

Spain and the Mediterranean

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This has been a year in which the Mediterranean agenda has prevailed in Spanish external activities. In light of the various meetings and agreements that have taken place, we could speak of the “Year of the Mediterranean”, to coin the slogan that has been during this same period in European actions. The Spanish Government completed this process at the end of 2005 with two important meetings for the region: the meeting in Palma de Mallorca of the High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilisations and the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona. Both events involved the most important European and international projects for Spain and in which Spain has played a leading role, both in terms of setting them up and promoting them.

The importance of the meeting of the High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilisations (26/27 November in Palma de Mallorca) lies in its constitution. Firstly, it involves normalising the project that Spain submitted in 2004 under the United Nations General Assembly, as well as allowing the project to materialise by giving a definitive impetus to the work that should be completed at the end of 2006 with the submission of the corresponding report to the United Nations. In this regard, the symbolism that this first meeting represents for Spain is especially important and it turns it, alongside Turkey, into the driving force behind an East-West dialogue in the framework of the international community. Mention should also be made of the Mediter-

anean’s leadership of the initiative on the part of Spain and Turkey, at a time when recent events give the Mediterranean a prominent place in these talks.

At this point, we should highlight one of the most important meetings between Spain and the Arab world. Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero’s participation in the Arab League Summit in Algiers at the start of the year (22nd March 2005) served to present the proposal as part of relations between the Islamic world and the West.

Although it was to be the last of this year’s meetings, we should stress the importance of the first Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Barcelona Process. Under the UK’s presidency of the EU, the Spanish and British Governments cooperated on organising the Summit, which saw an extraordinary participation from 35 Heads of State or Government, and on negotiating the contents. It is worth highlighting the fact that almost all the Heads of State or Government of the European member countries attended, except Luxembourg. This shows a clear European interest and involvement in the development of the Euro-Mediterranean project that started in Barcelona in 1995, renewing Europe’s climate of optimism that reigned ten years ago, in spite of all the problems that have plagued the Mediterranean, and the doubts that have been harboured internally since the French and Dutch referenda paralysed the Constitution project. This participation is all the more remarkable if we consider the joining of new countries in the Euro-Mediterranean project since the EU enlargement process. However, as for the partner countries on the southern side, only Turkey and the Palestine Authority

were represented at the highest levels. Beyond the political significance of the Summit and its level of participation, the results provided the Barcelona project with definition and operational capacity, two aspects intrinsically linked to Spain’s will to position and promote the Mediterranean agenda in Europe. We should also refer to the approval of the Five-year Plan of Action, which adds migration and the approval of the Code of Conduct on Countering Terrorism to the traditional areas of cooperation. Both of these aspects are sensitive ones from Spain’s point of view. Apart from these important developments, fresh impetus was given to pre-eminent items on the agenda such as the key role given to governance aspects to promote development and modernisation in the southern countries, as well as education, promotion of the role of women and employment, which are important to develop and improve the social and economic conditions in these countries.

If we look at the situation from the Spanish point of view, the Summit has probably marked out one of the most interesting challenges that external action in the Mediterranean will have to fight in the next stage: Spain’s leadership in the Euro-Mediterranean policy and commitments with the Plan of Action. This involves giving impetus to priority issues for Spain, such as migration. Secondly, the development and complementation of this Euro-Mediterranean policy with the implementation of the Neighbourhood Policy and its instruments, with a clear European dimension in terms of its projection to the East and South, and to which Spain is firmly committed. Finally, the maintenance of a privileged relationship that boosts relations between Spain and the Maghreb.

Although on the multilateral plane the Spanish external agenda started from these premises, the field of bilateral relations has also played an important part in meetings of extreme political significance. As part of priority relations with the Maghreb, this year the meetings with Algeria and Morocco have stood out.

The Hispano-Algerian High-Level Meeting (HLM) was held in Madrid on 24th February 2005, with the participation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, as part of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourhood and Cooperation in force between the two countries. This showed explicitly the high level of political understanding that exists between the two countries and gave fresh impetus to economic relations. As Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero pointed out, "Algeria and Spain have a political association and are in a position to develop an intense economic relationship". In accordance with highly important relations in the field of energy, which include the new Medgaz project, the aim is to make progress on extending business cooperation and Spanish investment in Algeria, with far-reaching prospects and considerable public financial support from Spain. The collaboration in the fight against terrorism was also a much-discussed issue at the HLM, as was Hispano-Algerian coordination on major issues on the international agenda, such as the conflicts in the Middle East, Iraq and the Sahara.

The relationship with Morocco has been marked by two major issues this year, highlighted by very important events: with respect to the control of migratory flows, mainly as a result of the events in Ceuta and Melilla during the Autumn; and with regard to the Sahara, as a result of the events in El Aaiún.

Following a considerable drop in illegal immigration during the first half of the

year, in September we witnessed the first episodes of a constant avalanche-like migration flow. Since the events in Ceuta and Melilla, it is clear how the regulation of migratory flows between Spain and Morocco requires coordination between both countries, in relation to the joint reception of sub-Saharan immigrants. This situation was part of the focus of the Hispano-Moroccan High-Level Meeting, held in Seville-Cordoba on 29th September, with the participation of Prime Minister Driss Jettou and a broad representation of Moroccan ministers. The meeting involved a detailed review of the relations between the two countries, both in terms of international and regional political coordination and intense economic, cultural and cooperation relations.

As regards international political coordination, the Hispano-Moroccan agreement was fulfilled with a view to the agenda to be promoted for the Euro-Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona, with the inclusion of two new paragraphs on emigration and the fight against terrorism. Impetus was also given to coordination regarding regional issues, such as the 5+5 dialogue, Maghreb integration, including progress in the solution of the Sahara conflict, the Alliance of Civilisations under the UN and the conflicts in the Middle East and Iraq.

In the field of bilateral relations, a great many specific agreements were reached in different areas, especially in terms of cultural relations and cooperation (future Hispano-Moroccan university, preparation of the Year of Morocco in Spain), as well as extremely significant economic initiatives. Along these lines, we should mention the continuation of financial cooperation programs through the Development Aid Fund loans and the program to convert debt into public investments, as well as the participation

of Spanish companies in the modernisation and development of various Moroccan economic sectors, such as telecommunications, the industrial sector, food and agriculture, etc. The meeting of Hispano-Moroccan directors that was held in Seville in November was a faithful representation of the economic exchange situation that turns Morocco into Spain's fourth most important non-European market, with a considerable growth trend.

Moreover, migration is currently marked by the interest shown by both Governments in improving the conditions of the enormous Moroccan community that has already settled in Spain.

Over and above important issues such as bilateral relations with these priority countries and with the other Mediterranean countries and the highly active participation in the Barcelona process during the "Year of the Mediterranean", Spanish activities have been marked by Spain's ongoing interest in solving conflicts in the area. In particular, the Middle East Peace Process and the consequences that the ongoing Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have had on the region have taken up a considerable part of the ability to act and Spain's persuasion to improve the situation in the region. To this effect, Spain's action has been targeted at participating positively and actively in setting up a joint European stance as regards these matters, in the context of the broadest international cooperation. Thus, a vast effort has been made to boost and put these actions into practice, which opens a new chapter in Spanish foreign policy, although intrinsically linked to the Mediterranean policy, by encouraging and collaborating on the different initiatives underway in the search for better opportunities for peace and stability in the Middle East conflicts and in the region as a whole.