

Brussels, May 27th 2008

Conference on "*The normalisation of the relations between the European Union and Cuba and the chances in the field of development cooperation*". Brussels, May 26th 2008

DECLARATION BY MIGUEL ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ, PRESIDENT OF THE GROUP FOR THE FRIENDSHIP AND SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF CUBA IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

On May 26th 2008, the Conference *The normalisation of the relations between the European Union and Cuba and the chances in the field of development cooperation* was held in the European Parliament in Brussels. This meeting was organised by the Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba which operates in the EP and by Grupo Sur, a network of NGOs based on EU countries and having a wide experience in solidarian work and cooperation in Cuba and in many other developing countries.

Around two hundred participants took part in the Conference, including Members of the European Parliament from the Socialist, Liberal, Green, and United Left Groups, national Members of Parliament, Ambassadors and diplomats from several Latin-American and African countries, officials from the European institutions, as well as members of national and European solidarian organisations working within the framework of Grupo Sur. Among the speakers in the different Round Tables one may underline the participation of the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, and some of his close collaborators, as well as the Vice-presidents of the European Parliament, Manuel dos Santos and Miguel Ángel Martínez, the latter also President of the Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba.

Other personalities who played a remarkable part were Ibrahim Omar Touré, Minister of Health of Mali, the Cuban Ambassador in Brussels, Elio Rodríguez, the former President of the European Parliament and current Chairman of the Development Committee, José Borrell, and the Vice-president of the Group for the Friendship and Solidarity with the People of Cuba and MEP Willy Meyer, as well as several experts from Havana, and Xavier Declercq, Donatella Oldrini, Iosu Perales, and José Moisés Martín, leading members of Grupo Sur.

The Conference featured two sides which later proved to be closely linked. In the first one, we analysed the work that Cuba has been doing in the framework of South/South cooperation, that is, implementing solidarian programmes in Third World countries, in view of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, or within the framework of humanitarian aid to alleviate the effects of natural disasters or conflicts. The words of the Minister of Mali, as well as those of young representatives from countries like Honduras, Guatemala or Togo, trained as doctors or as teachers in the different programmes were most impressive, just like the figures of Cuban field workers embarked in current cooperation projects. It is worth highlighting a sentence of one of the beneficiaries of this cooperation -"Cuba does not give, as it often happens with other Northern countries, her leftovers. She shares what she has, which

is sometimes not enough to cover her own needs."-. Special emphasis was laid on describing projects of triangular cooperation, in which Venezuela or South Africa are participating, financing initiatives for which Cuba gives the know-how of her experts, and the African or Latin American countries put the local logistic effort.

With this statement we reached the second main theme of our Conference: the required normalisation of the relations between the European Union and Cuba and the impact that such a normalisation would have for the benefit of many peoples' development: in favour of the Cuban people, in some extent, and -perhaps even more- in favour of many Third World countries. It was clear that this normalisation of relations is necessary for the coherence of the EU and a step forwards which will yield profits to Cuba, certainly, to other Third World countries in which triangular cooperation programmes could be implemented, and even more benefits for the European Union's image, credibility and for the respect and sympathy, which it will receive from many people in developing States.

It was unanimously recognised and claimed that such a necessary normalisation requires, as an essential and urgent condition, that the sanctions imposed by the EU on Cuba are eliminated once and for all. These sanctions were imposed in 2003 and suspended two years later. Currently they are nothing but a means to block the way towards normal, fruitful relations, like the EU enjoys with any other country in the world. Thus, the main message of the Conference, has been the call to the European Council of General Affairs and External Relations that will deal with the issue on 16th and 17th June, to step forwards and lift the sanctions once for all.

The Conference underlined the important moment in which this decision will be taken: when there is a series of positive measures being taken in Cuba, and when the EU has just defined its relations with Latin America and the Caribbean as a priority in the recent Summit in Lima. Also, when Cuba has seen its prestige and influence grow in the Caribbean and in Latin America, and in a moment when the EU, with the likely ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, will become a significant global actor that will need allies and friends to operate constructively in the world, globalised scenario.

The hope shown by many participants and speakers in both Round Tables was that the European Council will follow the positive approach put forwards by Commissioner Louis Michel, and will understand its responsibility to break the chains that have been an obstacle to the relations between the EU and Cuba, with the negative consequences that this obstacle has meant in the perception of peoples and Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in relevant sectors of the European public opinion.

The participants in the Conference, and more precisely the two sponsoring bodies, have committed their mobilisation and their trust that the 27 Governments of the EU Member States will act in a responsible way at their meeting on 16th and 17th June. At the same time, they have confirmed their commitment to keep making their utmost efforts in the new scenario that will emerge with the dialogue and cooperation with Cuba that is starting to appear in the horizon, just a few weeks from now.