CUBA TRADE BRIDGE

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Foreign Companies and Trade Permissions in Cuba

Commercial representation | Authorized trade channels | Payments | Customs | Foreign investment

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Publication Note

Professional use note	This document is designed as a research and market-entry reference for foreign companies evaluating commercial activity involving Cuba. It is not legal, tax, banking, sanctions, customs, accounting, investment or financial advice. Transaction-specific decisions should be verified with qualified professionals and relevant authorities.

Before relying on any item in a transaction, the reader should verify the applicable rule with qualified Cuban counsel, the relevant Cuban authority, the relevant bank, sanctions/export-control counsel where applicable, customs specialists, insurers and the parties to the transaction.

Version 1.0 scope note	This final English edition consolidates the strongest content from the working drafts, restores useful explanation boxes and practical checklists, expands the payment-security section, and organises long tables so that major headings and table blocks begin cleanly.

Version	Status	Main changes
0.1	Brief draft	Short research brief and visual identity test.
0.2	Working draft	Expanded structure with market-entry models and verification checklist.
0.3	Working draft	Cover updated with CTB bridge/world visual identity.
0.4	Improved draft	Commercial representation, authorised channel and investment sections strengthened.
0.5	Advanced draft	Authorised trading entity annex and indicative sector map added.
0.6	Compliance & operations draft	Banking, currency, OFAC/BIS, customs and operational controls added.
0.7	Payment security draft	Letters of credit section and LC verification questions added.
0.8	Language & layout revision	Cover centred, headings moved to clean page starts and closing page restored.
0.9	Consolidated reference draft	Best content from prior drafts restored; client question coverage expanded.
1.0	Final English edition	English master edition finalised for use as a CTB reference document.

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Version note: this English master edition should be reviewed periodically against updated official sources before reuse in later client work or translated editions.

PART I

Executive Orientation

This part summarises the core findings and turns the legal framework into a business-readable map for foreign suppliers, investors and service providers.

1. Executive Summary

Foreign companies evaluating Cuba should not treat market entry, commercial representation, product sales and foreign investment as interchangeable concepts. Each route involves different institutions, counterparties, permissions, payment routes and operational risks.

The central operational distinction is that a foreign commercial presence in Cuba does not by itself equal an import licence or a right to distribute products domestically. A representative office may support commercial relationships, market development, technical liaison and customer support, while import or export operations generally require an authorised Cuban foreign trade entity, an approved investment structure or another applicable official route. [S1] [S3]

Main conclusion	For an exporter, the commercial question is not only "Is there a Cuban buyer?" It is "Which authorised entity will execute the trade, which bank will pay, which currency route will be used, which sanctions/export-control checks apply, and who will clear and distribute the goods after arrival?"

Core client question	Working answer
Can a foreign company open a representative office?	Yes, subject to the commercial representation framework and registration/licensing requirements under Cuban rules. [S1]
Does a representative office equal an import licence?	No. Representation and import authorisation should be treated as separate matters.
Can a foreign supplier sell products into Cuba?	Potentially, but the transaction normally requires the correct Cuban buyer, an authorised trade channel and a workable payment route.
Can MIPYMEs access imported goods?	The framework for non-state actors uses authorised foreign trade entities for import/export services in freely convertible currency operations. [S3]
Can letters of credit be used?	Letters of credit exist as a Cuban banking instrument, but their value depends on the issuing bank, advising/confirming bank, currency, sanctions screening and buyer funding. [S8] [S11]
Is MLC still relevant?	MLC remains visible in official banking terminology, but the 2026 foreign-currency purchase mechanism for non-state actors refers to a separate foreign-currency account. [S9] [S10]
Is foreign investment a separate route?	Yes. Joint ventures, international economic association contracts and wholly foreign-owned enterprises belong to the foreign investment framework. [S6]

2. Core Distinctions

Concept	Main function	Do not assume it provides
Commercial representation	Local commercial presence for liaison, promotion, market development and support activities.	Automatic import rights, wholesale distribution rights, retail rights or payment assurance.

Authorised trade channel	Cuban entity authorised to perform foreign trade operations for qualifying Cuban actors.	Proof that any specific transaction will be approved, financed, paid or logistically executable.
MIPYME / non-state actor	Cuban private or non-state economic actor that may generate demand and fund transactions.	A general right to import independently outside the applicable authorised mechanism.
Foreign investment	Approved investment project or structure under the foreign investment regime.	A shortcut for ordinary trading where no investment project exists.
Banking instrument	Payment tool such as transfer, LC, guarantee or foreign-currency account.	A guarantee of settlement unless the issuing/confirming structure and funds are verified.
Customs clearance	Formal import process and customs declaration route.	Product approval, tax exemption or right to distribute without the required permits.

3. How to Use This Paper

Each substantive section separates official framework, practical explanation and verification items. This format is intended to prevent the most common market-entry error in Cuba: treating a general permission, a directory entry, a social-media signal or a verbal assurance as proof that a specific import transaction can be executed and paid.

Layer	Use in this paper
Official framework	Rules, institutions and official source references. This is the highest-confidence layer of the paper.
Practical explanation	Business-readable interpretation for a foreign supplier, investor or service provider.
Verification item	A specific point to confirm with a Cuban counterparty, official source, local adviser, bank or customs specialist before acting.
Limitation	A point that should not be treated as legal certainty, payment assurance or transaction approval.

4. Client Question Map

The following map summarises the main questions a foreign company normally asks before selling, representing itself, investing or shipping goods to Cuba. Later sections provide the detailed response framework.

