



IRELAC POLICY BRIEF 2018/02

Cuba – Dawn of Castro Era?

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On 19 April 2018, Raul Castro (86) stepped down as Cuban Head of State and of Government and was replaced by Miguel Diaz-Canel (58), the First-Vice-President chosen by Raul Castro many years ago. The new President was “elected” by a vote (603 in favor and 1 against) in the National Assembly. This “representative” Assembly is the legislative power in Cuba, its members are elected every 5 years but opposition candidates cannot be chosen.

However, Raul Castro remains the head of the Communist Party and of the army until 2021. These positions are much more powerful than the Presidency, since the Party takes all major economic, social and foreign relations policies, which the President is obliged to carry out.

Therefore, nobody expects from this generational changes other than a change of branding after almost seven decades of Castro’s dictatorship, which should continue, as immediately announced by Miguel Diaz-Canel to the national Assembly: “Raul Castro, as first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba, will lead the decisions of greatest transcendence for the present and the future of this country”... “I think there always will be continuity.” Continuity most likely means continued restrictions on the private sector for Cubans, tight controls on foreign investment and no openings to the single-party political system.

The new president Miguel Diaz-Canel, an engineer known with the nickname of “day-and-night” for his work-addiction and control habit at the strict service to the communist ideology, has promised to modernize the country’s economy and doing the government more responsive to the Cubans but no return neither to capitalism nor to freedom to criticize the government. However, the economic reforms announced by Raul and partially engaged but controlled by the Party and in hands of the Army or past-military officers, are far from being able to lead to productivity and prosperity

Cuban citizens and especially the young generations will have to wait more than expected initially.