the Commission's calculations tended in this direction (Commission of the European Communities, 1995), as they did in the process that led to the signing of the PDCA, following the novel and significant decisions taken by the PCC Conference, such as limiting tenure in key roles in the party, state and government to a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms.

Secondly, the main institutional advances leading to the adoption of regulatory instruments in EU–Cuba cooperative relations – which coincide

with the two key historic moments in relations since they were formally established – merely codified already-existing practices. This was the case with the 1996 Common Position, but also, essentially, with the PDCA.

Until relations between the EC and Cuba were established in 1988, the island had no access to the financial and technical cooperation designed for the developing countries of Asia and Latin America (LDC-ALA) created in 1976. Cuba benefitted only from the limited trade facilities agreed under the EEC's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP), which it had been using since 1973, barely a year after its establishment.

Cuba was excluded from the mechanisms in place between Europe and Latin America.

As well as a lack of reciprocal knowledge in both the EEC and Cuba, perceptions were skewed by the Cold War and limitations arose from Cuba's membership of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) and the historical dispute with the United States, a strategic ally for the EEC and its successor. Indeed, ideologically speaking, all EEC member countries were antagonistic towards Cuba while the Cold War bipolar order was in place. But unlike the United States, they maintained relations in several fields: economic, diplomatic (with the exceptions of Germany pre-1975 under the Hallstein Doctrine[2] and Ireland until 1999) and cooperative, especially before Cuba joined Comecon. There were multiple reasons for this, such as the liberal tradition, more or less independent foreign policy positions within the dominant global order, shared cultural and historical heritage, usually associated with strong ties remaining from the colonial era, Latin cultural connections and philosophical objections to the embargo as an instrument of pressure, which meant that political conditionalities were never applied to trade. Then there is the predominance of negotiation as a resource in the EU's external projection.

Cuba ranked even lower among Europe's external economic priorities than a Latin America historically placed in a second tier due to a system structured around member states' individual foreign relations policies – with Spain and Portugal having only recently joined. By the time the EEC established diplomatic relations with Cuba around the time the Cold War ended, its institutionalised ties with Latin America were just over 15 years old, having initially materialised in 1974 in several political dialogue and cooperation platforms: the Parlatino–European Parliament Inter-parliamentary Conferences (1974); the San José Dialogue (1984); and the European Union–Rio Group meetings (1987) institutionalised in 1990; as well as the spaces created for negotiated peace processes to emerge and develop in Central America (Sanahuja, 2000). These platforms were essentially political and had been supported by the implementation of European Political Co-operation (EPC) in 1970 – the forerunner of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) signed in 1992.

Incipient EEC development cooperation towards the region was also emerging, through the signing of first- and second-generation cooperation agreements with most of the countries in the area. Interparliamentary conferences aside, Cuba was excluded from the mechanisms in place between Europe and Latin America, which were characterised by a notable mismatch between the political commitment of EPC and their economic content, as well as by a level of development assistance well below that granted to other geographical areas.

2. Named after Walter Hallstein, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) from 1951 to 1958. This foreign policy doctrine was in force from 1954 to 1969 and established that the FRG should not maintain diplomatic relations with any state that recognised the German Democratic Republic, except the USSR.

From 1993 onwards the EU's policy towards Cuba showed signs of changing.

Cuba was also left out of the EU's cooperation with the Caribbean, the other region of which the island forms part. This was not addressed until 1998, when the Cuban government decided to join the negotiations over the Cotonou Agreement (1998–2000). Its participation had been insisted upon by the Caribbean countries associated with the then applicable Lomé Convention, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and some European figures (Perera Gómez, 2017: 133–135). For political reasons, the Cuban government showed much greater interest in signing a bilateral agreement with the EU than in multilateral participation. Its reticence derived from the perception of the Lomé system as a model of collective neo-colonialism and from some political risks, such as the commitment to a particularly constrictive democracy clause and Cuba's negotiating identity being "dissolved" by the large and heterogeneous ACP group (Perera Gomez, 2017: 136).

That official EEC–Cuba relations were established at almost the same time as socialism collapsed in eastern Europe contributed to the extreme politicisation of the bilateral atmosphere: as the end of the Cold War brought the supposed triumph of liberal ideology and the de-ideologisation of international relations, Cuba preserved the political, economic and social orientation of its system (Fukuyama, 2011; Huntington, 2015).

