

Ongoing cabinet reshuffle: Cuba has a new minister of foreign trade



Cuba's new Foreign Trade Minister Oscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga at a conference in the Mariel Special Economic Zone (Source: [ZEDM/Facebook](#))

Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Trade and Investment (MINCEX) is under new leadership. As the party newspaper "Granma" [reported](#) on Thursday, Foreign Trade Minister Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz was relieved of his post "at the suggestion of the President and after confirmation by the Politburo". He will be succeeded by his former deputy Oscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga.

The replacement of Cabrisas does not come as a complete surprise in the sense that the 87-year-old was more of a temporary solution from the outset. In April 2023, he took over from his predecessor Rodrigo Malmierca (66). The latter was increasingly subject to criticism at the time because he had failed to get a grip on the bureaucratic inertia of the ministry during his 14-year tenure at the helm of MINCEX, which had scared off more than a few potential investors. After Malmierca's dismissal, Cabrisas was tasked with getting foreign trade back on track and was also involved in strategic negotiations with Russia and China. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the talks, he is said to have even banned the use of smartphones on the ministry's premises at times.



Cabrisas is not only considered a confidant of Raúl Castro and President Díaz-Canel, but also one of the Cuban government's most experienced negotiators. A graduate in foreign trade and political science, he has been responsible for trade matters since the 1970s and was promoted by Fidel Castro as a young cadre in this area. Between 1980 and 2000, he became Cuba's longest-serving foreign trade minister. From 2016 to 2018, he served temporarily as Minister of Economy. In the recent past, Cabrisas was responsible for the debt

deal with the Club of Paris and the renegotiation of Cuba's old debt with Russia, both of which concluded very favorably for Cuba. Taking over the management of MINCEX again last April was apparently also linked to the task of training a successor and ensuring a good handover to a younger team. He has now clearly succeeded in doing so. In any case, in view of the recent wave of reshuffles and dismissals, the Cuban Communist Party's public relations department has tried to leave no doubt about the positive assessment of his performance: Unlike Economy Minister Alejandro Gil, who was sacked in February over corruption allegations, Cabrisas was dismissed from office with full honors. He remains Deputy Prime Minister and on the day of his resignation, the state news portal "Cubadebate" paid tribute to him with a [detailed article](#) about his visit to a food fair.

But what do we know about the new leadership team?

Cabrisa's former deputy and now successor, 53-year-old electronic engineer Oscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga, is regarded in business circles as a competent and experienced negotiator like his mentor. As the news agency "Prensa Latina" writes, Pérez-Oliva has "extensive management experience, which he has gained in more than 15 years as a company manager in the foreign trade business". He was also head of the business evaluation department in the Mariel Special Economic Zone (ZEDM). Pérez-Oliva's appointment rejuvenates MINCEX in two ways: his deputy is now 36-year-old economist Carlos Luis Jorge Méndez. As "Granma" reports, Jorge has previously worked in "various functions" in foreign trade, including "as a specialist, advisor to the Minister, and Director General of Foreign Investment".

With the latest cabinet reshuffle, Díaz-Canel is attempting to get an important key ministry back on track after several laborious years. The fresh minds of Pérez-Oliva Fraga and Jorge Méndez could be just the right ones for a new start, though their full commitment was required after just a few days, when Pérez-Oliva denied a false rumor that the ministry wanted to ban all private companies from exporting. "On the contrary, as the governing body of this activity, we are committed to the development and promotion of exports by all companies, regardless of their form," clarified MINCEX's account on X.

This much is clear: the two are not facing an easy task. ([Cubaheute](#))