

# Back to the Future: The PSOE's Return to Office and the Re-establishment of the Paris-Berlin Axis in Spain's European Policy.

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A century-and-a-quarter old, the Spanish Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español - PSOE) has deep roots in the Western European social democratic tradition and is generally considered to be the most 'European' of Spain's political parties. Proud of the role it played in securing and consolidating Spain membership of the European Union during its period in office between 1982 and 1996, the party was critical of the more explicitly nationalist discourse adopted by the Popular Party (PP) government between 1996 and 2004. In its manifesto for the March 2004 general election, the PSOE contrasted the constructive approach towards European integration adopted by the governments led by Felipe González with the confrontational stance which characterized much of José María Aznar's period as Prime Minister:

Spain, which developed into a respectable and respected force in favour of integration by promoting its vision of Europe and the defence of its national interests within the Union, has become obstructive and divisive, calling into question Europe's political autonomy and seeking to subordinate it to interests and strategies which we Europeans and Spaniards are not capable of influencing.

The Popular Party Government has altered the fundamental axes of our European policy, laying claim to a vision which retreats from Europe's federal orientation and from the deepening of the European project, opting for a an essentially intergovernmental Union with respect to the political sphere, without political autonomy and dependent on the United States as regards foreign and security policy. (PSOE, 2004a: 17)

The chief focus of the paper is an examination of the divergence of approaches of the two main Spanish political parties, the PP and the PSOE, with respect to, on the one hand, the question of bilateral relations with the US, and, on the other, Spain's strategy on the EU. Firstly, it will seek to explain the PP government's shift away from the favourable approach towards integration of its Socialist predecessor and to evaluate the success of a strategy more overtly geared towards the defence of national interests, even to the point of backing the US-led invasion of Iraq, despite the opposition of the overwhelming majority of Spaniards. Secondly, it will assess the reorientation of policy under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's Socialist government since its general election victory in 2004, and consider whether the policy of the current government has been more appropriate with respect to meeting Spain's long-term national interests.

The divergence between the PP and the PSOE on the question of attitudes towards European integration is significant given that, hitherto, the EU has not provided the basis for any serious political cleavages in Spanish politics (Closa and Heywood, 2004: 243). This paper is therefore a contribution to the literature on what has been referred to as the 'new paradigm' for Spanish foreign policy under the PP (in addition to Closa and Heywood: 2004, see Barbé: 1999; Heywood: 2003; Chari et al.: 2004; Closa, 2004; Paramio: 2004; and Sanz and Sánchez-Sierra: 2005) and its reversal under the PSOE.

## From Federalism to Intergovernmentalism: the PP's Strategy on EU Integration 1996-2004

The PP's entry in office in 1996 posed a fundamental challenge to the essential guidelines which had governed Spanish foreign policy since the death of Franco (Closa, 2004a). Thenceforth policy centred on a re-alignment with the US and the adoption of a more aggressive stance within the EU directed towards reinforcing Spain's position with respect to leading EU member states. Explicit emphasis was placed on the defence of national interests and Spain's individual influence, be it economic or in terms of voting capacity within the EU.

Although the PP government's slim parliamentary majority constrained its freedom of manoeuvre in the field of foreign policy during its first term (1996-2004), Aznar was still able to differentiate his policy from the previous Socialist government in several respects. Spain was finally incorporated into NATO's military command structure shortly after the PP general election victory (with the full support of the PSOE opposition), whilst official cooperation was suspended with Cuba. Both developments found favour with Washington, which Aznar visited for the first time a year into his premiership. Aznar also defended the bombing of Iraq by the US and Britain in 1998, despite criticism from other EU member states. This alignment with the Anglo-Saxon bloc represented a change in terms of the security policy hitherto implemented by the PSOE governments under Felipe González, and marked a defining moment with respect to Spain's attitude towards the Franco-German axis (Barbé, 1999: 175; 2001: 59).

Despite these developments, an eminent PP commentator on Spanish foreign policy was justifiably able to conclude, when evaluating the PP's first term in office, that the most notable feature had been 'the *continuity* of the current government's foreign policy with that of its predecessors. A continuity in its basic outlines which is not only based on the permanence of Spanish interests, but also on acceptance across a broad political consensus' (italics in original) (Herrero de Miñón, 2000: 51).

