

Spain and the European Communities

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It may be a truism to say that Spain's European policy has changed since it joined the European Communities in 1986, though both the causes of the change and how it came about are by no means obvious. According to Esther Barbé (our preferred authority in this field), it was a reactive change, in that the factors underlying it were Community-based — enlargement of the EU to 15, reform of the Treaty on European Union — and international — end of bipolarity, economic recession in the early 1990s — rather than internal. European policy has therefore evolved more out of the need to adapt to the new circumstances of Europe rather than out of its own political momentum.

It should not be forgotten, however, that Spanish policy towards Europe — and its foreign policy as a whole — has been dragged reluctantly along behind domestic policy, and that continuity has prevailed over change, though there have been significant exceptions. In this period Europe has actually been both a state policy and a tool of internal debate, since the political parties have tried to boost their domestic positions by supporting Community policy options. Spain's position on European issues has therefore had repercussions at internal level, and may have even more intense repercussions now. This internal dimension is related to aspects which either define the changes in government or which condition its policy and which are specific to Spain. Such relations, the policies that inform them and the changes arising in them, however, frequently have a different tempo and rhythm, something which is ultimately only perceptible in the medium term.

These factors make it possible to distinguish the stage marked by the *conception of European policy since accession, 1986-198[?]*, the basic lines of which involved the adaptation and implementation of a new Community policy after accession with the following objectives:

- to increase the relative weight of southern Europe, particularly Spain, obtaining greater financial resources in line with the principle of economic and social cohesion and recognition of the special geographic conditions involved;
- to obtain more favourable treatment as a less developed country through derogations from or extensions to the time limits for applying Community regulations on the environment, consumer rights, customs union, conversion of shipbuilding and the iron and steel industry, freedom of movement and public procurement;
- to reinforce EC links with the southern Mediterranean and above all with Latin America.

Spain (with Portugal) joined the Community on 1 January 1986, thus concluding an eight-year process of negotiation. Spanish accession was formalised through an unprecedentedly long and meticulous Treaty of 204 articles. Such protracted and arduous negotiations may have prepared the Spanish administration to address significant challenges:

- the transposition of 800 directives from the body of Community law immediately prior to accession;
- the need for a relatively easy and rapid adaptation to the changes the Single European Act introduced into the decision-making system, compared to the problems raised for other Community partners who were accustomed to the procedure of unanimity.

One of the areas in which that capacity to adapt was best expressed was budget negotiations. While the first outcome for Spain in 1986 resulted in a barely positive balance, Spanish pressure ensured that resources allocated to the structural funds doubled by 1988, with a consequent improvement in the financial balance in favour of Spain.

In strategic terms, national interests in the early years were protected by adopting the European Commission's views on the Single Market, i.e. the creation of the internal market would increase the gap between rich and poor, a trend that had to be counteracted by measures promoting greater 'cohesion' in the Community. The search for a North-South balance that would offset the North's greater competitiveness was therefore to involve measures favouring *economic and social cohesion*.

Moreover, the objective of defining Spain's foreign policy and playing a greater international role, using Community resources, was emphasised in the effort to transfer certain aspects of the country's international agenda to the Community agenda.

Broadly speaking, in political and administrative terms Spain managed relatively quickly to acquire the image of a serious, stable and effective country — particularly after its Presidency of the Community in the first half of 1989 — and succeeded in gaining the confidence of potential investors. The dramatic change in international society after the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, significantly affected its margin for manoeuvre. The end of the Cold War represented a real threat: Spain was once again at risk of being left on the sidelines of European integration a mere three years after accession.

The second stage was characterised by the definition of the Spanish model of European integration — 'Europe as an area of solidarity' — and by its wish to establish a prominent international profile in the context of the changes experienced in Europe after the end of the Cold War. Both objectives rested to some extent on the pro-European unanimity existing among political forces and public opinion.

