



## Spain and the European Union. Return to the Heart of Europe?

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The debates on European policy, stirring for the past three years in Spain, are a good representation of the level to which the two main Spanish political parties have come to defend the same approach and policy regarding Europe; despite attempts by others to demonstrate the opposite.

This government is completely lost in regards to European policy and preoccupied solely with scoring political points in the short term to favor its Prime Minister. He wants photos with "European leaders" during European Council meetings because everything he thinks and every action he takes in Europe is based on his motto "The return to the heart of Europe." For him, the return to Europe involves doing the exact opposite of former Prime Minister José María Aznar.

This brings to mind, a European Council snapshot of Chirac, Zapatero and Blair posing together. The French President put his arm over Zapatero's shoulder, with the clear

intention to protect, support, and bless ZP's European policy. Thus, the Prime Minister was fulfilling his dream: Spain had already returned to the heart of Europe.

This Administration seems to have forgotten that its main task is the defense of national interests. For ZP, public relations and rhetorical Europeism do not seem to be compatible with the defense of national interests.

However, the European policy of the main opposition party is also worrisome. The Popular Party (PP) supported the European Constitution, knowing that Spain would lose influence in the European Union. Why this contradiction? - Out of fear of being labeled "Euroskeptics." Because of this fear, they have failed to defend the main achievements made by the Aznar Administration in Europe. It seems as if PP were looking for forgiveness, for Aznar's "unpleasantness." However, in contrast with the current administration, he at least was ef-

fective with his European counterparts. PP should vindicate Aznar's European policy; the one that promoted the Lisbon Strategy, the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, the Berlin agreement in the previous Financial Perspectives; the one which succeeded in gaining respect for Spain.

If PP takes power, what kind of European policy will it carry out? Some say that Spain will return to be among the great powers, seeing as Sarkozy and Merkel belong to the same political family as PP. Thus it would translate in the presence of a European "Popular" triumvirate formed by France, Germany and Spain. Rajoy would be welcomed enthusiastically by his "friends" and would automatically become a member of the most influential club of European leaders.

While it's true this would be desirable, let's not deceive ourselves; in Europe nobody makes favors for free, one always has to offer something in exchange for good gestures. And, what is that "something"? The only things Spain can offer are leadership and projects. Unfortunately, the only "original" thing PP has proposed about Euro-

pean issues in the almost four years of legislative period has been the idea of teaching in Spanish schools how European institutions work. But if this PP initiative were applied, we would turn future Spanish generations into fervent euroskeptics; there is nothing more effective as studying the European Parliament, the Council or the Commission to feel disenchanting with Europe.

PP's performance regarding the European Constitution makes us fear that a hypothetical Rajoy Administration will be more preoccupied with not being labeled as an *Aznarist* euroskeptic due to the firm defense of Spanish interests. If it were so, what would the difference be between the European policy of the Popular Party and that of the Socialist Party? Would PP develop the same European policy as PSOE but with aesthetic nuances? If this occurs, they will not have anything to offer Europe. One fears that whomever wins the next elections, Spain will continue in the heart of Europe, just as ZP understands the concept, turning Aznar's European policy into a mere parenthesis of leadership and seriousness.

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