Question area	Typical client question	Where answered
Market entry	Do I need a Cuban company, representative office, distributor, importer or investment vehicle?	Sections 9-13, 28-33
Counterparty	Is the Cuban buyer a state company, MIPYME, CNA, TCP or another actor?	Sections 6-8, 16
Trade authority	Who is legally authorised to import or export the goods?	Sections 13-15
Payment security	Can I use an irrevocable or confirmed LC, and will my bank accept it?	Sections 19-23
Currency	Is the payment route MLC, a foreign-currency account, EUR, USD, CAD or another currency?	Sections 19-20
Sanctions/export control	Is the item, bank, party, vessel, insurer or route restricted?	Section 22
Customs	Which documents, HS code, permits and declarations are needed?	Sections 24-26
Logistics	Who clears, stores, transports and distributes the goods after arrival?	Sections 24-27
Investment	If trade is not enough, what investment structures exist?	Sections 28-31

PART II

Institutional and Commercial Framework

This part identifies the Cuban institutions and market categories that shape the entry options available to foreign companies.

5. Institutional Map

Foreign trade and investment activity involving Cuba may require interaction with several institutions. Their roles should not be conflated: trade policy, investment approval, banking, customs, company registration and economic planning are different functions.

Institution	Main role	Why it matters to foreign companies
MINCEX	Foreign trade and foreign investment policy; authorised foreign trade entities; investment promotion.	Trade route, investment pathway and official source validation.
Cámara de Comercio	Commercial representation registry and business support role.	Foreign representative office or branch registration context.
MEP	Economic planning, non-state actor policy and approval procedures for certain associations.	Economic actor status, public-private association questions and planning framework.
Banco Central de Cuba	Banking regulation, exchange-rate references and non-state foreign-currency mechanisms.	Payment route and currency verification.
Aduana General	Customs procedures, declarations, tariff/origin references and import control processes.	Import documentation and customs clearance.
OFAC / BIS / State Department	US sanctions, export controls and restricted-party frameworks.	Transactions with US nexus, US-origin goods, US persons or banks and third-country compliance concerns.

6. Cuba's Commercial System

Cuba combines state-sector dominance, regulated non-state economic activity, authorised foreign trade entities and foreign investment channels. A foreign supplier should therefore separate commercial demand from execution capacity. A buyer may need a product, but another entity may be required to structure the import, arrange payment, clear goods and manage local distribution.

Commercial planning rule	A Cuba transaction should be mapped as a chain: buyer demand - authorised trade channel - payment route - sanctions/export-control screening - customs clearance - local delivery. Weakness at any point can stop the operation even when demand is real.

7. State and Non-State Economic Actors

Actor	Commercial relevance	Verification focus
State enterprise / state entity	Traditional buyer, user, importer, payer or project counterparty in many sectors.	Check entity identity, parent organisation, payment route, sanctions exposure and import authority.

MIPYME	Micro, small or medium non-state enterprise that may generate demand for inputs, equipment or consumer goods.	Check registration, permitted activity, bank account, foreign-currency access and authorised trade entity.
CNA	Non-agricultural cooperative; may participate in economic activity under applicable rules.	Check registration, sector and access to foreign-currency mechanism.
TCP / self-employed actor	Smaller-scale business activity; may be relevant for distribution, services or retail-facing demand.	Check whether transaction size and product type fit the actor and channel.
Joint venture / foreign investment company	Approved investment vehicle with specific scope.	Check project approval, import powers, customs/tax treatment and financing.

8. Who Can Import and Export?

The working assumption for foreign suppliers should be conservative: not every Cuban buyer is the importer of record, and not every entity that wants a product is authorised to execute a foreign trade operation. For non-state actors, the framework reflected in Resolution 166/2024 uses authorised entities to conduct import/export services in freely convertible currency operations. [S3]

Where a Cuban buyer claims it can import directly, the foreign supplier should request written evidence of the role that the buyer or its designated authorised entity will perform. The evidence should include the entity name, authorisation basis, product category, bank route, customs route and responsible contact.

PART III

Foreign Commercial Presence

This part explains what a foreign commercial presence can support and why it should not be confused with trade authorisation.

9. Commercial Representation

Decree 32/2021 is the core reference identified for the establishment of foreign commercial representations in Cuba. The Gaceta Oficial describes it as the regulation for the establishment of foreign commercial representations in Cuba. [S1]

Commercial representation is relevant when a foreign company wants local visibility, market development, institutional relations, technical liaison or after-sales support. It may be strategically important for companies selling complex equipment, machinery, industrial goods, technology, after-sales service or project-based solutions.

Do not confuse presence with trading rights	A representative office may help a company build relationships and support transactions, but it should not be treated as proof that the foreign company can itself import, sell wholesale, sell retail, invoice locally or distribute goods domestically.

10. Representative Offices

A representative office is a local commercial presence for representation, promotion, relationship management and support functions. The specific licence or registration should always be checked against the official record and the permitted activities granted to that representation.

Function	Practical role	Limitation
Market research	Usually aligned with a representative presence.	Does not approve imports.
Commercial liaison	Supports meetings, introductions and negotiation follow-up.	Does not replace the Cuban contracting/import channel.
Technical assistance	May support complex products, training or after-sales coordination.	Does not remove product-level permits or customs requirements.
Customer support	May help the user after delivery.	Does not prove local inventory, warranty funds or distribution authority.
Promotion	May support product visibility and market development.	Does not authorise retail sale or wholesale distribution by itself.

11. What Representation Does Not Authorise

For transaction planning, the safest working position is that commercial representation should not be treated as an import licence, domestic sales permit or foreign investment approval. Even where a representative office can support a transaction, the underlying import/export mechanism must still be identified.

