



The foreign action in climate change: from opposition to accommodation

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Throughout the last years, Spain's foreign action on climate change has undergone a significant evolution. Its stance regarding European and international climate policies has shifted from opposition to a more ambivalent attitude, which combines a generally positive approach and the desire to accommodate Spanish interests within the European scheme. Naturally, this process has taken place within a broader context characterized by an increase in public attention towards global warming and a change in the fortunes of international climate negotiations.

Certainly, from 2004 to 2008 international climate policy has experienced highly substantial changes. The previous period had been marked by the failure of The Hague meeting in 2000, by the announcement by president George W. Bush that the United States would not ratify the Kyoto Protocol (March 2001) and by the bargaining between the European Union and the Russian Federation over the latter's ratification. During these years there were fears for the survival of the international climate regime, and it was only because of the EU insistence that prospects finally improved. The Russian ratification came about in 2004 and this made it possible to reach the threshold required for the Kyoto Protocol to come into force, which happened in February 2005. In turn, this triggered the negotiations about emission reduction targets for the post-2012, when the current commitments are due to end. Finally, 2007 was the year of the well-publicised Fourth Assessment Report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Over these four years, moreover, several events (not linked to the negotiation process itself) have made a significant contribution to enhancing the presence of climate change on the agenda: Hurricane Katrina, Al Gore's Oscar winning movie and the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to him and the IPCC, among others. In short, international climate negotiations have made a u-turn, and it is probably fair to say that very few Conferences of Parties have attracted as much attention as the one held in Bali in 2007. So, given this context, how has the Spanish position evolved regarding European and international climate negotiations? We shall start by presenting the main features of the years leading up to 2004, and we will then evaluate the 2004-2008 period.

Kyoto as a "time bomb"¹

Throughout 2000-2004 and especially from the second semester of 2002, Spain adopted a reluctant stance -if not one of outright opposition- concerning international and European climate policies. Actually, two circumstances placed Spain in a difficult situation. First, these were the years when the EU adopted a good deal of its measures to control greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions. The European Climate Change Programme was passed in 2000 and

the emissions trading directive in 2003 (2003/87/EC), to become the centrepiece of European climate policies. Global warming thus became an issue with domestic political and economic implications. Moreover, this occurred in parallel with the very negative evolution of GHG emissions (see the graph below). Spain was a long way from complying with Kyoto and the “burden sharing” agreement established by the Council, which allows for an increase in emissions by 15% between 1990 and 2008-2012. Indeed, in no other developed country did emissions increase as much from 1990 to 2003.

At a time when it was not clear whether the Kyoto Protocol was ever going to come into force, the measures to control GHG emissions were seen as a risk for economic growth. Thus, the *Comisión Delegada del Gobierno para Asuntos Económicos* (Government Delegate Commission for Economic Affairs) took responsibility for the climate in 2002 and the Spanish position came under greater control of economic ministries. José Folgado, Secretary of State for the Economy, was rather straightforward in summarising the new approach: “nobody will oblige us to comply with Kyoto over a cemetery of industries”². The government was therefore hoping either to renegotiate the 15% objective, or for the EU to be understanding of Spain's incompliance.

Business organisations were also hostile to the European policies derived from the Kyoto Protocol, especially those of sectors affected by the emissions trading directive (thermoelectric power stations, refineries, iron and steel, cement and lime, non metallic minerals -glass and ceramics- and paper industries), which spoke of industrial suffocation, unemployment and relocations. Business organization's demands therefore ranged from postponing the implementation of the directive to the public sector assuming the costs of complying with it, given that, as alleged, it was the government that had “made a mistake” when negotiating the emission target. Such was the mood about Kyoto -now regarded as a “time bomb”- that it was argued that Iberdrola had “broken the complicity maintained by electricity firms, employers' associations and the Government on the degree of compliance, or rather non-compliance, with the EU protocol (*sic*) on reductions in CO₂ emissions”³, because the energy company had defended that it was possible to comply with Spain's international commitments.

One of the most important episodes of this period occurred during the Environment Council of March 2004, a few days before the elections and shortly after UNICE (the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe) had questioned the convenience of complying with Kyoto. At that Council, Minister Elvira Rodríguez aligned Spain with Italy in defending that the EU should use the word “strategy” instead of “objective” when speaking of post-2012 emission reductions. Although it may seem a merely terminological difference, the proposal implied the rejection of a consensus that had arisen in the European community as early as 1990, namely, which the international regime on climate change has to include *targets and timetables*.

