

## **MYTHS AND REALITIES OF THE ASYMMETRIC RELATIONSHIP: CUBA, THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE FAILURE OF THE COMMON POSITION (2006-2016)**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to present some partial results of research about asymmetry in international relations, focusing on the EU's Common Position on Cuba and its consequences for the links between both players. The paper examines the EU's loss of the channels of influence, the persistent fractures and competition between the European supranational strategy and the national diplomacies of the Member States, and the underestimation of the contextual and relational factors that acted in favour of Cuba.

### **Keywords**

Cuba, Europe, asymmetry, conflict, negotiation

### **How to cite this article**

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### **Introduction**

The European Union aims to become a global actor with shared responsibilities among its members in fields such as Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), perceived as a supranational level of additional authority (Wessels, 2013), as a way to manage the growing challenges to national governance (Bulmer, 1995), and as a response to the need for affirmation and global intervention (Sánchez, 1995). However, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) was insufficient for the purposes of a true supranational and federalist integration regarding the CFSP (Perera, 2017), which has had an impact on the effectiveness of the “common strategies”.

The adoption of the Common Position on Cuba (CPC) was preceded by unsuccessful attempts to sign a framework cooperation agreement with Cuba on the basis of conditions associated with the organization of its political system (Roy & Domínguez Rivera, 2001), the shooting down of two civil aircraft of Cuba’s anti-aircraft defence (Foont, 2007), the report of the visit of the European Commissioner ruling out the existence of minimum conditions for negotiation (IRELA, 1996), and the campaign commitments of the Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar, to toughen the politics, demands and pressures on Cuba. In December 1996, the Spanish government fostered the EU’s adoption of the Common Position on Cuba (CPC), which is the subject of this paper.

William Zartman's “structuralist research dilemma” offered an adequate theoretical perspective to understand asymmetric negotiations and relationships. From this viewpoint, one of the areas of the asymmetric relationship in Cuba's foreign policy was addressed: ties with Europe, specifically the phenomenon of the CPC. This article analyses the factors that limited the results and led to the failure of the CPC as a model for managing European global foreign policy towards Cuba.

The problem addressed here has been little studied and rather neglected in more general analyses of the CPC. Approaches have been found to the question of the asymmetric relations both in Cuba and in the EU, but they have focused on higher priority aspects of their respective foreign policies. Such is the case of Zhou (2018), Criekeinge (2009), and Neuss (2011). The same applies to Whitman’s (2011) observations about the construction of the normative hegemony of the EU, and to those of Hughes (2006) about the asymmetric interdependence with Russia.



On Cuba's asymmetric relations, there is an almost absolute predominance of studies about its ties with the United States. López-Levy (2016) analyses the agreement to re-establish diplomatic ties between the two nations from an asymmetric perspective. The 1962 "Missile Crisis" was examined by Jones & H. Jones (2005), and Winter (2003), from the perspective of asymmetric perceptions of power. Domínguez (2006) studied the penetration of China in Latin America and the disparity of expectations vis-à-vis key actors in the region, including Cuba.

The phenomenon of the CPC, in particular, has been the object of study from different approaches and disciplines: Perera (2017), from a historiographical perspective of the present, while Díaz-Lezcano (2007) and Ugalde (2010), approach it as a political phenomenon. Likewise, Gratius (2005), among other studies, examined the use of tactical divergences between Europe and the United States.

This paper aims to answer the following question: To what extent did existing asymmetries between the EU and Cuba influence the failure of the CPC? In addition, three questions guided the research: how did the adoption of the CPC impact on Europe's work and interest in bringing Cuba closer to its system of values, principles and interests in the political sphere? How to explain that within a relationship of an interdependent and asymmetric nature in terms of resources, the EU's ability to influence and exert control over Cuba has been eroded? In a totally unfavourable asymmetric relationship, how does Cuba manage to resist the EU's demands and impose its preferences (the CPC was eliminated without internal political changes, and a Cuba-EU agreement was signed with a commitment to non-interference) in the relationship and the negotiation with the EU?

