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**Thinking Locally, Acting in Europe**



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"Thinking globally, acting locally" is an essential slogan in the current political discourse. Yet, in view of the policies on the European Union carried out by the two governments of the People's Party (PP) headed by José María Aznar between 1996 and 2004, we could coin a quite different slogan: "thinking locally, acting in Europe". Indeed, José María Aznar's policy-making during the last eight years has been characterised by turning his domestic concerns into the 'exclusive factor' of his European strategy, regardless of the context and the need for fitting in national objectives with Europeans'. Hence, it was natural that the electoral campaign preceding the general elections held on Sunday, 14 March, did not deal with any of the topics prevailing in the EU's current agenda. Neither enlargement nor the Constitution, nor the process of shaping a core group within the EU, seem to have room in Spain's political debate.

Throughout the electoral campaign, the People's Party revealed two of the 'obsessions' marking its performance in Europe: being a reference for the modern right, and being a united and strong state. First, being modern has meant making clear in Europe its choice for the efficiency discourse, the Anglo-Saxon model (economic liberalisation, a strong friendship with the United States through the Hispanic population of that country), as well as rejecting continental Europe (the French-German axis, the social-democratic model of welfare and criticisms on the French right). Second, being a united country has meant rejecting the federalist nature of Europe, for it might strengthen the decentralization process in the post-Franco Spain. Finally, being a strong country has been reflected upon its European and international choices - trying to attain a big country profile through a privileged relation with the United States.

Sunday's legislative elections ended Mr Aznar's responsibility leading Spain's European policy. What has marked such policy? To what extent can we speak of a Spanish model of European construction after nearly twenty years participating in its formulation? Can we speak of a substantial change between the European policy carried out by the Socialist Party and that of the People's Party?

The recent electoral campaign and, above all, an analysis of policy-making during Mr Aznar's term of office enable an identification of some general ideas on Spain's role in Europe. Looking at the agenda ('the what') and the alliances ('the how') formed by Mr Aznar are useful guidelines.

The European agenda of the Spanish government between 1996 and 2004 has been affected by the context (i.e. enlargement process) although in general terms it has been a constant agenda with perfectly fixed objectives. There have been three key topics on the agenda: the Lisbon agenda, the Tampere programme and institutional reform. The goals have been big.

The Lisbon programme, which was inspired by Mr Aznar and Mr Blair, and the general objective of economic liberalisation, has been coupled with specific objectives causing Aznar's break-up with other political forces and European partners. In the domestic domain, the first break-up between the Socialist Party and the People's Party on Europe had to do with the Socialists' opposition to labour

flexibility introduced by the People's Party. In the international domain, relations between Spain and France have been tarnished by France's reluctance to liberalize its energetic sector.

As for the Tampere programme, which is to create a space of freedom, security and justice, PP's policy-making followed the first steps taken by socialist governments to have European support on the fight against ETA. The development of the Tampere programme, particularly after the attacks of September 11, has highlighted the differences between both Spanish parties as well as the differences between the Spanish government and some of its partners, such as France and Sweden. Throughout the electoral campaign, the Socialist Party has insisted on integration policies for immigrants versus the conservative discourse revolving around the fight against terrorism and the special relationship between Aznar and Bush.

Regarding institutional reform, the People's Party has expressed to the EU one of its main worries - the strengthening of the Spanish state. Thus, after the People's Party won the elections by absolute majority in 2000 we can speak of Spain pledging its firm commitment to the intergovernmental model (a Europe of states). This is why Spain is very worried over the distribution of power within the Council, and not over the seats in the European Parliament. The Socialist Party once defended the "greatest possible power for Spain" within the Council, yet maintaining a much more solid Community logic. We can even talk of Spain being afraid of any reference to federalism and seeking a downgrading of the role played by Spanish regions in Europe (the loss of seats in Parliament especially affects regional parties; Spain's denial to accept regional presence in the Council; the adding to the Constitution of a reference to Member States' territorial integrity).

Spanish government's alliances to implement its policy in Europe completely distance Mr Aznar from the steps followed in the past by Felipe González. Indeed, Socialist Party's campaign to March 14 election has largely consisted on demanding a reversal of the three functioning principles setting up the Spanish model between 1986 and 1996: domestic consensus on the formulation of European policy, the reestablishment of good relations with the Franco-German axis, and a reorientation of Spain's transatlantic relations.

The consensus on European and international affairs to which Spaniards were used to vanished into thin air at the end of the 1990s, once the euro test was passed and after the People's Party won an absolute majority. Over the last year two key issues on the agenda – relations with the United States and the model of European construction to be included in the Constitution - have brought the conservative government face to face with the majority of Spanish political forces.

During Mr González's term of office, Spain's European model was built upon robust and permanent relations with France and Germany. Mr Aznar's period is more complex and is not based upon any permanent relation in Europe. In 1997, Mr Aznar said, referring to European affairs, that "it is not about being alone or accompanied, but to defend Spain's national interests". That is perhaps why Spain has created a utilitarian image of Europe following British tradition. Mr Aznar's confrontation with France and Germany has been permanent over the period -economic liberalisation, financial perspectives, etc. Iraq was the tip of the iceberg. However, the pro-active role displayed by Mr Aznar's government leading the Eight's pro-Bush letter in 2003, or the letter by Six EU Prime Ministers calling for the stability pact to be respected are a sign of fear for being out of the "core group", in case such a group emerged at a moment of profound change (an EU with 25 members).

Finally, the most significant change in Spain's policy has undoubtedly been its attempt to establish a privileged relationship with the United States. The triangle Europe-Latin America-the Mediterranean, which was Spain's map of the world, has been altered by the US factor. In this respect, Spain's drift in some sensitive topics for the European agenda (Iraq, the Kyoto Protocol) have placed the country in a difficult position for acting in the future as facilitator of agreements between Europeans. The end of Mr Aznar's era, election results and the policy of other states in the near future (i.e. United States, United Kingdom) will be decisive for Spain's role in Europe.

This is an introduction to a set of essays written by the research fellows working at the Observatory for European Foreign Policy (Institut Universitari d'Estudis Europeus). These essays intend to review, albeit not in an exhaustive manner, outstanding topics relating to Spain's performance within the European Union under Aznar. Since European foreign policy is the focus of this group of researchers, most of such essays address issues where state's foreign policy, Union's economic dimensions and the incipient CFSP become blurred. Just before general elections are held and when restless Europe is to have 25 members in a few weeks, it seemed the right moment to carry out this collective piece of work. Despite the variety of both authors and styles, some fundamental questions lie in all these contributions. To what extent has Spain influenced EU agenda? To what extent has Aznar's government changed Spain's policy-making on each particular research topic, in case this ever existed? To what extent has People's Party's policy-making generated consensus or divergence among Europeans?

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