

Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel in Europe



France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel (Source: Commons).

Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel returned on Saturday from a European trip lasting several days. The Cuban head of state's European visit first took the 62-year-old to the Vatican City State, where he was received by Pope Francis. Other stops included Italy, Serbia and France. In Paris, Díaz-Canel participated in consultations on a ["new global financial pact"](#) as chairman of the Group 77+China.

"We talked about the current situation in Cuba, especially the serious effects of the tightened economic blockade," Díaz-Canel [said](#) of the audience with Pope Francis last Tuesday, which lasted just over half an hour. "It was a frank conversation," he added. He thanked the pope for his "closeness and continued commitment to Cuba." Francis was a mediator between the United States and Cuba in the run-up to normalization under former U.S. President Barack Obama. Most recently, media reported last July on new mediation attempts by the Vatican that were apparently unsuccessful. It was the first meeting between Díaz-Canel and Francis, who had already met Raúl Castro several times.

During the subsequent meeting with Italy's President Sergio Mattarella, the latter [stressed](#) the "strong bonds of friendship between Italy and Cuba." For his part, Díaz-Canel stressed Cuba's will to develop relations and new trade agreements in the mutual interest. New agreements are to be concluded in the areas of culture and health. At a meeting with Italian entrepreneurs, the Cuban head of state thanked them for their continued support despite U.S. sanctions that would increasingly affect foreign entrepreneurs. As part of the opening of Cuba's wholesale and retail trade to investors, a grocery store will soon be established with the Farmavenda company, which has been present in the Cuban market for more than 40

years. "We want this business to have a good start and grow," Díaz-Canel stressed. Italy is Cuba's fifth largest trading partner.



The first meeting between Pope Francis and Cuba's President Miguel Díaz-Canel (Source: [Twitter](#)).

In Rome, Díaz-Canel also [visited](#) the headquarters of the United Nations Agriculture Organization (FAO), whose head Qu Dongyu warmly welcomed the Cuban delegation. Cuba has "great potential to develop sustainable food and agriculture systems that can withstand the climate," Qu said, adding that FAO will continue to support "the country's efforts in harnessing science, technology and innovation" in this area. Díaz-Canel expressed gratitude for the support provided by the U.N. agency, which helped draft Cuba's food security law.

On Wednesday, Díaz-Canel arrived in Belgrade, where he was [received](#) with military honors by Serbia's President Aleksandar Vučić.

Díaz-Canel stressed the "excellent and historic relations between our peoples, based on the friendship sown by Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro and General Tito." Relations are to be expanded through parliamentary group exchanges, at the corporate level, and new scientific, health, cultural, sports and tourism agreements. New deals were agreed upon in the fields of biotechnology and agriculture. Serbia will "do its utmost" to support Cuba's agriculture, he said. His country produces "surpluses of corn and grain," Vučić said. In addition, Serbia wants to import Cuban medicines and cosmetics.

The last stop took the Cuban delegation to the French capital, Paris, where the meeting on a "new global financial pact" convened by French President Emmanuel Macron began

Thursday. "We participate in this meeting with the great responsibility for Cuba that comes with leading the Group 77+China," Díaz-Canel said in his speech at the meeting.

The G77+China is composed of 134 of the 193 member states of the United Nations, representing 80 percent of the world's population. It was established in 1964 by the Non-Aligned Movement to create a strengthened joint negotiating capacity of the Global South within the United Nations. The People's Republic of China began its cooperation with the G77 in 1992, but has since become a member itself.

Díaz-Canel called for an improvement in the financial framework for developing countries. The Cuban head of state explained that the South, in view of its increased foreign debt due to unequal terms of trade, "cannot raise the \$4.3 billion per year needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals." It is "unacceptable" that "in the 21st century, outdated institutions from the Cold War and Bretton Woods periods are imposed on the majority of countries, aimed at profiting from the reserves of the South, maintaining imbalances and applying conjunctural prescriptions that reproduce a system of modern colonialism," Díaz-Canel said. The current foundations of North-South relations and coexistence on Earth need to be rethought, he said.

He also called for the "abolition of blockades and unilateral coercive measures," from which the countries of the Global South in particular suffer.

There was no government-level agenda item in France. However, following the speech, Díaz-Canel and President Macron exchanged views, which included a handshake. In addition, Cuba's president met with UN Secretary General António Guterres and Brazil's President Lula da Silva on the sidelines of the summit.

In all three countries visited, Díaz-Canel also met with members of Cuba solidarity groups and Cuban communities. ([Cubaheute](#))