



Spain and the Mediterranean: in defence of the Barcelona Process

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Introduction

The Mediterranean has been one of the cornerstones of the foreign policy of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government. The socialist government's commitment to the Mediterranean represents a continued emphasis on the classic priorities of Spain's external policy. Stability, peace and progress in the Mediterranean are of essential importance to Spain, and improving the situation in the region represents a priority area of action from both a bilateral and a European standpoint.

However, these objectives for the Mediterranean have also become important priorities in terms of European policymaking, resulting in a series of cooperation frameworks such as the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy. This article analyses Spain's role in relation to these cooperation frameworks over the past four years, as well as examining whether substantial changes have taken place compared to previous governments and evaluating the legacy of Zapatero's term of office¹.

A retrospective view

It has often been claimed that one of Spain's main contributions to Europe's external policy has been its promotion of Euro-Mediterranean relations. Ever since it first became a member of what was at that time called the European Community, Spain has been aware that in order to deal with the challenges present in the region (such as poverty, authoritarianism, regional conflicts, religious fundamentalism and migration flows), multilateral mechanisms were required. And furthermore, that all the countries of Europe had to assume their responsibility in the region.

As a consequence, Spain – working together with other Mediterranean countries of the EU – promoted initiatives such as 5+5 in the western Mediterranean area and the unborn Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean. This activism led to the first Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona being held in 1995, under the auspices of Spain's presidency of the EU.

Even so, creating a more effective cooperation framework to deal with the challenges in the region was not the only motive behind Spain's Mediterranean activism. The government also wanted to rebalance the southern and eastern priorities of Europe's external policy; Spain also aspired to create a framework of action in which it could play an important role, thereby increasing the country's prestige among both its European partners and those of the south and east of the Mediterranean. Finally, Spain attempted to drag a number of

delicate issues concerning its bilateral relations with other Mediterranean countries (and particularly Morocco) onto Europe's negotiating agenda. These issues included territorial disputes (Morocco's claims for sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla) as well as the delicate area of fishing rights, a matter of great importance for the economies of the Canary Islands and Andalusia.

When the PP came to power, it was feared that the Mediterranean (and specifically Spain's activism in Europe in this respect) would be pushed into the background. It is true that the Aznar government did sometimes adopt more unilateral policies that tended to prioritise the transatlantic axis and that new priorities such as Asia began to emerge. However, it is also true that a relatively successful Euro-Mediterranean conference was held in Valencia during the PP's terms of office (which coincided with a period of great tension in the international and regional context marked by September 11 and worsening violence in the Palestine territories). Despite the adverse political situation, the Valencia conference brought significant results, particularly the fact that an Action Plan was adopted.

During this period, important steps were also taken to boost the institutional development of Euro-Mediterranean partnership (the launching of a Foundation to encourage dialogue between cultures and civilisations and the creation of a parliamentary assembly), as well as the areas of finance (the founding of FEMIP²), education (the enlargement of the Tempus programme to include the Mediterranean) and Justice and Home Affairs issues were introduced onto the Euro-Mediterranean agenda.

During that same period, the idea also arose of creating a new policy to manage the EU's neighbourhood relations. Initially, this policy was designed with the countries of Eastern Europe in mind (Ukraine, Moldavia, Belarus and Russia), but in the end it was extended to include the Mediterranean basin. Spain had little involvement in this process beyond supporting the proposals made by other actors, such as Italy and the European Commission.

Moreover, during Aznar's second term of office, a significant deterioration took place in Spain's relations with Morocco, resulting in situations such as the Isle of Perejil crisis. This deterioration upset the balance of Spain's Mediterranean policy, and even more so given that Spain was not very successful in its attempt to gain EU support neither during the aforementioned crisis, nor during the previous disputes over fishing rights issues and Morocco's lack of involvement in the fight against irregular immigration. In this respect, Spain received very little support from France, and from Jacques Chirac in particular.

The socialist government announces its priorities

The socialist programme for the March 2004 elections declared that Spain had to "redefine, recover and strengthen the main areas of its foreign policy", specifying that it had to correct the "abrupt change of direction imposed by the Partido Popular government". The PP was accused of having broken the consensus in foreign policy. In other words, the socialist party's proposals combined a determination to preserve the traditional diplomatic approach with a desire to distance itself from the methods, alliances, priorities and legacies of the Partido Popular.

