

## DECLARATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE GROUP FOR THE FRIENDSHIP AND SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF CUBA

Brussels, 25th June 2008

In my condition as President of the *Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba* that operates in the European Parliament, and on behalf of my colleagues as well as on my own behalf, I want to express great satisfaction for the fact that, finally, the Council of Ministers of the European Union has lifted the sanctions that were imposed on Cuba in 2003 and which were later suspended in 2005.

Already at the time when those sanctions were established, our Group showed its disagreement, describing them as discriminatory and useless, and even counterproductive as regards the objectives they supposedly aimed at. In fact, they were never applied in a serious way by practically anybody, and even after being suspended they did nothing but prevent a normal course in the relations between the EU and Cuba.

Just a few weeks ago, a Conference organised by our Group in cooperation with a network of solidarian NGOs called Grupo Sur, concluded its debates by requesting the lifting of the sanctions once and for all. A similar message was addressed by us to the Foreign Ministers of the 27 EU Member States.

Fortunately, and after a number of minor incidents, some of them really strange, the last Council under Slovene Presidency has adopted the formal decisions to eliminate the mentioned measures that had become an obstacle for the normalisation of the EU-Cuba relations.

In his address to the Development Committee in the European Parliament, assessing the results of their six-month Presidency, Mr Andrej Ster, Slovenian Secretary of State for Development, has explained the adopted decision, defined as necessary and positive from any point of view. In that very intervention, Mr Ster has congratulated the Spanish Government for its leading role on the issue, having succeeded "to convince the public opinion of the European countries about the convenience of putting an end to the sanctions."

Our Group congratulates the 27 Governments Members of the Council, and in particular the Spanish Government for its strong will and efficiency, as well as the Slovene Presidency for its understanding and its mobilisation to reach the final result. We must also congratulate Commissioners Louis Michel and Benita Ferrero-Waldner on their good judgement and effort in favour of this cause.

Even if we might understand and share to some extent the considerations contained in the adopted text, we shall not issue any comments on them; similarly, we shall not make remarks on the statements coming from Cuba -Authorities and opposition-, regarding this whole process. We will stick to the only objective fact: the sanctions have been lifted and now a new chapter opens up for making progress through dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Cuba. This should benefit everyone, and will contribute to the improvement of living conditions of the Cuban people; it should contribute as well to the improvement of the image of the EU in the eyes of the Cubans, but also in the eyes of the Caribbean and Latin American peoples, as well as those in the developing world, where Cuba is always perceived with respect and, in many cases, with friendship and gratitude.

We, at our Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba, shall keep sparing no effort so that the new course now starting will be as positive as we want it to be.



Miguel Ángel Martínez  
Vice-President of the European Parliament  
President of the Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba