

Spain from Nice to Lisbon

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/spain_from_nice_to_lisbon-en-e83e8fd3-3063-42da-8265-221684a2a5d1.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



There were three main strands to the foreign policy of Spain: Europe, Latin America and the Mediterranean basin; the dominant feature of the European strand specifically had been support for the Franco-German axis. However, the line taken by José María Aznar's government had moved much closer to the United Kingdom and the United States, against the background of the transatlantic relationship. Indeed, a tendency to attach greater importance to relations with the US, to the detriment of Community links, was increasingly a feature of the period subsequent to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. That approach was strengthened considerably by Spanish participation in the Iraq war in 2003, when Aznar supported the proposals made by the administration of George W. Bush to the United Nations Security Council and participated in the Azores summit alongside his opposite numbers from the UK and the US.

However, before we analyse the implications and course of those events, we should turn our attention to the third Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which occurred in the first half of 2002 and was preceded by the Laeken Declaration, a key framework document in the Community political debate on the future of Europe. Consideration must also be given to the preparations for the accession of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) and the introduction of the single currency; these factors increased the vigour of the debate on European issues without diminishing the importance of the conflicts and concerns arising out of the international situation referred to above.

The slogan for the Spanish Presidency of 2002, 'More Europe', was explained by the Prime Minister, Mr Aznar, as firstly an expression of a desire to afford Europe a greater role and specific weight in international relations, and secondly a statement that the European project had been taken on board and was consciously supported by the Spanish public. In short, the aim of the Presidency was to associate the process of Europeanising Spain with an increase in the power of the European Union on the international scene, an idea also set out in the Laeken Declaration, where the EU was regarded as a stabilising body worldwide. In any event, the motto 'More Europe' had already been used by Felipe González when he was Prime Minister: since the 1990s he had advocated European integration as an ideal which could contribute to the embedding and consolidation of democracy in Spain and to the country's international profile. Meanwhile the People's Party (PP) viewed the process as an opportunity to attain a number of economic and foreign policy targets under the broader message of 'more Europe in the world', the aim of which consisted in making Europe an active construct to which regard was had in major world debates.

The introduction of the euro marked the success of a policy which was set in train in 1989 and ended on the assumption of the Presidency. Additionally, the accession of the CEECs was very much at the negotiation stage; indeed, the Spanish Presidency oversaw the negotiation of the chapters of the *acquis* relating to financial matters such as agriculture, regional policy, institutional development and budgetary and financial forecasts. It also saw the official inauguration of the European Convention, whose *Praesidium*, chaired by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, presented its findings on the idea of a Constitution for Europe.

The third Spanish Presidency of the EU Council was also distinguished by important national events such as the antiglobalisation demonstration in Barcelona on 15 March 2002 and the general strike of 20 June shortly before the Seville European Council. However, the event with the greatest impact on one of the key priorities of the Presidency, namely the internalisation and 'Europeanisation' of measures to tackle terrorism, was unquestionably a foreign event with global implications: the 9/11 attacks.

At the same time, under the Spanish Presidency the Euro-Mediterranean strand focused on the Middle East and underlined the need for mediation in the Arab-Israeli conflict while reactivating the Barcelona Process. On relations between the European Union and Latin America, an Association Agreement was concluded with Chile and a commitment was reached to negotiate political agreements with Central America and the Andean Community of Nations. On immigration, Aznar submitted a very restrictive proposal to the Seville European Council which consisted in limiting Community economic aid to countries which did not take measures to counter 'unlawful immigration' and in establishing a European Border Police; the proposal was

rejected by most EU Member States, led by Jacques Chirac, who was supported by a large number of NGOs. A commitment was therefore reached to soften the proposal, and the idea of automatic penalties was replaced with financial support to the countries in question for the formulation of border control plans.

Additionally, the enlargement of the EU to the CEECs was presented as a challenge to Spain's European policy both in terms of the economy and for the production structures and labour markets of the candidate countries; since the inception of the process, these had been perceived as clear competitors to Spain in matters such as intra-Community trade and direct flows of foreign investment. From the point of view of the Spanish government, the eastward enlargement of the European Union would mean that only two of the eleven regions in receipt of structural funds would continue to qualify for them; Spain would no longer receive cohesion funds and would subsequently become a net contributor to the Community budget. Despite the reluctance prompted by budgetary concerns, the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, Carlos Westendorp, sought a more constructive way for the Spanish government to be involved in the project — a topic which he had been working on since 1995 as part of the Reflection Group on the Future of Europe. A school of thought emerged around that time which appealed to Spain's 'special sensitivity' towards CEEC aspirations to join the EU, and it made allowance for the experiences of transition from authoritarian/totalitarian regimes to democracy in Spain and in the CEECs and the parallel processes of a 'Return to Europe'. Since then there has been unanimous support for enlargement from all Spanish political parties and most of the public. Indeed, the Spanish Presidency of the Council in 2002 identified support for enlargement as the fourth priority of its programme, after 'measures to tackle terrorism in an area of Justice, Freedom and Security', 'the successful introduction of the euro' and giving 'special impetus to the Lisbon Process'.