This analysis starts from the assumption that the use of sovereign and nationalist attitudes in the face of the hegemonic "dissuasive" approach that the CPC embodied, contributed to reinforcing the asymmetric profile of the relationship between Cuba and the EU. This eroded the relative advantages that give the EU its material capacities to exert influence, while Cuba maintained in its favour channels and relationship and context factors that allowed it to achieve results closer to its interests and expectations (repeal of the CPC, preservation of its sovereign attributes, and resumption of official cooperation without conditions).

The paper is based on empirical research of a documentary nature about the asymmetry phenomenon in international relations applied to the CPC. It uses both qualitative and quantitative data extracted from direct oral sources and official texts and statements. Indirect sources such as editorials, articles published in specialized journals, and opinions of renowned experts were also used. Interviews were used, as well as other data collection techniques. The time frame of the study coincides with the period in which the CPC arose and remained in force (1996-2016).

We start with Kelley and Thibaut's (1978) interdependence as a general theory of social interaction, and William Zartman's "structuralist dilemma" of negotiation with the aim of guiding research towards symmetry in international relations. The second theoretical entry corresponds to the contextual and relational analysis of power in negotiation, complemented by the expanded perspective of Crieke (2009), Schelling's conflict strategy (1964) and the agency theory of Druckman (2008), Banks (1995), Jensen & Meckling (1976), and Watts & Zimmerman (1983).

The understanding of "power as a perceived relationship" has Zartman & Rubin (2005) among its main advocates, with their empirical research on how the weakest succeed in



asymmetric negotiations, and their theoretical reconceptualization of the notion of power. Zartman (1997) proposes a less traditional and more refined approach to capabilities and their influence on the negotiation process and results as a "social gathering". For Zartman (1997, 2005), perception is not immutable, insofar as one of the parties can count on the ability to change the perception of the other.

The discourses and the global and regional platforms for multilateral action and cooperation built by the "weak" actor, in this case, could respond to the Bartos and Wehr's (2002) criteria, which suggests that they make it generate solidarity to handle the asymmetric conflict, and stand in the area of "best alternative to a non-agreement", reflected in the perspective of Fisher and Ury (1981).

The use of Zartman's notions led to including Crieking (2009) in the analysis, given the need to take into account contextual and relational factors. This author brings together the multiple approaches from international relations to the question of power into five categories: "force/possession", "relational-contextual", "perception", "agenda setting", and "constructivist vision". Unlike this author, our classification is much simpler by identifying the "classical structuralist" notion of the analysis of power that considers that the process and the results of the negotiation are determined by the way the material capacities are distributed; and the rationalist stance of those who view it as a relational phenomenon that encompasses far more than the parties' available resources, including ideology and organization (Michels, 1962), a perceived relationship (Zartman & Rubin, 2005), mobilization ability (Bartos & Wehr, 2002), and reputation (Schelling, 1964).

The way the actors formulate preferences, strategies and mutual demands regarding the other constitutes a crucial element to take into account when analysing the successes and failures in asymmetric power (Crieking, 2009: 17). Persuaded by this author's argument, which indicates that the superiority of power in the traditional sense should not only be held but also perceived (p.18), this article also includes Schelling's (1964) theoretical reflection on the credibility of "threats" and "rewards" within a conflict relationship. Druckman's (2008) analysis and definition of "degree of agency" provided us with an additional edge to address the limitations of the Common Position as a tool for EU foreign policy action. For Druckman, the problem begins when individual priorities differ from the agency's preferences, the negotiator has to decide which option to adopt, and his sense of obligation is reflected in his willingness to abandon his own vision in favour of the group's (Druckman, 2008: 144). Within the perspective of agency theory, Banks' reflections (1995) address the role of agents that emerge with comparative advantages and better information compared to those represented. Watts & Zimmerman's (1983) approach paved the way to understanding the "opportunistic attitudes" the parties tend to defend and to maximize their own interests to the detriment of the collective agreement. For Jensen & Meckling (1976), if all parties to the deal are focused on maximizing their gains, the agent will not always act for the benefit of the main one (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

In addition to the introduction, the discussion of the results and the conclusions, this article presents the partial results of the research, divided into three sections: the consequences of the breakdown of the dialogue, the loss of comparative advantages, and the EU's perceptual errors.



