

Spain and Cuba

or the Revenge of the Spanish Dancer

In the geopolitical world stage it will be best to pay more attention to the strategy of the North American government then (and at all times) with regard to what it could perceive as conciliatory politics from Madrid toward Havana, but that, in the Spanish context, it will be simply the right to protect its national interests (the historical and economic included).¹

It seems that the concern Spain may have with regard to how the government of Fidel Castro could harm, or rather benefit, not only its economic interests in Cuba, which are substantial, but also its “official treatment with regard to the global work by Spain in Latin America”² has been what has impelled Spain’s policies toward Cuba in all the moments of recent history as it concerns the relationships between both countries.

Until recently Spain has been Cuba’s most important commercial partner in the capitalist world (Venezuela might soon replace it). Trade with Cuba has increased significantly since the 1960s when North American interests left Cuba. “Until the Castro revolution Cuba only represented 2% of the trade from Spain; Spain only represented 1% of the trade from Cuba.”³

Up to 1975 the government of Francisco Franco maintained a close relationship with the government of Fidel Castro. For some historians the friendship between Franco and Castro was due the Franco’s anti-americanism stemming as much from the loss of “the always faithful” island of Cuba during the Hispanic American War as from the defeat Spain suffered during the Second World War when it became allied with Nazi Germany.

At the end of the Franco regime (1975-1976) the Spanish exports were double of the imports from Cuba. [...] In 1975 with Spain represented 6.5% of the whole Cuban trade, a figure only topped by the Japan in the developed world.

During the socialist government of Felipe González, and even when, or maybe in fact because Cuba was part of Eastern Europe’s economic block, Cuba bought up to 14% of the Spanish exports to Latin America, more than Venezuela (13%) and Argentina (9%). En 1985 this percentage increased to 20% of all the Spanish exports to Latin America.”⁴

It was during this time that investments of Spanish capital in joint ventures with the Cuban government began, allegedly to alleviate the lack of hard currency on the part

of the Castro government. The investments were made mostly in the area of tourism. Considering that 70% of the Spanish investments in Cuba are guaranteed by public funds, by the FAD (Fund for Development Aid), the losses that private capital could suffer in Cuba as a result of either default on the part of Castro’s government or of regime change, would only be 30%. Nevertheless, as a result of big losses in the treasury, the political consequences toward any government inside Spain could be disastrous. For example, and in spite of the public expressions of criticism toward the government of Fidel Castro, the investments and trade with Cuba did not decrease during José María Aznar’s term, exactly the opposite occurred; they increased considerably. Nowadays, Spanish provinces like Asturias, for example, supply Cuba with biotechnology, an area in which Spain has also made a considerable investment.

In the last few years and due to the fleeing of thousands of Cubans who have requested political asylum in Spain, it has not been possible for Spain to completely ignore the political situation in Cuba, although it insists in a policy of “constructive dialogue” with the Castro tyranny in spite of the Castro government’s intransigence on matters related to the respect for the fundamental rights of Cubans (economic, social and political).

The government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who brags about being democratic (under his leadership Spain has extended equal rights to homosexuals), has asked the European Union not to condition aid and trade to and with Cuba to democratic changes in the Island. More recently during the Salamanca Summit in October 2005, and in perfidious union with the Latin American countries there represented, it showed total leniency toward Cuba’s tyrannical government

We wonder what would have happened to Spain if in order to enter the European common market in the decade of the seventies, the Spanish government had not opted for democratic reforms, and in the case of Felipe González, for abandoning the communist radicalism of his party?

It seems apparent that Cuba will continue being a good trade partner of Spain, with Cuba distancing itself even more from the orbit of the United States (see for example Cuba’s recent move to abandon the dollar in exchange for the euro as its convertible currency). Also, it is not anticipated that the trade deficit facing Cuba with respect to Spain will diminish. We ask ourselves, family and linguistic ties notwithstanding, is Cuba’s relationship with Spain really beneficial for Cuba?

Joaquín Roy. *Cuba y España: percepciones y relaciones*. Madrid, Editorial Playor, 1988, p. 99. *Ibid.*

Joaquín Roy. *La siempre fiel, Un siglo de relaciones hispanocubanas (1898-1998)*.

Madrid, Instituto de Desarrollo y Cooperación, 1998, p. 115.

Ibid., p. 116.

Ibid. La cooperación con Cuba. *Análisis de las relaciones económico/empresariales de Asturias y Cuba*, 1995.