



Zapatero: Irrelevant Spain

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Spain's place in the world at the beginning of the year 2008 could not be more pitiful, especially if we bear in mind the position it could have enjoyed had the policies laid down by the governments of José María Aznar been continued.

It is true that the process whereby Spain re-established a sense of normality in its foreign relations began after the end of the Franco dictatorship, during the Transition and under the auspices of the first democratic governments. After two centuries of profound introspection, it seemed that Spain would once again open up to the main international trends and influences.

It is also true that during the PSOE period with Felipe González in Government, Spain's presence at various multi-national institutions increased in both quantitative and qualitative terms – although this did not always happen harmoniously or according to the growing importance of the nation. This could be witnessed in the case of NATO

whereby a peculiar model, not especially advantageous for our national interests, was adopted. Nonetheless, this model served to alleviate the psychological traumas of the Left.

Spain's true leap forward came during the eight-year premiership of Aznar. This rapid growth occurred for various reasons. First, and most importantly, it was due to his ambition to ensure that Spain, as he himself never ceased to declare, should become one of the most important democracies in the world.

This vision, which dominated his two terms in government between 1996 and 2004, entailed putting an end to the neutral image of Spain implemented by the Socialist government. It created a Spain, which was neither a large nor a small country, neither passive nor active, neither particularly supportive nor totally irresponsible. In accordance with the definition cultivated by our own diplomats at the time, Spain was different. The worst aspect of this exceptional status was that it

restricted Spain to a secondary role in international affairs. Within the EU, Spain always voiced its opinion in fifth place, after the big four had spoken. Our policies were often nothing more than pure alignment (or slavish compliance) with the positions adopted by Paris.

Aznar was the first Spanish Prime Minister to seriously consider shedding this role of obliging second-tier nation in order to place Spain among the great nations of Europe, among the EU Member Countries, in Trans-Atlantic relations, in Latin America and in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Furthermore, he was the first Spanish Premier to do so based on another strong conviction: that to be a leading player in the world, first it was necessary to play the part at home. The initial emphasis on prosperity and on opportunities not only led to spectacular national growth, both also introduced a climate of openness that was quite unprecedented. The welfare of Spaniards, the country's dynamic economic performance and the country's presence on the world markets provided the solid foundations for a more profound and far-reaching national project: a Spain that was not only the eighth most important power in the world, but a Spain that also sought to take its rightful place in international politics.

This meant rigorous policies at home, credibility abroad, a sense of solidarity towards our allies and a commitment to democratic values and institutions and security throughout the world. Aznar brought prosperity to Spain, but also a sense of responsibility. The country's increasing participation in peace support operations, its full integration into the Atlantic Alliance and its cooperation in the war on terror can only be understood in the light of this two-sided approach. It was a question of the economy, but also a matter of politics.

Had it not been for the dramatic terrorist attacks of March 11th, even the Azores photograph (with Aznar standing between President Bush and Prime Minister Blair a few ours before the Irak intervention) would still occupy place of honour on the nation's mantelpiece. As Durao Barroso stated at the time, Spain was rubbing shoulders with the most important country in the world and the world's oldest democracy, with its closest neighbour playing host.

In fact, if PSOE had not won the traumatic elections of 14th of March 2004, we could assume that Spain would have avoided becoming what it is today - virtually a pariah State. Our leaders would have sought to defend our national interests and succeeded in doing so. As a result, the country would not only be occupying its rightful place in international affairs, but it would no doubt continue to be respected by all. None of this is the case today.

How to Spoil a Legacy in Just Four Months

In March 2004, Spain was still a pale reflection of what it could have become. Before voluntarily stepping down, the Spain lead by José María Aznar was on its way to become a European power with a determined Atlantic vocation and a global presence. Spain had not only outgrown its old clothes, but its new clothes promised to be of much better quality. This dream was to be rapidly destroyed by the policies of the new Socialist Government under Rodríguez Zapatero.