Activity	Representation alone?	Required follow-up
Activity	Treat as allowed by representation alone?	Required follow-up
Commercial import of goods	No	Identify authorised importer or approved investment vehicle.
Domestic wholesale distribution	No	Verify local commercial authorisation and distribution route.
Retail sale	No	Verify specific local authorisation and product-sector rules.
Issuing local commercial invoices	Do not assume	Check tax/company/banking status and authorised business scope.
Holding inventory for sale	Do not assume	Check customs, warehousing and distribution permissions.
After-sales support	Potentially supportable	Confirm scope of representative office and service arrangements.

12. Non-Commercial Imports Linked to Representations

A foreign representation may need to import office equipment, samples or materials for its own non-commercial operation. Such imports should be treated separately from commercial imports intended for resale or distribution. The relevant customs, temporary admission, sample and representation rules must be verified for the specific item and purpose.

Verification item	For samples, demonstration units, spare parts or tools, verify whether the shipment is temporary, non-commercial, for demonstration, for warranty support or for sale. The classification affects customs treatment, documentation and risk.

PART IV

Authorised Trade Channels and MIPYME Trade

This part maps the authorised foreign trade entity model and the practical steps a foreign supplier should follow before signing or shipping.

13. Authorised Trading Companies

Resolution 166/2024 approves the regulation governing commercial relations in freely convertible currency operations between entities authorised to conduct foreign trade and non-state management forms. The Gaceta record identifies the rule as modified and links it to the authorised-entity framework. [S3]

Resolution 160/2025 modifies the single annex of Resolution 166/2024 and updates the authorised entity list. [S4] Resolution 20/2026 subsequently modifies the annex again and adds ENETEC, S.A. as an authorised entity, according to the Gaceta legal record. [S5]

Important limitation	An authorised entity list is not a guarantee of product-level approval, payment capacity, active business operation or transaction execution. It is a starting point for verification.

14. Current Authorised Entity Annex

The working extraction below consolidates the official annex referenced in prior drafts and includes the later ENETEC addition. Accents are simplified in some names for layout and search consistency. Legal verification must always use the current official Spanish text.

How to use this annex	Use this list as a first screening tool only. Before a transaction, verify the current official annex, the entity role, product fit, buyer relationship, bank route and customs route directly with the relevant parties.

14A. Official Annex List - working extraction

No.	Short name	Official / descriptive name	Indicative sector
1	QUIMIMPORT	Empresa Cubana Importadora de Productos Quimicos	Chemicals and industrial inputs
2	CONSUMIMPORT	Empresa Comercializadora de Articulos en General	General consumer goods
3	MAQUIMPORT	Empresa Comercializadora de Objetivos Industriales, maquinarias, equipos y articulos de ferreteria	Machinery, equipment and hardware
4	MAPRINTER	Empresa Comercializadora de Materias Primas y Productos Intermedios	Raw materials and intermediate goods
5	IMECO	Empresa Importadora y Exportadora de la Construccion	Construction
6	ACINOX	Empresa ACINOX COMERCIAL	Metals and steel
7	METALCUBA	Empresa Importadora, Exportadora y Comercializadora de Metales	Metals
8	TRANSIMPORT	Empresa Central de Abastecimiento y Ventas de Equipos de Transporte Pesado y sus Piezas	Heavy transport and spare parts
9	COPEXTEL, S.A.	COPEXTEL, S.A.	ICT, electronics and technical solutions
10	FCBC	Fondo Cubano de Bienes Culturales	Cultural goods
11	SASA	SERVICIOS AUTOMOTORES, S.A.	Automotive services and supplies
12	SOLINTEL, S.A.	Empresa de Soluciones Integrales de Telecomunicaciones S.A.	Telecommunications
13	CITRICOS CARIBE, S.A.	Citricos Caribe, S.A.	Agrifood / citrus
14	Agroindustrial Ceballos	Empresa Agroindustrial Ceballos	Agrifood

14A. Official Annex List - working extraction continued (2)

No.	Short name	Official / descriptive name	Indicative sector
15	Agroindustrial Victoria de Giron	Empresa Agroindustrial Victoria de Giron	Agrifood
16	Frutas Selectas	Empresa Comercializadora Frutas Selectas	Fresh produce
17	ALCONA, S.A.	ALCONA, S.A.	Agrifood / commercial
18	CUBAEXPORT	Empresa Cubana Exportadora de Alimentos y Productos Varios	Food and miscellaneous products
19	CARIBEX	Empresa Comercial Caribex	Food / seafood / commercial
20	ILIMPEX	Empresa Filial ILIMPEX	Import-export services
21	SOFTEL	Empresa Productora de Software para la Tecnica Electronica	Software and electronics
22	DESOFT	Empresa de Aplicaciones Informaticas DESOFT	Software and IT services
23	ITH, S.A.	Comercializadora ITH, S.A.	Tourism supply / hospitality
24	ICAIC	Instituto de Arte e Industrias Cinematograficas	Film and cultural industries
25	GRAN COMERCIAL	Empresa Comercializadora de Bienes de Consumos no Alimenticios y de Servicios Logisticos	Non-food consumer goods and logistics
26	ENERGOIMPORT	Empresa Importadora-Exportadora de Objetivos Electro-Energeticos	Energy and electro-energy equipment
27	RTV COMERCIAL	Empresa Comercializadora de la Radio y la Television Cubana	Radio and television supplies
28	PROPES	Empresa Importadora y Proveedora de Productos para la Pesca	Fishing supplies

14A. Official Annex List - working extraction continued (3)

