

# *Cuban President Raul Castro Meets with Pope Francis and Italian Prime Minister*

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Rome, May 10 (RHC) -- Cuban President Raul Castro met on Sunday with Pope Francis at The Vatican and with the Prime Minister of Italy, Matteo Renzi, during a brief visit to Rome.

At a joint press conference following their meeting, the Italian leader praised his country's relationship with Cuba and vowed to strengthen bilateral ties, particularly in the economic sphere.

For his part, Raul Castro thanked the warm welcome by authorities in Rome and referred to the ongoing talks between Cuba and the European Union to reset political relations.

Earlier on Sunday, Raul Castro was received by Pope Francis in Vatican City. About the meeting, Vatican spokesman, Federico Lombardi, said it was very friendly and lasted for 55 minutes.

Raul Castro reportedly thanked the Pope for his mediation in the talks between the United States and Cuba that led to the announcement of December 17, 2014, that both nations would re-establish diplomatic relations.

The leaders also exchanged gifts and best wishes at the end of their meeting, recalling their next encounter would be in Cuba next September.

Raul Castro travelled to Italy from Russia, where he took part Saturday in the celebrations for Victory Day. He arrived back in Cuba late Sunday night.

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