ALACIP Panel Inter-regionalism and the Americas

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Cuba as an example for Transatlantic conflicts, shifting triangles and hybrid inter-regionalism

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Introduction

The puzzle of overlapping and partly conflictive relations between Cuba and “the rest” turns it into an interesting case for relations between Europe and the Americas. Cuba under the Castro-regime has been an exception in regionalism, EU-LAC\(^1\) inter-regionalism, Trans-Atlantic and Inter-American relations (Whitehead, Hoffmann, 2007). In debates on IR theory and comparative regionalism (Paul, 2012), the Caribbean island serves as an example for the dynamics between “pure interregionalism” and “hybrid inter-regionalism”, on the one hand, and between different asymmetric triangles (Womack, 2010), on the other.

The authoritarian character of the regime and the centralized economy generated tensions in trans-Atlantic and inter-American relations, excluding a short period of convergence during the second mandate of Barack Obama who restored, in 2015, diplomatic relations with Cuba. Political constraints, such as the traditional definition of national sovereignty as non-interference in domestic affairs, hindered “pure interregionalism” through the inclusion of Cuba in the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement (2000) - an impossible formula replaced by “hybrid inter-regionalism” (CELAC-EU) and bilateralism after the signature of the EU-Cuban Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PCDA) in December 2016. The PDCA settled twenty years of “tango politics” (one step forward, one step back) imposed by the additional conditionality of the EU’s Common Position (Gratius, 2016).

The dominance of bilateral patterns in relations between Cuba and the three “regions” (Europe, Latin America and North America) can be explained by a combination of factors: the failure to include Cuba in EU-ACP cooperation, the importance of national sovereignty, the authoritarian character of the regime, the absence of an independent civil society, the mistrust against full participation in integration processes and Cuba’s identity as a Caribbean, Latin American and (historically) North American country that complicate its participation in regional, and, thus, interregional arrangements.

The inclusion or exclusion, the rejection or acceptance of the Cuban government has been a highly controversial issue in Atlantic relations and within each region. Latin America and Europe solved the “Cuban question” by including the country, first, in

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\(^1\) Beyond EU-CELAC Summits that represent “pure inter-regionalism”, this article makes a case for “trans-regionalism” - following the definitions of Hänggi (2000), developed by Gardini and Malamud (2014) - as relations between a regional organization (the EU) and individual Latin American and Caribbean countries which have never acted as a coherent bloc.
regional (CELAC) and, later on, in interregional (CELAC-EU) summits. The EU-LAC consensus on cooperation with Cuba contrasts with a still open divide in North America: Canada and Mexico follow a policy of constructive engagement (and economic interests) against the US sanctions approach. Albeit Donald Trump maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, he also restored hostility by implementing, since June 2017, the same old policy of pressure and isolation (Ayuso, Gratius, Pellón, 2017).

At this background, the article will explain the dynamics, reasons and motivations behind singling out Cuba in Trans-Atlantic inter-regionalism, explore lines of consensus and dissent between the actors and its impact on the types of inter-regionalism identified by Gian Luca Gardini and Andrés Malamud (2014). The first part explores different asymmetric triangles in order to understand Cuba’s separated relations with each partner: the EU and the US, the Caribbean and Latin America, and Inter-American relations. The second section offers an analytical overview on the evolution of Cuba’s partial insertion into the region and the inter-American system. A third part explores the dynamics between “pure inter-regionalism”, “hybrid regionalism” and bilateralism in Cuba-EU relations. Finally, the conclusions discusses Cuba’s “exceptionalism” (Whitehead, Hoffmann, 2007) in the Atlantic at the background of post-Castrism.

