



Thinking differently, acting in Europe

Number 1

Esther Barbé

Professor of International Relations at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and
Director of the Observatory of European Foreign Policy

In March 2004, the Observatory of European Foreign Policy published a special monograph about *Spain in Europe (1996-2004)* in digital format. The objective of the monograph was to analyse Spain's foreign policy agenda and strategy during the period of the José María Aznar's presidency. As the title suggests, one of the initial suppositions of the analysis is the Europeanisation of Spanish foreign activities. Is that how it was? Did Aznar's Spain see the world and relate to it through Brussels? The publication was well received, considering the number of visits received and above all the institutions which asked to link the publication to their web pages. Among these, the *EUobserver* published the introduction to the piece in English entitled *Aznar: thinking locally, acting in Europe* (described by the *EUobserver* as a paper of utmost importance). The fact that the elections were held three days after the tragic events of the 11th of March dramatically increased interest in Spain and the implications for Europe. This publication is the second of its type, in this case analysing the period of the Zapatero government (2004-2008). Once again the starting premise (the Europeanisation of the agenda and the methods employed) has been considered by the analysts. And once again the articles collected in this publication serve to "triangulate" the analysis. Spain and Europe are two vertices (more or less distant, in essence and in form) which the authors handle in their analysis of the case (third vertex).

Why is "Thinking differently, acting in Europe" the title of this introduction? For two reasons, the first of which is, in 2004 "thinking locally, acting in Europe" - paraphrasing the classic "thinking globally, acting locally" – was used to transmit the idea of the strength of the Aznar era. That is to say, if there was anything that characterised the eight years of José María Aznar's political practices, it was the conversion of his domestic concerns into an exclusive factor of his European strategy, regardless of the context of the time and of the need to make national objectives fit into European objectives. In short, we continue paraphrasing the classic phrase when we use "Thinking differently, acting in Europe". The second reason is, if anything characterises the government of Rodríguez Zapatero in terms of international influence, it is these two things: one, thinking differently than the previous government (something that is stressed in many of the analyses in this publication), and two, insisting on "acting in Europe" as a differentiating objective (from the previous government) and not only in terms of manners (the friendly face of Zapatero replaced the difficult relationship Aznar had with many of his counterparts). The famous "return to Europe" of Rodríguez Zapatero's government was presented as a breaking point with the vision of the previous government of Aznar, who saw Europe as a means and not an end. A question immediately comes to mind, "Which Europe are we returning to?" This is where the Spanish government is going to find a critical conditioning factor to consider in the formulation of its policies and one which had not been counted on: the changing nature of the European milieu (international). And if anything has become evident in recent years, it is that the Europe "conceived" by the Zapatero government – based on the more traditional Europeanism of the German-Franco axis – has been shaken to its

foundations, above all due to the failure of the European constitution. "First with Europe", a slogan meant to characterise Spain as the first country to approve the Constitution by popular consent, was a way of reinforcing Spain's position in Europe and the role of Europe in Spain. The European milieu (international), it must be said, was not very auspicious for the implementation of the Zapatero government's programme. Instead of a world with no Bush and a Europe with a constitution they got a world with Bush and a Europe with no constitution (and furthermore, a Europe with 27 members, in which Spain had to learn to relate to new members, a topic which is discussed in this monograph).

A second conditioning factor for all European policies (international) is internal dynamics. And in this respect it is important to remember that the Zapatero government featured two factors which were quite different. First of all, it enjoyed a public opinion which, at the beginning, shared the majority of its opinions (identifying with the government's position on the war in Iraq). Second, an opposition party which (logically, taking the political practices of the Aznar period) fully clashed with the government. It isn't unusual then, that the PP and the PSOE have not aired a common view of a strong Spain in Europe. For Zapatero, the most important elements in the context of a new Europe are alliances with stronger countries (a topic dealt with here), while the PP insists on vying for more (voting) power on the council. Aznar's modern Europe (an Anglo-Saxon and liberal Europe) clashed with Zapatero's French-German course. And without a doubt, the place where this collision was most evident was in the arena of federalism (thinking of Europe and even of Spain) which is evidenced by the Zapatero government's decision to open the European Council and related bodies to the participation of the autonomous communities. This subject is also dealt with in this monograph. In short, the debate between the two large political forces on European (and international) issues is presented. If, as it is asserted in this publication, the Congress has not set out to deal with potentially controversial subjects (Spanish participation in military operations, the ESDP), judging from Spanish public opinion, one might conclude that this has had a profound effect on the first decision of the government – the withdrawal of troops from Iraq – even if the timing and the way it was done may have drawn certain criticism. The decision to withdraw troops is the Flagship for a foreign policy debate which insists on ethical limits and norms: the rule of law, democratic legitimacy, solidarity, social justice and multilateralism. The idea of Pacifism is, together with Europeanism, what the Spanish most commonly associate with the government of Rodríguez Zapatero. Developments in legislation in this area (participation with international forces) as well as in other areas have led to a political change of course towards a more pragmatic outlook. This can be seen in the case of relations with the United States, and is commonly justified through our Europeanness, as in the case of our joint participation with other European nations in the international deployment of reinforcements for UNIFIL in Lebanon in 2006.

