



Cuba A Decisive European Parliament

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The European Parliament on June 21 approved an urgent resolution about Cuba's human rights record. This came after the External Relations Council decided not to lift diplomatic sanctions against the island, and against the wishes of Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. Once more, the European Parliament has struck a hard blow to the Socialist government's foreign policy.

The members of the European Parliament (MEPs) consider that the EU would be ready to resume a comprehensive dialog between the European Union and Cuba but that it should be subject to the verification of progress in the field of human rights; this noble aim - the advancement of human rights and democracy in the world - is the final purpose of this EU foreign policy endeavor just as treaties stipulate. Nevertheless, during the previous debate, recycled ex-Communists and neo-Communists argued that the European Popular Party Group had needlessly forced the inclusion of this point

point into the agenda at the request of Spanish Popular Party's MEPs, that there was no urgent human rights issue on the table and that it was all done with the sole purpose of weakening the Zapatero administration, in other words, as a consequence of internal Spanish politics. Of course, those MEPs had no scruples about abandoning their supposed defense of human rights in order to call for a no-strings-attached dialog with the tyrannical regime.

In regards to the argument against the debate, it is necessary to emphasize several basic points. First, the European Parliament does not allow the members of a group to force a debate against the opinion of the majority of MEPs. The procedure to follow in order to add an issue to the agenda is included in the Parliament's rules of procedure, which allows a political group or a certain number of MEPs to propose a change in the agenda at the beginning of the session. In this case, liberals and Popular Party's MEPs we-

were in favor of including an urgent debate about human rights in Cuba so they presented their motion, the assembly voted and the measure passed. Seemingly, the critics do not favor democratic decisions.

Second, the matter of human rights in Cuba constitutes an urgent issue from any standpoint after the Council confirmed the lack of progress on the island after Raul Castro inherited the power. No peaceful opponent of the Castro regime has been released from detention. Moreover, as the passed resolution by Parliament emphasizes, most of those being detained are in very poor health; this constitutes in itself a first-magnitude emergency. Finally, the pro-Castro MEPs conceal the fact that the main driving force for the debate in the PPE-DE Group has been Mr. Ribeiro e Castro, Portuguese MEP deeply involved with the cause of democracy and human rights in Cuba. Besides, the proposal counted with the co-sponsorship of ALDE (Grupo de los Liberales y Demócratas) headed by the Italian MEP Marco Cappato. Naturally, the Spanish Popular Party's MEPs supported the debate proposal wholeheartedly and as a united front from the very beginning. Finally, common sense prevailed and the parliamentary

resolution passed with the votes of most members.

Certainly, the resolution weakens the Zapatero administration's image since it clearly shows its double standard in foreign policy issues, the government's failure to keep its electoral promise of establishing as a priority the protection and respect of human rights as well as the refusal to fulfill its European commitments. This last issue, included in the resolution, is the one that caused most uneasiness among MEPs. The EU Common Position of 1996 on Cuba compels all high-level visitors to the island to meet with the dissidents. The Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos, in a gesture of disloyalty, did not do it during his controversial visit to Cuba in April, and the Parliament could not ignore that fact. With this new resolution condemning Cuba for not respecting human rights what the Parliament has stated is that the first thing is the unconditional release of the prisoners; that any dialog with Cuban authorities must be based on the verification of progress on human rights and that is not enough to talk big about Europeism and then disregard the acquired obligations.

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