It is quite possible that the current Prime Minister rose to his position accidentally, as the Wall Street Journal concluded at the time, and that he was therefore somewhat ill-prepared for his new responsibilities. However, the truth is that his vision of Spain and the country's role in the world must have been already decided and he wasted no time in introducing new foreign policy guidelines.

And since the summer of 2004, his policies have unfortunately remained substantially the same.

The first Zapatero obsession was to break off relations with the America of George W. Bush. Not everything came down to the Iraq question. In fact, for the new Spanish Socialists, Iraq was nothing more than an outward expression of all the ills Bush represented: a God-fearing Southerner given to championing the export of freedom and prepared to use force to do so if necessary.

Either through ignorance or bad faith, Rodríguez Zapatero saw the American Democrats as his salvation. He was well aware that Spain could not stand up to the United States and come out unharmed, but he thought that if he directed his discourse solely at Bush's Republican Administration, he could limit the damage. This explains his public pronouncements in favour of George W. Bush's opponent, Senator Kerry. However, his approach turned out to be really quite an exceptional risk. When Bush swept to victory at the elections in November 2004, the current Spanish Government suddenly found itself staring at the abyss, a position it brought on itself. Instead of humiliating Bush, Rodríguez Zapatero simply succeeded in humiliating Spain. Since the re-election of the American President, Spain has been consigned by America to the same status Franco's Spain enjoyed in the 1950's and 1960's: a Kleenex ally, one you can rely on if useful, but one who is ignored in all other respects. The unfortunate gestures, misunderstandings and humiliations that Spain has suffered are well enough documented without us having to embarrass ourselves by recalling them all here again, ranging from the grand Bush-Zapatero Summit in Istanbul, which lasted all of 7 minutes and 30 seconds (including the consecutive translation), the American denial that Moratinos had been asked to mediate with Syria, the lighting visit of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and

the more recent three supporting votes for the candidature of the Spanish general, Félix Sanz, for the chairmanship of the NATO Military Committee.

Rodríguez Zapatero's second great obsession is to become somebody among the Europeans. When the Socialist Prime Minister talked about returning to the heart of Europe, what he really meant was that Spain should become an appendage to the Franco-German Axis or, more precisely, the Chirac-Schröder Axis. This was partly because Spain shared the same continental status as these two countries, but, above all, because under these two leaders, France and Germany had become a world-wide point of reference for opposition to America's hegemony. Rodríguez Zapatero conceived of Europe as a construction that had been raised to combat America, one that should serve as a counterweight and a means of restricting the freedom of action of the USA in international affairs. However, this was not the Europe that Europeans wanted.

Four years later his vision has evaporated. Merkel's Germany is clearly pro-American in all important respects, and Sarkozy has just declared his undying love for America during a triumphant visit to Washington. Italy has preserved its good relations with the Bush Administration and Gordon Brown in London is not even contemplating damaging his country's traditional Special Relationship with its cousins across the Atlantic. In this respect, Neo-Socialist Spain has been left out in the cold. The paradoxical result of this situation is that, in order to alleviate its isolation, the Rodríguez Zapatero Government has been forced to accept a series of measures that are as unpalatable to its tastes as having to maintain and even slightly increase Spain's troop numbers in Afghanistan, send soldiers to the Lebanon and accept the NATO anti-missile shield, not to mention refusing to remove Spain's military contin-

gent in Kosovo even if the province should unilaterally declare its independence.

