

# EU-Cuba High-level discussion on human rights in Brussels

On 22 May, the EU and Cuba held their third high-level discussion on human rights in Brussels.

The EU delegation was headed by EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis and included the Managing Director for the Americas of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Edita Hrdá, as well as other representatives of the EEAS, the European Commission and the EU Delegation to Cuba. Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez, Director General for Multilateral Issues and International Law of the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Affairs led the Cuban side, and was accompanied by Cuban Ambassador / Head of the Mission to the EU Norma Goicochea Estenoz, as well as other officials of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Both sides had an extensive discussion on constitutional, legal and administrative aspects of citizens' participation in public affairs, notably with regard to the recent and forthcoming elections in the EU and in Cuba, where municipal elections will take place in 2017 and a new President will be elected in 2018. The EU underlined the importance of complying with international human rights electoral standards, including free access to media and to information, freedoms of expression, association and assembly so that voices from different parts of the political spectrum can be heard and participate.

In the area of economic and social rights, the EU and Cuba addressed the coverage of social protection systems and the promotion of social dialogue. The respect for core labour standards, the fight against discrimination and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups were also raised.

The two sides moreover discussed the protection of human rights of migrants and refugees in the context of migration flows implicating Cuba and the EU, and the promotion and protection of the right to health, in particular for persons in vulnerable situations. Both sides agreed to explore the possibility of setting up a sectoral dialogue on social issues, as well as trilateral cooperation on global health in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In follow-up to the last high-level discussion on human rights, they also addressed the situation of freedom of association and expression, including ways of engagement with peaceful civil society activists in Cuba and the EU, as well as on possibilities of all civil society to freely participate in public life. Finally, the two sides explored opportunities for closer EU-Cuba cooperation in multilateral human rights fora.

The talks reconfirmed the wish of both sides to deepen their dialogue and understanding in the area of human rights, with a view to developing cooperation to attain the objectives of the EU-Cuba partnership. The EU and Cuba affirmed their commitment for even closer engagement under the EU-Cuba

## Agreement on Political Dialogue and Cooperation.

### **Background**

High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini and the Foreign Minister of Cuba Bruno Rodriguez agreed in April 2015 to start EU-Cuba human rights consultations, anticipating on the negotiations of a bilateral Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement. The Agreement, which was signed in December 2016, will open a new chapter in EU-Cuban relations and contains detailed provisions on the promotion of human rights, an essential element of the bilateral partnership. It notably foresees the establishment of a structured Human Rights Dialogue that will allow both sides to share experiences and best practices, build capacities, and provide training or technical cooperation to address specific issues. The application of the PDCA should thus provide significantly enhanced opportunities for further discussions and dialogue in this and all other areas covered by the Agreement.

The Agreement is currently being reviewed by the European Parliament and should soon be applied provisionally, pending its ratification by Cuba and the EU and its Member States.