**Dynamics in the Atlantic Triangle**

According to Escudé’s Peripheral Realism, Cuba fits into the category of a “rebel country” which is considered by the authors as a cost-intensive strategy, compared to “obedience” (Shenoni and Escudé, 2016: 7). In fact, its “rebel” position as a consequence of the long-lasting bilateral conflict with the US forced Cuba to design a strategic foreign policy of costly alliances with US enemies (first the Soviet Union and then Venezuela) or US “challengers” like Latin America, Canada and the EU. Although in material terms, the island has limited power capacities, the ideational factor and particularly a strong and strategic foreign policy contributed to change the balance between Cuba and its Western partners and to gradually integrating the island into Atlantic relations, despite the authoritarian character of the regime. By creating counter-balancing, shifting alliances, and playing one actor against the other, Cuba’s foreign policy of regional and international recognition generated several disconnected trilateral relationships.

**Inter-American Triangle: Latin America, the OAS and Cuba**

Cuba has not yet managed (or is reluctant) to reinsert into the Inter-American system but created an alliance with Venezuela, Brazil and other countries to successfully push towards the end of the special OAS-clause introduced in the 1960s by the United States to avoid a Cuban membership. The clause was lifted under the Obama Presidency, in 2009. The island is still excluded from OAS membership, because of the democracy clause, but officially, the organization remains open to the future integration of Cuba into the Inter-American system including the IADB and other hemispheric entities. The
first ever Summit of the Americas with Cuba, in 2015 in Panama, demonstrated the new inter-American relationship.

The return to hostile relations during the Trump Administration after the announcement, in June 2017, of the new old Cuban policy of restrictions –financial transactions, remittances, trade and tourism- worsened the prospects of a normalization of relations and shows the still hegemonic position of the United States in an Inter-American system based on liberal democracy and a market economy. Nonetheless, it is a contested leadership position. The failed attempts to condemn in the OAS the authoritarian regime of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela prove the ideational power of Cuban-based initiatives like ALBA that clearly declined but is still able to build a counter-hegemonic alliance against the United States (Toro, 2011).

**Triangle 1: Cuba and the Americas**

*Transatlantic Triangle: EU, USA and Cuba*

The transatlantic triangle is also highly asymmetric. Cuban-European relations have been strongly conditioned by the United States and long-lasting sanctions on the Castro regime. The thirty years between 1988 and 2018 have been characterized by changing dynamics between the hegemonic power US, the middle “power” EU and the small Caribbean island (Gratius, 2018a). In this period, the EU’s position shifted between band-wagoning and soft balancing the US policy towards Cuba.

Since the Cuban Revolution, Europe and the US apply different instruments – engagement versus sanctions – of democracy promotion and don’t even agree on the final objective: Washington favors an immediate regime change and the EU a gradual regime transformation (Gratius, 2005). These differences fostered a tense relationship on the Cuba issue that becomes obvious once a year, when the EU and its member states condemn at the UN General Assembly the US embargo against Cuba.

After a short “honeymoon” of transatlantic convergence towards constructive engagement with the island under Obama, Donald Trump restored the status quo ante of a restrictive policy as a concession to the hardliner faction in Miami’s exile community. By limiting bilateral exchange, he replaced harmonic trilateral relations in favor of
constructive engagement under Obama again into a hostile Cuban-US relationship and a close alliance between the EU and Cuba (marriage) against the “pariah” USA (see Womack on the Asian triangle, 2010).

**Triangle 2: Cuba and the Transatlantic axis**

![Diagram](image)

**Inter-regional Triangle: EU, LAC and Cuba**

Cuba’s position in the Americas and relations with the EU has been conditioned by the Revolution, the conflict with the United States, and a shifting relationship with Spain. Regionalism based on family ties between Cuba and LAC determined the type of inter-regionalism, which is hybrid because of the dominance of bilateral patterns after the signature of the PDCA. But as a member of CELAC and the Cariforum, Cuba also benefits from “pure inter-regionalism” (Hänggi, 2000). Compared to its full inclusion into the Latin American and Caribbean “family”, the EU’s status is rather that of a distant relative whose relations with Cuba are stable but not particularly close, because of several conflicts (1995, 2000 and 2003) in the past. EU-Cuban relations remained tense until 2014, when the Council approved the mandate to negotiate the PDCA, and transformed into closer “family ties”.