The process of Europeanisation is a complex process which brings with it constructions with which we can identify. These can affect our vision of international relations and the definition of national interests, such as adapting the national agenda so that it coincides with the European one, or extrapolating domestic issues and making them European ones in order to increase their scope of influence. There is lot about all this in this publication. If there is one idea that should be stressed from the beginning, it is that the Spanish government has completely adopted the European platform in terms of international security, to such a degree that the Spanish discourse is fully adapted to the European Security Strategy adopted in 2003 (which is the case, for example, in the priority given to a resolution of a conflict in the Near East or in the centrality of effective multilateralism). One could speak of Spanish and European political identification, even on a personal level. In this vein, we should bear in mind that the Minister of Foreign

Affairs, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, and the Secretary of State for the European Union, Alberto Navarro, had previously undertaken actions for the formulation and implementation of EU common foreign and security policy as High Representative of the EU for the Middle East Peace Process and Head of the Cabinet of Javier Solana, respectively. As far as the political practices of the Zapatero's government are concerned, it must be said that the analyses collected in this monograph demonstrate to us situations of bottom-up Europeanization – in which Spain attempts to project its priorities and concerns onto the European agenda – as well as the top-down one, in which Spain adopts the dominant policies and priorities of the European Union. Before tackling this question, though, it is important to bear in mind one of the most significant factors influencing the Spanish agenda in the period from 2004 to 2008. This has been the sudden appearance of certain topics (such as immigration, energy, and Sub-Saharan Africa) which have led to transformation on a national level (the placing of Sub-Saharan Africa on the agenda, a leap forward in terms of cooperation and development) as well as the new dynamics of Europeanisation (energy, environment).

In this monograph, three important reflections on the Europeanization of the Spanish agenda are sketched out. First, there are references to the classic topics of bottom-up Europeanization of the Spanish agenda, as well as South America and the struggle against terrorism. In the case of the first two, the monograph deals with the question of the impact of the greater role of Spain as an agent for dynamisation in both areas, and other questions of interest. In this case, it must be said that in terms of the issue of South America, something which is glaringly missing from the EU agenda, Spain has encountered difficulties arising from new EU member states (the old soviet sphere of influence) in its attempts to continue to act as a leader of EU policy regarding Cuba (an area of special interest for Spain in the CFSP arena. To this we should add, as a contrast, that the expansion did not equate to a factor for change in terms of the opportunities or limits of the role of Spain as an agent for dynamisation in the Mediterranean or in the Middle East peace process (this has been very pronounced in the last four years). Furthermore, Spain's limitations in this theatre have come from the age-old sources (the UK, Germany and the US). In terms of the fight against terrorism, Spain has continued to play its traditional role as an agent for dynamisation (proposals in the framework of intergovernmental negotiations which led to the Treaty of Lisbon). Although in this period Spain would be characterised more as a member of a core group (Treaty of Prüm), as a sphere of development in the EU (police cooperation) than as a leader who wishes to export a national agenda to the European theatre (a situation that changed after the 11th of September).

Secondly, it is important to point out that the last four years have led to richer and more complex inter-relations between the Spanish agenda and the EU agenda, giving rise to a situation in which we can speak of a two-way Europeanisation (bottom-up and top-down) in terms of the context of transforming agendas. From the beginning, the agendas of the EU and Spain underwent changes in the period from 2004 to 2008. In the case of the EU, climate change and energy (linked to relations with Russia) have become priority issues. For Spain, immigration (related to relationships with Sub-Saharan Africa) has taken the spotlight on the agenda. In the case of energy security and global warming, Spain is dealing with a top-down process, one that has been interpreted in terms of private interest (for example, improvements in gas distribution in Europe), and has assumed a proactive role in the protection of these interests in the formulation of its European policy (linking, for example, the reduction of CO₂ emissions to per capita GDP). It lets us speak of a two-way Europeanisation in the last four years in issues in which the former role of Europe in Spain or Spain in Europe had been less. One could say, for example, that a priority issue on the European agenda, such as

relations with Russia, in which Spain traditionally has played a smaller role, has come in through the back door in terms of Spanish priorities (through gas agreements between Russia and Algeria). In the case of Spain, the most significant addition, and the one which has had most resonance in terms of the Spanish agenda influencing the European agenda (bottom-up), has been without a doubt controlling illegal immigration. This is not something new (in the Aznar era efforts had been made to this effect), but it has reached a much higher level, giving more sway to Spain for seeking a multilateral solution to the issue of border control, and it has also influenced the application of FRONTEX, in the scope of monitoring the waters between the Canary Islands and the African coast. Regarding these last items, it has to be said that during the Zapatero period illegal immigration became a priority item on the Spanish agenda. Again, we are dealing with a bottom-up process here (Euro-African conferences on migration and development) which can only be seen as Spain's assimilation of the EU strategy for Africa. This brings us to an issue which by itself constituted a large contribution of the Zapatero period in the formulation of Spanish foreign policy: cooperation and development. In this case, the turning point on this issue (ambitious strategic plans and the provision of resources) is related to, by definition, European directives on the issue. It was created and developed as a Europeanised policy. What we have to ask ourselves, and with this we move into the third and last reflection on this issue, is up to what point will it lead Spain to having a higher level of influence on the formulation of European foreign policy.

Thirdly, we have to consider that new issues in the Zapatero period had greater influence in terms of the role of Spain in the formulation of European foreign policy. This is evident in the case of the leap forward made in policies for cooperation and development. Another issue of lesser importance which is dealt with in this monograph is the role played by Spain during its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2007. Spain's capacity as an agent for multilateralism in the handling of conflicts in Central Asia, and also the incorporation of this vision in the Spanish agenda (where it did not previously exist) reinforced the multilateral identity of Spanish diplomacy. We will have to wait and see how the next government (to be elected in 2008) will handle these innovations, as well as the most problematic issue faced by Europe at the moment: the diplomatic recognition of the state of Kosovo. The legislature started with a problematic decision (at home and in Europe), the withdrawal of troops stationed in Iraq, and ended with an open and also problematic issue (at home and in Europe): the recognition of Kosovo. This issue awaits the president of the next government of Spain.