No.	Short name	Official / descriptive name	Indicative sector
29	Sur del Jibaro	Empresa Agroindustrial de Granos Sur del Jibaro	Agriculture / grains
30	Varona	Empresa Metal-Mecanica Varona	Metal-mechanical industry
31	SERLOVEM	SERLOVEM, S.U.R.L.	Industrial / services
32	CUBAZUCAR	Empresa Cubana Exportadora de Azucar y sus Derivados	Sugar and derivatives
33	IMPORTADORA CARIBE	Agencia Importadora Caribe, S.U.R.L.	Import services
34	IMPEXPORT	IMPEXPORT, S.U.R.L.	Import-export services
35	CINESOFT-DIGT@L	CINESOFT-DIGT@L, S.U.R.L.	Digital / audiovisual / software
36	Gestion del Patrimonio	Empresa de Gestion del Patrimonio S.A.	Heritage and property-related services
37	QUIMIMPEX	Empresa Importadora y Exportadora de la Industria Quimica	Chemical industry
38	CUBAELECTRONICA	Empresa Importadora y Exportadora de Productos de la Electronica y las Comunicaciones	Electronics and communications
39	PCT Habana	Parque Cientifico Tecnologico de La Habana, S.A.	Technology and innovation
40	EASIG	Empresa de Aseguramiento y Servicios Integrales a la Ganaderia	Livestock supplies and services
41	SERIC	Empresa de Refrigeracion y Calderas del MINAL	Refrigeration and boilers
42	AGRIMPEX CARIBE	AGRIMPEX CARIBE, S.U.R.L.	Agriculture / import-export

14A. Official Annex List - working extraction continued (4)

No.	Short name	Official / descriptive name	Indicative sector
43	PALCO	Empresa Importadora PALCO	Institutional imports
44	AZUMAT	Empresa Logistica AZUMAT	Logistics / sugar sector
45	POLO IMPORT-EXPORT	POLO IMPORT-EXPORT, S.U.R.L.	Import-export services
46	TRADEX	Empresa Proveedora General del Transporte	Transport supply
47	SOLIMPORT AUTOMOTRIZ	SOLIMPORT AUTOMOTRIZ, S.U.R.L.	Automotive imports
48	GEOPRODUCTOS	GEOPRODUCTOS, S.U.R.L.	Geoscience / industrial products
49	IT Codigo	IT Codigo, S.U.R.L.	IT / software
50	Agropecuaria Las Tunas	Empresa Integral Agropecuaria Las Tunas	Agriculture
51	Fernando Echenique	Empresa Agroindustrial de Granos Fernando Echenique	Agriculture / grains
52	Cafe Asdrubal Lopez Vazquez	Empresa Procesadora de Cafe Asdrubal Lopez Vazquez	Coffee processing
53	ENETEC, S.A.	ENETEC, S.A.	Added by Resolution 20/2026; sector to verify

15. Indicative Sector Map

The sector grouping below is a business classification for research use only. It is not an official classification, does not prove product-level authority and must be verified against the current official annex and the relevant authorised entity before any transaction.

Indicative sector group	Official annex numbers	Commercial reading
Agriculture, food and fisheries	13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 28, 29, 32, 40, 42, 50, 51, 52	Food, grains, livestock, coffee, fisheries and agricultural supply chains.
Industrial inputs, metals and chemicals	1, 4, 6, 7, 30, 37, 48	Chemicals, raw materials, metals and industrial products.
Machinery, construction and transport	3, 5, 8, 11, 46, 47	Machinery, construction goods, heavy transport, automotive and spare parts.
Energy, refrigeration and technical systems	26, 41, 53	Energy, electro-energy equipment, refrigeration, boilers and ENETEC update to verify.
ICT, software, electronics and communications	9, 12, 21, 22, 35, 38, 39, 49	Telecom, electronics, IT, software and innovation-related entities.
Consumer goods, tourism, culture and logistics	2, 10, 23, 24, 25, 31, 33, 34, 36, 43, 44, 45	General goods, cultural industries, hospitality, logistics and import-export service entities.

16. Trade with MIPYMEs and Other Non-State Actors

The non-state sector can generate meaningful commercial demand, particularly for inputs, equipment, packaging, spare parts, consumer products and service-related goods. However, demand from a non-state actor should not be treated as sufficient proof that the import can be executed.

Step	Question to verify	Evidence to request
1. Identify customer	Is the buyer a MIPYME, CNA, state entity or other actor?	Registration/status documents; NIT; bank details.
2. Confirm authorised entity	Which entity will structure the import/export operation?	Official authorisation and direct confirmation.

3. Confirm payment source	How will the buyer fund the operation?	Bank confirmation; LC draft; foreign-currency account proof where applicable.
4. Confirm product fit	Is the product allowed and suitable for the channel?	Technical sheet, HS code, permits and restrictions.
5. Confirm delivery chain	Who clears, stores and distributes the goods?	Customs broker, warehouse, transport and insurance details.
6. Confirm contracting party	Who signs the supply contract and who pays?	Draft contract, pro forma invoice and bank route.

17. Import and Export Flows

The simplified working flows below should be used as transaction maps, not as a substitute for official procedures. They help identify which party is buyer, importer, payer, user and consignee.

Stage	Import flow step	Practical meaning
1	Cuban demand identified	Customer/user states need and product specifications.
2	Authorised entity mapped	Entity with relevant foreign trade role is identified and contacted.
3	Supplier offer prepared	Pro forma invoice, Incoterms, technical sheet and compliance data prepared.
4	Payment route tested	Bank route, currency, LC/transfer route and sanctions screening reviewed before shipment.
5	Import documentation prepared	Commercial documents, transport documents, permits and customs declaration inputs compiled.
6	Shipment and clearance	Goods shipped, cleared, stored and delivered according to agreed route.

Stage	Export flow step	Practical meaning
1	Cuban export supply identified	Product, supplier, quantity and export readiness checked.
2	Authorised exporter mapped	Entity authorised to export the product or service is identified.
3	Foreign buyer due diligence	Buyer, destination, payment and sanctions/export-control risks screened.
4	Contract and payment route	Price, currency, payment method and bank route agreed.
5	Export documentation	Certificates, customs declaration, origin and transport documentation prepared.
6	Shipment and settlement	Shipment executed and payment monitored against agreed terms.