**Triangle 3: Cuba-LAC**

![Diagram](image)

**Regional Triangle: The Caribbean, Latin America and Cuba**
The end of the Cold War changed Cuba’s exceptional international status between the “second and third world” and its isolated position in its neighborhood as a result of US sanction and diplomatic pressure (Alzugaray, 2014 and 2015). After the breakdown of relations with the Soviet Union, regional insertion became a primary goal of Cuban foreign policy. The 1990s evidenced a gradual process of regional recognition of the Castro regime by re-establishing diplomatic relations with all Caribbean and, later on, Latin American countries including the former hostile neighbors Costa Rica and El Salvador that held diplomatic relations with Havana since 2009.

Cuba’s inclusion, first in the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and, in 2011, in CELAC, proved its successful policy of regional recognition. Today, Cuba is fully accepted in Latin America and the Caribbean and none of its neighbors has ever questioned its participation in ALADI, ACS or CELAC for political reasons or invoking the democracy clause. Cuba’s dominant position in the Caribbean as the largest island and its key role in ALBA (the Cuban-Venezuelan dominated ideological alliance between Latin American and Caribbean countries) generated a strong partnership relation with the Caribbean, a strategic alliance with Venezuela and close family ties with Latin America.

Cuba’s regional reinsertion: from the Caribbean to the Hemisphere

Cuba has always been and felt as an exception in its immediate neighborhood: the Caribbean. Different from most of its neighbors, Cuba is a Spanish-speaking country culturally linked to Latin America, the last nation that declared its independence from Spain, and the only one that carried out its own national Revolution that ended up in nearly sixty years of Castrism and a still hostile relationship with the United States due to the embargo and extraterritorial sanctions (the Torricelli and Helms-Burton laws, approved in the 1990s). These differences, and particularly, the regime type, justified Cuba’s late regional and still not concluded insertion into continental regionalism.

During the Cold War, the only two states in the Americas that maintained uninterrupted diplomatic relations with post-revolutionary Cuba were Canada and Mexico. Until
today, Canada is Cuba’s closest economic and political partner on the continent, while relations with Mexico deteriorated and became more distant after the signature of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Both, Canada and Mexico, used Cuba as a label for an independent and autonomous foreign policy in midst of a strong dependency from the United States in a sense of realist balancing but also as an act of “solidarity” with the threatened Cuban Revolution (Erisman, Kirk, 2018).

Cuba’s gradual regional reintegration began in the Caribbean. The country’s post-revolutionary relations with the Caribbean started in midst of the Cold War, in 1972, when Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad Tobago decided to re-establish diplomatic relations with the socialist country, against the regional trend of excluding Cuba. That was the starting point for closer relations with some of its non-Spanish speaking neighbors and the transfer of human resources and the benefits of Cuban education and health skills to the sub-region (particularly through “Misión Milagro” and the Medicine School in Havana).

Later on, Cuba became an original full member of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), created in 1994 in Cartagena de Indias, whose goals are “consultation, cooperation and concerted action” between its 32 member states but not economic integration. Since 2002, the Caribbean Community CARICOM and Cuba hold regular Summits, whose sixth edition will take place in December 2017 in Trinidad and Tobago, 45 years after both countries established bilateral diplomatic relations. From the perspective of Havana, apart from projecting economic interests, its increasing insertion into the Caribbean (Álfarez Figueroa, 2015) guarantees diplomatic support in regional and international forums against US sanctions and solidarity with Cuba’s third world positions and anti-hegemonic demands.

