



Zapatero's humiliated Spain

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Rodríguez Zapatero does not deserve to win the elections again. Not only has he tainted the country within the realm of home affairs, but his foreign policy over the last four years has made a mockery of Spain in the international sphere, leading the country to be cold-shouldered and, finally, humiliated by third-rate leaders ranging from Chávez and Evo Morales to Idriss Déby in Chad.

Miguel Angel Moratinos' diplomacy has not been especially successful in recent months, as we have been able to observe, much to the detriment of our national interests. Over the last month alone, the Rodríguez Zapatero Government has presided over four fiascos in its international relations: first, we must consider the imprisonment of the Spanish crew from the aeroplane chartered by the NGO, L'Arche de Zoé, on the part of the

Chad authorities, without any kind of legal guarantees. It is not simply the fact that Nicolas Sarkozy should appear in Torrejón as the saviour of the Spanish air hostesses (which, in itself, is already quite embarrassing). The most serious aspect is that the intransigent Chad Government was making preparations for Spain to deploy a military contingent in the South-East of the country in order to support its own armed forces. And, what is worse, the Spanish Government, including the Ministry for Defence in this case, continued to contemplate providing this armed support without using it as a lever to free our compatriots. Spanish soldiers will soon be landing in Chad as if nothing has happened.

The second fiasco consisted of the extremely poor diplomatic preparations that were made for the King and

Queen's visit to the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, our cities that, in a moment of forgetfulness, our Foreign Minister described as being located in Morocco (a slip that his professional colleague and Socialist Party companion, Máximo Cajal, had theorized about it before him). Just when our Foreign Minister felt secure in the belief that the inevitable criticisms from Morocco had been properly negotiated in order to keep them at a strict minimum, Mohammed VI and his ministers took our leaders quite by surprise with their incendiary rhetoric and the subsequent withdrawal of their ambassador from Madrid (whose return we are still waiting for). Improvisation? Naveity? Or maybe, also, a snub for the two cities on whose future Rabat demands to negotiate.

Third, we might mention the now famous and bad-tempered Latin American Summit Meeting. Not only did the Government leave His Majesty the King on his own, using him as a lightning conductor for the populist and indigenist feeling throughout the region, but it opened up a breach between Government and State (let us not forget that the King attends the meeting as the Head of State of the Kingdom of Spain), one that we have yet to discover how the Government intends to close. For the moment, all we have heard from the Venezuelan dictator is that Spain's diplomats are desperate to extract a joint statement from him in order to calm things down. Far from actually doing so, the Spanish Government, disguising its humiliation as a sense of goodwill, has done nothing other than provoke further bravado from the Venezuelan leader, who has

piled insult upon insult on our main institutions.

Finally, we might consider the affair relating to Félix Sanz Roldán, the current Chief of the Defence Staff (JEMAD). After Spanish Defence Minister, José Antonio Alonso Suárez, had sold us the idea that the candidature of Spain's high-ranking soldier enjoyed the necessary support for him to be appointed as the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, an example, according to his uncouth political marketing, of the excellent relationship between Spain and the United States, poor Sanz Roldán was not only eliminated from the running in the first round after receiving just three sad votes (from Luxembourg, Portugal and Turkey), but he also found that he was deserted in defeat by the government he was serving. Overlooking the previous sales pitch that the Government had made for its candidate, Moratinos stated that it was all just a question of personal ambition on the part of Lieutenant-General Félix Sanz, a lie compounded by the silence of the Minister for Defence, who preferred to take part in an exercise in mutual loyalty with his fellow minister instead of defending his own Chief of Staff.

Unfortunately, none of this is especially surprising. Rodríguez Zapatero reached La Moncloa with a desire to contradict everything Aznar had done and believing that he alone could humiliate the American President. He also believed that by pursuing his rampant brand of anti-Americanism he would be better received by the European leaders of the time, Chirac and Schröder, without realising that, instead of returning to the

heart of Europe, as he tirelessly claimed to be doing, he was really just placing the country under the boot of our French neighbours. It was not only George W. Bush who gave our government the cold shoulder, but Paris did the same, scorning our interests at the first opportunity.

Even more serious is Spain's lightweight influence in Europe since Zapatero's supposed allies disappeared from the scene, the electoral victims of their own policies. Angela Merkel replaced Schröder (accompanied by our Prime Minister's famous *faux pas* when he was delighted at the prospect of Merkel's defeat) and Chirac succumbed to the rise of Nicolas Sarkozy. Both of these leaders occupy positions at the opposite end of the political spectrum with regard to the current Spanish Government. Thus, from being the strongest ally of the European Constitution, with Moratinos stubbornly persisting in attracting the largest number of countries to the cause of an expanded and more ambitious text, this Government has ended up resigning itself to accepting a text that worsens Spain's position with regard to its partners in the EU.

At NATO, the Spanish Government is considered to be something of a Southern Front, due to the fact that, on too many occasions, we have been the ones that have caused the biggest problems to our allies. Not only have we refused to lift our caveats on the employment of our armed forces in Afghanistan, but we have criticised the Americans and the actions undertaken as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, opting for a system that limits the scope of action of Coalition soldiers. We have also objected to

NATO's proposal of an anti-missile shield and, of course, we have come nowhere near fulfilling the commitment of spending 2% of GDP on defence. We shall continue to be members of the Alliance, but not especially cooperative ones.

Rodríguez Zapatero's problem is that nothing he has tried has actually worked. In order to compensate for the fact that he ran away from Iraq, he is now forced to contemplate the risks of Afghanistan and be prepared to send troops to places he had never imagined. The United States, far from having been defeated in Iraq, has held up well and is transforming the situation there. Anti-Americanism in Latin America has also turned out to have a strong element of anti-Spain sentiment about it too, whilst Spain's good relations with Morocco are subject to the same vicissitudes as ever.

And all this in exchange for what? How has Spain benefited from Zapatero's foreign policy U-turn? Spain is more alone and isolated now than it was four years ago; Spain's voice is not heeded anywhere and Spain is ordered to "shut up" by a tin-pot dictator with all the manners of a gangster. Quite the contrary to Rodríguez Zapatero's slogan, Spain has not returned anywhere; it has actually drifted away from everyone. The only firm support the current Socialist Government has comes from the Islamic leader of Turkey, Recep Tayip Erdogan, whose progressive social Islamization of the country is alienating it from Europe at the speed of light.

Rodríguez Zapatero has designed a foreign policy based on erroneous princi-

ples, one that, to make matters worse, his ministers have not even been capable of implementing efficiently, having sown nothing but failure after failure. You don't have to be an Aznar supporter to understand that this is not what Spain deserves. In order to comprehend the sorry state we find ourselves in, it is enough to chat with our businessmen

and investors, with those who seek to play a role in the process of globalisation, with our scientists and our military staff. A credible country is not feasible with leaders who fail to lead. The price we have to pay is too high. Rodríguez Zapatero must not win the elections again. For the good of Spain.