It is nevertheless worth pointing out that this concept of the existence of a long-standing political consensus in Spanish foreign and security policy is itself debatable. As one commentator has argued, 'the government cannot be charged with having broken a consensus which was never explicitly articulated by the main political parties with parliamentary representation and which has never been clearly and unequivocally apparent to Spanish society (Calduch Cervera, 2004: 35)

Less debatable is the PP's shift away from the previous Socialist government's federalism towards an intergovernmental approach towards the EU, particularly during the party's second term in office when it was in receipt of an overall majority. This shift has been interpreted as being a function of the increasingly critical attitude towards federalist models of integration displayed throughout the EU from the mid-1990s, as well as reflecting the increasingly instrumentalist view of the EU expressed in

opinion polls in Spain, together with 'Eurosceptic' attitudes displayed by the PP government. Spain's relationship with the EU was therefore conditioned by a both structural international factors and domestic political factors (Closa and Heywood, 2004: 242). This intergovernmental approach towards institutional affairs primarily focused on economic questions and domestic and foreign security matters (Torreblanca, 2004).

The intergovernmental vision of the EU was most notably apparent in the PP government's refusal to countenance any amendment of the Nice Treaty. Aznar interpreted attempts at the IGC to propose a system of 'double majority' voting as a direct attack on Spain. At the European Council meeting in Brussels in December 2003, the Spanish government made little attempt to present its stance in terms of defending the interests of the EU as a whole: Spanish national interest was the sole concern. Despite Aznar's close relationship with Tony Blair, the UK prime minister had no compunction in making clear his continuing recognition of the priority status awarded to the Franco-German axis. With London, Paris and Berlin coordinating their approach towards the new Constitution, there was no place for an increasingly isolated Madrid. Moreover, the PP government's stance seemed likely to contribute towards a further increase in anti-EU sentiment throughout Spanish society (Closa, 2004a).

Just months later the PP went into the March 2004 general election campaign with a manifesto in which it pledged to maintain 'Spain's clout (*poder*) in the enlarged European Union's new institutional architecture'. This made a clear contrast with the PSOE's pledge in its own programme to provide its full support for the draft Constitution, which it interpreted as 'an extraordinary step towards a political union with a federal orientation' (Torreblanca, 2004).

The PP's emphasis on its newfound influence directed at the protection of national interests was prominent throughout its manifesto:

The Popular Party government has successfully strengthened Spain's influence and clout on the international scene. Spain today enjoys a prestige and international credibility which corresponds to the effort which has been put in.... Popular Party governments have been guided by the wish to exercise greater clout within the European Union, and join that group of countries which drives the European project forward (Partido Popular, 2004: 303; 307).

Of course, the government's efforts to defend the Nice Treaty status quo with respect to voting rights in the Council of Ministers was hardly the central issue when the general election was held. When Spaniards went to the polls on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2004, just three days after the Al Quaeda terrorist attacks on Madrid, the nation was still, understandably, in a state of shock. Uppermost in their minds were both the inept response of the government to the crisis and the implications of the intensification of bilateral relations with the United States during the PP's second term in office, to which we will now turn.

## The Development of Bilateral Relations between Spain and the United States and the General Election of 14 March 2004

Much has already been written on the particular circumstances in which the March 2004 general election took place, leading to the defeat of the PP at the hands of the PSOE. For the first time since the establishment of democracy after Franco's death a government in receipt of an overall majority had been voted out of office, an outcome which had seemed unlikely right up until polling day<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore unnecessary for me to cover similar ground (for more detailed coverage of the election see Barreiro (2004) Chari, 2004; Closa, 2004b; Noya, 2004; Paramio, 2004; Ramiro, 2004; and Sanz and Sánchez-Sierra, 2005).

Sufficient for our purposes will be a synthesis of the main conclusions reached by those who have considered the very special circumstances of the 2004 general election in more detail. These include the following points:

- During its final term in office, the PP government sought to transform Spain's status within the international community, thereby securing a place amongst the leading group of EU countries and as a key interlocutor of the United States.
- Spanish society had little appetite for the human, political and economic costs likely to stem from this ambition and the government neglected to explain its strategy sufficiently clearly to a population which amply expressed its scepticism in opinion polls (Calduch Cervera, 2004: 25).<sup>2</sup>
- The government's popularity was placed at risk by its adoption of a less consensual, more authoritarian, approach following its capture of an overall majority.
- Surveys indicate that Spanish society continues to be unequivocally pro-European and mildly anti-American.