## **Presentation of the results**

### **1. From ascending interdependence to estrangement (1996-2003): mistrust, tension and disagreements**

The EU's hegemonic demands and approaches, and their rejection by Havana, deepened mutual asymmetric perceptions, not only in terms of their material dimensions, but also in the purposes and intentions of one party against the other. What had been until then a promising relationship - although not without complexities - was replaced by distancing, tension, non-dialogue and mistrust.

The CPC text openly expressed the intention to foster political change in Cuba, through the demand for "respect for human rights and real progress towards multi-party democracy". The Cuban government was ruled out as the recipient of humanitarian aid, proposing its channelling through "non-governmental organizations, churches and international organizations (...)" (Official Journal, 1996). Cuba's authorities, for their part, rejected the European measures, calling them "unilateral, discriminatory and interfering" (MINREX, 1996). The Cuban leadership was blunt in the face of European positions, particularly Spanish ones. It refused the ambassador proposed by the Aznar government (Vicent, 1996) and condemned the complicity of the European legations with the subversive activity of the American diplomatic representation in Havana. (Ramonet, 2006: 239). The codification of the US government's measures and sanctions against Cuba in the Helms-Burton Act further debilitated the already complicated relations between Havana and Washington. Its third and fourth chapters were aimed at discouraging investments by third countries in Cuba's economy, hit by the loss of the bulk of its external exchanges after the collapse of the USSR and the disappearance of East-European socialist nations. In this context, the EU adopted Regulation 2271/96 "Protection against the effects of extra-territorial application of legislation adopted by a third country" (22 November 1996).<sup>1</sup> However, the measure was never applied due to the Memorandum of Understanding on the Helms-Burton Act (11 April 1997), according to which the EU agreed to strengthen the sanctions against expropriations and investments made in such assets and present a common proposal with the United States under the Multilateral Investment Agreement (MIA).<sup>2</sup> President Fidel Castro and the head of Cuba's Parliament, Ricardo Alarcón, forcefully rejected the commitments (Vicent, 1998), which, according to them, not only affected Cuban but also European interests. Two events had a notable impact on the Cuba-EU relations: the visit of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II (Egurbide, 1996), and the acceptance by the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, and the Council of Ministers of the Association of Asian States, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) of the integration of Cuba, first as an observer, in the Lomé Convention. This group of nations supported "full membership and eventual participation in post-Lomé IV negotiations (CARICOM, 1998). The possibility of Cuba's accession to this Convention put the EU at a relative disadvantage, insofar as its position became a minority compared to that of 71 countries that supported Cuba without any type of political conditions. The

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<sup>1</sup> With this regulation, Brussels consolidated a legal framework of protection against the extraterritorial measures of the United States.

<sup>2</sup> This included two aspects that would limit future investments in Cuba: investments in illegal or discriminatory expropriated assets -in allusion to Cuba- will be discouraged, through public campaigns and denial of government support in the form of loans or insurance; lists of claims for expropriated property will be made and turned public.



process created fissures within the EU: on the one hand, countries like France were more prone to the inclusion of Cuba in the Lomé process (Josselin, 1998), while others, such as Spain, defended the maintenance of the bilateral canal (IRELA, 1996).

Within the EU, a certain erosion of support of Brussels' conditioning and sanctioning position emerged. The Italian government sent its Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini with a message of interest in the development of Cuba and in promoting economic and political cooperation (Vicent, 1998a), while the Commonwealth Development Corporation of the United Kingdom provided financing to Cuba amounting to 33 million dollars, in order to reactivate Cuban economy (Dolan, 1998). Thus, the differentiation between national and supranational behaviours and positions shaped Cuba's strategy, which tended to stimulate, differentiate and use them in its favour. The arrests of dissidents in the spring of 2003 placed Cuban-European ties in a new crisis. The presidency, the General Affairs Council of the EU, and the European Parliament condemned the events (European Parliament, 2003), while the Cuban Foreign Ministry rejected such positions (MINREX, 1996). The adoption in 2003 of several additional initiatives known as "diplomatic sanctions" led Havana to respond with similar actions, including the "rejection of any assistance or humanitarian aid that the Commission and the governments of the European Union may offer", with the exception of aid coming from "regional or local autonomous regions, from Non-Governmental Organizations and solidarity movements, which do not impose political conditions on Cuba" (Castro, 2003).