This politicisation formed the basis of the system of the conditions the EEC insisted on for constructing contractual ties with Cuba via a framework cooperation agreement. It was reflected in the tone of resolutions such as those adopted by the European Parliament on December 15th 1988 and February 15th 1990, as well as in statements by senior European officials (Perera Gómez, 2017: 63–66). Negotiation of a cooperation agreement thus became the main point of disagreement on the bilateral agenda.

Until 1993, bilateral relations suffered from poor definition and continual setbacks and little progress was made in the field of cooperation. The EEC's action towards Cuba veered from snubs and the adoption and suspension of specific cooperation initiatives to demands and expectations of change. In both the EU and Cuba the prevailing conceptions showed a degree of inertia compared to the pre-1991 era, with schematic ideological considerations placed before the pragmatic needs induced by a changed world. Thus, until 1993, less than 1% of all funding granted to Cuba by the EEC and its member states came via European Commission cooperation (Perera Gomez, 2017: 106–107).

However, from 1993 onwards – and as early as the previous year in some fields – the EU's policy towards Cuba showed signs of changing. Activity increased in areas of cooperation through the implementation of specific initiatives and humanitarian aid, through a flow of resources that grew progressively over subsequent years.

Official data shows that in the mid-1990s the European Commission became Cuba's main source of international cooperation, particularly when the country was granted access to EU regional cooperation programmes for Latin America (Tvevad, 2015: 20). Nevertheless, this amounted to annual volumes donated of around €20 million, whose modest size is clearly shown by the fact that in the same period the

Dominican Republic received around €150 million per five-year period within the framework of the Lomé Convention. Tvevad points out that between 1993 and 2003 the Commission provided €145 million in assistance to Cuba, mainly in the fields of humanitarian aid, food security, NGO co-financing and economic cooperation (Tvevad, 2015: 20–21). For a ten year-period, in the fields mentioned the resources represented by this figure were frankly minimal.

Funds from the EEC/EU and its member states never completely dried up.

The €145 million mentioned is the entire sum granted to Cuba by the European Commission for the specified period. As such it includes several categories, with cooperation funding, in a strict sense, added to the resources granted for humanitarian aid, which were particularly high at that stage.

Cooperation was scarce because it was neither regulated by ad hoc financial protocols nor covered by any agreement. While the European Commission's cooperation commitments did not surpass $750,000 (0.43% of the total) between 1980 and 1993, humanitarian aid reached around $63 million (35.85%) and official development assistance (ODA) from the EEC countries that were members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) amounted to $112 million (63.72%). All this added up to a total of $175,770,000 for the period in question (Perera Gomez, 2017:106).

Significantly, however, funds from the EEC/EU and its member states never completely dried up: the Commission provided funds for specific projects and one-off initiatives, while member states contributed ODA. The exception was the 2003–2008 period, after Fidel Castro announced in July 2003 that Cuba would reject official cooperation from the EU and its member states (Castro Ruz, 2003) – an unprecedented countermeasure in response to the diplomatic sanctions adopted by the Council following the imprisonment and lengthy custodial sentences handed to leaders of the illegal opposition during the so-called Black Spring. These sanctions – limiting high-level government visits; a lower profile for member states' participation in cultural events; inviting Cuban dissidents to member states' national day celebrations; and re-evaluating the Common Position every six months – were suspended in 2005 and definitively abolished in 2008. Even between 1996 and 2002, when the Common Position was in force, certain cooperation resources were allocated to Cuba.

Humanitarian aid, which, as mentioned, is not strictly speaking development cooperation and should not be considered as such, rose significantly between 1993 and 2003, supported by the opening in Havana of a delegation of the European Communities Humanitarian Office (ECHO). In this period, over €45 million of resources were mobilised, according to the data available (Perera Gómez, 2017: 150), with the aim of contributing to alleviating the consequences for the island of the collapse of European socialism, health issues (the neuropathy epidemic), climatological catastrophes (the so-called Storm of the Century) and a whole series of events related to the downturn in the economy. Despite not being properly speaking development cooperation funds, at times they effectively played their role, to the extent that certain funds in this category were used to

remedy emergency situations in sensitive sectors such as the national production of medicines. Indeed, in 1993 Cuba received 60% of all EU humanitarian aid to Latin America: of the 12,245 billion ECU granted to Latin America for this purpose that year, Cuba received 7,805 billion (Commission of the European Communities, 1994) – not enough to boast about, but an indication of the significant deterioration of the situation on the island.