With respect to the government's response to the March 11 attacks, it can be argued that:

- The terrorist attacks and the government's subsequent inept news management and perceived lack of transparency served to mobilise voters who, in other circumstances might not have actually vote, to do so against the PP.
- The circumstances in which Spaniards went to the polls meant that foreign policy was a key issue for many voters, capable of neutralising

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<sup>1</sup> I spent election night at the PSOE's Headquarters in Madrid and can confirm that, despite the momentous events of previous days, there was little expectation amongst the party's supporters that it would actually win the election.

<sup>2</sup> According to a survey carried out by the Spanish government's own polling organisation, the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) (Sociological Research Centre) a month before the US-led invasion of Iraq, 91 per cent of the Spanish population indicated its opposition to a military 'solution' to the conflict; two months later, following the invasion, a quarter of those polled indicated that they had participated in an anti-war demonstration (Sanz and Sánchez-Sierra, 2005: 5; 13)

in many minds the government's considerable domestic policy achievements - most notably its successful handling of the economy. In 'normal' circumstances, the PP's economic competence might well have been sufficient to obtain victory in a general election.<sup>3</sup>

As one commentator has argued, 'Aznar's foreign policy model was unsustainable both in the medium and long term with respect to the defence of the national interests of a medium-sized power such as Spain, whose interests are mainly focused on Europe' (Arenal, 2004). Given this, how is the PP government's decision to deepen relations with the US and support its war in Iraq to be explained?

With respect to theoretical approaches which seek to elucidate the factors behind Aznar's support for the US-led war against Iraq, Heywood (2003) has suggested the use of three analytical frameworks - two-level games, liberal intergovernmentalism and neo-realism.

The two-level game approach is employed to suggest that, at the domestic level, Aznar sought to gain support for his decision to back the US-led war in Iraq by linking Washington's 'global war on terrorism' with his own uncompromising stance on the Basque separatist group, ETA. Given that, as Heywood points out, opinion polls shortly before the municipal and autonomous community elections in May 2003 indicated that just 17 per cent of Spaniards believed that the government's support for the war in Iraq would change their voting intention, Aznar's somewhat risky strategy appeared not to have had too detrimental an impact on the party's electoral prospects. It was in this context that the government had reason to feel confident that the issue of Iraq would be unlikely to inflict undue damage at the general election due in early 2004.

Likewise, Heywood suggests that a liberal-intergovernmentalist approach interprets the PP government's pro-Atlantic stance in terms of a tactical manoeuvre in preparation for the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference. Opposed to the 'social Europe' advocated by Paris and Berlin, Aznar instead emphasised economic policy agendas based on market liberalisation and labour market deregulation shared with the UK under Tony Blair, and beyond the EU, with the US under George W. Bush. This London -Madrid axis would serve as counterbalance to the traditional Paris-Berlin axis which had served as a template for policy under the Socialists.

Finally, a neo-realist focus on state power, understood primarily in terms of economic capacity and international capacity, suggests that Aznar's support for the war in Iraq aimed to secure for Spain a position as one of the EU's

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<sup>3</sup> It took the terrorist attacks to force foreign policy to the fore. Writing shortly before the attacks, one commentator noted, 'As can be seen during the campaign, the thesis is once again confirmed that foreign policy issues remain absent from the political debate and fail to attract the interest of public opinion' (Calduch Cervera, 2004: 34). According to a CIS survey following the election, as many as 30% of Spaniards claimed that the terrorist attacks of 11 March had an influence on their vote to a greater or lesser extent (a lot, quite a bit, appreciably) (Noya, 2004: 2).

leading powers. According to this approach, the inclusion of Spain in transatlantic dialogues, most notably the meeting in the Azores between Bush, Blair and Aznar on the eve of the war with Iraq on 16 March 2003, served as confirmation of Spain's elevation from mere middle power status. Heywood concludes, 'Aznar appears to have adopted a strategy of hoping that if Spain behaves like a major power, people will end up believing that it is one : the evidence suggests that the Spanish population is some way from buying into such a view' .

