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A Challenging Dialogue Process: The Cuban-United States Academic Workshops (TACE)

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Presentación

Documentos CRIES es una publicación de la Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales que periódicamente presenta artículos de investigadores de la región ligados a los programas y proyectos que desarrolla la Red.

Este conjunto de materiales constituyen un aporte invaluable tanto para el trabajo de las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en

distintos campos como para la discusión académica de los avances de los estudios sobre problemáticas de la región.

Confiamos que el conjunto de estos aportes contribuyan a ampliar el campo de discusión y de incidencia tanto de redes y organizaciones de la sociedad civil como de académicos y funcionarios de América Latina y el Caribe en el análisis de temáticas que afectan a la región.

Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales

La Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES) fue establecida en Managua en 1982. CRIES es una red de centros de investigación, think tanks, ONGs, fundaciones y asociaciones profesionales de América Latina y del Caribe cuyo objetivo principal es promover la participación de la sociedad civil y la investigación económica y social vinculada a esta participación.

El mandato principal de CRIES es profundizar la participación de la sociedad civil en los procesos de integración regional y en el debate público sobre temas regionales y subregionales, e incrementar el involucramiento de las redes y organizaciones de la sociedad civil en la formulación e implementación de políticas públicas.

Actualmente más de 100 organizaciones nacionales y regionales involucradas en proyectos de investigación y en programas de incidencia regional y sub-regional son miembros de CRIES, promoviendo la creación de un modelo inclusivo, participativo y sustentable de integración regional en América Latina y el Caribe.

CRIES publica regularmente la revista académica tri-lingüe *Pensamiento Propio*, un *Anuario de Integración Regional*, y una serie de documentos, conjuntamente con una colección de volúmenes colectivos sobre diferentes temas regionales.

Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research

The Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES) was established in Managua in 1982. CRIES is a network of research centers, think tanks, NGOs, foundations and professional associations from Latin America and the Caribbean which main goal is to promote civil society participation and related social and economic research.

CRIES main mandate is to deepen civil society participation in regional integration processes and in the public debate on regional and subregional issues, and to increase the involvement of civil society networks and organizations in the formulation and implementation of public policies.

Currently CRIES membership include more than a 100 national and regional organizations involved in regional and sub-regional research projects and advocacy programs fostering the creation of a participative, inclusive and sustainable model of regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Additionally to a set of collective volumes on regional issues, CRIES publishes regularly *Pensamiento Propio*, a tri-lingual academic journal; a *Regional Integration Yearbook*, and a series of CRIES documents and policy briefs.



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Taking advantage of opportunities

During more than fifty years, after the overthrow of the Batista regime and the victory of the revolutionary forces led by Fidel Castro in 1959, the United States and Cuba have been engaged in a tense and conflictive interaction, with crisis and peaks of tension at different moments of their relationship.

Since 1961, the United States (US), have adopted an official policy of diplomatic isolation and economic embargo/blockade towards Cuba, including the support to a failed attempt by a paramilitary Cuban group to invade the island during the same year. Also in 1961, President Kennedy severed relations with its neighbor through a series of Acts and enforcement measures, in response to Cuba's alignment with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) perceived as the main threat to the Western world and to US interests. That alliance brought communism and Soviet presence to the United States 'backyard' —90 miles from its coast— defying the superpower's 'containment' doctrine in the Americas and threatening US security during the most difficult years of the Cold War. As illustrated by the October 1962 "Missile Crisis", this alliance and the sequels of this confrontation were on the verge of dragging the world to a nuclear Third World War, fortunately avoided after direct negotiations between the US and the USSR.

Since the imposition of the economic embargo/blockade by the United States in the 1960s, several situations tended to reinforce the tensions between the two countries: under the pressure of the US, the members of the Organization of American States (OAS) expelled Cuba in 1962; the US included its neighbor in the list of States Sponsors of Terrorism in the 80s, and passed the Baker Memorandum and the Helms-Burton and Torricelli laws that reinforced its policies towards Cuba, aiming at a change of regime in the island. Meanwhile, Cuban immigrants and political exiles constituted a powerful political Cuban-American lobby group in the United States, which has influenced the position of various successive Administrations, increasing existing restrictions as time went by. Therefore, as aptly put by a Latin American analyst, the bilateral conflict gradually became, within this context, an intermestic issue for the United States¹.

