

Fourth Trip Report

Period

July 16, 2009 – July 26, 2009

Submission date: August 7, 2009

Name:

Asociatia Pro Democratia

Project coordinator: Madalina Bucheru

The fourth trip to Cuba took place from July 16 to July 27 and continued the work of network establishing for APD and was concentrated on giving dissidents several IT equipments in order to help them in their activities.

The following visits took place during the fourth trip to Cuba:

Vladimiro Roca is the first Cuban dissident the project team during its visit. He told us about „Red“ , the short from „Red Cubana de Comunicadores Comunitarios“-Cuban Network of Community Communicators, a group of courageous Cubans that tried to make a social difference in their country. La Red is a fresh initiative, with only two – three months of activities, based on a national level on the activity of two groups: animators and communicators. The animators are in fact those who interact with the Cuban people and make substantial efforts to encourage them to get involved or, at least, say what their problems are. Taking into consideration the fact that most Cubans are afraid to communicate their problems or needs to the authorities, the work of these animators becomes very important. They become those who carry the message to the authorities, but most important they try to help Cubans overcome their fear.

Vladimiro Roca showed us one of their first newsletters, in fact a successfull story of communicator Niurka Caridad Ortega Cruz from the town of Arroyo Naranjo. She presents the poorly and unhealthy conditions that exist in the Sport Complex Ciro Frias from the above mentioned town. In fact, kids and teenagers learn how to swim in pools that present no guarantee against contagious or infectious diseases. This news is enforced by several photos that best present the situation. He also told us, that after the publication of this fact in their newsletter that is in fact read also by the authorities, the responsible parties took the needed measures to restore the swimming pool. Vladimiro Roca mentioned that the authorities usually make efforts to improve the situations presented in the newsletter of „La Red“, this being in fact one of this network's most important successes – a change that benefits the current life of all Cubans. He told us they had many plans and that their organization is growing very fast, but external help is still fundamental to their efforts. We must mention that Vladimiro Roca and later on, Martha Beatriz Roque impressed us deeply for their strength and dignity, but mostly for their desire to improve the lives of a Cuban majority that is still powerless in front the regime.

La Red Cubana has his own website: <http://redcubanacc.blogspot.com> with news, articles and photos on social issues that affect Cubans

Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello is one of the most important figures of the Cuban dissidence and probably one of the courageous women there is. Ms. Martha told us that she is often persecuted by her two policemen neighbors who don't hesitate to hit her despite her age, this being one of the reasons for the extra security measures in her house. She also mentioned that the rest of her neighbors support her.

We met Ms. Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello on Tuesday afternoon, in her small apartment from a faraway and crowded neighborhood of Havana. Her door was also closed with a bolt and her windows had gratings. On her door was written the following message "En Cristo hay libertad" (There is freedom in Jesus Christ) (Annex 1). Right in front of her apartment is a wall painting representing Fidel Castro that appeared, as Ms. Martha told us later, after she wrote on her door.

Ms. Martha's apartment was full of books and diplomas that proved her lifetime struggle for education and support for the development of the civil society in Cuba. She is in fact a very educated woman, the founder of the Institute of Independent Economists of Cuba and the leader of the Association for Promoting Civil Society. Before 1987 she was an economics teacher at the University of Havana. After that year she could no longer find work given her efforts to produce a change in the surrounding society. She was imprisoned twice, the last time in 2003, at 57 years old, when she received a sentence of 20 years for creating a website on a north-American domain where she posted several articles on Cuban reality and for making contacts with several US organizations that supported the democratization of the Cuban regime. Her sentence is available here, <http://www.ruleoflawandcuba.fsu.edu/documents-havana-7s.cfm>, this being the most eloquent evidence of the fact that the freedom of speech in Cuba means conspiring against the safety of the state. After one year in prison, Ms. Martha was released given her bad medical condition, but her sentence is still available.

Like Vladimiro Roco, she is one of the founders of "La Red" and one of its most important animators. They are in fact the connexion between the society and the Internet as they transform the work of the communicators in newsletters that they send each time to more people. As animators they also organize seminars, divided in different workshops like grammar, geography. Ms. Martha insisted on the fact that the education process in Cuba does nothing more than to create unprepared citizens, one of the things she mentioned being that most young people have grammar problems or very limited knowledge in essential domains. She stated that this is fact

one of the regime's intentions, to poorly educate its citizens so they won't have the necessary means to oppose it. The state media is in fact one of their most important instruments, as most Cubans have no access to other sources of information. Ms. Martha was very pleased with the fact that the workshops started to gather more people, this being the first step for giving them the opportunity to loose their fear and act freely.