The sanctions and diplomatic measures adopted by the Council in June 2003 were no more effective than the Common Position was in its day.

Humanitarian aid was also affected by the conflictive state of Cuba–EU relations at the time, while the volume of funding allocated by the European Commission for this purpose was gradually reduced as the situation in Cuba showed signs of improvement from the mid-1990s onwards.

Also significant was the activity of a broad and unusual movement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that managed to activate previously unexplored or little explored mechanisms of insertion into European cooperation policy, with a view to obtaining financing for specific development projects at local level. Even after the Cuban government suspended all cooperation with the EU and its member states in 2003, non-governmental cooperation continued for a short period of time. The accusations that Cuba indirectly received cooperation funds from the EU and its member states via this channel – presented as hypocrisy and double standards – prompted change on the Cuban government's part. While it did not completely suspend them, it did begin to very closely examine the source of the funds mobilised through NGOs for cooperation projects carried out on the island.

The sanctions and diplomatic measures adopted by the Council in June 2003 were no more effective than the Common Position was in its day. On the one hand, certain member states, like Belgium and Luxembourg, did not comply with them to the letter and so cooperation was not suspended with these countries. But when the Cuban government responded by restricting the access of diplomats from the EU and member states who invited Cuban opposition figures to their national days to all levels of party, state and government the 27 had evidence that the policy agreed in the Council at the behest of José María Aznar's Spanish government had compromised their bilateral relations without achieving its goals.

Despite being suspended in 2005, the diplomatic measures remained in force and provoked another impasse until their definitive lifting in 2008.

That this stage was ultimately left behind, EU policy was unblocked and bilateral relations were relaunched was related to the global context determined by the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks and the behaviour of some concomitant variables: Spain–US and EU–US relations, the EU's internal process, its expansion to the east, the changes in the Latin American regional situation and domestic changes in Cuba

After the impasse of 2003–2008 – probably the most infertile period in the history of EU–Cuba relations – bilateral cooperation was gradually restarted with various member states. Intense diplomatic activity by the sectors involved on both sides took advantage of the Cuban, Latin American, European and international contexts of the time to build a

new consensus that became the germ of the current stage. The never-interrupted cooperation with Belgium and Luxembourg was joined in 2007 by the resumption of collaboration with Spain. Later, Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands followed, with over half of EU member states collaborating with Cuba today.

As discussed, member states' cooperation was already significant prior to 2003, with no definite consequences for the establishment of wider cooperation with the EU. However, in this new phase, the accumulation of bilateral state–state cooperation instruments with over half of EU members became a factor in destructuring the Common Position, as this contradicted its binding nature and showed the disjuncture between the policies implemented at the different levels of sovereignty (state and supranational), despite both ultimately involving the same actors.

2. The prospects for EU–Cuba cooperation: Challenges and opportunities

As the PDCA's signing drew closer, some of the risks the instrument faced became apparent (Perera Gomez, 2017: 224–226)

On the one hand there was what might be seen as the institutional risk stemming from the results of the process of ratifying the agreement, whose "mixed" (EU and member state) nature required it to be submitted for the approval of the legislative bodies at both levels. The first and most important of these was achieved relatively quickly and easily, with the EP approving the PDCA with Cuba on July 5th 2017 (European Parliament, 2017a). However, its assent was accompanied by the adoption of a non-legislative resolution (European Parliament, 2017b) that showed that, after a period in which the EP had seemed to join the general EU consensus in support of the change of policy towards Cuba, the predominance of conservative forces in the chamber meant that it would remain a particularly active critic of the Cuban government.

With Lithuania's vote in favour still outstanding, full ratification by the 27 national parliaments remains pending. But the institutional risk has been greatly minimised by placing 90% of the agreement's provisions within areas of EU competence. With ratification by the European Parliament achieved, this whole broad section of the PDCA entered into force on a provisional basis in 2017 and there it has remained.