At the heart of the European Union, which represents the maximum expression of the new Europe for Spain's current leaders, the current Government has not accomplished a great deal either. In fact, quite the contrary is true. On the one hand we might mention the question of funds, which Rodríguez Zapatero renounced gratuitously with a phrase that will surely go down in History: "*It is amusing to watch how they fight amongst themselves in order to defend their interests*", in reference to the meetings at the EU Council Summit. On the other hand, we might mention the whole matter of the European Constitution. Here the Government first said one thing and then, subsequently, proclaimed the opposite. After the failure of the text in France and Holland and all the anguish that the Constitution should finally succeed, Moratinos dreamed up the Spanish position of a "Constitution Plus". More text, not less, was the slogan. He even designed a parallel mini-Summit in order to create a club of supporters for this idea, a meeting that was only attended by second-ranking civil servants, we might add, and that was opposed by the German Presidency of the EU. A few months later, once a consensus had been forged between Berlin and Paris regarding a more light-weight treaty, Madrid abandoned its dream of a beefed-up version, along with its friends and supporters in order to accept the new model, which was precisely the one that was most detrimental to Spain's interests, as it removed the country from the leading group within the EU and consigned us to an inferior level.

In short, Nicolas Sarkozy, with his natural sense of ambition, was to design a wide-ranging alternative for the Mediterranean Region that did not rely on Spain. He also passed through Morocco and Algeria, achieving everything that Spain has failed to achieve over the last few years, due to the

fact that its weight and influence has diminished substantially in this part of the world.

In effect, with regard to the Sahara problem, when Rodríguez Zapatero came to power he seemed to declared that "I will resolve this in six months". But the time has passed and in spite of the radical shift in Spanish and Socialist policies regarding the region, and in spite of the ongoing winks and concessions to the King of Morocco, neither the Sahara matter nor bilateral relations have improved. In fact, as I write these very lines, the Moroccan Ambassador in Madrid continues to be absent, having been recalled for consultations following the Spanish Foreign Ministry's poor management of the visit that Their Majesties the King and Queen made to Ceuta and Melilla. Within the field of diplomacy, gestures are as important as words and, whatever might be said regarding the matter, not having the Moroccan Ambassador in Spain is not a good sign for the close relations that this Government has sought to establish with Rabat.

In Latin America, the Government's policy could not be more foolish. First, it attempted to join a wide-ranging anti-American front and, in doing so, fanned the flames of all imaginable populist and indigenist movements within the Region, as in Bolivia and in Venezuela under Chávez. Second, the Government challenged the American giant in its own backyard with measures such as the sale of weapons systems, some of which required a US licence, to the dictator's regime in Caracas. Third, it abandoned Spain's investors within the Region, requesting instead that they submit to the new leaders, who shift between the most archaic Socialist tendencies to an attitude informed by historical resentment.

In the end, all the Government has achieved is to ensure that Spain loses its traditional allies, abandons the freedom agenda set in motion by Felipe González and brought to

maximum fruition by Aznar, becoming a victim to the whims of the new petrodollar dictators. As we could observe at the Summit in Chile, anti-Americanism has mutated into an anti-Spanish stance, a position encouraged precisely by those same leaders to whom the current Spanish Government has held out its hand time and again. Four years after assuming the reins of power, Rodríguez Zapatero has no real friends in Latin America. Neither good friends nor bad friends. And this is not for want of trying. His policy towards Cuba has been so scandalous that, in the end, what Zapatero aspired to achieve, namely to get the EU to accept the Castros as something normal, has slipped from his grasp, thanks to the moral stature of nations such as the United Kingdom, Holland and the Czech Republic.

The flagship project of this Prime Minister's foreign policy, namely his so-called "Alliance of Civilisations", has been nothing other than a fiasco that has brought few or no benefits to Spain, and, to top it all, we are paying huge bills to the UN for the privilege. The leading role that Moratinos attributed to himself in the Middle East has been shown for what it is as a result of his inability to pull off any initiative in the Region. Furthermore, it was pathetic how he went begging to Washington in order to ensure that Spain was also invited to the recent Annapolis Summit. The pride Felipe González felt during the Madrid Summit in the early nineties is just a distant memory now. If the Zapatero-Moratinos duo ever dreamed of serving as privileged intermediaries vis-à-vis the Arab world, the Arabs themselves have turned their backs on them once again. They do not need either the Spanish Government or the Spanish Foreign Office to tackle the Palestinian question, nor do they need them in order to approach the United States and the EU. Spain simply does not count for anything.