The changes in Spain's European policy, meanwhile, came about in the framework of the intergovernmental negotiations from 1989 to 1991 that were to lead to the Treaty on European Union. Such changes should therefore be seen as an attempt to adapt firstly to the political, institutional, social, economic and monetary implications of the creation of the Single Market and the establishment of the four Community freedoms envisaged for 1992 (free movement of persons, goods, services and capital), and secondly to the form of the negotiating process itself, built around the system of two simultaneous intergovernmental conferences — one dedicated to the examination of Economic and Monetary Union and the other to the work on Political Union — culminating in the Maastricht European Council in December 1991.

The 1989 Presidency took place during the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party's second term of office in the first half of the year, a period of European, regional and local elections. The Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) had enjoyed an absolute majority in the Spanish Parliament since the 1986 elections, though it had lost a significant number of seats compared to 1982. Among other things, the Presidency offered the Government an opportunity to improve its image, which had tarnished by the end of the legislature, and to win voters over thanks to the prestige associated with a purged administration. It was, nonetheless, a challenge due to the concern prevailing in some EU Member States as to the capacity of a newcomer with a tradition of rigid bureaucracy to respond to the organisational demands involved.

The Government, on the other hand, was determined to make the Presidency a landmark along the road towards the modernisation of democratic Spain, the effects of which would go beyond the merely organisational aspects. It was also seen as an opportunity to put the final touches to Spain's relations with the EU, but above all, the image the Government tried to project, as Prime Minister Felipe González himself made clear, was one of dignity, and of prestige in particular.

Francisco Fernández Ordóñez, then Minister for Foreign Affairs, said that such an environment was institutional and realistic, even though Spanish observers and officials concurred in defining it as an 'administrative Presidency', since no completely original initiatives were launched. The agenda inherited from the preceding German Presidency was adopted instead, while the Commission's programme of work was reflected very faithfully. The most important issues from the 1980s (enlargement, SEA and financial perspective) had already been resolved, and the Spanish Government therefore inherited completion of the Single Market, the European Social Charter and definition of the stages of Monetary Union. Added to this legacy were some particularly Spanish issues, such as the treatment of southern Europe's specific environmental problems and various measures relating to the situation of EU nationals (removal of border

controls, residence rights and political rights), anticipating subsequent proposals concerning European citizenship.

Most of the Spanish initiatives stood out very clearly on the external agenda and in European Political Cooperation (EPC). Spain had found a tool with which to extend the scope and increase the effectiveness of its foreign policy, both in areas of traditional interest and in new spheres. Latin America was a priority, as was the Mediterranean basin (particularly negotiations with Morocco). A third area of interest involved relations with EFTA countries, a point on which Spain believed it could broker an agreement regarding its proposal that participation in the internal market required a contribution to efforts to bring about cohesion.

Opinions on the success of the 1989 Presidency vary. While some observers felt that all expectations had been exceeded, particularly with regard to the Single Market and political cooperation, others believed that progress in priority areas had been frustrating, though such failure was largely due to the limited room for manoeuvre surrounding key issues.

Specific progress was made on the single market, yet the most spectacular success was perhaps the adoption of the Delors Report on EMU and the first stage of preparations for it. The importance of this issue was underscored by the Spanish Government's decision to include the peseta in the European Monetary System just before the summit, thus emphasising that participation in EMU was essential for Spain, despite the associated costs. The Presidency was nevertheless obliged to refrain from forcing an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) to be convened to avoid a direct confrontation with Margaret Thatcher, whose opposition prevented the adoption of the European Social Charter in Madrid.

González himself said that agreement was more possible than desirable. Spain also failed to make progress in its proposals on citizenship, and obtained little of tangible value from European Cooperation Policy towards Latin America, though this was ultimately resolved with a declaration on the debt and an increase in financing for development aid. From a different perspective, however, the results favoured Spain's image within the EU and had an impact on the electoral prospects of the PSOE and of Felipe González.