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The Harsh Siege on Communications and Information Technology

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Among the many shortcomings that plague Cuban society today, subject to the ruthless war on all fronts imposed by the United States, which strikes at every bruise of the broken body of the economy, perhaps little-known figures illustrating the scope of the blockade beyond such visible areas as food, medicine, and transportation.

A severely affected sector—with links to the entire development of life nowadays—has been the communications and information technology sector. Its normal operations suffered damages estimated at \$58,772,100 last year.

However, the relentless persecution to impede the normal development of communications and the advancement of information technology in Cuba began with the triumph of the Revolution itself.

An article published just a few days ago by Granma newspaper details: “Many people are unaware that seven telephone cables were laid between Cuba and the United States to facilitate communications between the two countries. Nor has it been reported in the major international press that, starting in 1959, this cable service was blocked (...), to the point where, in 1986, it was permanently interrupted.”

The Cuban Telecommunications Company (Etecsa), the leader of the telecommunications sector, continues to be the most economically affected by the extraterritorial imperial policy.

To mention just one example, this state-owned company is required to spend significant amounts of money to cover the Internet capacity you and I enjoy, which is based on two submarine cable systems. Payment must be made in foreign currency and on time, otherwise the service will be suspended.

Information released on October 31, 2023, by the Ministry of Communications details one of the most far-reaching arbitrary acts carried out by the United States government against the Cuban communications system in recent times.

Between 2017-2018, important steps had been taken toward the signing of a contract between Etecsa and

Columbus Network Limited (CNL), a subsidiary of Liberty Latin America, for connection to the first ARCOS-1 submarine cable that would connect the United States to Cuba, according to the Ministry of Communications.

The decision was pending for more than four years awaiting the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) review of the license application.

On November 30, 2022, the Department of Justice published a recommendation made by the Foreign Participation Evaluation Committee to the FCC to deny the license.

But no structure in this key sector is immune to the brutality of the blockade. Since its creation, the Information Technology and Communications Business Group (GEIC for its acronym in Spanish) and all its companies have also been subjected to U.S. siege.

Robelis Lambert Matos, GEIC's Business Director, denounced in recent statements to Cubadebate that companies such as Cubatel, Radiocuba, Solitel, and Movitel are facing critical impacts as a result of the economic war they are facing: "Without a solid technological foundation, digital transformation or artificial intelligence will be unviable," the executive stated.

A concrete impact of such a policy on the Radiocuba enterprise was the sudden cancellation of its satellite service. A French company based in the United States suddenly informed the Cuban entity two years ago that it had to terminate the contract "because it had been 100% acquired by a company from the Union and was not authorized to continue operating with Cuba."

The measure forced Radiocuba to seek, with all the difficulties that this entails, a new provider, ultimately migrating to a Russian entity that offers the same service.

Segurmática, for its part, has been unable to acquire essential tools for its work, such as "VirusTotal" (for antivirus analysis), because they are blocked for use on the island.

These realities make it clear that the economic, commercial, and financial blockade is the main impediment to the normal development of communications and information technology in the country.

**Translated by Amilkal Labañino / CubaSi Translation Staff**

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