

# Раздел Международное сотрудничество Section International Cooperation

## Cuba and Venezuela: Cooperation and Development

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**Abstract.** The article examines the relations between Cuba and Venezuela since the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Cooperation in 2000. Great attention is paid to the social and energy projects launched within the framework of ALBA, as well as to the political integration in CELAC. In addition, the author examines the implementation of cooperation projects in the field of health in order to combat COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Cuba, Venezuela, cooperation, export, regional integration, ALBA.

## Куба и Венесуэла: сотрудничество и развитие

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**Аннотация.** В статье рассматриваются отношения Кубы и Венесуэлы с момента заключения Комплексного соглашения по сотрудничеству в 2000 году. Большое внимание уделено социальным и энергетическим проектам, запущенным в рамках ALBA, и интеграционному политическому объединению CELAC. Кроме того, автор исследует проекты сотрудничества Кубы и Венесуэлы в области здравоохранения в целях борьбы с COVID-19.

**Ключевые слова:** Куба, Венесуэла, сотрудничество, экспорт, региональная интеграция, ALBA.

DOI: 10.31432/1994-2443-2021-16-2-89-93

**Цитирование публикации:** Амбарцумян М.В. Куба и Венесуэла: сотрудничество и развитие // Информация и инновации. 2021, Т. 16, № 2. с. 89-93. DOI: 10.31432/1994-2443-2021-16-2-89-93



**Citation:** Hambardzumyan M.V. Cuba and Venezuela: Cooperation and Development // Information and Innovations 2021, T. 16, № 2. p. 89-93. DOI: 10.31432/1994-2443-2021-16-2-89-93

### **Implementation of the Cooperation Agreement**

Cuba's President of the Council of State Fidel Castro and former President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Hugo Chavez signed a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement aimed at strengthening friendly ties, promoting economic and social union and the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean on October 30, 2000 in Caracas [1].

According to the document, the parties pledged to develop programs of bilateral and regional cooperation. Venezuela undertook to provide technical assistance and consultation, as well as to supply 53,000 barrels of oil and petroleum products to Cuba. Cuba, in return, has pledged to provide Venezuela with medical and technical services, with further Venezuelan personnel training.

Venezuela's export data in the International Trade Center's international trade database shows that a year after the 2000 Agreement, Venezuelan exports to Cuba amounted to \$16 million, which accounted for 6.5% of total Venezuelan exports [2]. When international oil prices reached a record high of \$ 142 US per barrel in 2008, the country experienced the biggest economic growth in its history. However, oil production decreased later, and the fall in oil prices led to an economic disaster [3]. Venezuela exported 115,000 barrels of crude oil per a day to Cuba in 2008, then the volume declined by more than half due to Venezuela's economic instability, which escalated, in parallel, with the political conflict. Thus, since 2008, exports to Cuba have not exceeded 0.1% of all Venezuelan exports.

As for Cuba, the share of exports to Venezuela has increased significantly since the conclusion of the Agreement, with a peak in 2012 [4]. Cuba's exports to Venezuela

amounted \$22 million (1.3 % of total exports) in 2001, while it amounted \$2.5 billion (44% of total exports) in 2012. However, due to the unstable economic situation in Venezuela, Cuba's exports began to decline. By 2018 it had fallen to \$462 million, in comparison with \$1.4 billion in 2015.

### **Regional projects ALBA and CELAC**

In 2001 Chavez proposed the idea of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) as a program on the comprehensive integration of the Latin America and the Caribbean peoples. The Governments of Cuba and Venezuela announced the formation of the ALBA guiding principle in 2004, laying the historical foundation for building Latin American unity. Initially, the program was formed on a bilateral basis [5]. Since 2004, ALBA has become a new form of integration, expanding and deepening trade between Venezuela, Cuba, and later Bolivia.

In economic terms, ALBA acts as a protest mechanism against neoliberal policies and their impact on trade policies that do not benefit the region; and aims to fight poverty and social exclusion in Latin America [6].

Within the framework of the ALBA, a number of strategic energy alliances are being created that do not harm or violate the sovereignty of States, strengthening trade exchange between countries, leaving aside the mechanisms imposed by multinational companies. For example, Petrocaribe is a program for supplying Venezuelan oil to a number of Caribbean countries at preferential prices. Petrocaribe initiative launched oil enterprise in Cuba, power plants in Nicaragua

and Haiti, and oil refineries in Haiti, Jamaica, Dominica, and Nicaragua [7].