Closa (2004a: 4) also adopts a neo-realist interpretation, suggesting that Aznar's government maintained a neo-realist view of international relations, as opposed to the federalist discourse adopted by its predecessors.

Aznar himself does appear to bear out this interpretation. In his book on his premiership, he criticises the fact that, until the PP entered office, Spain had been 'a slightly second-rate country. The best that could be hoped for was to keep up with the leading group, standing out a little, but never taking the lead. And that is what changed: the readiness to accept responsibilities.... I don't want Spain to be sidelined by History'. (Aznar, 2004: 151). Aznar therefore had no compunction in awarding the title, *In the Vanguard of Europe* to one of the chapters in his book. He also expresses much pride in the fact that 'Bush's first visit to Europe after he was elected President was to Spain. It wasn't Great Britain, or France, or Germany. He began his European tour in Madrid. His commitment to the struggle against terrorism was absolute. It was just a few months before the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>' (Ibid. 154).

The connection between US support for the campaign against ETA terrorism and Spain's support of the US policy on Iraq was therefore significant. Shortly after 9/11 Aznar insisted that there was no fundamental difference between ETA and al-Qaeda, which ultimately led him to high-profile support for Bush's invasion of Iraq (Woodworth, 2004, 177).

The opportunity of becoming a privileged interlocutor of the US allied to the possibility of obtaining help from George Bush in confronting terrorism in Spain were too good to miss. Shortly before the 2004 general election, Aznar told the *Wall Street Journal* that, before 9/11, Spain's European allies had abandoned Spain to its own devices in its campaign against ETA. Subsequently, international co-operation was forthcoming, particularly from the US. Significantly, Aznar criticised France's failure to help Spain against ETA.<sup>4</sup>

Antipathy towards France and, to a lesser extent, towards Germany was also provoked by Aznar's rejection of the Paris-Berlin axis's emphasis on a 'social Europe'. An economic liberal, like his allies Tony Blair and Italy's Silvio Berlusconi, Aznar sought to further liberalise the EU economy, whilst also seeking to place more emphasis on the adoption of a tougher line with

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<sup>4</sup> *El País*, 'Aznar afirma que antes del 11-S España luchó sola contra ETA', 16 January 2004, p. 20.

respect to the terrorist threat. On the latter point, Aznar was an enthusiastic proponent of reducing illegal immigration and increasing the EU's jurisdiction with respect to judicial and police powers.

Aznar and Blair in particular worked together on the promotion of labour market flexibility and economic liberalisation throughout the EU, leading to their bilateral statement on the need for more deregulation at the European Council meeting in Vienna in 1998. This was followed by a further joint declaration the following year, again concerning labour market flexibility. This initiative led to both governments giving their full backing to the so-called Lisbon Agenda in March 2000, which aimed to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010'. This strategy indicated Aznar's rejection of the paternalist, corporatist and, generally, state-led economic policies advanced by the EU's traditional Franco-German axis.

Further points of dispute between Madrid and Paris and Berlin included Aznar's support for President Bush's refusal to sign up to the Kyoto Treaty on greenhouse gas emissions, the US President's rejection of the International War Crimes Tribunal and the US advocacy of an antimissile shield.

An even greater impact was made by the *Wall Street Journal's* publication of a letter written by Aznar and signed by the Heads of Government of six other EU member states (Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic) in January 2003. Coming just two months before the US invasion of Iraq, the outspoken support for US military action did little to foster unity within the EU. Aznar later stressed that the letter aimed to challenge the Franco-German attempt to present their opposition to US military action in Iraq as the position of the EU as a whole (Aznar, 2004: 155-156)

Having considered the PP government's strategy with regard to both the EU and the US and the possible impact on the result of the March 2004 general election, we will now turn our attention to the PSOE.

### **The PSOE: Back from the Abyss 2000-2004**

According to an opinion poll taken shortly after the 2004 general election, the PSOE was neck-and-neck with the PP *before* the terrorist attacks in Madrid (Paramio, 2004: 165; PSOE 2004c: 10). Nevertheless, in the judgement of most commentators, once José María Aznar declared the date of the general election, the only doubt appeared to be whether the PP would retain its overall majority under Aznar's successor, Mariano Rajoy. Media predictions of a PSOE victory were notably thin on the ground.