With respect to the Mediterranean, the electoral programme highlighted that the incoming

government would have to tackle "the backward drift and loss of leadership of our Euro-Mediterranean policy", and that it was "of vital, urgent importance to re-launch and restructure it". The socialists even spoke of "recovering Spain's Mediterranean policy" and to that end promised to hold a "Summit of Heads of State and Government on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Barcelona Process, in November 2005"³.

On his first speech before the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, Miguel Ángel Moratinos repeated this commitment, and announced that the summit would be held in Barcelona. During his address, the minister declared that Spain would ensure that the European Neighbourhood Policy did not turn into a kind of veiled pre-membership arrangement for countries from the East that would establish discrimination between regions. At the same time, Moratinos stressed that Spain would seek agreement with France and the EU as a whole in order to promote the regional integration of the Maghreb region, and that the government would distance itself from the power plays that took place in the region during the Aznar period⁴.

To what extent has the PSOE complied with these promises? This article analyses Spain's role in the development of the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as its reaction to France's proposal to create a Mediterranean Union.

The Barcelona Process, the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Mediterranean Union

During the first year of Zapatero's term of office, the government and Spanish diplomacy made great efforts to bring to fruition the idea of holding a summit that would revitalise the Euro-Mediterranean process and highlight Spain's leadership in this field. Spain's first triumph was its successful bid for 2005 to be declared "Mediterranean Year", while the second came when the United Kingdom agreed to the conference being held in Barcelona, in spite of the fact that Britain would hold the presidency of the European Union at that time. The third was when Spain convinced the British government that the event should be a high-ranking one; that is to say, it would be attended by heads of state and government, something that was unprecedented at a Euro-Mediterranean level.

An intense diplomatic process was duly commenced; its objectives were that a significant number of Euro-Mediterranean leaders should attend the summit, and that a series of agreements would be signed by the Euro-Mediterranean partners, and which would give a fresh boost to the Barcelona Process. The first of these objectives was only partly achieved; while the heads of nearly all the EU Member States attended the meeting, only a few of the Mediterranean partners did so. Nor was the second objective fully achieved, even though an ambitious Work Programme was approved (and which included significant new features in areas such as immigration, education and the environment), consensus could not be reached on general conclusions, while the code of conduct for the fight against terrorism did not live up to expectations, either. To some extent, the summit's bitter-sweet results were caused by undue expectations. Both Spain and other countries had allowed expectations to become inflated, particularly if one bears in mind the regional context in which the summit was held.

In spite of this frustration, the efforts made by Spain's government and diplomats did strengthen Spain's role in Mediterranean issues. Thanks to its efforts and to the work

carried out jointly with other countries such as Morocco and France, Spain also managed to promote an orientation towards cooperation over the issue of migration that went beyond the mere coordination of police forces, and significant steps were taken towards greater judicial cooperation between the Mediterranean partners.

Nevertheless, in subsequent years, Spain's activism never again reached the heights of 2005. During 2006, 2007 and the early part of 2008, Spain has continued in its commitment to the Barcelona Process, insisting on the importance of the cooperation framework compared to other frameworks and initiatives. Spain also supported Albania and Mauritania's entry into the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. However, in recent years there has been a dearth of specific proposals to help restore confidence in the Euro-Mediterranean framework.

Within this defensive strategy, it should be mentioned that the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) generated a certain amount of fear in Spain, mainly because it was perceived to be a policy that was overly slanted towards Eastern Europe, and also because it might eclipse the Barcelona Process. Even so, as the ENP became consolidated, Spain took on board the policy's philosophy and attempted to ensure that the policy was as sensitive as possible to Spain's interests.

Specifically, this meant achieving a budget framework that would not be detrimental to Mediterranean countries, and which would in turn be as generous as possible - in terms of funding and its geographical reach - to the areas of cross-border cooperation and maritime basins. Meanwhile, during José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's term of office, Spain also reached agreements with France, Portugal and the Commission to make reality Morocco's desire to achieve a deeper level of integration with the EU than that of mere association. This is what has come to be called the "Advanced Statute" and was still in the process of being defined during the last stage of Zapatero's term of office.

Thanks to Spain's involvement in the preparation of this Advanced Statute, and thanks also to the work it carried out jointly with Morocco for the Barcelona Summit in 2005 and the Euro-African Conference on Migration in Rabat in 2006, Spain stopped being perceived as a state that was hostile to Morocco's interests within the EU. Morocco had particularly felt this hostility in 2001 and 2002, under the Aznar government. This change helps to explain why the crisis that took place in Spanish-Morocco relations in November 2007 (following the visit by the Spanish monarchs to Ceuta and Melilla) had a limited impact and no repercussions at all at a European level.