The absence of dialogue between the two parties generated disparity in terms of benefits and results. While the EU saw its access to Cuban decision-makers and its influence on the social sectors of its interest limited, Havana maintained and opened, as much as possible, channels of dialogue with authorities of the member states, parliaments, political parties, decentralized autonomous governments, and civil society organizations. The country seemed to have alternatives to the non-negotiated agreement (Fisher & William Ury, 1981), ensuring that, in the same period, foreign aid maintained a positive cumulative growth rate (Pérez, 2014). Meanwhile, Brussels faced increasing pressure from political, social and opinion sectors that did not skimp on their criticism about the absence of results of a policy of poor results that did not respond to their expectations and interests (Almont, 2005; Lemoine, 2010; Press, 2010; Stephens, 2014; Smith, 2011).

At the same time, Cuba drew red lines regarding any dialogue or understanding with the EU, insisting that the "sovereignty and dignity of a people are not discussed with anyone" (Castro F., 2003). Castro (2003) stressed that the EU lacked "enough freedom to dialogue with full independence", while showing his interest in rewarding attitudes that were autonomous and unmarked of the hegemonic vision of the US, emphasizing that the creation of the EU "was the only smart and useful thing to do to counterweight the hegemony of its powerful military ally and economic competitor". Punishment as a way of influencing Cuban decision-makers was rejected by the Cuban leader, when he declared that Cuba "does not obey masters, accept threats, ask for alms, nor does it lack the courage to tell the truth" (Castro, 2003).

In addition to the indefinite postponement of the decision on Cuba's candidacy to Cotonou (Ortiz, 2016), the European diplomatic sanctions did not go beyond the limitation of high-level government visits, the reduction of the presence of the Member States in cultural events, the invitation of Cuban dissidents to national holidays, and the re-assessment of the CPC (MINREX, 2003). Far from serving the European objectives, these decisions



rather helped Cuba to reaffirm its sovereignty discourse in the face of more strategic challenges, such as the conflict with Washington, to get rid of additional pressures that did little to its international performance, and to outline its strategies of differentiation and reward against actors not adhering to the idea of interference and imposition of conditions. This stance had very favourable results for Cuba, so much so that trade relations, investments and decentralized cooperation were maintained with Europe (Bayo, 2004), although it should be noted that the weight of this continent, in Cuba's global exchanges, tended to decrease in favour of countries such as China and Venezuela.<sup>3</sup>

In the context of "non-dialogue", and unlike the EU, which saw the bulk of possibilities to exert influence over Cuban decision-makers and access to various sectors of the island's society closed, the structural limitations of the European construction process (Perera, 2017) and the place of the CPC in the agenda of internal political disputes in Spain and in the intransigent positions of the ex-socialist nations, seemed to shape, as Criekinge suggests, the Cuban strategy. This strategy consisted, essentially, in focusing on States - with emphasis on those with the greatest relative influence - to stimulate dissent regarding the supranational position, offering rewards aligned with their national interests. For President Castro, the European policy towards Cuba was hijacked by the said political groups, and Aznar's, "thoughts and relations with the Miami mafia" (Ramonet, 2006).

In 2005, the situation began to ease up, at least partially, with steps taken by both sides, such as the temporary suspension of EU diplomatic measures at the request of the governments of Luxembourg, Spain and Belgium and the EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel (Xalma, 2008); the reestablishment of the Cuban Government's official contacts with the embassies of EU countries; and the Cuban Foreign Minister's tour of various European countries (Ugalde, 2010). The official visits of high European government authorities to Cuba, with the CPC in full force, demonstrated that this policy was fractured and had lost the support of the same actors who had previously defended it. After a time of unsuccessful enforcement, they had realised that it no longer aligned with their interests.