This lack of confidence in the PSOE was understandable given the difficulties experienced by the party over the previous eight years. The crisis of leadership suffered by the party following Felipe González's resignation in 1997 culminated in the PSOE's worst performance for decades

at the 2000 general election. The election of the 39-year-old José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at the party's Congress following the election marked a defining moment in the party's history. The average age of those appointed to serve on the party's Executive Committee was also below 40-years-old, indicating a clean break with the generation which had served under González.

The challenge facing Rodríguez Zapatero was considerable. Taking over the leadership at a historical low point, he had to move the party on to a definitive post-González era whilst engineering an effective opposition to a Popular Party government whose unity, discipline and unquestioned leadership were reminiscent of the qualities displayed by the Socialist Party when it entered office in 1982.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the PP's capture of an overall majority in 2000 led to the adoption of a less consensual, more high-handed style which reflected badly on José María Aznar personally. One leading newspaper suggested that Aznar's government had managed, in just 2001, to destroy much of the credit gained during its entire first term in office (Romero, 2002: 98).

The government's inept handling of a general strike in June 2002, and its even more maladroit management of the *Prestige* oil tanker disaster later the same year offered further opportunities for the PSOE to gain from the government's discomfiture.

Furthermore, in the area of foreign policy, the adoption of a quasi-presidential approach in which Aznar reserved for himself power over the elaboration, execution and control of policy was a further criticism which could be levelled (Calduch Cervera, 2004: 25). This personalisation of power around the figure of Aznar, the government's adoption of foreign policies which found little favour with the public, and the long-standing identification of the PSOE with European integration - which still remained popular with the majority of Spaniards - all offered Rodríguez Zapatero the means of making progress at the government's expense.

The field of foreign policy certainly offered the PSOE the opportunity to differentiate itself in terms of its opposition to a governmental policy which appeared to sacrifice the continuation of good relations with the EU on the altar of an Atlanticist shift in policy for which the majority of the public had little affection. The PSOE's criticism of the government's slavish support for the unilateral actions of the US administration in Iraq and the downgrading of relations with the EU, the Mediterranean and Latin America - the three traditional axes of Spanish foreign policy - found a receptive public. Moreover, the sober, responsible style of opposition employed by Rodríguez Zapatero gave additional credibility to the PSOE's criticism of government policy (Paramio, 2004: 163).

The municipal and autonomous community elections held on 25 May 2003 nevertheless brought mixed results for the PSOE, indicating that the party was still some way from dislodging the PP from power at a national level. Although the party increased its vote by more than 700,000, it only gained 160,000 votes more than the PP throughout the whole of Spain. Indeed, in his book on his premiership, Aznar has drawn attention to the relatively favourable results obtained by the PP at these elections as an indication of a degree of public endorsement of his policies (Aznar, 2004: 150).

During the election campaign, Rodríguez Zapatero made perhaps his most outspoken attack on the government. Shortly after the bombing of a Spanish restaurant in Casablanca on 16 May 2003, in which 41 people were killed, Rodríguez Zapatero warned that the government's support for the war in Iraq had quite possibly made the country a target for international terrorism. He commented that international terrorism could not be fought by 'illegal wars', adding, 'the worst WMD is fanaticism; certain wars encourage fanaticism.' (Díez, 2003: 18). Less than a year later, the general election was held which returned the PSOE to office.

### The PSOE in Office 2004-present

In his investiture speech on 15 April 2004, Rodríguez Zapatero indicated his intention to re-orientate Spanish foreign policy back towards its traditional priority areas, namely the EU, the Mediterranean and Latin America:

My position on the presence of Spanish troops in Iraq is well known, as are the arguments and rationale supporting it, so, there can be no room for misinterpretation. Our firm commitment to international security and the fight against terrorism is beyond all question. I want to make it very clear that Spain will assume its international obligations to defend peace and security. This we will do always, with just one condition: actions must be based on a prior decision by the United Nations or another competent international body. In any case, the deployment of the Spanish Armed Forces to missions outside Spain will always be decided after due consultation with Parliament...