After a long period of relative regional isolation, the Post-Cold War offered new spaces for autonomy and opened the opportunity to reintegrate Cuba into the Latin American and Caribbean community. Today, the Castro regime is fully recognized and participates in eight of ten regional bodies (see table 1) and holds links with the other two (CARICOM and OAS). Because of its geographic position, dual cultural identity and special alliance with Venezuela, Cuba serves as a bridge between the Caribbean and Latin America. Since 2009, when the organization lifted the special clause introduced against Cuba in the 1960s, the island can even apply for OAS membership, although, the democracy clause and historic conflict with the United States hindered its full integration into the continental organization.

Table 1: Cuba and the Americas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional body</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Cuba’s status</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALADI (1980)</td>
<td>19 Latin American countries</td>
<td>Technical harmonization of trade regimes</td>
<td>Full member since 1998</td>
<td>Free trade regimes and market economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEPAL (1984)</td>
<td>33 Latin American countries</td>
<td>UN regional body, Original full</td>
<td>Economic system,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Economic and Social Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELA (1975)</td>
<td>19 Latin American countries</td>
<td>Declining economic body</td>
<td>Founding member</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CELAC (2011)</td>
<td>33 (Caribbean, LA)</td>
<td>Political Dialogue, Summits</td>
<td>Original full member</td>
<td>(democracy clause)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALBA (2004)</td>
<td>11 (Caribbean and LA countries)</td>
<td>South-South cooperation</td>
<td>Original full member</td>
<td>None (financial sustainability)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACS (1994)</td>
<td>Caribbean countries + Venezuela</td>
<td>Intra-Caribbean cooperation</td>
<td>Original full member</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petrocaribe (2005)</td>
<td>Caribbean, Central America, Venezuela</td>
<td>Energy/oil supplies</td>
<td>Fully integrated</td>
<td>None (financial constraints Venezuela)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caricom (1957)</td>
<td>14 Caribbean countries</td>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>No membership, Summits</td>
<td>Market economy condition, free trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cariforum (1970)</td>
<td>15 countries</td>
<td>Caribbean countries of ACP group-EU</td>
<td>Full member, not part of the Cotonou Agreement</td>
<td>Bilateral PDCA Cuba-EU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: own elaboration.

Cuba’s regional policy started parallel to the end of its integration into the Socialist bloc COMECON and the controversial and asymmetric relationship with the Soviet Union. The process of gradual recognition by all Caribbean and Latin American states took nearly ten years, but was a very successful process. Today, all countries of the region recognize the Castro regime, criticism is nearly absent and, until 2016, LAC constructive engagement was opposed to the EU stance of conditional engagement by the Common Position and the US diplomatic isolation and sanctions policy. In this sense, Cuba was used by the region, and later on particularly by its ALBA allies, to balance US power and to “soften” its hegemonic position (Toro, 2011).

Despite the democracy clause, there was no political debate on human rights, when Cuba was fully integrated into the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). By including the island in the organization, at a moment that coincided with leftist governments in most South American countries, CELAC send a clear message of autonomy and independence to the United States and the OAS. In the same line, its second Summit took place in 2014 in Havana, under the Cuban pro-tempore Presidency of CELAC. In this case, inter-regionalism followed regionalism (Gardini, Malamud, 2014). Cuba’s regional recognition and later membership in CELAC and, twenty years before, in the Spanish-led Iberoamerican Community of Nations, motivated the EU to include Cuba from the very beginning in 1999 into the inter-regional Summits.

The US changed its position under the Obama Presidency, when they agreed, in 2009, to lift the OAS restrictions on Cuba. The elimination of the restrictions to reintegrate Cuba into the OAS at the Summit of the Americas, not by coincidence at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago (one of the first countries that recognized Cuba) was the starting point of a closer relationship and the re-establishment of Cuban-US diplomatic relations a few years later. The Cuban-US rapprochement was the result of Latin American and particularly Venezuelan and Brazilian pressure at that time to bring
Cuba back into the Inter-American System. Albeit for ideological reasons Cuba doesn’t participate in the OAS, there are discussions on the island’s reintegration into other inter-American organizations like the IDB (to facilitate soft loans for infrastructure and the modernization of the Cuban economy).

