

Summary of István Dobozi op-ed “Kuba Castro után?” in the December 9, 2016 edition of the Hungarian weekly *Élet és Irodalom*

Cuba after Castro?

In his op-ed, Coalition member István Dobozi takes issue with views that give too much credit to the late Fidel Castro in social policy, particularly in health care and education. Using historical statistics, the author asserts that Cuba scored comparatively well in these areas even before Castro's revolution of 1958. However, after the revolution gaps were rapidly bridged to achieve practically universal access to essential social services across the entire country, including those rural areas where deep poverty prevailed before.

Notwithstanding these achievements, the overall economic record of the Castro regime over its half-century rule is rather poor: Cuba, one of the most developed countries in Latin America before 1959, was turned into one of the poorest today. The lack of a major external financial donor, coupled with a weak economic performance in recent years, have started to fray even the state-provided social services, including health care and public education.

Looking ahead, the author sees good prospects for Cuba's transition to the successful Chinese and Vietnamese model, which combines a one-party communist political system with deep-seated market reforms, including privatization of considerable parts of the state sector, and opening up the economy for foreign investors. With its cheap and well-educated labor, Cuba would be a magnet for foreign investors. The resulting rapid economic growth could provide continued political legitimacy for the communist party, at least for some time.

Regarding bilateral relations between the United States and Cuba, the author does not expect President Trump to reverse the improvements achieved in the past two years under the Obama administration. Mr. Trump will likely seek the following "deal" with the Cuban leaders: in exchange for Chinese-Vietnamese-style economic reforms, the U.S. would lift the economic embargo against Cuba. With Fidel Castor's passing away, a major obstacle has been cleared to move in this direction under the new, deal-oriented American president.