## **2. The erosion of the relative advantages of the EU in the asymmetric relationship with Cuba: the uselessness of the influence and control tools**

Faced with the impossibility to build its hegemony through force, Europe used "soft power" to attract and influence the world (Nye & Ikenberry, 2004; Tuomioja, 2009; Ibáñez, 2011; Aspíroz 2015). The destruction of the alliance with the Soviet Union, the intensification of the US sanctions and Cuba's deep economic crisis offered the EU an unprecedented terrain to position itself in the country, taking advantage of its North American competitors and gaining presence in a key and influential country in the Latin American and Caribbean political context. Starting in 1993, the EU's policy towards Cuba showed symptoms of change, with activity in two leading areas of the European Commission increasing: cooperation, through the development of specific actions, and humanitarian aid, through a flow of resources that progressively increased in subsequent years (Perera, 2017). Brussels created and expanded a base of influence over the Cuban

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<sup>3</sup> For additional information, including statistical data, see Xalma's article (2008) in <https://eulacfoundation.org/es/system/files/Europa%20frente%20a%20Cuba.pdf>



authorities and society, supported on the one hand by its position of deterrent hegemony - clearly differentiated from Washington's coercion and hostility - and, on the other, by instruments associated with "soft power" aiming at aligning Cuba with its options. This resulted in a scenario of clear imbalance in favour of the EU, insofar as it not only had resources and capacities, but also the means of attraction and influence.

The EC, in an official communication sent to the Council and Parliament, expressed its objective of promoting and achieving a peaceful transition in Cuba, recognizing the need to strengthen ties with the country, as well as the influence and leadership capacities that the EU could play in that context. It also detailed and praised the economic reforms that served European interests, pointing out the existence of reformist sectors within Cuba's political and state leadership (Commission of the European Communities, pp. 2-3).

The environment for the EU's influence actions in the country began to thin out in 1996 with the adoption of the CPC, until it reached its most complex moment, caused by the 2003 "diplomatic sanctions" and Havana's rejection of official cooperation programmes. It can be deduced from the CPC text (Official Journal, 1996) that the EU assumed that given Cuba's marked vulnerability and fragility, its superiority in terms of material capacities and resources, together with punishments and rewards, would allow aligning Cuba with its positions relatively easily.

EU pressure reinforced the asymmetric perception between the parties in terms of purposes, pushing away the possibilities for dialogue and compromise. The European demands were perceived by the authorities in Havana as an extension of the legitimacy base of the United States' zero-sum line, considering that Europe shared with the United States "extraterritorial laws which, by violating the sovereignty of their own territories, increase the blockade against Cuba (...)" (Castro F., 2008). Faced with this situation, Havana decided to close the channels of influence contained in the EU's official cooperation policy and programmes, while leaving open exchanges with other actors that did not require any conditions (Castro F. , 2003; MINREX, 2003).

This led to a situation of asymmetry, in which the "strong" actor saw its influence and control instruments rendered useless, while the "weak" actor, supported by the institutional weaknesses of its adversary, demonstrated its ability to gain followers, divide and erode the opponent's stance. Thus, the Cuban strategy for managing the CPC seemed to take shape in the face of the confrontation of the two institutional processes that have marked the history of the EU: on one side, the supranational or communal, on the other, the intergovernmental. At the same time, Havana seemed to use one of the programmatic foundations of its foreign policy: the identification and use of fissures and struggles of "inter-imperialist" interests (Rodríguez, 1980).

Cuban diplomacy realised that it could take advantage of the dissent that was gradually felt up by member states that had more constructive positions and greater interest in relations with Cuba (Gratius, 2005; Perera, 2017; Ugalde, 2010), which ended up generating contradictions, undermining and delegitimizing the EU's supranational interference. This will be expanded in the third section of this article.

By dismissing, denigrating and disqualifying the promise of rewards made by Europe, Havana left its adversary devoid of sufficient instruments of attraction to achieve its purposes. Its strategy seemed to be based on Europe's limitations in exercising its "soft power" in a consistent and productive way and the possibility of conducting, without





significant restrictions, influencing actions within the EU. In the words of Cuba's former ambassador to Spain: [...] they were wrong in the move, because we were able to do what they could not do. We could limit their relationships. [...] up to a point (Allende Karam 2015, quoted in Perera, 2017, : 152). In turn, Cuban diplomat Ángel Dalmau affirmed that the embassies of his country "were able to work in the terms more or less in which a Cuban embassy works in Europe" (Dalmau, 2015, quoted in Perera, 2017: 153).