Cuba-EU relations between bilateralism, pure and hybrid inter-regionalism

For three reasons, Cuba is an exceptional case in EU-LAC cooperation. First, it was the last country that signed, in 2016, a third generation cooperation agreement with the EU and one of the few that “did it alone”. Second, for twenty years (1996-2016), the EU applied a Common Position towards Cuba, an instrument that has never been used neither before nor after against any other Latin American or Caribbean country. Third, the island’s ambivalent position in between the EU’s Caribbean and Latin American policies that follows separated channels and its dual identity made it electable for both, the European Development Fund (EDF) for the ACP group and the inclusion in relations with non-associated Latin American countries.

Cuba’s singular status in EU policy was the result of its limited regional insertion until very recently, but also of a clear bilateral preference of the Cuban governments reluctant to be identified as just another Caribbean country, but as a special case in the Americas because of socialism and a global foreign policy (Alzugaray, 2015). Cuban regional and hemispheric “exceptionalism” paved the way towards a bilateral deal, and constituted the main obstacle to its inclusion into an asymmetric, cooperation based and EU driven inter-regionalism (Gardini, Malamud, 2014).

From 2011 on, Cuba’s full membership in ACS, ALBA, Cariforum² and CELAC offered a platform for including the island in bloc-to-bloc relations with the EU. Nonetheless, the socialist-authoritarian character of the regime posed clear limits to inter-regional formula. For example, Cuba’s still socialist economy doesn’t permit its participation in regional integration processes like CARICOM nor in free trade or other types of collective negotiations that require a minimum of bloc cohesion and similar political and economic systems.

Aware of Cuba’s regime particularities and distant regional relations, at a very early stage, the EU adapted to those conditions, when it decided, in 1994, to approve a negotiation mandate for a bilateral, individual cooperation agreement with Cuba, openly challenging hostile US policy. Similar to Latin America, also the EU and its member states used Cuba to demonstrate autonomy and independence from the US, and to improve its image in the region as an alternative and soft democracy promoter to Washington.

Nonetheless, different to Canada and LAC, in realist terms, band-wagoning the US as the EU’s closest global partner also played a decisive role in the decision to apply a policy of “conditioned” instead of “constructive” engagement. These considerations

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² The CARIFORUM represents the Caribbean countries of the Cotonou Agreement with the EU. The whole ACP group is composed of 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific States including Cuba.
behind the doors and a strong normative approach on human rights of EU negotiations with Cuba and the “plane crisis” in 1996 led to the failure of the first attempt to sign an agreement between Brussels and Havana, in midst 1990s and, later on, to the Common Position.

The approval – as a response to the US Helms-Burton law and the imprisonment of human rights activists in Cuba – of the Common Position, in December 1996, introduced major tensions in bilateral relations that lasted until its replacement by the PDCA, exactly twenty years later. These two decades in between the Common Position – launched by the former Spanish Government of José María Aznar – and the PDCA were characterized by a constant shift between rapprochement and distance in regular controversial debates on Cuba in the Council (Gratius, 2017). These negative dynamics changed, when Fidel retired and his brother Raúl Castro was officially appointed President, in 2008:

**Failure of pure inter-regionalism.** Hybrid inter-regionalism replaced failed “pure inter-regionalism” in the ACP-EU framework. Although Cuba’s inclusion in 1998 in Cariforum - the EU counterpart in the ACP group - permitted its participation in negotiations on the Cotonou agreement. Nonetheless it was signed in 2000 in without Cuba and against the European preference for pure-inter-regionalism that didn’t coincide with the bilateral preference of Fidel Castro. Negotiations failed, apparently because of different positions on human rights, but also as a result of a negative costs and benefit analysis of Fidel who was quoted to said “it’s not worse such a big effort for such a low gain” (Gratius, 2000). In 2000, after rejecting the island’s inclusion in the Cotonou Agreement, Fidel Castro began to replace difficult political relations with the EU by a strategic alliance with its ideological counterpart Hugo Chávez who offered a much more beneficial economic exchange between Cuban expertise and Venezuelan oil than the rather modest cooperation funds of the EDF. A few years later, the economic and political alliance Cuba-Venezuela generated ALBA. The bloc served to improve Cuba’s economic situation and regional political status until its steady decline, when Chávez’s successor Nicolás Maduro lost control over the economy (the inflation rate and recession reached global records in 2016) and the political conflict with the opposition that caused more than 80 deaths in the half of 2017.

**Reconstruction of bilateralism.** Cuba’s relations with the EU remained at a low level between 2003 and 2008, when Brussels answered to a new wave of repression with the approval of diplomatic, political and cultural restrictions and Fidel Castro ordered to freeze development cooperation with EU member states and the European Commission. When Fidel was officially replaced by Raúl Castro, in 2008, relations were re-established: under the Government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Spain was the first country to restore development cooperation and the political dialogue, and others followed the same path. Today, Germany remains one of the few European countries that haven’t yet re-established its aid programs with Cuba. At a Spanish initiative, the EU lifted the restrictive measures imposed on 2003 and started to engage in political dialogue. The EU recognized Cuba’s reform process under Raúl Castro (2006-2018) -
including more individual freedoms, steps towards a market economy and the liberation of political prisoners - that paved the way towards the approval of the PDCA negotiation mandate in 2014. Bilateral conversations started with the first High Representative Catherine Ashton and concluded under the mandate of her successor Federica Mogherini.

The PDCA doesn’t introduce neither spectacular increases of development cooperation – the EU’s budget was approved before and assigned modest 50 million Euros to Cuba in 2014-2020 – nor trade preferences, given that Cuban products have to compete in the European market with those of Latin American countries that signed free trade agreements. Its real weight is the political symbolism of Cuba’s full insertion into EU external relations and, vice-versa, the normalization of Cuba’s foreign policy towards Europe. It is not a coincidence that the signature of the agreement coincided with a distention in US-Cuba relations. The PDCA includes a human rights dialogue as part of a political dialogue on global affairs like arms control, drugs trafficking, racism, migration or sustainable development (Council of the EU, 2016). Different to Brazil and Mexico’s status as strategic partners, EU-Cuban dialogue is at the senior officials level and doesn’t foresee regular summits.

Even though, Cuba has a similar status than the two strategic allies Brazil and Mexico or Chile in EU-LAC relations. However, different to the other three countries, relations are highly asymmetric and dominated by North-South cooperation and the transfer of European know-how and technology to Cuba. In fact, “b) accompany the process of updating the economy and society in Cuba” is an important goal of the agreement, as well as “f) enhance regional cooperation in the Caribbean and Latin American regions with the aim of developing, where possible, regional responses to regional and global challenges”.

In this particular case, title VII of the PDCA focuses on regional integration reflecting, once again, the EU’s preference for “pure inter-regionalism” by saying that “cooperation shall support activities linked to the development of regional cooperation between Cuba and its Caribbean neighbors, in the context of CARIFORUM, in particular in the priority areas identified in the Joint Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy” (Council of the European Union, 2016).

The same old formula of asymmetric inter-regionalism has been applied in former, so called third generation cooperation agreements between the EU and LAC countries, and failed in the cases of Brazil, Mexico and Chile already recognized as individual partners. The signature of Brussel-Havana’s first ever agreement and the final recognition of the Cuban regime on behalf of the EU confirm the trend towards bilateralism. Without having acknowledged the same status, Cuba is now in the same package as the EU’s “strategic partner” Brazil and Mexico. Although the contents of the PDCA aren’t beyond the former third generation agreements between the EU and Latin America, the deal singled Cuba out as a special partner of the EU, and that happened in
midst of a debate on declining pure or hybrid inter-regionalism and the judgment that “there is little more to expect from inter-regionalism” (Gardini, Malamud, 2014).