There was also the risk of inaction – unlikely due to its absurdity, but not impossible if the parties or any single one of them regarded signing the PDCA as a goal achieved rather than a means of pursuing specific objectives. In practice so far the agreement has operated as a functional means for Cuba's development strategy in sectors that are also important for EU cooperation: food security, energy and climate change, culture and social inclusion, disaster preparedness and higher education, among others. It also suits specific political interests on both sides: for Cuba, the very existence of the agreement itself; for the EU, an institutionalised political dialogue and the possibility of influencing the situation on the island more directly than by previous means (the Common Position).

While the agreement is designed to evolve and provides a basis for working on its own upgrading time will be needed, along with the proper deployment of the current instrument, which has yet to be rolled out to its full potential.

Another foreseeable risk was that the PDCA would become a sort of status quo in the EU–Cuba bilateral relationship without evolving to a higher level. The situation remaining as it is would certainly not be a desirable outcome. In parallel to the agreement's implementation and in line with its results, a path of evolution must be drawn up to put EU–Cuba relations in their rightful place – in other words, at least as strong as relations between the EU and all Cuba's neighbours. While the agreement is designed to evolve and provides a basis for working on its own upgrading that depends on the EU and its member states, on Cuba, on all the actors involved and on how the possibility is used, time will be needed, along with the proper deployment of the current instrument, which has yet to be rolled out to its full potential.

Finally, though the possibility may seem remote, the history of EEC/EU–Cuba relations makes it necessary to consider the risks of regression. Included among these risks are inaction and non-evolution, which would amount to stagnation in the period of strongest and fastest progress in EU–Cuba relations. It would be a great shame if the road was to become tortuous again, but it is also true that many challenges await, including not missing the opportunity to use the current momentum generated by the implementation of the agreement.

The EU's cooperation with Cuba faces a range of threats and challenges.

The first is an unfavourable international context. Conditions today differ substantially from those in place when the agreement was negotiated and signed and the period immediately after its entry into force. While Ayuso and Gratius (2017) warned of this, the hemispheric situation they reviewed has only worsened: the ideological profiles of the region's governments have changed, the situation in Venezuela has deteriorated and Joe Biden has made little alteration to US policy – indeed, relations may even be more hostile. In this sense, EU policy on its relationship with Cuba seems still to be going against the grain (Ayuso and Gratius, 2017).

These factors are added to the period of domestic crisis Cuba is going through, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pace of the reforms envisaged in the 2011 Guidelines has slowed significantly, where it has not stopped,[3] and many of the government's measures aimed at alleviating the crisis – opening the so-called "freely convertible currency stores", monetary and exchange unification – have worsened its effects on the economy and on major swathes of the population, exacerbating the effects of the fall in tourism, the US limitations on the sending of family remittances and the impacts of shortages.

In addition to the various ways the United States exerts real influence over events in Cuba, the situation described above has generated public discontent, particularly among the most disadvantaged groups. This was reflected in civil society protest movements of varied nature and scope, led to the demonstrations of July 11th 2021 and is likely to emerge in other forms. The repressive aspects of the Cuban government's response to these events have brought negative repercussions. On the one hand, they undermined the backing for the government at international level. On the other, the existence of a legal framework that binds the parties and establishes penalties for non-compliance

3. The 8th Congress of the PCC adopted an agreement on the state of the implementation of the Guidelines and their updating for the 2021–2026 period. According to the available information, of the original Guidelines approved in 2011, 30% were implemented, 40% are being implemented and the remaining 30% are at the proposal and approval stage. In the updated version, of the 274 previous guidelines, 17 were maintained, 165 were modified, 92 were deleted and 19 were added, bringing the total to 201.

or violation of its provisions could be problematic for the sectors in the EU that are most committed to bilateral cooperation. The Cuban government's reaction has, thus, been reflected in the EU's institutional outreach, which had been considerably nuanced and even somewhat diluted since a new stage in bilateral cooperation began around 2010.