In short, there is no region in the world where Spain is better off today, after four years of the Rodríguez Zapatero Government, than it was at the beginning of 2004, before the current Prime Minister's rise to power and destruction of the country's foreign policy. And there is no reason to believe that, should he continue to lead the nation for another four years, Spain's image, importance and role will be enhanced in any part of the world.

The nonsense of Twenty-First Century Socialism

In international politics, a country has a role to play if it is strong and if it stands firm in the face of the vicissitudes of world affairs. Although in a rather negative sense, the foreign policy of the Rodríguez Zapatero Government is extremely coherent with regard to its domestic policies. It is based on a dream of creating a strong nation through diversity and extreme decentralisation, a policy that, in the end, has only led to a Spain that is weaker as a nation and one that is perceived as being weaker by the rest of the world. To the bewilderment of Spain's leader of Post-Modern twenty-first century Socialism, his conception of what harmonious international relations should be has not always been very warmly received by his alleged friends. This was certainly the case with the French President, who refused to sit down with the Heads of the Spanish Regional Governments who had been invited to join the Spanish delegation at the first Bilateral Summit between Spain and France after PSOE's election victory.

His ongoing attitude of appeasement through greater and greater concessions, as witnessed in his approach to the ETA problem, also translates in international affairs into what one shrewd British diplomat has called "a policy of preventive surrender". That is to say, no red lines have been laid down in the negotiations that should not be crossed,

whilst Zapatero has been prepared to immediately accept what the other side demands. The example of Gibraltar, in which he accepted a Tripartite Forum and abandoned any attempt to recover this occupied territory, is quite typical of his approach. He gives in to everything without anything in return, apart from a nice photo with his counterparts.

His liking for minorities and his attempts to make them the social norm has not been very enthusiastically welcomed by Spain's partners and allies either. The Left's obsession with the Palestinian question, for example, led to that photo of Rodríguez Zapatero wearing the *kefiya* or Palestinian headdress, an image that circulated around the world. And this was precisely at a moment in which Israel's security was at stake as it waged a war in the Lebanon against Hezbollah and suffered a series of constant attacks launched from a Gaza Strip controlled by Hamas. With his policy of criticising Israel, based on no other criteria than that of romantically siding with the resistance (in spite of the fact that it is made up of terrorists), the Spanish Prime Minister has won the honour of being the only Western leader ever to be publicly praised by the leaders of Hezbollah.

Zapatero's anti-militarism has led to a number of painful situations, such as his lack of concern regarding the safety of Spanish troops deployed on peace missions in extremely hostile environments. His lack of concern led him to send our soldiers on high-risk missions with the same levels of preparation and material as if they were embarking on low-risk ventures. This approach is at the root of the deaths that Spain has suffered in the Lebanon and in Afghanistan and, what is more, it has led Spain's troops to reduce their duties in order not to expose themselves to danger, to the point where they are shut up in their garrisons practically all of the time. What better proof do we need of the Government's negligence than its sudden rush to

purchase anti-mine armoured vehicles as part of an attempt to cover up its hopeless military planning?

The Che Guevaraian approach of the Post-Modern Left has also wreaked havoc with Spain's interests in Latin America, especially its commercial interests. In order to get on with the new Latin American despots, the Government has chosen not to defend Spanish companies, who, without the nation's support, have been left at the mercies of Bolivia's nationalising whims or the constant threats of the oil-rich dictator of Venezuela. The fact that it was the King of Spain who had to intervene in an attempt to change the rules of this dangerous game, by publicly standing up to Chávez, speaks volumes about Spain's Socialist Government.

