

To the
Presidency of the European Council
Brussels



September 13, 2019

Dear President Antti Rinne,
dear President Donald Tusk,
dear President select Charles Michel,
dear High Representative select Josep Borrell Fontelles,

We are writing to urge the European Union to continue its welcome policy of developing positive and strong relationships with Cuba based on mutual respect and understanding.

The last two years have seen a significant change in the attitude of the United States government towards Cuba which has included the reduction of communications and relations between the two countries. At the same time we have seen the US increase its application of extraterritorial laws through the application of Title III of the Helms-Burton legislation which negatively affects hundreds of businesses, banks and even NGOs in European countries and across the globe.

In November 2018, for the 26th consecutive year, the United Nations General Assembly voted 188-2, in support of a resolution calling for an end of the U.S. blockade on Cuba. At the same time there have been recent visits to Cuba by a number of leading European political figures and in turn there have been visits by leading Cuban political personalities to Europe. These developments are to be welcomed. The European Union has the right and the capacity to play an independent role in encouraging the practical implementation of the will and desire of the peoples of Europe.

Again there has been welcome progress in the relationships between the EU and Cuba through the signing of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement in March 2016. We hope that this agreement will be filled with progressive activities and sustainable projects.

There are now very valuable preconditions laid out in Finland's Presidency Program for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union 1 July – 31 December 2019. That program

with the title “SUSTAINABLE EUROPE – SUSTAINABLE FUTURE” includes several important intentions, which can support an improvement of the relations between the EU and Cuba. First, there is Chapter 2 about “Common Values and the Rule of Law: Cornerstones of EU Action”. Basic stated values of the EU are mentioned – human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights, including those of minorities, and the Republic of Cuba fulfils those values, and constantly works hard for their development. Compared to many neighbouring countries Cuba is leading that development. The EU can support Cuba at this time, and help strengthen the rule of law internationally by working for an end of the US blockade against Cuba. Finland’s Presidency Program mentions autonomous and independent courts, which are already in existence; in this case it could be the World Trade Organisation and others, which could be utilised to support EU companies against the threats of the extraterritorial US anti-Cuba Blockade policies.

An important second aspect in the new Presidency’s Program is articulated in Chapter 3, where it is underlined, that “the European Union has taken the lead in combating climate change and in advancing global climate action under the Paris Agreement.” In this regard Cuba is very advanced and continues to make efforts to develop a ‘sustainable and green’ economy. All its efforts over recent decades illustrate an amazingly ambitious and progressive strategic program for a systemic policy of climate protection. Cuba’s national “Tarea Vida” (Program for Life) began in July 2017 and is being implemented across Cuba at every level.

In our view, it would be decisive for the development of better relations between the EU and Cuba for the European Union to have a clear and unequivocal stance against the punitive and indefensible policies embodied in the anti Cuban Blockade legislation. This stance should include a clear statement informing the US administration of the EUs intentions to strongly support the rights of the member states to trade with Cuba without the threat of fines being imposed by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Further, we believe that the EU should clearly endorse the right to trade with Cuba and the refusal of any EU companies to pay any fines which OFAC might seek to impose on them for trading with Cuba. Such actions would help to implement “Council Regulation (EC) No 2271/96 of 22 November 1996”. In this regard, the European Commission should call upon the World Trade Organisation to indict the U.S. government for its violations of international trade laws and principles. With such action the EU would support many other countries, companies and organisations, in their perfectly legal desire to do business with Cuba.

We also believe that it is of utmost importance, that the EU strengthens the rule of law in international relations. Therefore it should recognise the independence and sovereignty of Cuba by declaring its full support for the complete and unconditional withdrawal by the United States of America from its illegal occupation of Guantanamo Bay. The EU should support Cuba’s rights and demand for full restoration of the land to Cuba and adequate compensation for the years of occupation.

We are a broad and diverse group of organisations based in Europe working to develop friendship and solidarity between Cuba and our respective countries, as well as with the European Union itself. It is our view that the European Union has an important role to play in developing positive relations with Cuba based on mutual respect and understanding between sovereign nations, and we hope that your Presidency will see these policies developed further,

Sincerely yours,

The undersigned are listed on the next page:

The undersigned

(members and non-members of the EU)

- AUSTRIA: *Michael Wögerer* (President), Österreichisch-Kubanische Gesellschaft and *Prof. Alfred Kohlbacher* (President of the Board of Trustees)
- BELGIUM: *Wim Leysens* (Secretary), Coordinación para el levantamiento del bloqueo contra Cuba (40 member groups); *Regi Rotty*, Voorzitter Vrienden van Cuba and President Amis de Cuba; *Isabelle Vanbrabant* (President), Iniciativa Cuba Socialista – Belgium;
- BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: *Sead Halilovic* (President), Association of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian-Cuban Friendship;
- BULGARIA: Association of Friendship "Bulgaria-Cuba"
- DENMARK: *Sven-Erik Simonsen* (President), Association Denmark – Cuba
- DONETSK: *Stanislav Retinskiy* (President) Association "Donbass - Cuba"
- GERMANY: *Angelika Becker* (President), Netzwerk Cuba e.V. (41 member groups)
- GREECE: Asociacion Cultural Jose Marti – Grecia; *Andreas Chaicalis* (President) - Greek Cuban Association "Venceremos" of Kalamata
- ITALIA: *Irma Dioli* (President), Associazione Nazionale di Amicizia Italia-Cuba
- IRELAND: *Simon McGuinness* (National Coordinator), Cuba Support Group
- LUXEMBURG: *Joël Wunsch* (President), Amistad Luxemburgo-Cuba
- NORWAY: *Cihan Karakoc* (president) Norwegian-Cuba association
- PORTUGAL: *Augusto Fidalgo*, Associcao Portugal-Cuba
- SERBIA: *Prof. Ljiljana Bogoeva Sedlar* (President) Serbian-Cuban Association
- SLOVENIA: *Igor JURIŠIČ* (President) Slovene - Cuban friendship association
- SWEDEN: *Zoltan Tiroler* (President), Swedish-Cuban Association
- SWITZERLAND: *Samuel Wanitsch*, Asociation Switzerland-Cuba
- TURKEY: *M. Onur Çuvalci*, Cuba-Turkey Friendship Association "José Martí"
- UNITED KINGDOM: *Rob Miller* (Director) and *Bernard Regan* (Secretary) Cuba Solidarity Campaign