The debate has also been raised about the contextual elements that acted in favour of Cuba's negotiating capacity and political action. Perera (2017) points towards the full and definitive reintegration of Cuba in its regional environment, favoured by the political changes in the region<sup>4</sup>, the flexibility of the Obama administration vis-à-vis Havana, the progressive resumption of bilateral cooperation with different member states unilaterally suspended by the Cuban government in July 2003, and the release of those arrested during the events of March 2003 (pp. 184-185). Ugalde (2010), Alzugaray (2009) and Hernández (2009) emphasise the consequences of the transfer of command to Raúl Castro, the impacts of a more pragmatic discourse, the economic reforms undertaken, and the changes in the international scenario. Drouhaud (2016) and Terranova (2015), give more weight to the results of Cuba's foreign policy and its alliances with emerging powers such as China and Russia.

### **3. The EU and failed perceptions, calculations and strategies: agency problem**

This empirical approach to the CPC identified two issues that contributed to displacing the asymmetry in favour of Cuba and its preferences, in particular those associated with the preservation of its sovereign attributes, the weakening of the interventionist line contained in the European strategy, and maintaining channels of influence with European institutions and governments: the role of the EC's agency (Druckman, 2008; Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Banks, 1995; Watts & Zimmerman, 1983), on the one hand, and the credibility of its promises of rewards and punishments (Schelling, 1964).

The EC had a complex agency role to play, having to carry out the formal mandates conferred by the decisions taken within the Council of Ministers and the Parliament and deal with the demands and pressures of some Member States which, although part of the Council agreements, at the level of their respective diplomacies guided their action more towards the defence and promotion of their national interests than to the needs of supranational policy. The above coincides with Gartius' (2005) views, who considers that in the EU - the Commission, the European Parliament and the 25 member states - there was no policy but a great diversity of policies towards Cuba, ranging from unconditional commitment to political and economic distancing (6).

After the adoption of the CPC, Spain, paradoxically, was the first country to breach it by maintaining bilateral cooperation in various areas, consolidating itself as a provider of goods, becoming the second investor in Cuba's economy, and admitting the participation of President Fidel Castro in the Ibero-American Summits, the ninth edition of which took place in Havana. Likewise, a group of countries like France, Belgium and Portugal were

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<sup>4</sup> It includes the admission to the Rio Group, a founding member of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, those asked to join the OAS and the Inter-American System (Perera, 2017)



favourable to compromise, which attests the prevalence of national interests over the supranational strategy (Gratius, 2005: 6). It should be noted that not all Member States truly complied with the sanctions. The Belgian diplomatic representation in Havana, for example, used formulas that allowed it, without radically breaching the European commitment, to make visible that its legation was accredited to the Cuban government, whose officials continued to attend their official activities. This had its compensation in that the cooperation with Belgium was not suspended (Perera, 2017 :51).

In France, there was dissatisfaction regarding the null results of the CPC and the obstacles it imposed on attaining national objectives. President Jacques Chirac pointed out that the initiative blocked the "immense potential of relations between the two countries" (Chirac, 2005). In turn, the member of parliament and president of the France-Cuba Parliamentary Friendship Group, Alfred Almont, declared his intention to communicate to the French head of state his idea of "proposing the repeal of the Common Position towards Cuba" (Almont, 2005). Likewise, the president of the Pernod Ricard business group, Patrick Ricard, spoke in favour of the elimination of all the pitfalls affecting the Franco-Cuban relationship (Ricard, 2005).

Unlike the Cuban-American conflict, the dispute between Havana and Brussels did not pose an existential threat Cuba, considering the nature of the "soft power" exercised by Europe, based on attraction rather than coercion. Hence, Cuba took precautions not to weaken its negotiating power in the main dispute, insisting on "a respectful dialogue, among equals, on any matter, without prejudice to our independence, sovereignty and self-determination" (Castro R., 2009). He also stated "Cuba's will to maintain a respectful relationship, which necessarily happens because the EU recognizes and treats Cuba on equal terms" (MINREX-Cuba official statement, quoted in Reuters, 2010).