A Declaration by the European Union's High Representative on the events of July 11th in Cuba calls "on the Cuban government to respect the human rights and freedoms enshrined in universal Human Rights Conventions", as well as urging it to "to release all arbitrarily detained protesters, to listen to the voices of its citizens, and to engage in an inclusive dialogue on their grievances", adding that "[a]ddressing the Cuban people's grievances requires internal economic reforms" (High Representative, 2021a).

The action–reaction processes present in the bilateral framework do not seem to have affected cooperation with the EU but they still pose a challenge.

Meanwhile, paragraph 14 of a European Parliament resolution from September 16th 2021

Recalls that the PDCA contains a human rights clause – a standard essential element of EU international agreements – which allows the agreement to be suspended in the event of violations of human rights provisions; [and] calls on the European Union to trigger Article 85(3b) to call an immediate meeting of the joint committee in the light of the breaches of the agreement on the part of the Cuban Government, which constitutes a 'case of special urgency' (European Parliament, 2021b).

This reiterates the warning previously made in the non-legislative resolution that accompanied the PDCA's ratification (European Parliament, 2017b) and was repeated in the resolution of June 10th 2021 (European Parliament, 2021a), which called for it to be activated.

These pronouncements are examples (among others) of how the issue of arbitrary detentions and political prisoners, as well as human rights, are being reactivated on the EU's agenda with Cuba. In truth, they had never completely disappeared, but had been channelled down other routes, such as the bilateral political dialogue on human rights included in the PDCA, which has given rise to three bilateral meetings whose specific content has not been revealed.

So far, the action–reaction processes present in the bilateral framework do not seem to have affected cooperation with the EU or had significant consequences for relations with it or its member states – the delegation in Havana has continued to work in a normal manner – but they still pose a challenge. Faced with the repercussions of the adverse domestic situation and pressures from abroad, the Cuban government has closed ranks and hardened its position and does not seem likely to soften its stance. The EU and its institutions, meanwhile, will respond to this and any possible repercussions by taking at least a declaratory position focussing on the subjects of the political situation and human rights in Cuba. The Cuban government finds this intolerable and it has soured the atmosphere and tensed the bilateral discourse (*Prensa Latina*, 2021a and *EFE*, 2021), which had already considerably relaxed since cooperation was resumed and in which allegations are being revived that the more recent state of relations seemed to have buried. In the European

Parliament, at least, the rhetoric has been stepped up, something that is particularly noticeable in the difference in the language used in the non-legislative resolution (European Parliament, 2017b) and the more recent ones (European Parliament, 2021a and 2021b). This may be expected to go further if Cuba's domestic situation gets more complicated.

The position of the European Council and Commission seems still to favour maintaining cooperation and dialogue with Cuba.

However, some factors must be considered that may mitigate the forecasts made above. The position of the European Council and Commission, as expressed through the High Representative, seems still to favour maintaining cooperation and dialogue with Cuba. In a speech to the European Parliament during the debate over the approval of the resolution adopted on June 10th 2021 the High Representative pointed out that the agreement has "has created new spaces for the participation of Cuban civil society" and added that "I cannot think of a better instrument", as it set out "a policy of critical engagement with that country". He gave assurances that the instrument "allows us to accompany the country in political, economic and social reform" (Brzozowski, 2021a). Borrell also criticised the US blockade against Cuba, highlighting the impact of escalating the economic siege on a private sector already hard hit by Donald Trump's decrees (*Cubadebate*, 2021).

The words of Josep Borrell's Declaration cited above are also worth consideration. It ends "The EU stands ready to support all efforts addressed to improve the living conditions of Cubans, **in the context of our partnership established under the EU-Cuba Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement**" (High Representative, 2021a).[4] This position, along with the other terms of the Declaration, was reiterated in the plenary debate on the European Parliament Resolution of September 16th 2021 with the addition: "It is our belief that **we need to continue to talk to each other. Our previous policy, the common position of our [sic] 1996 did not reap results**" (High Representative, 2021b).[5]

Another element to consider is that article 85, paragraph 3 of the PDCA, which was invoked by the European Parliament in its resolution of September 16th 2021, states that "It is understood that suspension would be a measure of last resort" (Council of the European Union, 2016). It does, thus, appear to be an option on the agenda, at least for the time being.

