

Shared history, Fear and Enthusiasm

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Dissident groups are the conscience of a nation. Such groups prove not only that the desire for freedom is still alive, but that it is surviving even in those countries where the right to freedom has not yet been fulfilled in the constitution. The role of opposition groups in times of oppression is difficult due to the fact that the future is simultaneously a source of hope and uncertainty and that freedom remains an abstract idea.

Cynical politicians in many countries of the world including those residing in long established democracies often see dissidents, who are in less fortunate states than themselves, as idealistic dreamers lacking real political experience. This point of view can be seen in particular in those countries where generations of politicians have forgotten that the overthrow of tyranny and the establishment of a democratic constitution is always a difficult path, full of traps and obstacles.

This cannot be rehearsed in a dry run. You can simulate a nuclear explosion on a computer but you can't simulate democracy. Democracy can only be only practiced with all the risks of mistakes and disappointment. A constitution is not a mathematical or physical model. Rather, it is the live interaction of many human beings, of free people able to make their own conscious decisions.

A functioning democracy is possible in countries that have gone through the hard and painful experience of a totalitarian regime. This is obvious in the successful establishment of democracy in many new countries all over the world over the past 15 years. The Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic can well remember the fall of the totalitarian system and the establishment of new institutions. By looking into the eyes of Cuban freedom fighters, I see a reflection of our recent past. I see the same questions, the same hope and enthusiasm, the same anxiety of the unpredictable.

Fifteen years ago, as a citizen of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic I was not permitted to travel abroad by the communist regime. Yet today I am the chairman of a democratically elected parliament. This shared experience is one of the many reasons why politicians and citizens in our country have such an intense interest in the situation on Cuba. Slovakia is a sincere and active friend of a free Cuba, both now and the day when it begins to build institutions of a free society.