The Aznar government had strong reservations about revising the treaties, as evidenced in the debates on the formulation of a Constitution for Europe. During those debates the Aznar government, along with Poland, backed the vote-weighting system set out in the Treaty of Nice, which to some extent confirmed those countries' places among the key countries in the EU, with 27 votes in the Council (compared to 29 for Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom) and one Commissioner for each of them, although the trade-off was a significant fall in the number of seats in the European Parliament. In that regard the adoption of the plan to draw up a Constitutional Treaty represented a turning point in Spain's role in the EU. Another feature of that period was the return to power of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in the general election of 2004 following a campaign which criticised the Aznar government's foreign policy (which was distinctly pro-Atlantic in its approach) and instead advocated a new rapprochement with the Franco-German axis as the backbone of European integration. The national and international background, marked by the attacks of 11 March 2004 and the new government's opposition to the war in Iraq, was a decisive factor in the new administration's first decision, namely the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq within 24 hours of the assumption of office by the new Socialist Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The decision symbolised the return to multilateralism and international lawfulness (by putting the democratic principle and public legitimacy at the forefront of its political strategy) and a new 'return' to Europe and its traditional diplomatic principles, to the detriment of the pro-Atlantic attitudes which had cast Spain alongside the CEECs for a time under the preceding government.

Disagreement about these two views of Spain's international role and its place in Europe was to emerge again in 2005 during the referendum campaign on the Constitutional Treaty. Despite the difference of opinion between the parties, both the PSOE and the PP argued for a 'yes' vote, and Spain became the first country to adopt the text of the Constitutional Treaty in a plebiscite. The 'no' votes in France and Germany, however, brought the process to a standstill, despite the attempts by the Spanish government to salvage the text in 2005, when José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero made himself head of a group of Member States who hoped to be able to re-introduce the text and overcome opposition to it. The signing of the Treaty of Lisbon on 13 December 2007 was regarded by the Zapatero government as unblocking European integration following two years of *impasse*. Zapatero was re-elected in 2008 and declared his intention to work for an effective, politically integrated EU, with his prime focus being the prospect of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council during the first half of 2010.

Despite its determined support for European integration, the Zapatero government was no different from its

predecessors where the protection of Spanish interests within the Union was concerned, and this was illustrated during negotiations on both the financial framework 2007–2013 and European immigration policy, which resulted in the government following a strategy worked out jointly with the African countries covered by the policy.

On enlargement to a Europe of 27, a process which was finalised in 2007 with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, the Zapatero government, like its predecessors, feared that enlargement would result in the geopolitical marginalisation of Spain and Mediterranean considerations as well as a loss in the transfer of funds under cohesion and regional policies, with the funds concerned being diverted to the new Member States. However, as on other occasions, Spain viewed the situation as an opportunity to act as a ‘bridge’ between the various aspects of ‘potential Europe’; in other words, to act as a link between the new countries and the founding countries, between countries in receipt of Community aid and net contributors, between Mediterranean countries and CEECs, and between countries in favour of supranationalism and those which advocated an intergovernmental model. Its role as a mediator once again gave it a very important part to play in bringing about transnational consensus to help ensure continuity and stability in the integration process.

The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon on 1 December 2009 brought about substantive changes in the way the Union operated, such as the appointment of a permanent President of the European Council, the establishment of the post of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, the establishment of a European External Action Service and the formalisation of the *trio of Presidencies*, or three consecutive Presidencies working as a team and cooperating in a joint programme of Council activities over an 18-month period. The Spanish Presidency of the EU Council will be followed by the Presidencies of Belgium, Hungary, Poland and Denmark in 2011 and 2012. The Spanish Presidency of the first half of 2010 is taking place amid a worldwide economic and financial crisis and therefore has to focus its efforts in finding a way out of it. This prime objective overlaps with the work being undertaken by the Reflection Group horizon 2020–2030 for the EU, under the chairmanship of the former Spanish Prime Minister, Felipe González, which is due to present a report containing the results of its deliberations at the European Council in June 2010.

The prime objectives of the fourth Spanish Presidency of the EU Council are as follows:

- Full and rapid implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon
- Economic recovery and job creation
- A Europe of citizens’ rights and freedoms
- Developing the role of Europe as a responsible, supportive player on the international scene

The Zapatero government has also attached high priority to the European Commission proposal for accession to the European Convention on Human Rights; the Convention complements the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which became legally binding under the Treaty of Lisbon.

Other priority objectives include taking decisions on developing the European solidarity clause and the popular legislative initiative. The solidarity clause provides for joint action on the part of the EU and its Member States in the event that one of those States is subject of a terrorist attack or a natural or man-made disaster. The citizens’ initiative consists in a petition by at least one million Union citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States for a legislative proposal to be tabled on matters regarded as appropriate for regulation under the Treaties. Furthermore the Presidency has also expressed its commitment to combat gender violence in Europe by introducing a European protection order and a handbook of good practices.

At the same time, the implementation of those objectives is based on two cross-cutting principles, equality and innovation. This is reflected in the motto of the Presidency, ‘Innovating Europe’. In conclusion, it is to be hoped that the Lisbon objectives can be achieved in such a way that innovation and investigation become the cornerstones of sustainability and well-being, generating opportunities for an increasingly diverse, genuinely interdependent European society, a society which encourages and welcomes the benefits of

cooperation that transcends national borders.