In 2004, the the joint program for poor areas of Venezuela (Barrio Adentro) was launched to provide with health services. The project was implemented in four stages and by the end of 2008 there were approximately 30,000 Cuban medical professionals among doctors, nurses, dentists, and technicians, and by 2014 more than 24 million citizens had received free medical care [8].

ALBA is also making significant progress in the “Milargo” program organized in 2004 by the Governments of Cuba and Venezuela. Its implementation has helped to operate on more than 8 million poor Latin Americans, eliminate illiteracy in Venezuela, Bolivia and Nicaragua, and significantly reduce it in other member states. The creation of a Latin American medical school in Cuba, and then the training of medical specialists in Venezuela is particularly important [9].

In addition, Cuba and Venezuela are jointly developing modern information technologies. Due to the US sanctions imposed on Cuba, access to the Internet there is limited. An agreement on an underwater fiber-optic cable between Venezuela and Cuba was signed in 2007 in Caracas. A project for the cable, that was named ALBA-1, was presented to the telecommunications company Gran Caribe in 2009. The island had a satellite capacity of 323 megabits per second, and the cable allowed to increase available capacity for 3,000 times. Although the fiber-optic cable was laid in 2011, the first tests were started in 2013, and it was only 2015 that Internet access gradually expanded. However, prices are still prohibitively high for most Cubans [10].

The Governments of Cuba and Venezuela join forces on the CELAC platform — the community of Latin American and Caribbean countries. Both states are in favor of condemning the blockade of Cuba, returning

Guantanamo, ending sanctions against Venezuela and any interference in the affairs of Latin American and Caribbean countries, which is indicated in the Communiqué of the III summit [11] and in the Declaration of the V CELAC summit [12].

CELAC is an important political project, the main goal of which is to accelerate the development of the region and solve global problems without US intervention. An important area of activity of CELAC as the most influential political association of Latin American and Caribbean countries is the implementation of collective diplomacy with non-regional partners. CELAC managed to elaborate a set of programs to resolve problems in the field of sustainable development, social and economic issues with the participation of such non-regional partners as the EU, China, India, and Russia [13].

### **Joint efforts in the context of Covid-19**

In February 2021, the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro, met with the government delegation of Cuba, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Ricardo Cabrias. During the meeting, the parties confirmed their intention to strengthen cooperation in various sectors of interest to both countries; discussed the expansion of trade relations in the field of health, technology, agriculture, culture, sports, etc.

Maduro noted that the states “realize the dreams of commanders Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez about a united America” through to cooperation [14].

Moreover, Cabrias and Maduro discussed therapeutic care and monitoring of patients with COVID-19. Thanks to many years of cooperation between states in the field of health, the two governments have managed to unite their efforts in the fight against the pandemic.

Cuba as a leader in a health care has a reliable system, high-level doctors, and a pharmaceutical industry that is currently conducting the research needed to fight the pandemic [15]. That is why most of the Cuban doctors and specialists remained in Venezuela to fight coronavirus. The Bolivarian National Armed Forces also contributed to the logistical revitalization of several medical centers. In May 2020 Maduro government announced the arrival of 1,200 more Cuban doctors to treat patients with COVID-19. This contingent, consisting of doctors specializing general medicine, intensive research, clinical laboratories, as well as hygiene and epidemiology, was sent by the Cuban Government. The new group joined more than 25,000 island specialists that were already in Venezuela [16]. The civil and technological reconstruction of the facilities included the installation of lung fans, indoor oxygen shots, and other high-tech equipment to assist in critical and severe cases.

Under the “Barrio Adentro” program, in close collaboration with the government and local health authorities, more than 4,500 beds were installed in 410 comprehensive diagnostic centers and 17 rehabilitation wards to provide the necessary treatment. More than 13 thousand employees who visited the red zone treated 334000 patients with COVID-19, and 93% of them returned home healthy [17].

## Conclusions

The 2000 Agreement was an important step for the rapprochement of Cuba and Venezuela, as well as for the birth of integration projects such as ALBA, CELAC, Petrocaribe, etc.

Despite the unstable economic and political processes, within the framework of social cooperation and trade, the bilateral relations between Cuba and Venezuela have uniquely strengthened, and it is already possible to

speak of economic complementarity between the two countries. The strategic partnership is based on threedirections: economic and energy cooperation, a common security policy, and the promotion of Latin American integration.

The agreement is historic and challenges the blockade of Cuba and the sanctions imposed on Venezuela. Moreover, it revives the idea of Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti about the integration of the region. Cuba and Venezuela are launching projects to restore not only their economies, but also the well-being of the entire region in the areas of health, energy, technology, culture, etc. The countries encourage mutual cooperation projects in the fight against COVID-19.

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