18. Supplier Documentation Pack

A foreign supplier should prepare a standard pack before approaching a Cuban buyer or authorised trade entity. This reduces delays and makes it easier for banks, customs specialists and counterparties to assess the transaction.

Document category	Recommended contents
Commercial	Company profile; pro forma invoice; price validity; Incoterms; payment terms; lead time; warranty terms.
Product	Technical sheet; catalogue; HS-code working assumption; product composition; certificates; standards; shelf life where relevant.
Compliance	Country of origin; end-use statement if needed; restricted-party screening; US-origin / EAR / sanctions notes where applicable.
Logistics	Packing list draft; dimensions/weight; container loadability; port of loading; insurance; shipping route; temperature or storage needs.
Banking	Bank details; preferred currency; LC terms; advising/confirming bank preference; acceptable documentary terms.
After-sales	Spare parts plan; manuals; training; service requirements; warranty execution route.

PART V

Payments, Banking and Sanctions Screening

This part addresses the question every exporter asks before shipping: how can payment be made, secured and verified?

19. Banking and Currency Checkpoints

Payment planning should start before commercial shipment planning. In Cuba-related trade, a buyer may be commercially willing, but the transaction may still fail if the bank, currency, sanctions screening, LC route or foreign-currency funding cannot be confirmed.

Checkpoint	Question	Evidence
Buyer bank	Which Cuban bank or foreign bank is involved?	Bank name, branch/contact, SWIFT/IBAN details where applicable, written bank confirmation.
Currency	Which currency will be used?	EUR, USD, CAD or other route; bank acceptance; sanctions/nexus review.
Payment method	Transfer, documentary collection, LC, advance payment or other?	Draft LC, pro forma terms, bank commitment or payment schedule.
Funding source	Does the buyer have funds or approved access?	Foreign-currency account confirmation, bank confirmation or confirmed LC.
Sanctions screen	Are parties, banks, vessels or insurers restricted?	OFAC, State Department Cuba Restricted List, BIS/EAR and local bank compliance review.
Timing	When will the exporter be paid?	At sight, usance, advance, partial advance or milestone-based payment.

20. MLC and Foreign-Currency Access

MLC remains visible in official Cuban banking references, including exchange-rate references that mention MLC transfers. However, the 2026 BCC mechanism for non-state economic actors uses a separate foreign-currency account and should not be treated as identical to a traditional MLC account. [S9] [S10]

Practical reading	When a Cuban buyer says it has MLC, divisas or a foreign-currency account, the exporter should ask what type of account it is, which bank holds it, whether funds are available, whether the bank will permit the payment method proposed, and whether the account can support an LC or transfer for the specific transaction.

Item	What it indicates	Verification need
MLC reference	Still appears in official banking terminology.	Do not assume it is sufficient for international settlement.
Cuenta en divisas	Foreign-currency account route in BCC non-state actor mechanism.	BCC FAQ indicates it is not an MLC account. [S9]
Foreign-currency purchase mechanism	Non-state MIPYMEs/CNA may apply under the official mechanism.	Verify eligibility, allocation, timing and bank approval.

Export settlement	The exporter needs receipt in its own bank.	Confirm whether the exporter bank will accept the route before shipping.

21. Payment Security: Letters of Credit

Letters of credit are available as a banking instrument in Cuba. Banco Exterior de Cuba lists the issuance and negotiation of letters of credit among its services and describes a letter of credit as a payment tool governed by international rules, with payment against conditions and documents. [S8]

For an exporter dealing with an unknown Cuban buyer, open-account payment should generally be treated as a high-risk structure. A letter of credit may provide a more structured payment route, but only if the issuing bank, advising/confirming bank, currency route, sanctions screening, documentary terms and buyer funding are acceptable.

Exporter rule	Do not ship merely because the buyer says "we can open an LC". First obtain a draft LC, send it to the exporter bank, confirm whether the bank will advise, negotiate or confirm it, and resolve sanctions/export-control questions before shipment.

LC type	Meaning	Exporter implication
Advised LC	Exporter bank advises the LC but does not add payment undertaking.	Payment risk remains primarily with issuing Cuban bank.
Confirmed LC	A non-Cuban confirming bank adds its own payment undertaking.	Stronger exporter protection if confirmation is accepted and documents comply.
Irrevocable LC	Cannot be cancelled or amended without consent under the applicable rules.	Still depends on issuing bank risk and documentary compliance.
Sight LC	Payment expected upon compliant document presentation.	Stronger cash-flow profile than deferred terms.
Usance / deferred LC	Payment occurs after an agreed period.	Adds credit and country/bank risk over time.

LC verification questions for the English master edition

No.	Question
1	Can an irrevocable letter of credit be opened in favour of the foreign supplier for this import operation?
2	Which Cuban bank will issue the letter of credit?
3	Can the LC be confirmed by a foreign bank outside Cuba?
4	Will the LC be issued through SWIFT and subject to UCP 600?
5	Which currency can be used for the LC - EUR, USD, CAD or another currency?
6	Does the Cuban bank require 100% funding or collateral before issuing the LC?
7	How long does it normally take to open the LC from Cuba?
8	What fees apply for issuance, amendments, negotiation and confirmation?
9	Has the buyer or authorised entity recently completed LC-paid import operations with foreign suppliers?
10	Can the buyer share a non-confidential example of the operational flow?

22. OFAC and BIS Screening

Cuba-related trade can trigger sanctions and export-control questions even when the exporter is not located in the United States. The risk depends on the product, currency, banks, insurers, vessel route, US-origin content, US persons, restricted parties and end-use.