There would be

A return to consensus-based foreign policy decisions; the prioritizing of a European vision in our policies; a commitment to the immediate approval of the European Constitution; preferential attention to Latin America and the Mediterranean; scrupulous respect for international legality; and the confirmation of the United Nations as a guarantor of international peace and security, all of which constitute the fundamental goals of the new foreign policy (Rodríguez Zapatero, 2004: 15-17)

Three days later the incoming prime minister confirmed the immediate withdrawal of the 1,300-strong Spanish military contingent in Iraq.

As though to emphasise the re-establishment of the priority status of the Paris-Berlin axis in Spanish foreign policy, the new prime minister's first trips abroad within Europe were to Germany on 28<sup>th</sup> April and to France the following day. In Berlin, the Spanish prime minister commented,

I offered the Spanish people a pro-European option. That option represents the recognition of what France and Germany represent as the Union's driving forces and of our wish to be close. For me, there is no new and old Europe, just a united Europe (Egurbide, 2004: 16)

In Paris, the French President, Jacques Chirac announced the creation of a new Berlin-Paris-Madrid axis, whilst Rodríguez Zapatero expressed his wish to return to the heart of the construction of Europe.

In its manifesto for the elections for the European Parliament in June 2004 the PSOE further underlined its pro-European vocation, contrasting it with the critical stance of the previous government:

With the right, Spain ceased to be a leading player in the construction of Europe, contrary to the will of the majority of citizens and destroying the political consensus which had existed before it gained office. The anti-European policy of the PP government - which blocked the Constitution and promoted division within the EU due to the War in Iraq and its subservience towards the Bush administration - isolated and weakened Spain in Europe.

The European policy of the PP government can be summarised as having aimed to obstruct the Union's efforts to continue to press forward decisively, consciously encouraging division. ... From being a country with firm and supportive allies both politically and economically, starting with Germany and France, Spain under the PP became isolated, opposed by a good part of its Community partners and committed to leading blocking minorities. With the right, Spain was weaker in Europe. The PP government treated the Convention drawing up the Constitution like dirt, later preventing it from being passed, when 85% of Spaniards supported it. It also fostered division within Europe on the question of the War in Iraq, despite the rejection of the immense majority of public opinion and political forces... It has promoted, together with political leaders like Silvio Berlusconi, a hard right neoliberal vision, identifying the dismantlement of the public sector with a clear opposition to the EU's development, and seeking to subordinate the EU with respect to the Bush Administration and his strategy, which breaches international law (PSOE, 2004c: 5-6)

In the election, the PSOE was able to secure a narrow advantage over the PP - 25 seats to the PP's 24 - at elections to the European Parliament held on 13 June 2004. Later that month the Socialist government was able to contribute towards the EU being able finally to reach an agreement over the question of Qualified Majority Voting in the Council of Ministers, as well as secure approval of the draft Constitution at the European Council meeting in Brussels on 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

Spain became the first EU member state to hold a referendum on the new Constitution on 20 February 2005, with 77 per cent of those voting being in favour, on a low turnout of just 42 per cent. Jacques Chirac lent his support to the Spanish government's campaign in favour of the Constitution on a visit to Madrid shortly before the referendum. Rodríguez Zapatero reciprocated, being awarded the honour of being the first Spanish prime minister to address the French National Assembly on 1 March 2005. Thanking France for the help which it had offered in the fight against terrorism, he immediately distanced himself from his predecessor's criticism of France on the issue (see above, page 7). Moreover, Rodríguez Zapatero made clear his support of the 'social' Europe defended by France:

Citizens are only free if they have an education, if they're healthy, if they have work, if they're protected against the vicissitudes of life or if their dignity is not at the mercy of the blind forces of society or the economic system.

The Spanish premier also defended the rule of law, implicitly criticising the unilateral actions of the previous government in the area of foreign and security policy:

It is true that Europe is growing, enlarging itself, but it is the direct opposite of a classical empire, because the Union is a community based on Law and is so in the fullest sense: it has renounced the temptation to impose its rules on its members by the use of force. Its only force is the Law. It thereby expresses, in my opinion, the ideal of an International Community which has respect for legality (Zapatero, 2005).

The European 'project' was nevertheless dealt a blow when referenda on the Constitution in France in May 2005 and in Holland the following month. This setback, which effectively placed the process on hold, was compounded by the failure to reach a deal on the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective at the European Council meeting in Brussels on 16-17 June 2005.