In spite of the events mentioned, throughout those years, the two countries have also negotiated and signed agreements. Since September 1977, they have

established offices of interests in each other's capitals, and occasionally have adopted a pragmatic approach to solve specific problems and to cooperate on specific issues. Yet, these ventures did not provide the basis for an ongoing dialogue that could lead to normal relations or to the cancellation of the embargo/blockade, because they have not been able to engender neither trust nor mutual respect. Therefore, rapprochement times, which are generally associated with Democrats in office, repeatedly have been derailed by new obstacles from both sides that lead to peaks of tension.

In 2009, after Fidel Castro was replaced by his brother, Raúl Castro, as President of Cuba and, Barack Obama was elected President of the United States a window of opportunity opened for the improvement of US-Cuba bilateral relations². During the Port of Spain Americas Summit in 2009, President Obama publicly committed himself to look for a “fresh start” in the relations between the two countries, while President Raúl Castro reiterated its disposition to normalize Cuba's relations with the United States and to start a dialogue with the new administration to improve the bilateral relations.

Notably, when both President Raul Castro and Barack Obama came to power, they emphasized that respectful engagement must form the basis of peaceful international relations. Despite the initial enthusiasm, other internal and external priorities in the US, have slowed down the pace of the changes expected. However, Obama's second term in the Oval Office opens for new opportunities to make an improvement in the bilateral interaction happen.

There is a growing understanding and recognition within the US of the inconvenience –and perhaps the failure- of the measures taken towards Cuba during 50 years, as well as its humanitarian implications. Attempts to foster a change in the current regime have not been successful. Cubans have been reluctant to any foreign intervention in their internal affairs, and have started a process of economic change on their own under the umbrella of the current “*proceso de actualización económica*”³. Additionally, Cuba has managed to break international isolation through a proactive foreign policy and the reincorporation to the Latin American and Caribbean community⁴. American business groups are beginning to feel missed trade opportunities. Agricultural and entrepreneurial lobbies are pressuring for an easing of the embargo/blockade as they are beaten out by European Union, Latin American and Canadian companies.

At the same time, the emergence of different interests amongst younger generations of Cuban-Americans is potentially channelling new perspectives on the relationship between the two countries, which could, in turn, contribute to slowly erode the current lobby power of the Cuban-Americans and their influence on US foreign policy towards Cuba, which still reflects Cold War thinking.

With the end of the East-West confrontation, and the changes undergone by the international system, it is difficult to understand the reasons for the survival of the embargo/blockade and of the lack of normal diplomatic relations amongst the two countries.

Regarding the multilateral dynamics in the Americas, the changing leadership in both the US and Cuba has positively impacted in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Inter-American system has not been able to overcome the bilateral conflict. Notwithstanding this, a shift in attitude within the OAS is evident. Latin American pressure on the US rescinded Cuba's expulsion from the OAS in June 2009, although the country has not yet returned to the organization as a member. However, since the early 90s, Cuba has been attending most of the regional Summits and recently has become a full member of the Latin American and Caribbean Community of Nations (CELAC, according to its Spanish acronym), chairing the organization from 2013 to 2014.

Within that context, the Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research (CRIES) —a Latin American and Caribbean think tank and network of NGOs and research centres, and founding member of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) —following conversations with international experts on dialogue facilitation, and both Cuban and US academics, decided to launch in 2009 an academic bilateral dialogue. CRIES was in a good position as regional convener, given the fact that since its establishment in 1982, it had enjoyed good relations and had developed collaborative projects with Latin American and US universities, NGOs and think tanks, including Cuban research centres and civil society organisations.

Lessons learned and best practices can be drawn from the developments along the last four years, and shared with other organizations and dialogue practitioners within the framework of GPPAC, that intend to convene similar processes, and that, as well as CRIES, are willing to learn from the exchange of experiences, in order to improve its practice in the field of democratic dialogue⁵ and citizens' diplomacy⁶.