OFAC FAQ 766 discusses payment and financing terms for authorised exports/reexports of items other than agricultural commodities to Cuba and includes references to letters of credit issued by Cuban financial institutions within the authorised framework. OFAC FAQ 767 provides a more limited payment/financing

framework for agricultural commodities. [S11] [S12]

BIS states that exports and reexports to Cuba of items subject to the Export Administration Regulations require a BIS licence unless authorised by a licence exception or exempted from licensing requirements. [S14]

Risk area	Why it matters	Verification step
Product origin	US-origin or EAR-controlled content may trigger BIS review.	Classify item and check EAR jurisdiction.
Product type	Agricultural commodities may have different financing rules.	Check OFAC FAQ 767 and transaction-specific counsel.
Bank route	US-dollar or US-bank touchpoints can create compliance issues.	Check bank willingness before contracting.
Counterparties	Cuban military/security-linked or restricted entities may be prohibited or high-risk.	Screen SDN, Cuba Restricted List and internal bank lists.
Vessel/insurer/logistics	Carrier or insurer may refuse Cuba risk.	Confirm acceptance in writing.

23. Payment Route Verification

The payment route should be documented as part of the transaction file. A foreign exporter should not rely on verbal assurances where the buyer is unknown, the shipment value is meaningful, or the product is hard to re-route after dispatch.

Payment method	Commercial reading	Exporter position
100% advance payment	Strongest for exporter; difficult for buyer.	Best for small first shipments or high-risk counterparties.
Partial advance + LC	Balances buyer and exporter risk.	Use when buyer cannot prepay full amount but bank route is available.
Confirmed irrevocable LC at sight	Strong payment structure if a reputable confirming bank is involved.	Preferred for unknown buyers when feasible.
Unconfirmed LC	Better than open account but still exposes exporter to Cuban issuing bank risk.	Use only after exporter bank review.
Documentary collection	Documents released through banks but no bank payment undertaking.	Higher risk than LC.
Open account / post-payment	Shipment before payment.	Generally high risk for unknown Cuban buyers.

PART VI

Customs and Operational Controls

This part translates customs, documentation and operational continuity questions into a practical pre-shipment checklist.

24. Customs Framework

The Aduana General import page lists commercial customs process areas including temporary warehouses, commercial tariffs, origin of goods, customs declaration forms/methodologies and import procedures. [S13] For transaction planning, the exporter should confirm not only export documents from its country, but also the Cuban customs process that the importer or authorised entity will follow.

Customs item	Why it matters	Verification step
HS code / tariff	Product classification affects tariff, permits and documentation.	Agree a working HS code and verify with customs specialist.
Origin	Origin can affect documents and sanctions/export controls.	Prepare certificate of origin where required.
Customs declaration	Importer or broker prepares declaration inputs.	Confirm who files and who pays duties/charges.
Temporary warehouse	Goods may require storage before release.	Check storage, demurrage and handling exposure.
Product controls	Food, health, telecom, energy, chemicals or dual-use products may need additional permits.	Verify with competent authority before shipment.

25. Import Documentation

The exact documentation set depends on product, Incoterm, origin, shipment route, buyer and customs regime. The list below is a working pre-shipment pack for a commercial import.

Document	Purpose	Verification point
Commercial invoice	Price, seller, buyer, product, quantity, currency and payment terms.	Must match LC/pro forma and customs declaration.
Packing list	Packages, weights, dimensions and marks.	Critical for customs, insurance and logistics.
Transport document	Bill of lading, airway bill or other transport document.	Consignee/notify party must match import route.
Certificate of origin	Origin evidence where required.	Also relevant for sanctions/export-control screening.
Insurance certificate	Required depending on Incoterm and risk allocation.	Confirm insured party and coverage.
Technical sheet	Specifications, composition, model, standards and intended use.	Supports HS classification and permit review.
Product permits/certificates	Health, veterinary, phytosanitary, telecom, chemical, energy or other permits.	Must be confirmed before shipment.
LC documents	If LC is used, all required documents must be compatible and obtainable.	Avoid impossible or inconsistent document requirements.

26. Product and Operational Controls

Product-level controls can be decisive. A product may be commercially attractive and still face delays if it requires health registration, technical approval, standards certification, spare parts planning, installation support or controlled end-use review.

Product family	Controls to check
Food and beverages	Health, shelf life, labelling, cold chain and import permissions.
Machinery and equipment	Technical specifications, spare parts, installation, training and warranty support.
Chemicals	Composition, safety data sheets, restricted substances and storage requirements.
Telecom/ICT/electronics	Telecom approval, encryption/export controls, cybersecurity and after-sales support.
Energy equipment	Technical standards, grid compatibility, safety and installation authority.
Medical/health products	Health authority approvals, registration, storage and product liability.

27. Logistics, Energy and Operational Continuity

Operational continuity should be considered part of trade feasibility in Cuba. Power availability, fuel constraints, port congestion, inland transport, warehouse reliability and cold-chain resilience can affect delivery even after customs clearance. UNE official reporting in July 2026 described 24-hour service impacts and large SEN deficits, illustrating why energy resilience should be assessed for commercial operations. [S15]

Operational area	Questions to verify
Port and route	Port of discharge, congestion, feeder reliability and insurance.
Inland transport	Truck availability, fuel exposure, route reliability and delivery timing.
Warehouse	Storage conditions, power backup, security and handling capacity.
Cold chain	Generator backup, fuel availability and temperature monitoring.
Customer operations	Can the buyer receive, store, install or resell the goods after delivery?
After-sales	Who provides technical service if electricity, transport or spare parts are constrained?

