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**A Spanish model for the European 'near abroad'?
The legacy of Aznar to EU's foreign policy toward
neighboring non-candidate countries**



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Since coming into power in 1996, the Aznar government has increasingly tried to set Spain apart from its past as 'the smallest of the large', or 'the largest of the smaller or medium ones' in Europe. Under the stewardship of José María Aznar, and his center-right Popular Party, Spain has repeatedly tried to break the glass-ceiling which separates it from the large and influential countries in Europe. And in the aftermath of the Nice Treaty (December 2000), with the Spanish delegation having ensured Council votes which placed it very near those of France and Germany, it almost seemed as if four years of dogged pursuit had finally paid off. The then government's spokesman, Pío Cabanillas, certainly thought so in that, during a press conference in Madrid, he reportedly confidently declared: "We're [now] one of the big guys."¹

As an alleged 'big' country in Europe, one would thus certainly expect a Spanish imprint on most of the current European issues with high salience; may they relate to the internal EU construction process (Convention, IGC), or the settlement of a 'wider European' order come 1 May 2004 (i.e. relations with Russia, Ukraine, Mediterranean or the new European neighborhood policy). However, although Madrid has forwarded proposals in the first respect;² in the debate regarding a post-enlargement European architecture Spain's voice has been lamentably absent. One could thus infer that the internal functioning of the Union is more of a priority to the Aznar government, than Europe's relationship with its neighbors.

Nevertheless, by piecing together the actuation of Madrid in these years past, may one discern a Spanish model for Europe and its neighborhood, a model to which we will return to at the end of this essay.

If the Socialist governments under Felipe González (1982-1996) were characterized by a great interest for transposing Spanish problems with its immediate near abroad (the Mediterranean) onto the European agenda; the Aznar legislatures have largely abandoned this traditional geographical fixation in favor of a more thematic (cross-issue) agenda.³ Madrid has instead

¹ "Spain Makes Big Case for More Clout in Europe" *International Herald Tribune*, 28 March 2001.

² See Aznar's speech at St. Anthony's College, Oxford, 2002; or , the Hispano-British joint proposal in 2002, for more see "Blair and Aznar reveal future of EU vision" *EUObserver*, 28 February 2003.

³ Spain's traditional role as a European broker for Mediterranean interests (especially Maghrebi) has thus seen a dramatic reduction in the years of the Popular Party. One could even argue as Nuñez (2001) and Martín (2003) do that Spain, under the leadership of Aznar, has not taken advantage of the role it created for itself as a Mediterranean leader in the lead-up to the Barcelona Process (with the brief exception in the interlude of Mediterranean revival during its EU Presidency; see Eduard Soler i Lecha in this collection); nor has it tried to exercise its influence in European institutions in favor of mobilizing communitarian resources for the Mediterranean region. Jesús A. Nuñez Villaverde "The Mediterranean: A Firm Priority of Spanish Foreign Policy?" in Richard Gillespie and Richard Youngs (eds.) *Spain: The European and International Challenges*. London: Frank Cass, 2001; and Iván Martín "La nueva política de vecindad de la Unión Europea: ¿una oportunidad para relanzar las relaciones España-

largely concentrated on the pursuit of a few concrete issues in Brussels in recent years. The Spanish priorities in Europe have circled around topics at the very core of a traditional right-wing agenda such as citizen's security, justice and defense.⁴ And although these issues are above all expressions of Spain's domestic political reality (terrorism, immigration), or as a means to enhance Spain's international standing (Iraq coalition), they have also served as a way for *la Moncloa* to season the EU foreign policy agenda towards Europe's neighbors with a distinctively Spanish flavor.

The international turn of events following the al-Qaeda attacks in New York and Washington in 2001 have provided an important boost for Spain's European agenda in terms of citizen's security. Terrorism and illegal immigration have become the two major mantras of the Spanish representatives operating in Brussels in recent years, although other Spanish concerns have also been pushed with some insistence by the government such as asylum, money laundering and drug trafficking.⁵ However, it should be noted that in essence Madrid has consistently pursued the same policy-issues since the formation of the first Aznar legislature in 1996. For example, Spain, in the IGC leading up to the Treaty of Amsterdam and the following European Council in Vienna (1998), made maximum use of its power of persuasion to ensure the gradual harmonization of police and justice activity among EU member states. Moreover, heavy Spanish political capital would also be invested in the posterior development of a European area of freedom, security and justice (Tampere, 1999). Indeed, Madrid's vigorous actuation on these JHA-related issues would soon earn it the qualification of being a leader at the European level.⁶