The interinstitutional balance seems still to favour the European Council and Commission over the Parliament, which is expected to remain dominated by its conservative wing. However, the EP's resolutions, which constitute instruments of political pressure, often go against what might be considered the EU's established policy – although they are non-binding in nature. A European Parliament resolution could undoubtedly be used at certain junctures on an ad hoc basis by other EU institutions in order to endorse a specific action, but this does not look likely to be the case at the moment. It does not appear that any Joint Committee of the PDCA has yet been convened to settle the "case of special urgency" and decide on "appropriate measures", as the agreement establishes and the EP resolution of September 16th requires.

Finally, there has been a continuation of the trend in place since the new era of relations with the EU and the negotiation of the agreement began, whereby the bilateral rhetoric and communication models used

4. Emphasis added by authors.
5. Emphasis added by authors.

to conduct relations shifted from confrontation in the public arena to the diplomatic channels (Perera Gómez, 2017).

The more or less frequently inflammatory rhetoric and events that trigger action and reaction are either contained within diplomatic channels – High Representative: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; European Parliament: National Assembly of People's Power – or they are expressed on social networks. Cuba's official press occasionally relays the government's reactions along with information on the political dialogue sessions held with the EU, meetings of the Council or the Joint Committee and the implementation of certain projects within the bilateral cooperation framework. Meanwhile, the alternative press and opposition media more often than not take such radical and confrontational positions – calling for the PDCA to be suspended or to discontinue not only cooperation, but also dialogue – that they tend to be given little consideration.

An additional challenge is the Cuban government's capacity and political will to promote the reform process, given that, as noted above, such processes have previously had a direct and positive impact on the progress in EU–Cuba cooperation. Following the events of July 11th, the economic reforms have received a new but moderate boost. The combined pressure of shortages and social combustability led to the temporary easing of the restrictions on medicines and food being brought into the country by international travellers, something broad swathes of the public had demanded. While this helps ease the acute shortages in these two areas, the COVID-19 pandemic has limited its effect. Greater in scope and part of what could be considered an economic strategy, the regulations on the constitution of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) were approved, expanding the private sector's fields of activity, despite the limitations established in relation to foreign capital and the import and export trade. As well as being a condition for maintaining government legitimacy at the domestic level, continuing, extending and deepening the reforms will also be a significant factor in whether cooperation with the EU stagnates or progresses. The two statements by the High Representative cited above reflect this. Specifically, "We welcome the lifting of restrictions for travellers, allowing them to bring unlimited amounts of food and medicines, as a first step in the right direction" (High Representative, 2021a); and "Last summer, Havana outlined further steps towards market liberalisation. The EU has consistently offered to support the reforms", before going on to list a series of sectors that benefit from European Commission cooperation programmes (High Representative, 2021b).

Continuing, extending and deepening the reforms will also be a significant factor in whether cooperation with the EU stagnates or progresses.

Since 2008 the EU is Cuba's main development cooperation partner.

But as well as the challenges and threats mentioned above, there are also opportunities for EU–Cuba cooperation to develop. Twenty-five years without cooperation established an inertia that made a dramatic reversal of the direction of travel difficult, but networks have been woven, commitments have been established and projects of mutual interest are already underway.

One of the key opportunities is the current state of cooperation itself and the progress made since it was structured into the wording of a framework agreement. Since 2008, the EU, which is Cuba's main development cooperation partner, has committed over €200 million to supporting the country's development in three priority sectors: sustainable agriculture and food security; the environment, renewable energy and

climate change; and economic and social modernisation (European External Action Service, 2019). In November 2017, when the PDCA entered into force, the cooperation portfolio amounted to less than €40 million, which was mobilised based on the thematic lines of the EU budget for projects in specific areas of priority interest (food security, disaster prevention and mitigation and heritage) (Perera Gomez, 2017).

EU–Cuba cooperation seems at times to follow its own dynamics, relatively independently.