The EU seemed to ignore that with greater influence, the punishments and promises of the United States had not achieved any significant movement on the part of Cuba. It could also have underestimated the influence of national interests in defining the individual behaviours of member countries that from the beginning violated the wording and purposes of the CPC (Gratius, 2005). Trade relations, investments, and tourism were maintained despite the sanctions, which tended to be more symbolic than real.<sup>5</sup>

The European position weakened before the range of alternatives that Cuba had in the event that the relationship was not normalized and an agreement reached. These included links with governments and decentralized actors in the EU itself. Cuba's former ambassador to Spain recalled that they could not "limit entry at the level of autonomy, even with people from the PP at the head of their governments (Allende Karam, 2015 quoted in Perera, 2017, : 152). A similar situation was found in France, where Cuban diplomats had access and built agreements and initiatives with regional and departmental entities and municipalities (Sánchez-Levis, 2005). According to World Bank data, the net official development aid received by Cuba maintained its upward trend. In

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<sup>5</sup> Europe is the main investor in Cuba, with 71% of the total, with Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Germany being the most representative countries (Fonseca, 2017). From 1995 to 2017, Cuba's total exchange of goods and services with the exterior tripled, with an increase of 4448 million CUP<sup>5</sup> to 12574 CUP, while trade relations between Cuba and the EU were maintained between 2012 and 2017, oscillating between 4233 million CUP and 3624 million CUP, which means a weight of more than 20% in the island's external exchanges (ONEI-Cuba, 2018). We agree with Díaz-Lezcano (2007) in the sense that "the commercial variable does not depend directly on the political springs that mobilize the bilateral dynamics" Díaz-Lezcano, 2007. For their part, European countries remained among the top markets for Cuba ONEI-Cuba, 2018.



the year the CPC was adopted, it amounted to USD 57 million<sup>6</sup>, in 2004 to USD 99 million, reaching the record of USD 2,678 million in 2016 (World Bank, 2017).

With the provisional suspension of the "diplomatic sanctions" against Havana (European Union, 2005), and its subsequent definitive elimination in 2008, the EU seemed to be trying to recover from a situation of symmetry in which it could resume its contacts, access and influence on the Cuban authorities, through dialogue and cooperation programmes. Cuba, for its part, insisted on the repeal of the CPC as a *sine qua non* condition for the resumption of negotiations, emphasizing that it was not "enough to remove the sanctions" (Pérez Roque, 2008), and stating that the "discredited form of suspending the sanctions against Cuba that the European Union just adopted on 19 June had no economic effect on the economy of the blocked country (...)" (Castro F., 2008).

After two decades of unsuccessful application of the CPC, the European authorities ended up aligning with the Cuban position that demanded its immediate repeal, respect for sovereignty, and the resumption of cooperation without any conditions. In the text of the "Agreement for political dialogue and cooperation", "the respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of the Republic of Cuba" was reaffirmed (...) "as well as the adherence of the Parties to all the principles and purposes stated in the Charter of the United Nations (Council of the European Union, 2016)".

## Results and discussion

The failure of the CPC is related to phenomena such as resource distribution, context, and relationship. This empirical study so far notes a strong incidence of the second and third categories on the object of study. However, in the case of the first, a much finer analysis is still required, considering that the research at the beginning tended to overemphasize the disparity of resources between the parties, and only later expand this approach with the introduction of theoretical insights about the "agency problem" and the "conflict strategy". The aforementioned theoretical perspectives place us, in turn, in another area of reflection that must determine if the CPC responded more to legitimate European interests, if it was a currency in transatlantic negotiations - which combined harsh rhetoric, symbolic sanctions and pragmatism of the European national diplomacies - or if it resulted from the combined influence of both. As the "strongest" strategy, the CPC leads us to the principle that capacities and resources do not always determine the outcome of a negotiation, although their better distribution and use could have improved their efficiency, under specific conditions. To what extent will it be feasible to continue considering the CPC as a classic case of "structuralist dilemma", when it failed to concentrate the bulk of European resources in the same direction? Even so, the failure of the CPC as an instrument of pressure on Cuba allowed verifying the validity of Zartman's theses that open the possibility that the disparity in terms of resources and capacities does not always determine the relationship process and the results of negotiations between the parties.