During its EU Presidency (first semester 2002), Spain was to dedicate its turn at the European helm to issues such as of international terrorism and illegal immigration with a view to forge European unity around these matters.⁷ In the lead-up to the European Council in Seville, for example, the Spanish EU Presidency's vigorous shuttle diplomacy between different European capitals would result in the adoption of anti-terrorist measures as yet another task among the Petersberg missions for the European Union's nascent security and defense policy (ESDP).⁸ Spanish activism would include such specific measures in relation to third countries such as adopting antiterrorist clauses, mechanisms to forge mutual antiterrorist collaboration, and study how to make use of EU's military capacity to protect the civil population against terrorist attacks.⁹

Marruecos? *Real Elcano Análisis* ARI Nº 137/2003. The reason for Spain's seemingly disinterest, one might argue, can be explain by the fact that with the launch of the 1995 Barcelona Process, Spain's interests were largely fulfilled in this area. Spain in 1995 saw its fundamental objective for the Mediterranean region realized, "namely that the EU should assume the responsibility of increasing the resources destined to Mediterranean co-operation (through the MEDA programme)." Esther Barbé, "Spain and CFSP: The Emergence of a 'Major Player'?" in Gillespie and Youngs, op. cit, p. 53

⁴ At a rare occasion where José María Aznar laid out his political project, he announced his interest in strengthening the classical functions of the state, such as security, justice and defense, and added that these should be the key in the center-right parties across Europe. "Aznar defiende la familia ante el PP europeo y se opone a las sociedades multiculturales," *El País*, 23 April 2003.

⁵ Spain continues to be a major European base for money-laundering as well as the principal doorway for drugs heading for the European market.

⁶ Esther Barbé, "La política europea de España 1999-2000," *Observatory of European Foreign Policy Working Paper* 1/2003.

⁷ In terms of domestic terrorism, Aznar saw his government's ambitions largely satisfied in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001, an event which speeded up the adoption of the European arrest warrant under the Belgian EU Presidency (second semester 2001), in spite of the initial opposition of the Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi. The warrant foresees automatic extradition of individuals claimed by the courts in another EU member country.

⁸ Speech by the President of the European Council, José María Aznar, at St Anthony's College in the University of Oxford, 20 May 2002.

⁹ Esther Barbé, "La política europea de España 2002-2003," *Observatory of European Foreign Policy Working Paper* 48/2003.

This forward stance on terrorism, together with Aznar's unvarying support for Bush's Iraqi policy, has been quite unsettling to Europe's neighbors from Minsk all the way to Rabat. George Bush's and the neoconservatives' pre-emptive military doctrine has many implications, such as for example, international interventionism to remove dictators, even in situations where such interventions do not count on the legitimizing support of a UN Security Council resolution. This phenomenon is worrying for the public in general in the light of the forthcoming evidence of sloppy Western intelligence work and the non-solid evidence that served as the pretext for the intervention. However, perhaps this new doctrine is especially worrisome for more than one non-democratic (or dubiously democratic) leader in the vicinity of the European Union who feel that they might be the next target. Spain has in this case added fuel to fire to the fears of some neighboring governments by being very activist both within NATO and in the European Union's ESDP to promote the possibility to use military capacities/rapid reaction force in Europe's periphery, in general, and in the Mediterranean in particular. The Spanish support for Bush's 'war on terrorism' is also a cause for concern in the view of how some countries are turning the pre-emptive doctrine to its favor. The prime example in this respect is Israel, which already has a speckled history of heeding UN resolutions. Ariel Sharon's administration can now justify its actions as part of its own program of 'pre-emptive diplomacy' against the Palestinians, thus seeming to gain the upper hand against any critique from the international community.

In terms of illegal immigration, the Aznar government would use its EU Presidency as a platform to attempt to coordinate member states on a range of issues related to this particular Spanish headache. Benefiting from his personal friendship with the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, José María Aznar managed to secure high political support for his efforts to control illegal immigration in the Mediterranean. In a joint Hispano-British proposal – which in an early (non-public) draft allegedly even contemplated military fleets patrolling the Mediterranean – the British and the Spanish premiers laid out the idea that EU development assistance should be conditional on if neighboring third countries' (e.g. Turkey, Ukraine or Morocco) willingness to assist European efforts to reduce illegal immigration.¹⁰ However, due to Franco-Swedish resistance, this particular proposal would not prosper at Seville. The same faith would await another Seville initiative, this one proposing the establishment of a common border police. This time, however, a wider group of member states were opposed, not at the least for the additional strain on the communitarian budget that such an undertaking would have entailed. These Spanish initiatives might have been a bit too ambitious for the majority of the member states to handle at the time. However, the very success of the Popular Party's strategy is well illustrated by the fact that immigration now occupy a fairly central place on the European agenda as a security concern.