A brief history of the TACE initiative

In 2008, after a training workshop in São Paulo, Brazil, a few experts came together and suggested to initiate a dialogue process between the two countries, with CRIES as its convener, facilitator and coordinator. One year later, the undertaking became a reality, with the participation as co-coordinators of both American University (United States) and Havana University (Cuba) of a Citizens' Diplomacy process under the umbrella of the Cuba-United States Academic Workshops (TACE, for its acronym in Spanish).

TACE finally came to life in mid-June, 2009, after a one-year preparatory phase, with an academic conference on hemispheric affairs and a first workshop held at the *Universidade Estadual de São Paulo* (UNESP) in São Paulo, Brazil.

CRIES, in its role as convener, has had the permanent responsibility to enable safe and politically neutral spaces for interaction between the two parties, to ensure that decisions were reached by consensus, and that Chatham House rules applied to the discussions and exchanges during the whole process. These commitment on behalf of the convener and facilitating organization, set the basis for participants' to explore common ground, to identify shared interests and develop new and innovative approaches to improve the relationship between both governments, without the fear of being pointed out in reports or by group members for what was said inside the room or in informal conversations.

At the same time, CRIES has served as an effective platform for channelling the advocacy and outreach efforts, bringing recommendations and proposing viable options to the relevant policy arenas, especially at international and regional levels. Nonetheless its role as overall coordinator, CRIES has worked throughout the whole initiative with two national coordinators from both sides of the conflict divide, in order to jointly set the agenda of both the process and of each event, to develop criteria to select participants, to decide on the invitation of experts whenever input was needed on a specific topic, and to conduct monitoring tasks. This has resulted in a positive responsibility-sharing experience, which has also stimulated ownership in participants.

In regards to the process itself, while the first phase of the dialogue was developed through meetings outside Cuba and the United States, once consensus was reached

around several sets of recommendations, in January 2012, meetings were held both in La Habana and in Washington D.C., in order to make a first preliminary presentation of the results of the dialogue to officials and different audiences in both countries. These developments were accompanied by a low visibility strategy during the activities at the beginning, and a gradual increase in public outreach when trust was built amongst the group, and the first joint deliverables were produced.

Four years after the first workshop in São Paulo, the participants from both countries —a group that include well known academics and experts in foreign policy, most of them with past diplomatic or government experience- were able to overcome mutual stereotypes and build trust, in the path towards finding avenues for cooperation that could help improve, or, in the best case scenario, “normalize” the relations between the United States and Cuba.

As a result of the collective effort, and with the help of a facilitation team, a compendium of recommendations to both governments on five priority areas of the bilateral agenda (Academic, Scientific and Cultural Engagement; Freedom to Travel; International Commerce and Development; Terrorism and Security Issues; and Environment)⁷ has been published and presented publicly and at official levels in the period between January 2012 and June 2013. This policy document, which is the result of the consensus built along the initiative, aims at being a useful tool for advocacy and lobbying purposes in the coming years. It is expected to contribute to finally fostering peaceful, respectful and constructive interactions between the two neighbours.

The final stage of the bilateral academic dialogue closed in June 2013 with a formal presentation of the document containing recommendations for cooperation in areas of mutual interest, in Washington D.C. to the Cuban Office of Interests in the United States, the State Department and at a formal panel at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) congress.

New windows of opportunity have opened for the process, given the re-election of President Obama for another four-years period, and the fact that certain topics included in the TACE agenda have currently gained momentum. Simultaneously TACE participants are committed to advocate for the implementation of the recommendations suggested by the group.

Since April 2013 a new phase of the project was launched in Buenos Aires, Argentina, aimed at disseminating the results among Latin American and Caribbean decision-makers and academics, in order to move the bilateral issue to a multilateral arena. The reason behind this shift is two-fold: 1) as the TACE group developed ownership of the initiative and felt confident to organize activities and to lobby both governments for the implementation of the recommendations, it was time for CRIES, as the convener, to think of an exit strategy of the bilateral dialogue, that would, nonetheless, give continuity to its support to the process based on a re-definition of its role; and 2) the coordinators of the process agreed on the fact that a hemispheric approach to the Cuba-US issue could be crucial for improving the bilateral relations. Therefore, CRIES, as a regional player, undertook this challenge and in the coming years, will facilitate advocacy strategies to influence, through Latin American counterparts and governments, the US and Cuban foreign policy-making processes.

