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By Volker Hermsdorf
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No way independent - Donors reveal: USAID cuts also drain the swamp of the contra media

While access to Russian news outlets such as RT and Sputnik is banned in Germany and the EU, online portals supported by foreign governments in Cuba have so far been blithely contributing to discrediting the island republic's socialist system. Now, one of their former main sponsors, the US government, is threatening the existence of some of these supposedly independent media outlets. Their staff, whose salaries, by Cuban standards, were funded by US agencies, dubious NGOs, and foundations, must now sheepishly admit that they were never independent.

"President Donald Trump's order to suspend foreign aid and dismantle the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) threatens the survival of a network of independent Cuban media outlets that have played a key role in the fight against state censorship on the island and in exposing human rights violations," the Miami-based daily Nuevo Herald warned at the end of February. One of the affected outlets, which the newspaper claims has "significantly weakened support for the communist government in recent years," is called El Toque . The portal was launched around ten years ago with the support of "RNW Media" (formerly Radio Netherlands Worldwide), an agency of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To counter doubts about its independence, right-wing foundations in Europe and various US sources later took over funding of the outlet, which, according to the Nuevo Herald, is now based in Miami.

In Germany, El Toque was primarily supported by the Taz newspaper , which presented its authors as "independent Cuban journalists" at workshops run by its Panther Foundation in Berlin. After Trump cut off the funding, the Nuevo Herald, of all newspapers, which is close to right-wing Cuban exiles in Miami , dismissed this false claim. El Toque had already had to

lay off half of its staff because foreign aid was frozen, its director, José Nieves, told the newspaper. "Around 14 independent Cuban media outlets depend on this," Nieves continued his self-exposure.

The Taz , the taxpayer-funded international broadcaster Deutsche Welle , and the Berlin government also supported European anti-Cuba projects that were dependent on the US government. For example, the online newspaper Diario de Cuba, produced in Madrid by Cuban exile opponents of the system with the support of the US services National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the CIA . The NED, an umbrella organization funded by the State Department and a central funding agency for pro-US NGOs, had invested millions in the propaganda portal in recent years. Nevertheless, the Taz also presented its representatives as "independent journalists." Since the US government suspended payments "that made our work possible," the portal's director, Pablo Díaz Espí, has been begging opponents of the Cuban system for donations.

Meanwhile, a lobby of those in the USA, Cuba and other countries who lived off US millions is also putting pressure on Washington - apparently with success. In a CNN interview with Andrés Oppenheimer, a writer for the Nuevo Herald , Trump's special envoy for Latin America, Mauricio Claver-Carone, stated at the end of February that "after a review," funds could again flow "to the most efficient independent media with the greatest impact." The US government is also preparing further "very creative" measures against the Cuban government, said Claver-Carone. The recent sanctions and a global media campaign against Cuba's international health missions are likely a foretaste of this. There will certainly be a new use for journalists whom Western media will continue to certify as "independent" despite their dependence on US government money