The use of conditions by the "strongest" over the "weakest" tended to erode, as Zartman and Rubin indicate, the minimum conditions for a relationship-negotiation with acceptable results for the parties involved. Instead of improving the conditions of influence and control over Cuba's decision-makers, they were reduced to a minimum,

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<sup>6</sup> US dollars



after the closure of official communication channels and Cuba's rejection of the EC's conditional cooperation (rewards). At the same time, the perceptions of the European strategists on the relative advantages of aligning Havana with their positions, on the vulnerabilities and insufficiencies of Cuba's capacities, and the power difference between the parties, constituted the bases of the miscalculation, which led them to underestimate and not adequately consider the weight of the relational and contextual factors defined by Zartman, Zartman & Rubin, and Crieking. The analysis of the approaches of these authors allowed us to identify the elements of the context and the relationship that Cuba used in its favour.

Incorporating Banks, Druckman, Jensen and Zimmerman's insights about "agency" further opened up our analysis and rethink the question of material capacities, whose dimensions are not always the most influential. However, how they are organized, arranged and used are. This study confirms that the EU's resources and capacities were unfocused, reducing the strength and credibility of the supranational strategy. While Brussels pressed and placed demands on Havana, some of the member states used strategies of their own national diplomacies, with dialogue, cooperation and ties, without conditions.

Likewise, the reflections derived from the application of the agency theory made us return to the general principles of interdependence theory (IT), considering that at some point in the research, the problem of the disparity of capacities was relegated to second place - with the questioning of its influence on the process and its results - becoming evident the adaptability of IT for the analysis of a process that includes structure, transformation, interaction, and the adaptation of the players. This allows us to affirm that the abysmal disparity and its pressure on the "smallest" actor were more apparent than real, given that trade, investment, tourism and official cooperation were maintained. It could have been different if the aforementioned links had been conditioned to changes in Cuba's behaviour.

Schelling's conflict theory deserves a similar analysis. Promises of punishments and rewards hardly work in a context of seeming asymmetry, where the most resourceful player does not have effective means to co-opt and align its opponent. In this case, neither the offer to negotiate and sign a framework agreement for bilateral cooperation, nor the threat of reducing diplomatic contacts, achieved the expected results. Everything indicates that the strong bilateral interdependence (trade, tourism, investment, governmental and non-governmental cooperation), as well as elements of the context and of the relationship itself, contributed to relativizing the superiority of EU's power vis-à-vis Cuba.

## **Conclusions**

The adoption of the CPC and the subsequent application of diplomatic sanctions produced results contrary to those the EU expected. Cuba's perception that this broadened the legitimacy base of the Washington zero-sum line against it, closed the EU's possibilities and channels of influence over the Cuban authorities and society. With the aforementioned initiative, the confrontation between the European hegemonic approach - more persuasive than coercive - and the sovereign-nationalist on the Cuban side, was opened. In this context, the asymmetry is deepened not only in terms of resources but



also of purposes and intentions, which manages to annul the minimum conditions for the relaunch and development of the bilateral dialogue.

The disparity of opportunities for influence disadvantaged the European authorities, given the closure of access to their representations in Cuba, while the diplomatic legations of Havana maintained their influence in more or less normal conditions in the different European capitals. The CPC was disrespected from the beginning by some of the member states and, over time, dissents and fractures were created in this supranational strategy that began to compete with the bilateral policies conducted by the different capitals, without conditions.

Europe's perception regarding its superiority of power vis-à-vis Cuba, its vulnerabilities, and the favourable different capacities made it make erroneous strategic calculations, which underestimated the effects of relational factors, such as Havana's veto capacity over its initiatives and actions of influence, the limited effects of its rewards and punishments, the weight of mutual interdependencies, etc. It also miscalculated the context factors, such as Cuba's insertion in the Latin American and Caribbean regional sphere, its upward relations with the emerging powers, and the change in policy of the administration of President Barack Obama, among others.

This study shows that in the absence of sufficiently convincing punishments and rewards, the weak actor has a margin of manoeuvre that it actively uses to resist and even move its adversary towards its options and preferences. The empirical evidence of this work indicates that the player with the least relative power needs certain premises to create value in conditions of asymmetry, without having to engage in a risky negotiation process: (1) absence of existential threats, (2) the global value of the benefits must exceed that of the costs, (3) the alternative to a non-agreement must be viable, (4) realizing that the punishments promised by the "strong" actor are inapplicable or ineffective, and (5) the "no dialogue" stance is much more beneficial than that of accepting the rewards that the adversary has promised.

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