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EU, Cuba Make “Substantial Progress” Toward Accord

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The European Union and Cuba have made “substantial progress” in the second round of negotiations toward a bilateral accord and they will hold a third round at the end of this year, the EU’s top diplomat for the Americas said on Thursday.

“We have met with a very well-prepared Cuban team who came to Brussels with a constructive spirit of compromise, something that allowed us to make substantial progress in narrowing our positions to arrive at a common vision on how the chapter of cooperation should be,” said Christian Leffler.

“We have a clear conviction of what the general structure must be ... the different areas of dialogue on policies and interaction and those (where) potential compromise (can be achieved),” he said at a press conference following two days of talks.

The Cuban government, meanwhile, said in a communique that the negotiation process was evolving “normally” and that the exchanges with the EU “developed in a constructive manner.”

Cooperation is one of the three pillars that will comprise the first bilateral agreement between Cuba and the EU, along with political and institutional matters and trade.

The European negotiators on Thursday made a presentation on what the main areas of trade cooperation and investment facilitation might be, a point that Leffler said will not be the most complex area in which to find agreement.

He said that this matter will be discussed again, along with “more sensitive political questions,” in the third round of talks, which will be held in Havana toward the end of the year, although the issues that will be discussed still have not been agreed upon.

Until then, both parties will maintain their informal technical contacts to continue moving forward on the agreement.

“The Cuban side is clear and in agreement that the accord must facilitate cooperation among all the actors of Cuba and the EU, including civil society,” Leffler said.

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