

# *Cuban President Raul Castro Meets French Foreign Minister*

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Havana, April 14 (RHC), – France's foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, met with Cuban President, Raul Castro, over the weekend, during the first visit to the island in 31 years by such a high-ranking French official; and a sign of the quickening pace of improving ties between the European Union and Havana.

Laurent Fabius said he discussed several issues, including ongoing economic reforms in Cuba and bilateral relations in what he characterized as "a long conversation" with Raul Castro.

"We want to push forward our relations in the areas of culture, education, economics and politics," Fabius, a former prime minister, told reporters at the end of a one-day visit to the Caribbean country.

"Of course, we have different points of view on certain issues, which doesn't stop us from exchanging perspectives and moving forward," he said.

Earlier in the day, Fabius met with his Cuban counterpart, Bruno Rodriguez, various Cabinet ministers, Cardinal Jaime Ortega and French businessmen.

France is looking to expand its business ties with Latin America and sees Cuba as an important player in the region, given that it hosted a regional summit this year and both Brazil and Mexico are increasing their

presence in the country.

"There are many French firms already here, but it's necessary that this presence is strengthened and our Cuban friends agree," Fabius said.

Bilateral trade last year was \$388 million (280 million euros), according to the French government, involving mainly wheat exports to Cuba.

Construction and engineering firm, Bouygues, beverage maker, Pernod-Ricard, the Accor tourism corporation and energy company, Total, all have investments in Cuba and are among 60 French firms operating in the country.

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