

CUBA IN TRANSITION

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Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE)

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PREFACE

After more than 50 years, on December 17, 2014, there was a dramatic change in the relationship between the United States and Cuba as both nations began a process of rapprochement. This included the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations, the removal of Cuba from the list of nations sponsoring terrorism, a loosening of the restrictions on travel between the two countries, the easing of trade restrictions, and the potential for U.S. investments in specific sectors of the Cuban economy.

In the midst of this powerful transformation which culminated in the opening of embassies in their respective capitals only 10 days earlier, the Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy (ASCE) held its 25th annual conference at the Hilton Miami Downtown Hotel from July 30-August 1, 2015. The theme of the conference was “Cuba-What’s Next?” It focused on the unprecedented challenges and exciting new opportunities for the Cuban economy given the events that occurred during the year. It explored such topics as the effects of restoration of the U.S.-Cuba relationships on the Cuban economy, an analysis of Cuban economic reforms, the impact of Cuba’s emerging private economy, demographic and environmental issues and an analysis of the legal framework for U.S.-Cuba foreign trade and investment. This year’s conference featured a panel on a comparison of the process of transition between Cuba and North Korea organized by the Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) and with participation of several Korean scholars. This panel amongst other topics explored the relation between the Communist party and the military in the two countries, as well as the implications of U.S.-Cuba relations for the case of U.S.-North Korean relations. The conference also included a plenary session on Cuba’s economic and political situation; a panel dis-

cussion on the applications and implications of Internet technology in a changing Cuba; as well as sessions on social, legal, and national security issues and a student panel.

The Board of Directors chose this year’s theme because even with the improvement in diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, it is not clear to us that Cuba will initiate the appropriate economic policies which are necessary to spur economic growth. Even after several years of more liberal policies which included the establishment of some private businesses, the government has failed to move in a rapid manner to implement the unification of exchange rates, the establishment of capital markets and most importantly, the establishment and protection of private property rights and the subsequent movement towards a free market system. In order to explore the multitude of issues surrounding the Cuban economy, this year’s conference—as have those in the past—brought together participants that looked at these developments from various disciplines and methodologies. This year’s presenters comprised economists, sociologists, political scientists, legal scholars, engineers, and agronomists amongst other fields.

From its inception, ASCE has been a non-political, non-partisan, professional association whose main objective is to promote interest in the study of the Cuban economy in its broadest sense. For this year’s conference, the Board of Directors again invited with full financial support some of the leading economists from the University of Havana to participate in our annual conference in Miami. The list of these invitees was compiled by the Board based solely on their academic record. Unfortunately, all declined to participate. Whether this decision reflected these individuals’ preferences or more so those of administra-

tors at the University of Havana and Cuban government officials is unclear. As always, we will continue to make the invitations with the hope that we may get a chance to interact with them at our annual meetings. Even so, the list of prominent individuals living on the island who were invited to participate and attended this year's conference with full financial support from ASCE was again very large. As in past years, their experiences and knowledge of the Cuban economy added enormous value to our conference. Finally, I want to thank our keynote speaker Mark Wells, the U.S. State Department Coordinator for Cuban Affairs, for a very enlightening discussion of his impressions on the process ongoing in U.S.-Cuba relations.

As President of ASCE, I would like to thank the Board of Directors for their time and effort in making this year's conference a success. In particular, I would like to thank Ted Henken, President ex-officio of ASCE and Rafael Romeu for their work. A special thanks goes to Joaquín Pujol, the "institutional

memory" of ASCE for all his work on behalf of the organization. I appreciate also the work of our Treasurer, Ernesto Hernández-Catá, and that of our Secretary, Helena Solo-Gabriele both of whom have done an outstanding job. Enrique Pumar again did a marvelous job in running the student prize committee and Luis Luis and Ernesto Hernández-Catá in managing ASCE's blog. I also want to thank Roger Betancourt for providing me with judicious advice. As always, Jorge Pérez-López continues to do extraordinary work in organizing the conference program and editing the conference proceedings, with Gary Maybarduk as Associate Editor. I would like to also thank the University of Miami's Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies for their logistical assistance during the conference.

Finally, ASCE would like to recognize the financial support of the Christopher Reynolds Foundation. Thanks to their generosity, we were able to extend invitations to this year's conference to a record number of conference participants coming directly from the island.

Carlos Seiglie
President