TACE Process as a Citizens' Diplomacy initiative

The Cuban-US Academic Workshop has been based on a widely tested version of what is generally known as "citizens' diplomacy"⁸. This kind of initiatives is perceived as one of a few opportunities for non-official communication between the parties from across the conflict divide. Through a series of workshops guided by professional facilitators, participants search for a common basis on which the two parties, as "partners in conflict"⁹, can engage with each other constructively, so that, over time, success builds on success to establish a positive relationship and to influence, eventually, the relationship of governments.

However, the first step of citizens' diplomacy is to identify the right political conditions for initiating those processes. In the case of TACE the window of opportunity clearly appeared when tensions between the two countries were on its low and the political conditions—with political changes on both sides—were ripe for starting the process. Previous stages of the bilateral relation would have made it very difficult—nearly to impossible—to initiate a citizens' diplomacy process because of the existing tensions and the weight of the so called "intermestic" character of the issue through the intervention of the Cuban-American community in US politics. For that reason, one of the established rules of TACE was not to

involve, since the beginning, members of the Cuban-American constituents and to keep the initiative as much inter-state (or inter-society) as possible.

It is worth noting that citizens' diplomacy efforts differ from "back channel" negotiations, which involve representatives of the respective governments. In contrast, participants in citizens' diplomacy workshops have no official responsibilities and are not able to speak on behalf of or make commitments for their governments. Usually, all of the participants are based in an academic setting such as a university or research center, have no government positions at the time but may have regular consultations with their governments without holding official positions, and usually have access to decision makers with whom they could discuss innovative and realistic suggestions. Participants engage in the discussion of issues they have selected and categorized in terms of the degree of difficulty they expect their governments would have in reaching an accommodation on a particular issue.

In the specific case of the TACE academic dialogue process, the initiative was designed to engender the development of solutions that fall "outside the box" of prior approaches. It was not the first time Cubans and North Americans tried to find ways to sustain a non-hostile interaction in the search for solutions to their bilateral issues. In fact, before starting the TACE process, there was a long record of failed attempts to establish a dialogue process—particularly on a governmental level, which made the new efforts seem much more difficult.

Still, there were some distinctive features of the Cuban-US Academic Workshop that provided reason to expect that this time the effort would bear fruit: (1) the Workshop was initiated and was organized by a "third party"—a Latin American non-governmental network and think tank (CRIES) which was well-respected in both countries; (2) it involved a group of Cubans and North Americans, most of whom had had government experience or who had worked closely with government officials in the past; (3) it would be facilitated by a team, with expertise in these kind of endeavors, with a clear purpose, flexibility to adapt, and a well-defined methodology; (4) it envisioned a sustained four-year period, which ensured sustainability; (5) it encouraged and enabled the participants to focus on solutions that by their nature contributed to a process of building confidence and trust among themselves and between the countries; and last, but very important in this specific case, (6) it was undertaken with the tacit approval of key officials in each government, who were kept informed about the progress of the process.

The focused goal of the Cuban-US Academic Workshops has been, since its outset, to develop trust and to collectively produce a series of recommendations on how to advance cooperation in areas of mutual interest that could be a useful tool to influence decision-makers in both countries on foreign policy issues especially related to the bilateral agenda.

The first stage of this citizens' diplomacy initiative began in 2008, with a preparatory process of political exploratory interviews in both countries and the coordination of goals and expected outcomes of the program with National Co-coordinators from American University and the University of Havana. They were key in the process of selecting and inviting the group members from both countries; in coordinating the overall process together with the CRIES team and in facilitating inter-group communication.