It is possible that Rodríguez Zapatero aspires to lead the new European Left and that his rapid international tour promoting the ABBA Government (as it has been defined by a prestigious Spanish-British historian, namely that of *Anything but Bush, Blair and Aznar*) was an attempt to consolidate this alleged leadership. After all, the old European Left was searching for a young leader who was supposedly qualified for the task. However, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero must have disappointed them as well. His project has dissolved like sugar in a glass of water. Spain, a country that fails to bother the United States, that is completely ignored by London, Paris and Berlin, that has lost its voice and vote in the EU, that is despised by its supposed friends in Latin America - who continue to insult the Spanish nation - and that is marginalized by its neighbours in the South, cannot be the leader of anything, except perhaps the world's leading laughing-stock. Nobody can enjoy a strong position in world affairs whilst being so weak at home.

And nobody can be taken seriously abroad if he does not take his international duties seriously. And Rodríguez Zapatero shied away

from the rest of the world as soon as he realised that his impossible policies were going awry. Over the last four years, he has been the leader who has undertaken the least number of trips abroad, as well as being the Prime Minister who has attended the least number of bilateral meetings in Spain's recent history. Although the Government has sought to fill this dreadful void with its international agenda, this policy is like water: tasteless, odourless and colourless.

Rodríguez Zapatero perfectly embodies what a Spanish diplomat sarcastically exclaimed in the late eighties, to the effect that Spain's foreign policy consisted of three principles: Spain always forms part of an axis; Spain always mediates in something; and Spain always ends up dropping its trousers. It is a shame that Zapatero's axis consists of the Castros, Chavez and Evo Morales and that Spain does not even have a role or room within which to mediate.

How to Recover Spain's Place in the World

We cannot expect anything good from the New Socialism of Rodríguez Zapatero. It is a disaster and it would be naïve to attempt to reach any kind of agreement with this radical and extravagant PSOE. Any kind of consensus would be based on such a minimum understanding that it would be quite meaningless. Another thing to keep in mind, is that some remnants might remain in PSOE of what Spanish Socialism has always been, namely a pragmatic force channelled within the context of wide-ranging international movements and not within the extremist margins of the current Government.

The problem is that, in order to defend its interests, Spain needs to be strong. This requires inner strength. Strength capable of projecting a credible image abroad. First of all, Spain should attempt to recover the normal coordinates of any liberal democracy that is firmly anchored within what we call the West. This means re-establishing a cordial dialogue with Washington, whoever may sit in the White House, as well as re-suming our place among the big four of Europe. Spain's voice must be heard and taken into account.

Spain must put an end to its fickle policies in Latin America and clearly support the freedom agenda within the Region. Furthermore, it must promote the universal values of free-

dom and respect for all persons throughout the world, placing special emphasis on the Arab world.

This will not be easy, partly because Rodríguez Zapatero has created an anorexic Spain that no longer has the muscle to take on the great challenges presented throughout the world, ranging from globalisation to international security. A radical transformation of the country's intelligence services and Armed Forces are a *sine qua non* condition for Spain to be able to operate in the new context of the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, international credibility is a little like a Chinese vase. When it breaks, it can always be glued together again, but it is never quite the same. Rodríguez Zapatero has destroyed Spain's image and, even though we might manage to repair it, Spain would have to make new gestures in order to prove its commitment and solidarity and recover the levels of credibility it enjoyed before March 2004.

In the last analysis, Spain needs a new social contract, not simply a consensus among parties, in order to be able to successfully meet the challenges of tomorrow and the day after that. It is essential that Spaniards understand what it means to be a great country, one that is prosperous and responsible. And it is also essential that they understand that we are not living in a world of fantasy, as Rodríguez Zapatero would have us believe. At the end of the day, although Bin Laden may not place Spain in its headlines, Al Qaeda has mentioned the country fourteen times since March 2004 and it has threatened Spain in all of them.

The Spain we need cannot be built by the current Prime Minister, because he has channelled all his energies in the opposite direction. If his errors with ETA have begun to have tragic consequences only recently, the country has been paying for his strategic

and foreign policy errors for some years now. Rodríguez Zapatero constitutes a heavy

mortgage for Spain. And I, for one, do not want to have to continue paying it.

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