

# *Cuban President Raul Castro Holds Talks with Visiting Italian Foreign Minister*

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Havana, March 13 (RHC) — Cuban President Raul Castro held talks in Havana on Thursday with Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Paolo Gentiloni, who is paying an official visit to the island.

Raul Castro and Paolo Gentilone exchanged views on the favorable development of bilateral relations between their countries, and their will to further expand economic and cooperation exchange. They also addressed issues of mutual interest relevant to the international arena.

Gentiloni was accompanied during the talks by Italian Under Secretary of State Mario Giro. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez also attended the meeting.

During a news conference held after the talks with the Cuban president, Gentiloni said that he told Raul Castro that he was hopeful that the process announced by Cuba and the United States on December 17th can successfully conclude with several necessary steps and that the economic blockade imposed by Washington on the island be lifted. The Italian government official also said that the normalization of relations between Cuba and the United States and the accord under negotiation by the island and the

European Union are two important events.

Gentiloni told reporters in Havana that his country will try to boost the progress of the European Union-Cuba process aimed at reaching a political and bilateral cooperation accord. In this regard, he said that the Italian government considers it important that the European Union should have more frequent contacts with Cuba to deal with the agenda and come up with an accord.

Meanwhile, as to the current update of the Cuban economic model, the Italian foreign minister said that his country will expand cooperation with Cuba and announced a visit by a business mission in early May and the opening of an office in Havana by the Italian Foreign Trade Ministry in the coming months.

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