The participants of the workshops were selected according to a set of criteria —their capacities, area of expertise and knowledge; their political reach, and their representation among the academic and political community, and by a process of acceptance by each of the groups, as the list of potential participants from one side needed to be approved by the other side, as part of the trust building exercise. Therefore, there was consensus on the overall permanent members of the group. If experts in particular fields were required to be consulted and invited to a particular workshop to address a specific issue, the whole group was consulted.

The agenda was set from the beginning with the participation of the whole TACE group. A consolidated list of priority bilateral issues from each side was asked to be presented during the first plenary meeting in São Paulo in order to find the common ground to base the content discussions in further activities throughout the process. At the first meeting each side presented 10 issues but the discussion led to the identification of a final list of 23 issues which were categorized. From this list were chosen those that the group identified as issues that were not addressed already by the governments and that fell within the scope of the capacities and skills of the TACE group.

Since the Sao Paulo meeting in 2009, the workshops were held in "safe spaces" outside Cuba and the United States with the idea of preserving the dialogue from any external interference in a neutral setting, preferably with a historical and political symbolic meaning for the process. In this regard, it started in Brazil with a first day academic symposium on hemispheric issues hosted by UNESP, as

a way of showing an international concern and political will to improve the bilateral relationship, which also affected the multilateral regional dynamics. The keynote speaker at the symposium was Prof. Marco Aurelio García, at the time Special Advisor on International Affairs to Brazilian President Ignacio "Lula" da Silva, as Brazil's role as regional player was also considered crucial for the process. This activity served as an "ice breaker" for the following TACE workshops because the symposium provided a space for initial exchanges amongst the North American and Cuban participants, which were not necessarily directed at each other. It also enabled them to develop their ideas about topics of importance for both countries in a hemispheric context, and to begin non-confrontational discussions about their different perceptions.

After the symposium, the first closed TACE sessions were held. Seven participants from Cuba and five from the United States, along with a team of trained facilitators from Argentina, participated in the workshop. By the end of this first experience, participants expressed unanimous praise for the exercise, and urged that the project should be continued to work on changing the "legacy of distrust," and to maintain dialogue on key points to which the group could contribute collectively, in order to improve the bilateral relationship among the two neighboring countries. Thus they agreed to form working groups organized around the four broad thematic categories that encompassed the specific issues they had raised: (1) issues on which some agreement or ongoing collaboration between the two countries existed; (2) topics on which collaboration might seem possible in the near future; (3) economic topics; (4) issues mainly requiring unilateral action by one of the countries and/or were sensitive to one or both.

In May 2010, a coordination meeting with 4 Cuban and 3 American delegates took place in the City of Knowledge, in Panama. Representatives from Cuba and the United States presented draft documents on the topics selected during the TACE I (Environment and Bilateral Trade), and some decisions on the overall process were made.

Continuing with the initial practice carried out in Brazil in 2009 and the workshop held in Panama in May 2010, a new meeting took place in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, at the end of July, 2010, at the Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI); while a few months later the Toronto workshop developed before the opening session of the LASA Congress, from October 2nd to October 4th, 2010.

As for the implementation of the activities, those workshops were preceded by academic conferences, where topics related to multilateralism, prevention of violent and/or armed conflict and citizens' diplomacy in the Americas were addressed.

The workshop held in Buenos Aires in July had a threefold objective: (1) to work on recommendations based on the issues that were addressed in previous meetings (Bilateral Trade and Environmental Cooperation); (2) to incorporate new topics to the agenda of the process (Academic Exchange and Tourism as a sub-item under Bilateral Trade); and (3) to experience new group facilitation dynamics that may contribute to a shift of the general process resulting in a more prolific generation of proposals and consensus for the implementation of an Action Plan and joint advocacy strategies.

The following meeting in Toronto, Canada, in October 2010, was held just before the beginning of the Latin American Studies Association Congress (LASA). In this opportunity, the work was based on the agreements reached in Buenos Aires so that the extended TACE team could later resume work on the suggestions incorporated to the document with Preliminary Recommendations on the topics covered: Natural Disasters and Environmental Cooperation, Bilateral Trade, Tourism and Cultural Exchange. Moreover, the workshop touched upon two new topics, Cultural Exchange and Terrorism. The group examined these new topics in an attempt to come up with ideas aimed at solving differences and promoting cooperation in those fields. At the workshop, experts on specific issues were invited to contribute with their insights and participants proposed to agree on certain innovative ideas to start preparing an Action Plan for the next stage of the process.

