

Franco's Spain and European integration

Source: CVCE. Carlos Sanz Díaz.

Copyright: (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.
Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/franco_s_spain_and_european_integration-en-481bb424-d791-48cf-8d54-7746982d42ec.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



At the end of the Second World War, all European opinion groups which promoted the process of integration of the 'Old Continent' agreed that Spain could not be invited to take part while Franco remained in power. For the countries that had just witnessed the defeat of right-wing totalitarianism, the achievement of the European ideal was closely linked to consolidation of the still-fragile post-war democracies. A regime such as the one in power in Spain, which in 1945 appeared to be the last bastion of fascism, had no place in the common European venture.

Spain paid for Franco's support for the Axis powers during the war with isolation and marginalisation from the nascent process of European integration. The country seemed to be about to miss the historical boat yet again. Since the end of the 19th century the most significant efforts at modernisation had sought to bring Spain closer to the levels of economic, social, political, scientific and cultural development prevailing in the most advanced European countries. For some of Spain's most outstanding representatives of science, thinking and politics in the first third of the 20th century, modernisation required the country to 'Europeanise', a formula that would allow it to overcome its age-old backwardness and resolve the many conflicts that were stifling its people, or as the philosopher Ortega y Gasset put it: 'Spain is the problem, Europe is the solution'.

Marking a sudden break from the inheritance of the liberal Europeanising culture that had culminated in the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939), General Franco's regime (1939–1975) adopted an unsavoury nationalism coupled with a heavily fascist-influenced authoritarian political model and a self-sufficient economic organisation. During the Second World War this formula appeared to sit comfortably with the New European Order led by Hitler, but the defeat of the Axis gave way to radical disharmony between Spain and the new climate reigning in post-war Europe. In an international environment of widespread hostility towards the regime, Franco's Spain took a highly critical view of the early stages of European integration, an attitude that reflected its scepticism towards the viability of the European project and its contempt for the liberalism and democracy which it considered to identify the European ideal, in addition to an injured national pride fuelled by Europe's continued ostracism of Spain.

All post-war initiatives to further European integration and Euro-Atlantic cooperation projects were predicated on the express exclusion of Franco's Spain. Representatives of the Spanish regime were barred from attending the May 1948 Congress of Europe in The Hague, which opted instead to welcome prominent representatives of the exiled Spanish democratic opposition. Months later, the Committee for the Study of European Unity adopted the opinion of the Hague Congress and of the recently formed European Movement International that Spain should be excluded from a future union until its regime changed. This position was maintained by the Council of Europe, established in 1949, and by the European Communities, created by the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which subscribed to the principle that democracy was an essential prerequisite for Spanish membership of its institutions. This form of policy-oriented conditionality was explicitly asserted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in a resolution adopted on 10 August 1951: 'The Assembly expresses the hope that in the near future the Spanish people may be able to hold free elections and set up a constitutional regime whose members will be eligible to serve as representatives in this Assembly'.

If exclusion from European political institutions was a somewhat distressing yet tolerable humiliation for Spain, its absence from the economic integration initiatives that led to the European Economic Community was much more worrying because, despite its focus on self-sufficiency, the Spanish economy was still largely dependent on trade with other European countries. Spain was not invited to take part in the Marshall Plan in 1947, and did not belong to the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) or the European Payments Union, on which Europe's trade and financial exchanges were based. The French proposal of creating a European Agricultural Community or Green Pool in 1951 and the founding of the European Economic Community in 1957, decisions which had a direct impact on the Spanish economy, required the dictatorship to reconsider its position towards European integration, which it could no longer

disregard or reject outright.

Up to that point, different versions of a particular Spanish Europeanism had developed in government circles, the professional elites and various social and opposition groups, all of which shared the view that Spain should take some sort of part in Europe, but differed in the specific form such participation should take, and in the significance they attached to the European ideal. Senior Catholics in the Government, led by Foreign Minister Alberto Martín Artajo, tried to build bridges with *Vatican Europe* through their relations with European Christian Democrats, who were prominent advocates of the integration process. Some distinguished members of the pro-Franco elite meanwhile subscribed to the *sui generis* Europeanism of the European Documentation and Information Centre (CEDI), a forum for those whose notion of an ultra-conservative Europe heavily committed to defending the Christian West against communism found common ground with the aspirations of Franco's Spain.

An alternative approach came to the fore among professionals and academics, whose interest in Europe was based on an acknowledgement that Spain could not remain aloof from the process of integration, and who fuelled the intellectual debate on the economic and cultural consequences of that process. Another group, the 'technocrats', who had had significant responsibilities in government and the administration since the mid-1950s, saw Spanish-European relations through the prism of the necessary modernisation of the Spanish economy. This approach advocated a purely instrumental Europeanism that exploited the European example to justify abandoning the self-sufficient rationale that was leading the country towards bankruptcy, replacing it with limited economic liberalisation. For this group, Spain's shift towards closer ties with the Communities was a necessity dictated by the economy. Its pro-Europeanism was the external expression of the economic development approach fostered at domestic level, divesting the European ideal of its link to liberal democracy. The political difficulties caused by the rejection to which the Franco dictatorship continued to be subject in democratic Europe were, in their view, irrelevant or at least not insuperable.

Based on very different premises, in the 1950s a Europeanism advocated by the internal opposition was voiced which felt that Spain would have to change its political system if it wished to play an active role in Europe. 'All anti-Francoist political activity during these years had a European character. (...) Europe represented for us an open window which allowed us to dream of democracy', Tierno Galván was to write years later. Galván was one of the intellectuals who, like Ortega y Gasset, Calvo Serer and Giménez Fernández, based their call for the dictatorship to be replaced by a regime that respected fundamental freedoms on their European convictions.

From the outside, political exile meanwhile had a long history of participation in European forums, which represented mouthpieces for people the dictatorship considered to be 'anti-Spain'. Politicians such as the European Movement's Salvador de Madariaga, Indalecio Prieto and Rodolfo Llopis as leaders of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), and Tomás Gómez and Pascual Tomás for the UGT trade union successfully fought to ensure that representatives of the Franco regime were not accepted in European political, economic and trade union institutions, and demanded democratisation as a prerequisite to any contact between Spain and Europe. A majority of the European left, in whom the memory of the Civil War aroused a collective feeling of historic debt towards the 'anti-Spain' Spanish democrats, supported their position.

In 1962 the debate within the Spanish Government on the need to adapt to the conditions established for European integration was resolved in favour of the technocratic position, the Government asking on 9 February for negotiations to be opened with the EEC. The European left anticipated this by presenting a report in the European Parliament (the Birkelbach Report) which rejected Spain's association with the European Communities while it continued to be governed by an undemocratic regime. The democratic leaders of the Spanish exile, meeting at the Congress of the European Movement in Munich in June 1962, followed suit. Since the Communities failed to respond, the Spanish Government repeated its request in January 1964. After protracted exploratory talks and the opening of negotiations in 1967, Spain had to content itself with the signature on 29 June 1970 of a simple preferential agreement which regulated trade with the Six.

The result dashed the highest hopes of the regime's leaders, who had favoured economic links between Spain and Europe throughout the 1960s, based on increased trade and financial flows, the influx of mass tourism and a significant outflow of economic emigration to the more developed European countries. The dictatorship, rejected by Europe but without fearing the danger of total economic isolation, which would have been seriously detrimental to its development ambitions, appealed to national interests to justify to a domestic audience why closer links to the EEC were not possible or, it was now said, desirable. The 1970 agreement, to which an additional protocol to adapt it to the new Europe of the Nine was added on 29 January 1973, was the last document signed by Spain and the European Communities before the application for accession submitted by the Government of Adolfo Suárez on 28 July 1977, only two weeks after the first democratic elections since the end of the Civil War.

The preferential agreement between Spain and the EEC was signed in the first stages of the Franco regime's death throes. The deterioration in the dictator's health continued over the next five years, in parallel with the exhaustion of the regime's political project, alienation among the various groups that sustained the dictatorship, increased social conflict, the growing power of the democratic opposition and intensified violent state repression. While the still illegal democratic opposition obtained the support of political and trade union leaders throughout Western Europe, the Franco regime, incapable of evolving and stubbornly maintaining its repressive stance, aroused ever greater repudiation among European public opinion. The last executions under Franco, on 27 September 1975, unleashed a torrent of international condemnation and led to the withdrawal of EEC ambassadors.

When the dictator finally died on 20 November 1975, Spain was more isolated from Europe than ever. One of the major challenges facing Franco's successor, King Juan Carlos I de Borbón, and the political class that had guided the uncertain process of political transition towards democracy was to enable Spain to take part in the process of building a united Europe from which it had been excluded for almost four decades of dictatorship.