PART VII

Foreign Investment and Local Structures

This part explains when a company should consider an investment route rather than a simple export transaction.

28. Law 118 Framework

Law 118 is the core foreign investment framework referenced by Cuban investment sources. MINCEX investment materials identify the principal modalities as joint ventures, international economic association contracts and wholly foreign-owned enterprises. [S6]

Foreign investment is not simply a more formal way to sell products. It is relevant where the company seeks a long-term operation, production, local service capacity, infrastructure, manufacturing, project investment or strategic partnership.

29. Main Investment Structures

Structure	Basic description	When relevant
Joint venture	Cuban and foreign parties form a company with agreed participation.	Long-term projects, production or service operations with Cuban partner involvement.
International economic association contract	Contractual association without necessarily forming a separate joint company.	Project, management, production, service or resource arrangements.
Wholly foreign-owned enterprise	Foreign investor owns the enterprise subject to approval and applicable limits.	Strategic cases where full foreign ownership is permitted and approved.

30. Mariel Special Development Zone

The Mariel Special Development Zone is an investment platform with a special legal regime. The official ZED Mariel site describes it as Cuba's first zone of its type, created by Decree-Law 313/2013, and references fiscal incentives and special regimes. [S16]

For a foreign company, Mariel may be relevant when the objective is not merely to sell into Cuba, but to establish production, logistics, technology or value-added service operations. It should be assessed as an investment route, not as a general shortcut for ordinary import sales.

31. State - Non-State Association Route

Gaceta Oficial No. 24/2026 includes Decree-Law 114/2025 on association between state and non-state business entities and Resolution 8/2026 establishing the MEP procedure for evaluation and approval. [S17] This is relevant to the broader Cuban commercial landscape, but it should not be treated as a general foreign-company route without specific analysis.

Practical limitation: this route may affect local partner capacity in some cases, but a foreign supplier must still verify trade authority, payment route, customs process and any foreign investment implications separately.

PART VIII

Decision Tools

This part provides practical tools that can be used in client meetings, transaction screening and internal go/no-go decisions.

32. Market Entry Model Comparison

Model	Purpose	Advantages	Limitations
Direct export via authorised importer	Selling products to Cuban demand through authorised trade channel.	Fastest route for product sales if buyer, authorised entity and payment route exist.	Payment, sanctions, customs and logistics risks remain.
Representative office	Local presence for promotion, liaison and support.	Useful for relationship-heavy sectors and technical products.	Not an import licence or domestic distribution right.
Foreign investment	Approved project or long-term local operation.	Relevant for production, infrastructure, services and strategic positioning.	Longer approval cycle; project-level obligations.
Mariel / special regime	Investment platform with special rules.	Relevant for production/logistics/value-added operations.	Not automatically suitable for ordinary trade.
State - non-state association	Cuban local structuring route involving state and non-state actors.	May influence local partner capabilities.	Requires separate verification and may not involve foreign company directly.

33. Decision Trees

A. Product sales

Product sale -> identify Cuban customer -> identify authorised trade entity -> confirm product fit -> confirm payment route -> screen sanctions/export controls -> confirm customs route -> ship only after documentation is aligned.

B. Local presence

Need local commercial presence -> assess representative office framework -> define permitted activities -> register/licence as required -> maintain separation between representation and import rights -> use authorised trade/investment route for actual commercial imports.

C. Foreign investment

Need production, warehouse, service base or long-term operation -> assess Law 118 modalities -> identify Cuban counterpart or project route -> evaluate Mariel or sector opportunity -> prepare investment proposal -> obtain relevant approvals -> structure banking, customs and labour arrangements.

D. Unknown buyer payment safety

Unknown buyer -> reject open account as default -> request buyer bank details -> request draft irrevocable LC -> obtain exporter bank pre-review -> seek confirmation if possible -> screen sanctions/export controls -> ship only after LC terms are acceptable and documents can be complied with.

34. Risk Matrix

Risk	Description	Level	Mitigation
Counterparty risk	Unknown buyer, unclear legal status or weak history.	High	Request registration, references, bank details and authorised entity confirmation.
Authorised channel risk	Wrong or inactive entity selected.	High	Verify current official annex and direct entity role.
Payment risk	Funds, bank route or LC not confirmed.	Very high	Use confirmed LC or advance payment where possible; bank pre-review.
Sanctions/export-control risk	Restricted party, US nexus, EAR-controlled item or restricted bank.	Very high	Screen parties, goods, banks, vessels and end-use.
Customs risk	Missing permits, wrong HS code or document mismatch.	High	Pre-clear documents and product controls.
Logistics risk	Port, storage, fuel or cold-chain disruption.	Medium to high	Plan route, warehouse, generator and insurance.
Operational continuity risk	Blackouts, fuel shortages or service constraints affect delivery/use.	Medium to high	Verify customer readiness and resilience.
Documentation risk	LC requires documents that cannot be produced.	High	Match LC terms to obtainable documents before issuance.

35. Verification Checklist

Checkpoint	Minimum confirmation
1. Counterparty	Customer identity, legal form, contact persons, business activity and track record.
2. Authorised channel	Name, official authorisation, product fit and role in the transaction.
3. Product	Technical sheet, certificates, HS-code assumption, permits and restrictions.
4. Commercial terms	Price, Incoterms, delivery timing, warranty and validity.
5. Payment route	Currency, bank, LC draft, confirmation, fees and settlement timing.
6. Compliance	Sanctions, export controls, restricted parties, end-use and US nexus.
7. Customs	Import declaration route, tariff, origin, permits, broker and consignee.
8. Logistics	Port, freight, insurance, storage, inland delivery and fuel exposure.
9. Operations	Power, cold chain, installation, after-sales and spare parts.
10. Evidence file	All approvals, bank communications, contracts and official confirmations archived.

