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REPORT FROM THE ROUNDTABLE ON CUBA:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
END OF COMMUNISM IN EASTERN EUROPE

October 15, 1999

Ottawa

Dept. of Foreign
Affairs /
Min. des Affaires étrangères

FEB 23 2006

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On the 15th of October, 1999, Cuban and Eastern European experts met in Ottawa to reflect on the 10th year anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The focus of the discussion was the lessons of the decade-long transition from Communism to a market economy and Western-style democracy. The roundtable was organized by the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development.

**CUBA:
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
END OF COMMUNISM IN EASTERN EUROPE
ROUNDTABLE REPORT**

1. **Transition Theory**

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Can the experiences of Eastern Europe's transition from Communism to a market economy and Western-style democracy really be a potential post-communist future in Cuba? Are there grounds for optimism? Does a framework for analysing transitions exist? The main themes within such a framework could include issues related to transition to democracy and consolidation of democracy. How compatible are reforms aimed at building a market economy and those aimed at promoting the growth of a liberal democracy? Can these reforms be implemented simultaneously?

Three sets of variables to look for when analysing a transition were explored. The first set of variables includes factors such as the cohesion of the nation, state, political culture, and the role of the external environment (i.e. the role of international organisations). The second set focuses on a country's starting conditions including popular perceptions about what is beneficial, the nature of the previous regime and its institutions, location of the elites and social structure (stratification) generated by the previous system. The third set of variables is based on elite analysis. For instance, whether elite splits between existing and ascending leadership facilitate a peaceful transition. It also includes rational actor analysis.

While most participants agreed that there is ground for optimism regarding a potential post-communist Cuba in Eastern Europe, others were not so optimistic. The former group argued that, after all, Cuba adopted the Soviet political and economic system and was a member of Communist alliances. The latter group argued that the particularities of the Cuban experience make such comparisons inapplicable. These parties include the size of the country, the socialist revolution, the longevity of Castro's leadership, the strategic importance of the island's proximity to the U.S.A., and the geographic link to Latin American and the Caribbean. Others noted that

ISBN: E2-267/1999E
0-662-30234-6