As far as the process is concerned, the Canada meeting marked the outset of a consolidation stage for the group and the dialogue process. Throughout the meetings, the exercises, dynamics and exchange of opinions and views on the different topics helped participants get rid of their biases and prejudices, thus getting not only to come up with out-of-the-box ideas, but also to reach new consensus on the priorities. In effect, the participants unanimously agreed that this meeting represented a qualitative breakthrough.

A new plenary workshop took place in Mexico D.F., in July 2011, preceded as usual by a symposium on hemispheric affairs. Throughout the workshop, the participants made follow-up presentations on the latest political

and economic developments in both countries; and developed in depth discussions on the following specific issues: Terrorism, Cuba's relationship with International Financial Institutions, and Subversion. There were also sessions aimed at going through the recommendations that were worked upon in the Toronto meeting to polish their wording, and produce new ideas for collaboration in the issues addressed. The list of recommendations was also re-categorized and the suggestions were prioritized as well as divided in short and long-term implementation clusters. Finally, the work was oriented towards finding preliminary common ground for visibility and advocacy actions for the next meeting to take place in Havana, in January 2012.

The Mexico meeting prepared the ground towards the implementation of the first activity of the TACE initiative in Cuba, which was a turning point for the process.

A few months after the event in Mexico, *Pensamiento Propio* 34¹⁰ was published. It was a special issue of CRIES' academic journal on "Academic Dialogue and Citizens' Diplomacy in the Americas", which included joint papers written by TACE participants; research and analysis; as well as comments on different aspects of specific topics addressed during the process which were relevant to the bilateral agenda. This publication was an important sign of the collaboration developed by group members, who decided to work together on the preparation of articles and comments. This meant that there was a common understanding of the problem being addressed, and they were able to present different perspectives, reaching agreement on the final suggestions on possible policy formulation.

In January 2012, the *Fundación Antonio Núñez Jiménez del Hombre y la Naturaleza*, a Cuban environmental research center, served as host to the Havana workshop. This was the first time that the TACE process moved to one of the constituent countries. The agenda set in the period between the Mexico meeting and the one in Cuba, included not only working sessions for the group to finalize recommendations on the bilateral topics addressed so far, but also meetings with high authorities of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MINREX), the Ministry of Culture, the President of the National Assembly (ANPP), a dinner with a well-known Cuban writer who chaired the *Unión Nacional de Escritores y Autores de Cuba* (UNEAC, according to its Spanish acronym) and a member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, and a working session with a selected group of Cuban economists. Those meetings

represented a golden opportunity to introduce the whole TACE group to Cuban governmental representatives and to exchange questions and reflections related to internal and foreign affairs.

On May 21st, 2012, a presentation of the TACE process and the preliminary recommendations were held at the Brookings Institution (BI), in Washington D.C. Representatives from US research centers, congressional staffers, experts and advisers were invited to this first event organized in the United States, under the title “Overcoming Obstacles to US-Cuba dialogue”. The BI’s event was well attended—more than a hundred people from different backgrounds were present—and included presentations by Theodore Piccone (BI), Philip Brenner (AU), Sally Shelton-Colby (AU), Jorge Mario Sánchez Egozcue (CEEC/ University of Havana) and Andrés Serbin (CRIES Coordinator of the project). The outcome of this activity was highly positive, in terms of media coverage, TV interviews to the different TACE speakers, the level of participation and the interest that the process raised in the audience. Additionally, it had a significant impact in Cuba, including positive remarks on TACE by government officials and media (news releases, TV, Granma and radio).

The preliminary set of recommendations presented at BI was circulated and disseminated in both countries, and it received good feedback from different sectors.