In any case, what has most revolutionised Euro-Mediterranean relations in the past four years is Nicolas Sarkozy's proposal to build a Mediterranean Union. It was first mentioned by the then-candidate for the presidency of France during a speech in Toulon in February 2007, in which Sarkozy presented it as a response to the supposed failure of the Barcelona Process. Later on, in a speech he made in Tangiers that October, the now-President of the Republic stressed that the Mediterranean Union would be a complement to the already existing initiatives.

What was Spain's reaction? At first, the proposal produced great unease in political, diplomatic and academic circles. The approach of the French proposal was very different to the one Spain had reiterated so many times: to work at a European level. Spain viewed France's proposal as a backward step, in that it excluded non-Mediterranean EU countries;

the Spanish government believed that its steady, gradual involvement in Mediterranean issues had been one of its main areas of success in the past decade. Furthermore, as Sarkozy's proposal began to take form, Spain started to fear losing its central position on the Mediterranean agenda, to the extent of the eventual disempowerment of the Barcelona Process – a process into which Spanish diplomacy and government had invested enormous effort.

This explains why the Spanish government (which could not afford to enter into confrontation with France over this issue) centred its efforts on ensuring that the French proposal would have the minimum possible impact on the Euro-Mediterranean partnership or, if possible, that it would even strengthen it. At first, Miguel Ángel Moratinos even suggested that the French proposal be transformed into a "Euro-Mediterranean Union"⁵; implying that this change of name would mean that the Barcelona process would take a qualitative leap forward, at the same time as anchoring it to a European-based approach, and with the full participation of all the EU Member States.

Moratinos' idea was not followed and Spain has only managed to modify the French proposal, albeit in a limited fashion. The change was announced during the trilateral meeting held in Rome in December 2007, when Sarkozy, Prodi and Rodríguez Zapatero sealed an accord to promote the re-named "Union for the Mediterranean". Even though emphasis has been placed on the fact that the new initiative will coordinate with the Barcelona Process and the European Neighbourhood Policy, and that the EU will also be involved (through the Commission), it is also true that the measure is being presented as a new stage in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Furthermore, this is a stage which, in the medium-term, might well eclipse the Barcelona Process.

Conclusions

As this analysis shows, the Mediterranean has been one of the main priorities of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government. During his mandate, great efforts have been made to push forward the Barcelona Process, the flagship of Spain's Mediterranean policy, which is firmly anchored in a European approach. Thus, one of the central pillars of Spain's external policy has been maintained and even strengthened.

There were some significant triumphs during the first half of the current term of office, including the introduction of the dimension of Justice and Home Affairs into Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, a global Euro-African strategy on how best to tackle the issue of migration, and the devising of new formulas for integrating Mediterranean partners into the EU (Morocco's Advanced Statute). Even so, they are incomplete achievements that did not succeed in restoring confidence and enthusiasm for Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

Nicolas Sarkozy's proposal to create a Mediterranean Union has awoken fresh uncertainty over Spain's role in Mediterranean issues. The future of Euro-Mediterranean relations and, to some extent, Spain's Mediterranean policy is at stake in 2008. Spain cannot welcome France's renewed interest in Mediterranean issues. However, the Spanish government should also carry on emphasising the need to make use of this boost in order to help the Barcelona Process to take a qualitative step forward, though without ruling out complements based on a sub-regional approach or structures that are similar though not identical to the strengthened cooperation initiatives. Spain should also ensure that the plan

to develop an Advanced Statute with Morocco is successful, so as to provide the latter with real incentives to develop a programme of reform that could show the route to follow for other countries in the Mediterranean basin. Because this is the sphere in which Spain and every other country involved in Mediterranean issues should be redoubling their efforts: offering truly attractive incentives to the countries of the south and east of the Mediterranean, so as to regain credibility among the governments and societies of our southern neighbours.

Notes

¹ The article does not refer to Spain's actions in the Near East, an area of action that is specifically dealt with in another article in this collection.

² Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership.

³ PSOE [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party] (2004) *Merecemos una España mejor, programa electoral, elecciones generales de 2004*.

⁴ "The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (Moratinos Cuyaubé) appears before Parliament to inform of the general lines of action of his Ministry's policy", Committee for Foreign Affairs, Session no. 2, *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados*, VIII Legislatura, no. 24, 19 May 2004. p 7.

⁵ Miguel Ángel Moratinos, "Del proceso de Barcelona a la Unión Euromediterránea", in *El País*, 2 August 2007.

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