The most recent data published on bilateral cooperation appears in the brochure *Cooperación de la Unión Europea con Cuba. Contribuyendo a la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible,* produced by the EU delegation in Havana. It notes that at the end of 2019 the value of ongoing projects exceeded €139 million, more than four times the average over the previous ten years, thanks to the funds committed to the sustainable food security programme, renewable energy contracts and the mobilisation of complementary regional funding for investments in various sectors and areas of climate change and culture. At the same time, Cuba began to participate in more multi-country programmes. More difficult to quantify economically, these relate to exchanges of public policy experiences in Latin America (Eurosocial, ElPacto, Euroclima+, Alinvest and Adelante) and programmes in the fields of higher education (Erasmus+) and research (Horizon 2020) (European Union Delegation to Cuba, 2019: 18).

By September 2021, EU cooperation with Cuba had reached €155 million, 2.5 times its previous volume and the largest proportional increase in cooperation among recipients in the Caribbean region.[6] This is significant given the particular features of the EU–ACP link in the Cotonou Agreement, which includes a financial protocol, and the existence of an economic partnership agreement with the area, neither of which mechanisms includes Cuba. Thus, as well as increasing participation in multi-country programmes as a partner, Cuba currently has access to all the regional cooperation instruments for the Caribbean from which it was previously excluded.

The PDCA is largely responsible for this growth, providing the general framework for the necessary contacts between the parties at different levels, as well as for the creation and implementation of projects and the performance of specific activities. Indeed, its very existence has encouraged high-level visits to take place within the bilateral framework: Federica Mogherini visited in January 2018 and September 2019, Pedro Sánchez in November 2018 and the king and queen of Spain in November 2019, to give a few examples. But EU–Cuba cooperation seems at times to follow its own dynamics, relatively independently of both the PDCA and the circumstances of both partners, as well as from their respective contexts. Although the PDCA provides the framework and is the basic condition that facilitates the roll-out of bilateral cooperation, the everyday and ongoing dialogue between the EU delegation in Havana, the government and civil society organisations are the most important and necessary vehicle.[7]

What is more, cooperation involves specific key issues that are sometimes more strategic than the sectors to which the cooperation itself is directed. Since the summer of 2020, for example, over €10 million has been allocated to collaboration to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Programmes have been adjusted in the circumstances created

6. Data provided in a Whatsapp conversation with Juan Garay, Head of Cooperation at the European Union's Mission in Cuba, September 13th 2021.
7. Ibid.

by the pandemic. Of the €10 million mentioned above, €2.5 million have been channelled through civil society, managed by a European NGO and involve Bio Cuba Farma and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO). At the same time, a 2021–2027 dialogue group has been created to provide €14 million support for Cuban biotechnology.[8]

As well as the above, the Combiomed Digital Medical Technology Company received consumables for the production of intensive care monitors and pulse oximeters with support from "Salvando vidas y mitigando el impacto en salud de la emergencia de COVID-19 en Cuba", a European Union (EU) project in the country, developed jointly with the office of the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Public Health (MINSAP) to respond to the pandemic (Pan American Health Organization, 2021).

Cuba urgently needs all the cooperation it can get, including from the EU.

In parallel, major cooperation is taking place with the member states. One example is the announcement in September 2021 that France will grant Cuba funding of €45 million to increase the island's capacity to produce vaccines against meningitis and pneumonia, particularly for use in Africa (*AFP*, 2021) – a clear example of triangular cooperation.

At present, Cuba urgently needs all the cooperation it can get, including from the EU. In fact, EU cooperation may be preferable because it is institutionalised, stable, secure and has been stripped of the imperatives – sanctions and the Common Position – that previously bound it, while the EU also continues to distance itself from the commitments and pressures emanating from its transatlantic connections – a major influence at other times. The EU thus makes a visible commitment to the agreement that seems to follow the high-political interests established in the field of EU–Cuba bilateral cooperation, making it possible to smoothly overcome the potential obstacles that have and continue to emerge (attacks on the PDCA from a range of media outlets, European Parliament resolutions, political statements by the High Representative for CFSP).