You can find out more on her activity on <http://marthabeatrizinfo.blogspot.com/>.

Lourdes Esquivel lives in a faraway suburb of Havana, in very poor conditions. Both her husband and son were unjustly arrested and the date of the process still remained unknown. Ernesto Diaz Esquivel, her son, was arrested on June 8, 2009. His father Jose Diaz Silva was arrested on June 11, 2009 after making a complaint against a policeman that beat both him and his son on May 25, 2009, when they were simply attending a reunion in a private house. Although Ernesto Diaz Esquivel was shot by the Police, the prosecutors brought false witnesses and sent him and his father to prison.

The case of Jose Diaz Silva and his son is a very serious one not only because he is innocent, but because they do not have many chances to be released. International support for their release is necessary.

Teresita de Paz Ruiz is the widow of a life time political prisoner. She told us that her husband was one of Cuba's ambassadors in Benelux, before the country turned to a socialist regime. Given the opposition of her husband for this regime, he was put in prison for 23 years. After he was release from prison he formed a Comity for the Human Rights and tried to support those in need, whom rights were systematically transgressed by the Cuban dictatorial regime. After his death, ten years ago, Ms. Teresita tried to continue his work in the Comity, but the financial problem is her biggest problem.

Elizardo Sanchez is an opposition politician and one of the most visible figures of Cuban opposition. He presented the current situation of the anti-communist opposition in Cuba. According to his declarations, 20 years ago, there were thousands of political prisoners in Cuba, and only a few dozen of visible dissidents. Today, there are 200 political prisoners (60 persons recognized by Amnesty

International as „prisoners of consciousness“), and there are thousands of active and visible dissidents.

Mr. Elizardo also told us that the Cuban opposition is not divided and has multiplied in the last years, with many new independent organizations having been constituted. Some of the most important organizations are „Agenda para la transicion“, lead by Marta Beatriz Roque and Vladimiro Roca; “Todos unidos”, Mr. Elizardo’s group, „Movimiento cristiano-democrata“, led by Oswaldo Paya. He thinks that the European Union is the only external political entity that tries to put diplomatic pressure on the Castro regime. Mr. Sanchez thinks that most probable the actual leader, Raul Castro works on the instauration of a Castro dynasty. He insisted that the development of the civil society is the most necessary measure in order to change the Cuban regime.

Oscar Mario Gonzalez is a 65 years old journalist, who lives alone and by far the one person that most impressed us during our assignment in Cuba is an indepent Cuban journalist. He was arrested for one year and half (July 2005 – end of 2006), with no trial or justification other than his critical articled towards the government. He still risks going to jail as he is still publishing in foreign journals this kind of articles.

He is truly dedicated to being an independent journalist, even if this means risking going to prison at his age. Mr. Oscar reinforced his deep believe that writing is his profound spiritual necessity, but must important his right as a citizen, that he has no intention to give up. His articles are published in foreign papers like Extranjero or Primavera de Cuba (www.primaverdacuba.org) and he is one of the most important independent Cuban journalists.

Mr. Oscar thinks the Cuban situation is better described by it’s double morality: the population doesn’t really believe in the official speeches, but they all fake it. He told us that no one can be neutral and although the Police has developed a certain tolerance towards dissidents, they won’t hesitate to make unjustified arrests when of the opposition members becomes to visible and important. Mr. Oscar insisted that there are no chances for democratization from the inside of the Cuban regime, as its leaders are much too isolated and indifferent to Cuba’s real problems as they are not affected by them.

He also insisted on the fact that most Cubans think it is useless to fight for a change, not only because this action will bring problems to one’s family, but mostly because

there is a lack of believe in change. People are already too constrained and obedient to go against the regime. The young people, those who could really make a change have no ideology and are only interested in leaving the country. Mr. Oscar thinks they are not mobilized at all in the fight to change the dictatorial regime.

Like the other dissidents, Mr. Oscar believes that a Castro dynasty will be installed. But what impressed as the most is his genuine believe that, despite the current almost feudal situation, things have to change. He truly believes that a better future for Cuba is possible, where his rights as a journalist and citizen will be respected.