

In search of loopholes

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By Roberto Morejón

A business meeting between business people from geographically close countries is normal, but if they are Cubans and Americans it is a singular and unique event.

This is how the meeting organized in Havana by the Chamber of Commerce of Cuba and the Focus Cuba group, in which more than 20 U.S. and Cuban-American businessmen studied business opportunities, can be described.

The examination becomes complex because despite the geographical proximity, Cuba and the United States cannot sign agreements in an expeditious manner because of the blockade of the Northern power.

However, there are still loopholes and hosts and guests talked about them as well as the opportunities of the Caribbean nation, whose government has reiterated its willingness to dialogue with the United States, if the sovereignty of the land of José Martí is respected.

On the Cuban side, there are no objections to a mutually advantageous relationship that includes business, contrary to the orientation of the White House.

Its tenants did not keep their electoral campaign promises on resuming the relaxations towards Cuba, established during Barack Obama's term of office.

Since the tightening of the blockade signed by Donald Trump until today, these restrictions have continued, although Havana recognizes some steps taken by Washington in recent months, albeit of limited scope.

As was corroborated at the business meeting, there are business opportunities in the areas of food, finance, agriculture, transportation, technology and trade.

No one denies the permanence of obstacles inherent to the U.S. administration's siege, such as the persecution of banks that managed to support business ties.

But Cubans consider that the purpose can be consummated, much more so when of the more than 8 billion dollars spent on imports in 2021, only 370 million dollars corresponded to purchases in the neighboring nation.

Those acquisitions are made under onerous conditions because Cuba must pay in cash and cannot transport the cargo in its ships.

Also favoring the viable compromises between U.S. and Cuban businessmen is the increase in this country of economic actors, that is, representatives of cooperatives and micro, small and medium-sized entities, a novelty greeted by the visitors.

No one thinks that the eventual commercial activities will be clear, but the attempt to analyze them undertaken in this capital, the first since 2016, deserves praise.

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