This could also be due to a degree of inertia that is characteristic of how the EU institutions function. Given the number of years it took for the consensus to build in the Council of the EU that led to the lifting of diplomatic measures in 2003, as well as the negotiation and signing of the PDCA and the resulting discontinuation of the Common Policy, it seems logical that reversing it should take just as long, if not longer. It also seems unrealistic, as it would be unprecedented. No EU cooperation agreement with Latin America has yet been suspended by the EU or denounced by any of the parties, while the suspensions that have taken place under the Cotonou Agreement involving certain countries have been partial, and have basically related to the implementation of the convention's financial protocol.[9]

Such suspensions occur when the EU considers that the fundamental principles underpinning the cooperation agreement and its democracy clause in particular have been violated. Hence the requirements to that effect in the EP resolutions adopted on June 10th and September 16th 2021 cited above. Still, as approval depends directly on the Council, where different member state governments have different positions, it seems

8. Ibid.

9. Applies to the following countries from the dates indicated: Comoros: 31/12/2016; Gabon: 23/07/2016; Equatorial Guinea: 30/06/2001; the Solomon Islands: 09/10/2012; Kiribati: 16/09/2015; Madagascar: 31/12/2018; Micronesia: 25/02/2010; Mozambique: 31/01/2015. https://www.google.com/search?channel=crow5&client=firefox-b-d&q=acuerdos+suspendidos+por+la+UE

impossible to establish a common pattern for 27 such dissimilar actors with such diverse interests – a product of the hybrid nature of the EU and its structural deficiencies (Perera Gómez, 2017). This diversity was visible in the member states' varied reactions to the events in Cuba of July 11th 2021 and to the aborted march called for November 15th, as well as in the fact that the EP's demands have found no echo in the Council.

The entry into force of the part of the agreement involving the member states is important but not decisive for the future of cooperation.

This connects to the subject of cooperation with member states. The PDCA is in provisional operation because it remains unratified by Lithuania, a country subjected to the renewed US interference in European politics under the Donald Trump administration, as revealed in early March 2020 when a letter became public from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis asking him not to ratify the EU–Cuba agreement (*Deutsche Welle*, 2020). Similar revelations have not emerged during Joe Biden's presidency, but his policy towards Cuba has not differed greatly from that of his predecessor.

In any case, the entry into force of the part of the agreement involving the member states is important but not decisive for the future of cooperation. The PDCA's largest and most important parts concern relations with the EU, which means, as noted above, that over 90% of the agreement is being provisionally implemented. The question is: for long can it remain provisional? No institutionally established limit appears to exist. Failure to definitively enter into force in its entirety could in practice lead to something like the inverse of the situation before the PDCA was signed: whereby institutionalised relations existed with the EU but not with the member states. The majority of member states, including the most important among them, have had agreed and operational bilateral channels in place since cooperation ties were re-established with Spain in 2007. It is the integrated institutionalisation of bilateral cooperation with the member states that would be called into question and excluded. As regulated in the agreement, this would involve a quantitative and qualitative leap focused, for our present purposes, on "sectoral policies" and accompanied and complemented by their own dialogues.

Member state ODA was always considerably higher than European Commission funding, contributing around two-thirds of the total. This has been a constant throughout the history of European integration. Above all it is because member states allocate a proportionately greater volume of resources to their own cooperation interests – countries, regions and areas of traditional influence – than they pool for EU activities in this field. The PDCA did not change this, and it does not seem likely to be affected by the fact that not all member states have ratified the agreement.

Each state seems likely to continue with its own cooperation outside the agreement or even to take advantage of the broad and advantageous framework it establishes for cooperation relations with the EU, free from the obstacles posed by the Common Position. That the CP was not fully respected by the member states either established a precedent and demonstrated that their own bilateral cooperation interests might be placed before those of the EU. However, even in the current climate, member states support the agreement and EU cooperation based on the

approval given in the Council, while continuing their own cooperation without needing the corresponding part of the PDCA to enter into force.

The PDCA's generality as an instrument for guiding current cooperation and the somewhat elastic nature of the cooperation it promotes and covers (breadth of actors, sectors, purposes, means, etc.) can continue to provide an adequate platform for highly diverse ways of achieving it and alternative routes when others are blocked. This may be a handicap, to the extent that the opportunities to effectively implement all the commitments and guidelines contemplated in it may be scarce or limited, but it could also be considered its principal virtue – or one of them.

In short, the EU's cooperation with Cuba has the potential to continue developing, but it also faces challenges and threats that can and should be overcome with political will on both sides. Efforts should be made to surmount the adverse conditions of their respective situations and find solutions to them, as well as to those facing the international environment. In practice, cooperation must prevail over conflict.

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