**Conclusion and prospects**

The late inclusion of Cuba in EU-LAC relations evidences the importance of democratic values in (normative) inter-regionalism and the strong influence of the United States in an asymmetric triangle that weighs more than EU-LAC “family ties”. Both, the absence of a democratic government in the Caribbean island and the US embargo explain the former EU Common Position on Cuba and the singling out of the country as a special bilateral partner of Brussels. The case clearly fits into the category of “hybrid regionalism” as a reaction to Cuba’s peculiar position in regionalism, EU’s normative policy of democracy promotion and US pressure in highly asymmetric triangles.

Cuba’s steady and gradual process of regional and interregional reinsertion since the 1990s demonstrates the limited impact of the traditional discourse of political values and democratic conditionality in Atlantic relations. Shifting triangle dynamics between Cuba and the Atlantic confirm a trend towards regime recognition and insertion against a still hostile relationship between Cuba and the United States.

From a political realist standpoint, Latin America, the Caribbean and the EU counterbalanced or soft balanced and compensated the United States sanctions and isolation strategy. In this sense, both Latin America and the EU (together with Canada) use Cuba to formulate an autonomous, independent foreign policy and democracy promotion strategy by cooperation and dialogue as an alternative to US punishment.

Latin America’s and the EU’s policy between bandwagoning and soft balancing US policy towards Cuba delayed its inclusion in regionalism that is still under way: for economic and cultural reasons, it is not a member of CARICOM and not part of the network of free trade agreements. Something similar happens with Cuba’s inclusion in inter-regionalism: until the ratification of the PDCA, Cuba will not have full access to all regional and bilateral programs of cooperation.

The political post-Castro scenario in 2018, when Raúl Castro – as announced – is expected to hand over Presidential power to Vice-President Miguel Díaz-Canel might accelerate its full participation in regionalism and inter-regionalism. It is obvious that a regime change in the Caribbean island would nearly immediately generate an upgrading of its regional and inter-regional position, but it would probably also mean to lose Cuba’s traditional exceptionalism as a socialist rebel state.

This process would also be limited and conditioned by US-Cuban relations that suffered a new setback under President Donald Trump after two short periods of rapprochement: first, under Jimmy Carter’s first two years (1977-1978), when both countries opened “interest sections” – de facto Embassies –, and, second during Barack Obama’s second mandate (2014-2016) when both countries opened diplomatic channels.

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3 In EU-LAC, Transatlantic, and Inter-American relations and within CELAC (and its democracy clause).
“Uncompleted hybrid regionalism” reflects Cuban exceptionalism in the region and as a latecomer in EU-LAC relation that has been a by-product of the island’s gradual regional reinsertion and political recognition. The historic US-Cuban conflict, socialist authoritarianism and state capitalism have been major obstacles for the islands full participation in regionalism and inter-regionalism that is now under way and contrasts with new tensions between the US, Cuba and Latin America. In this hemispheric context, the Caribbean, Latin America and the EU appear united, when it comes to defend cooperation and dialogue as a more efficient formula than political pressure and sanctions as instruments of democratic change.

But Cuba still creates tensions. Not all LAC countries share the idea to spread liberal democracy that has become seriously under pressure in several countries and particularly in the ALBA group. Recent OAS debates on Venezuela revealed a clear dissent and albeit Cuba is not part of the hemispheric organization, its protagonism in ALBA and CELAC contributed to rest credibility and strength to democracy promotion. In a sense, Latin America and the EU, formerly defenders of the democracy clause, renounced to apply a democratic conditionality that, at least in the Cuban case, has not worked. The best evidence gives Cuba’s inclusion in regionalism and inter-regionalism.

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