Two-way adjustment

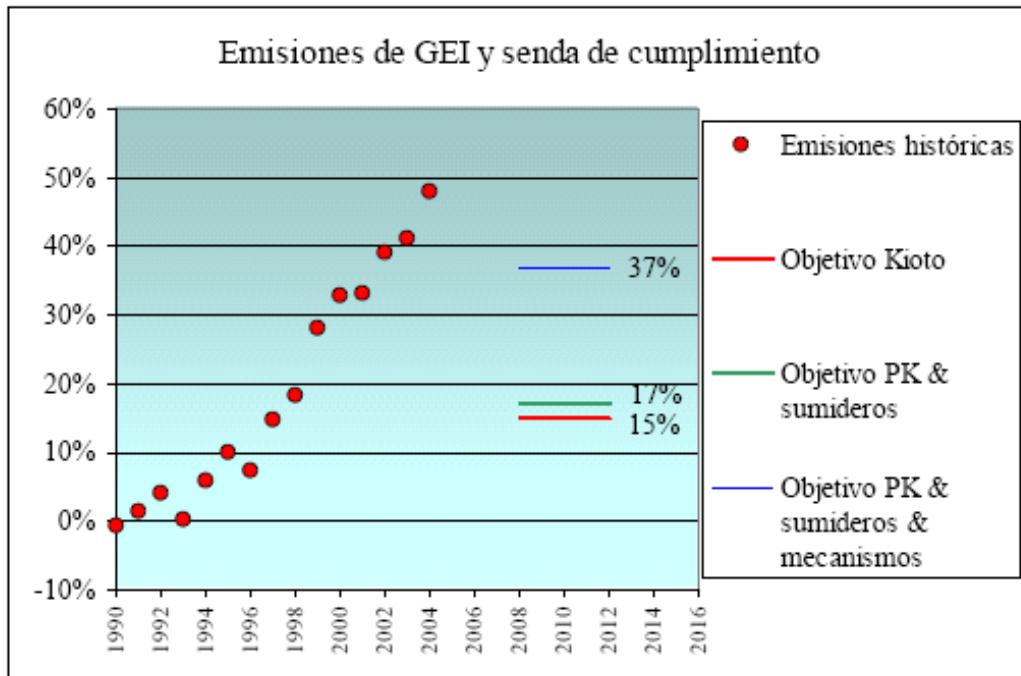
The government elected after the elections of March 2004 was therefore faced with the following situation. First, there was considerable delay in the preparation and implementation of certain important measures. The emissions trading directive had not been transposed (the deadline was December 31, 2004) and the *Plan Nacional de Asignación* (National Allocation Plan, which distributes the emission allowances among

companies) was not yet even at the draft stage, though it had to be submitted before March 31 to the Commission. Moreover, the opposition to policies derived from Kyoto was now widespread, making the endeavour more difficult. The proposals put forward by the Ministry of the Environment were quickly rejected by a wide variety of actors. In addition to criticisms coming from industry lobbies, which warned against the loss of "thousands of jobs", there were also those from the *Consejo Económico y Social* (Economic and Social Council) which declared itself "worried" about the consequences that limits on GHG emissions could have on "production, investment and employment in Spanish companies"⁴. Similarly, the discourses and proposals of many parliamentary groups (PP, CiU, ERC and Coalición Canaria) were a far cry from the enthusiasm for Kyoto that had been displayed at other times by these same groups⁵.

The scepticism also affected some of the government's own ministries. In September 2004, the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Commerce José Montilla reassured industries that their concerns would be taken into consideration by the government and that he would "evidently pass them on to the forums that they should be passed on to, certainly without giving them too much publicity, but aiming to gain in efficiency". Even more explicitly, the minister admitted that "in the relevant inter-ministerial commissions we will strive to support this perspective, from the point of view of protecting the industry's interests"⁶. The political and social debate would not be reframed in terms more favourable with Kyoto until early 2005, coinciding with the revival of international negotiations we alluded to earlier.

In this framework, the government has developed a strategy that can be characterized as one of two-way adjustment. First, Spain must adjust itself to its own international and EU commitments. In this regard, the path set by the 2008-2012 *Plan Nacional de Asignación* (PNA) provides some targets. Hence, over this period Spanish emissions shall not be higher than an increase of 37% on 1990 emissions, which is still 22% above the 15% target. This difference is expected to be covered both by sinks (2%) and the purchase of emission allowances (20%) (see graph). Along with this, some gestures have been made in support of international efforts to mitigate climate change, in particular during 2007 -a year in which climate change has attracted public attention in unprecedented fashion. Thus, in February 2007 José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero received Al Gore at La Moncloa while the latter was on tour promoting his movie.