Popular concerns about uncontrolled immigration run deep in Spain, which still has not got used to the idea that it has past from being an emitter country to a receptor country in terms of migration flows. The Popular Party has picked up on this fear and promised strong measures at home and abroad to resolve this problem. The Aznar legislatures have thus gone far out of the way to 'securitize' the relationship between immigration and citizen's security. Aznar has even explicitly touch on a raw nerve in the public's concern when it comes to immigration, in stating: "It is not surprising that a citizen from a developing country, who enters Europe illegally and fails to find work or a means of satisfying his needs, should resort to crime in order to survive."¹¹ Elaborating at another occasion Aznar held that –

"We are a borderland country, a country which from the outside is seen as a land of opportunities. This makes us proud and aware of our responsibility to of receive those who seek to carve out a better future for themselves; but we also know that integration becomes much more difficult if one starts off from a situation of illegality, or if a country's

¹⁰ First published in The Guardian, later republished in "Blair planea usar aviones y buques de guerra para detectar y deportar a los 'sin papeles': Londres quiere sancionar a los países que no acepten la repatriación de indocumentados," *El País*, 24 May 2002. For a more detailed discussion, see Elisabeth Johansson "The distant neighbors — EU, Middle East, North Africa and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership," *Observatory of European Foreign Policy Working Paper* 37/2003.

¹¹ Aznar Speech at St. Anthony's College, op. cit.

real receiving capacity is surpassed. We desire an integrated and pluralist society, and that requires hindering illegal immigration in all of Europe.”¹²

The Spanish outlook is far from unique. Indeed the PP's quest to deal forcefully with the matter of immigration during Spain's EU Presidency was much helped by the electoral successes which right-wing parties across Europe (some on xenophobic election programs) have had in recent years. However, perhaps the leading role which the Aznar government has played in terms of putting this issue on the European agenda – as well as the fact that Madrid has neither been afraid to fall out with third countries that are deemed to not be in compliance (the 2002-2003 Spanish-Moroccan dispute)¹³ nor of enacting tough domestic laws¹⁴ – have contributed to Spain being seen as a particularly strong advocate of a model of Europe closed to the world and third country citizens ('Fortress Europe').

Spain under PP has, in sum, seemingly positioned itself as a bulwark of European security favoring a 'Fortress Europe', by Europeanizing its domestic political agenda on terrorism and immigration. Located in the European periphery, Spain is much more exposed to neighborhood instability than many other European countries, which might on the one hand justify such Spanish initiatives. However, PP's strong language on issues related to citizen's security, goes against the logic which the European Union traditionally has stood for: a Europe 'open to its neighbors' where dialogue and engagement ('carrots') have always taken precedent over negative measures ('sticks'). The Spanish model for Europe's relations with neighboring countries has in consequence, and as we have seen, created some tension in Europe's neighborhood and even raised some critique in Brussels.¹⁵ However, although Aznar's legacy to the European foreign policy might endure in terms of its substance (illegal immigration and terrorism); beyond March 2004 the style is bound to change, paving the way for less confrontational discourse towards EU's neighboring third countries. The Wider Europe/New Neighborhood policy, for which negotiations are under way (Spring 2004), seems to favor a more cooperative attitude and swing the pendulum away from a fortress-mentality and in favor of greater openness.

¹² Author's own translation. Speech by José María Aznar, upon awarding the "Gran Cruz de San Raimundo De Peñafort" to EU's JHA Commissioner Antonio Vitorino, Palacio de la Moncloa, 24 February 2003.

¹³ The 2001-2003 Hispano-Moroccan spat was set off by the fact that the Moroccan ambassador to Spain was called up to the Spanish Foreign Ministry to be held answerable for why Rabat was not doing more to stem illegal immigration destined for Spain and Europe and passing through or originating in Moroccan territory.

¹⁴ Immigration became a hot issue of the internal political debate in Spain when the PP government tried to modify the laws regulating foreign citizens in Spain (previous reform had been in 1985) in 1999, winking the Tampere European Council decisions as creating obligation for reform. The Spanish government proposed the Parliament with a draft law making the Law visibly tougher, however, it would have to retreat and modify its content as a result of the heavy critique from the opposition. The modified *Ley de Extranjería* was, however, passed by the Spanish Parliament in 1999 as the government ensured support from its coalition parties. The Law has since been further reformed in the light of the absolute majority which the PP has enjoyed, from March 2000. Barbé, *La política europea de España 1999-2000*, op.cit.

¹⁵ "Prodi y Amnistía Internacional exigen medida a los Quince en las medidas contra la inmigración ilegal," *El País*, 13 June 2002.