Finally, during the week of the 28th to the 31st of May of 2013 in Washington D.C., the first part of the Cuba-United States Academic Workshops ended, with the public presentation of the document *Opportunities for US–Cuban Relations: Proposals for Cooperation in Areas of Mutual Interest*¹¹. The latter is the tangible result of a four-year effort. The final document went public during a week filled with activities around the publication, both for CRIES and the members of the TACE group present in Washington, which ranged from academic discussions to meetings with high level regional and US officials. As part of the former, Armando Fernández from the Fundación Nuñez Jiménez from Cuba and Andrés Serbin from CRIES chaired a panel at the LASA Conference with an attendance of over 130 people. During the panel the most relevant recommendations of the document were presented to the audience. Phil Brenner of American University and Jorge Mario Sánchez of the University of Havana, were the moderators of the panel, and comments on the document were made by Professor Jorge Domínguez from Harvard University. Ambassadors Anthony Quainton and Carlos Alzugaray,

former US Under-secretaries of State, Richard Feinberg and Ted Piccone, and Professor Meg Crahan were the main presenters at the panel. The presentations and the comments were followed by a fruitful debate amongst the audience and the panel members. The success of the panel and the presentation of the document were reflected in a series of interviews by Washington and Cuban media in the following days.

It is important to mention that amongst the issues highlighted during the interventions, was the fact that this was the first joint document of recommendations that has been elaborated by academia and diplomats from both countries in over fifty years, and that these recommendations were addressed at the governments of each of the two countries.

Finally, as part of the advocacy strategy, the President of CRIES, Dr. Andrés Serbin, was received by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Amb. José Miguel Insulza. It was a golden opportunity to deliver a copy of the document with the request for it to be considered within the OAS, which was appreciated by the inter-governmental representative. On the same day a reception took place in the Office of Interests of Cuba in Washington. During the reception a copy of the document was presented to Ambassador José R. Cabañas, Chief of the Section of Cuban Interests. Three days later, a TACE delegation was received by the United States Department of State. The official delegation included, among others, Amb. Lilian Ayalde, in charge of Caribbean and Cuban Affairs; the coordinator for Cuban Affairs, Ray McGratch, and Cuban Affairs Advisor, Dan Erickson. During this meeting the TACE delegation presented copies of the document and further explained the reach of the recommendations included in it.

Further TACE activities are expected in the future, focused on dissemination and debate among decision makers, academia and civil society representatives in the hemisphere through a series of events, presentations, and advocacy planning that will take place in different cities of the region, starting in 2013, and moving from a bilateral approach to the multilateral arena.

Lessons learned and final reflections

The outcomes of the TACE process, beyond the concrete products and certain changes it has contributed to

generate during the four years of the undertaking, are expected to contribute to a broader impact in the medium- and long-term period, due to its overall goals.

Notwithstanding this, there are certain lessons learned resulting from the process that might be useful to share so far.

In the first place, it is worth mentioning that, although the process was not linear, the initiative progressed in a sustained manner since its inception, and clear progress was made in different dimensions, at each of the meetings.

After the initial workshops where trust was built among the participants and issues to be addressed were clearly identified, as a set of policy suggestions was developed, special emphasis was placed on the planning of advocacy and outreach strategies. Additionally, participants undertook individual and group commitments to write articles and op-eds, to implement and/or to follow-up on some of the ideas developed, operationalizing the more general recommendations into viable policy proposals which, initiated by academics and civil society, would in time force the action and collaboration of both governments.

Secondly, as the program developed, there was an even more evident need to maintain both the General Coordinator and the National Coordinators, for it was up to them to foster work and oversee compliance with the commitments undertaken in the period between one workshop and the other. The good relationship and communication forged amongst the Coordinators, has positively impacted on the sustainability of the process and the positive working atmosphere during the activities. In addition to that, it favoured the agenda-setting process throughout the initiative, and allowed for consistency and clarity in the messages sent both to the group and to external actors.

In the third place, it became more evident that the core group took ownership of the project. The workshop in Havana, as well as the events at Brookings Institution and LASA were clear indicators of the ownership that the participants from both countries had taken over the project. They, as a consolidated group, identified the need to organise a series of events in their respective countries. They showed engagement with the process by making suggestions on new activities, thoughtful reflections on how to move the initiative forward, and introduce themselves as a cohesive TACE group during the Brookings Institution and LASA presentations and

side meetings with political and cultural representatives in Cuba and the US.