Graph 1: Spanish GHG emissions and targets set by the PNA 2008-2012



Source: Plan Nacional de Asignación 2008-2012 (Real Decreto 1370/2006)

GHG emissions and compliance path

- Historic emissions
- Kyoto objective
- KP objective and sinks
- KP objective & sinks & mechanisms

Second, though Spain has abandoned its oppositional attitude concerning international and European climate policies, it has also sought to downwardly re-adjust the ambition of its future commitments. The change is well illustrated by the negotiation of the Environment Council's agreement on post-2012 targets. Initially, Spain was contrary to including reduction percentages in the final document. Indeed, Spain was even opposed to the text referring to a maximum atmospheric concentration of GHG (550ppmv) as a point of reference for future negotiations. However, between November 2004 and March 2005 the Spanish stance changed and the country joined the countries in favour of establishing quantifiable targets and timetables, but only in return for the inclusion of the principle of "equity" in the agreement. Therefore, Spain can now consider an old argument of its own legitimate by the Council, namely, that targets should be based on an equal share of per capita emissions. Similarly, the passing of an energy saving plan that was insufficient to comply with the first PNA (2005-2007) was interpreted "as the threshold for renegotiating" the Spanish objectives. In a way, the plan showed Spain's willingness to control emissions and it was hoped that the Commission would understand the difficulty of the task⁷.

The document presented by the European Commission on January 2008 (on the efforts of the Member States in view of the EU's objectives for 2020) seems to respond well to the Spanish strategy⁸. According to the Commission proposal, the common objective of reducing emissions by 20% between 1990 and 2020 should be distributed among the member states "by taking into account the GDP per capita of the states". So, between 2005 and 2020 Spain's emissions should be reduced by 10%. Insofar as the Spanish GHG levels in 2005 were 52% higher than in 1990 (Kyoto's year of reference), the Commission's proposal represents, in fact, a highly substantial reduction of the current commitment. This is exactly the kind of agreement that has been pursued by the Environment Ministry since 2004.

Finally, Spain apparently seeks to add an additional dimension to its foreign climate action. At the proposal of the Spanish and Colombian environment ministries, the first Iberoamerican Meeting of Climate Change Offices was held in September 2004. An agreement was reached there to establish a network of offices, with the aims of "promoting the building of capacities and knowledge", "re-approaching the stances before international forums", "promoting the integration of climate change in development aid strategies" and encouraging Clean Development Mechanism projects. This network has held regular meetings, including encounters during the annually held international climate conferences. Although it is still too early to draw any conclusion, it could well be that Iberoamerican cooperation could lend Spain a certain clout on some southern countries regarding international climate negotiations.

Conclusions

From 2000 to 2004, the lack of domestic policies to limit GHG emissions, their consequent upward evolution and the adoption of EU measures perceived to be inconvenient for economic growth, encouraged the Spanish government to oppose European and international climate policies. From the 2004 elections onward, however, the persistence of the Union's policies, the change of government and an improvement in the perspectives for international climate negotiations encouraged the government to adopt a new attitude. In short, Spain has developed a strategy that seeks to reconcile the situation of its GHG emissions and the EU's increasingly demanding policies. Thus, it is trying to reduce both its emissions and the ambition of its international commitments, being until now more successful with the latter than with the former.

Notes

¹ "Una bomba de relojería", *El País*, 8 de febrero de 2004.

² "Las empresas advierten de que el Protocolo de Kioto costará hasta 4000 millones al año", *El País*, 3 de noviembre de 2003.

³ "Iberdrola rompe la baraja", *El País*, 23 de noviembre de 2003.

⁴ Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, 27th July 2004.

⁵ *Comisión de Medio Ambiente del Congreso de los Diputados*, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, 15th December 2004, p.12.

⁶ *Comparecencia del Ministro de Industria, Turismo y Comercio José Montilla ante la Comisión de Industria, Turismo y Comercio del Congreso de los Diputados*, Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados, 30th September 2004, p.19.

⁷ "El Gobierno aprueba un plan de ahorro para reducir un 20% la importación de petróleo", *La Vanguardia*, 9th July 2005.

⁸ European Commission (2008), *Proposal for Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Effort of Member States to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to meet the Community's greenhouse gas emission reduction commitments up to 2020*, 2008/0014 (COD), Brussels, 23rd January 2008.

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