36. Sector Mini-Scenarios

Scenario	Key checks
Food shipment to MIPYME	Confirm authorised importer, health/food documents, payment route, cold chain if relevant and buyer foreign-currency capacity.
Industrial machinery sale	Confirm authorised entity, technical specifications, spare parts, installation, warranty and LC terms.
Energy equipment	Check product standards, sanctions/export controls, installation capacity and power-system compatibility.
ICT/electronics	Check authorised entity, encryption/export controls, telecom approvals and after-sales support.
Representative office for machinery firm	Use representation for liaison and technical support; use authorised trade channel for imports.
Investment in production or assembly	Assess Law 118 modality, partner, Mariel applicability, investment approval and import privileges.

How to use these scenarios	Use each mini-scenario as a first meeting prompt. Ask the client to identify the product, Cuban buyer, authorised channel, payment security target, customs documents, logistics path and operational continuity risk before any commercial offer is treated as executable.

Client meeting prompt	Question
Product	What exactly is being sold, under which HS code assumption and with which certificates?
Buyer	Who is the Cuban buyer, end user, importer, payer and consignee?
Payment	Which payment method is acceptable to the exporter bank before shipment?
Execution	Who clears, stores, distributes, installs and services the goods after arrival?

PART IX

Annexes

This part includes definitions, source register, publication checklist and legal disclaimer.

37. Glossary

Term	Working meaning
Authorised entity	Cuban entity authorised to conduct foreign trade operations for relevant actors under the applicable framework.
BCC	Banco Central de Cuba.
BIS	US Bureau of Industry and Security.
CNA	Non-agricultural cooperative.
FGNE	Formas de Gestion No Estatal - non-state management forms.
LC	Letter of credit / carta de credito.
MIPYME	Micro, small or medium enterprise.
MLC	Moneda libremente convertible; still appears in Cuban banking terminology.
OFAC	US Office of Foreign Assets Control.
Representative office	Foreign commercial presence for representation/support functions, not an automatic import licence.
UCP 600	International Chamber of Commerce rules commonly used for documentary credits.
ZED Mariel	Zona Especial de Desarrollo Mariel, Cuba special development zone.

38. Source Register

ID	Source	Use in this paper
S1	Gaceta Oficial No. 63/2021 - Decree 32/2021	Regulation for establishment of foreign commercial representations in Cuba.
S2	Decree 32/2021 reference text / Register detail	National Register of Foreign Commercial Representations attached to Cámara de Comercio.
S3	Gaceta Oficial - Resolution 166/2024 MINCEX	Regulation governing MLC commercial relations between authorised foreign trade entities and non-state management forms.
S4	Gaceta Oficial - Resolution 160/2025 MINCEX	Modifies the single annex of Resolution 166/2024.
S5	Gaceta / Resolution 20/2026 MINCEX	Adds ENETEC, S.A. to the authorised-entity annex.
S6	MINCEX investment portal / Law 118 references	Foreign investment modalities: joint venture, international economic association contract and wholly foreign-owned enterprise.
S7	Gaceta Official / MEP Resolution 8/2026 and Decree-Law 114/2025	State - non-state business association framework and approval procedure.
S8	Banco Exterior de Cuba - Services	Issuance and negotiation of letters of credit.
S9	Banco Central de Cuba - Foreign currency sale to non-state actors	Official mechanism for CNA and non-state MIPYME foreign-currency purchase; account is not MLC account.

S10	Banco Central de Cuba - Exchange-rate references	Official banking references including MLC transfer terminology.
S11	OFAC FAQ 766	Payment/financing terms for authorised exports/reexports of items other than agricultural commodities.
S12	OFAC FAQ 767	Payment/financing terms for agricultural commodities.
S13	Aduana General de la Republica - Importacion	Customs import process references: tariff, origin, declaration and related processes.
S14	BIS - Cuba Export Controls	EAR licensing requirement framework for Cuba exports/reexports unless licence exception or exemption applies.
S15	Union Electrica - SEN status note	Operational continuity signal for power supply and large electricity deficits.
S16	ZED Mariel official site	Mariel legal framework and special development zone information.
S17	Gaceta Oficial No. 24/2026	Decree-Law 114/2025 and Resolution 8/2026 on state - non-state association.

39. Transaction & Update Checklist

Before transaction-specific use, translated editions or future updates, the following checks should be completed.

Check	Action
Source verification	Open each official source, confirm title, date, status and whether modified or repealed.
Annex verification	Re-check the authorised entity list against the latest official annex.
Legal review	Have Cuban counsel review representation, import/export, investment and public-private association sections.
Bank review	Have at least one exporter bank review LC and payment-route wording.
Sanctions review	Have sanctions/export-control specialist review OFAC/BIS wording where US nexus may exist.
Customs review	Confirm documentation pack and customs checkpoints with customs broker or Aduana source.
Layout review	Render every page and check no heading or table starts awkwardly at page bottom.
Language review	Translate LC questions and checklists into the publication language for TR and ES editions.

40. Disclaimer

This document is prepared for informational and commercial research purposes only. It does not constitute legal, tax, customs, banking, sanctions, accounting, investment, financial or regulatory advice. It should not be relied upon as a substitute for advice from qualified professionals.

Cuban laws, administrative practices, authorised entity lists, banking rules, payment channels, sanctions rules and operational conditions may change. Readers must verify all information before making commercial decisions, signing contracts, issuing invoices, shipping goods, opening letters of credit, making payments or investing.

Company names, official lists, directories, websites and social-media signals should be treated as research inputs. They do not prove legal existence, import authority, payment capacity, operational capacity or transaction approval unless confirmed through appropriate official and transactional evidence.

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