Accordingly, it was essential to guarantee the sustainability of the initiative, for any impasse may discourage participation or undermine interest in the process or its credibility. In this regard, the commitment of the donors —mainly the Ford Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, among others —was crucial.

In the fourth place, participants managed to build trust amongst themselves and to find a common ground on which to build concrete suggestions and policy options. This has led them to volunteer to write joint articles and op-eds on the topics of interest. Trust in the results of their work, led participants to agree on specific outreach rules to progressively make visible the outputs of the process.

In regards to the visibility component of the initiative, it went through incremental steps. At first, due to political sensitivity, the TACE group decided to maintain a low public profile, only sharing documents with those stakeholders that were directly engaged. Over time, they raised the profile by fostering collective undertakings - by publishing some documents in *Pensamiento Propio* and by presenting the TACE project, as well as a first draft of the recommendations at Brookings Institution, and the final recommendations in Washington D.C., in May 2013. All those actions, not only represented huge steps in the gradual public outreach and advocacy strategies previously agreed by the group, but were able to tackle other crucial obstacles, such as the initiative being used for political instrumentalization, or being taken over by external stakeholders' political agenda, which would have differed from the original goals of the process.

Fifth, the incorporation of experts to address topics requiring a more specific and thorough knowledge resulted in value added. Although the members of the project's core group were experts or scholars from different research fields, they invited resource persons on specific matters to build suggestions and proposals on a sounder knowledge base.

Currently, a mid-term evaluation, based on qualitative techniques, is being conducted. It is expected that it will serve as a learning tool for the group, in order to reflect on the most significant changes and achievements that have occurred so far, directly or indirectly inspired by this TACE initiative, and to make adjustments —if necessary— to the follow-up of the project and its objectives in the coming years. Furthermore, the evaluation is not

only a reflection exercise for the group, but it will also contribute with facts and important information for other stakeholders —mainly donors— on the outcomes of the programme. The outputs inherent to the process, could be used as well to document stories and lessons learned that the group could allow to be disseminated on the website, in newsletters or in a collective volume, as a way of sharing their experience with others, and potentially as an inspiration for similar undertakings.

It must be noted that both Cuban and North American representatives were aware of the historic significance of certain developments taking place in both countries, and thus saw this situation as an opportunity to contribute to foster change in the current status of Cuba-United States relations. The group unanimously acknowledged the need and the urgency to help materialize that transformation. It is for that reason that they view the TACE initiative as a one-of-a-kind opportunity to channel their expertise and knowledge and translate them into concrete ideas for action.

Finally, it should be noted that most of the current political events in terms of the bilateral relations between Cuba and the United States and the multilateral relations on the hemispheric level begin to assimilate some of the recommendations of the TACE project. This is not only a reflection of the eventual success of a citizens' diplomacy process in providing, through unofficial dialogue, some new insights to a situation of conflict and tension, but mostly the adequacy of the timing and the political opportunity chosen by the TACE participants in starting and developing the process in the expectation of contributing to influence a 50 year situation of conflict. Citizens' diplomacy cannot substitute official, government diplomacy, in solving confrontations, but can help to oil, in a favourable juncture, the acceleration of the actions of the heavy traditional bureaucracy towards an improvement of relations and the overcoming of tensions.

NOTES

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5. See, Practical Guide on Democratic Dialogue, published by the OAS and UNDP, with the collaboration of CRIES and IDEA, at http://www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org/documents/view.pl?s=13;ss=:t=:f_id=1854.
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8. Ibidem.
9. Kaufman, Edy (2008) "Talleres Innovadores para la Transformación de Conflictos" in Serbin, Andrés (coord.) *Construcción de paz y diplomacia ciudadana en América Latina y el Caribe*. Buenos Aires: Icaria Editorial / Ediciones CRIES.
10. Download or read online at <http://www.cries.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/34.pdf>
11. Op. cit.

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