When agreement was finally reached at the European Council meeting in Brussels on 16-17 December 2005, Rodríguez Zapatero was able to secure a deal which meant that Spain would remain a net recipient of EU funds until 2013. Rodríguez Zapatero's decision to return to the Paris-Berlin axis paid dividends given that the alliance formed with France and Germany at the summit proved to be decisive in Spain obtaining its goals (Chislett, 2006: 3)

Spain's success at the summit was particularly remarkable given that, shortly afterwards, the Spanish prime minister claimed that the country's economic muscle meant that it deserved to be part of the G-8 Group of Nations (Lafont, 2005: 40)

A further indication of Spain's growing confidence was given in March 2006 when the government decided to end restrictions on the entry of workers from the Accession countries from 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006 in order to meet the demand for labour from a buoyant economy. Under the PSOE, unemployment has fallen to below 9 per cent, the lowest figure for nearly three decades. Hitherto, only the UK, Ireland and Sweden had permitted the entry of workers from the new member states.

Meanwhile, relations between Spain and the United States remained strained. The US Deputy Secretary of State, Robert Zoellick, paid a visit to Madrid in April 2005 at which he expressed concern at the Spanish proposal to sell arms to President Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. The issue was to cause controversy throughout 2005. Zoellick nevertheless acknowledged the value of Spain's continuing role in Afghanistan, and President Bush sent a letter to Rodríguez Zapatero on 14 April 2005 thanking Spain for its contribution to security in the country. Four months later, 17 Spanish military personnel were killed in a helicopter crash in Afghanistan. Currently there are around 700 Spanish troops in Afghanistan operating under UN mandate.

May 2005 also witnessed a meeting in Washington between the US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and his Spanish counterpart, José Bono. Although Rumsfeld returned to the question of the proposed Spanish arms sales to Venezuela, which he described as 'a mistake', he indicated that the US administration was looking to move on from the bad feeling caused by the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq (González, 2005: 22). Spain nevertheless pressed on with the sale of €1.7 billion of military equipment to Venezuela in early 2006.

## Conclusion

Writing just a month after the terrorist attacks on Madrid and the subsequent PSOE victory in Spain's general election, Celestino del Arenal recommended that Spain adopt a new style of foreign policy. This should be agreed around the basic axes of Spanish foreign policy concern and have the support of Spanish society; it should maintain an equilibrium between its European and transatlantic dimensions; it should ensure that there is substance behind relations with Latin America and the Mediterranean; it should be realistic about the resources at Spain's disposal; it should be uncompromising against terrorism, but should be just as forthright in its defence of international legality and the leading role of the United Nations; its credibility should be guaranteed by virtue of being founded on the achievement of a consensus between the main parliamentary forces, which still allows each government to leave its particular stamp; it should seek to unite and not divide in the defence of democracy and human rights at an international level (Arenal, 2004).

Despite the many difficulties which undoubtedly lie ahead for the current Socialist government in Spain, it is the contention of this paper that it has made considerable progress in just two years with respect to re-orientating Spanish foreign and security policy towards the kind of aims outlined above, which were so palpably neglected by the PSOE's predecessors in government.

As to why the PSOE decided to return to the pro-European policy which had served Spain so well during the party's previous period in office (1982-1996), it is worth stressing the visceral pro-Europeanism which is such a defining feature of the party. In this respect, little has changed since the party was last in office. As Felipe González informed me in response to a series of written questions which I submitted in 1999:

As regards the use of the European 'tool' in order to carry out change, such a strategy was evident not just because it was more acceptable from a social point of view, but also, and most importantly, because there was no sense in 'inventing' a new economic model rather than applying the model which had been used so successfully in Europe's most prosperous countries. Political difficulties focused, firstly, on clearly and consistently committing ourselves to being in the vanguard of the process of integration, and then introducing the internal changes which would enable us to apply those aspects to which we had committed ourselves in Brussels. Integration has therefore been an instrument which we were able to use relatively courageously.

The PSOE's ideas about European integration and the efficacy of adopting within Spain ideas which had been tried and tested in other leading European countries is therefore of considerable significance as we seek to understand and explain the actions of the current PSOE government. For Madrid, the Paris-Berlin axis retains its importance in this strategy, whether or not the left or the right are in power in France or Germany. As has been noted, Rodríguez Zapatero has enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Gaullist Jacques Chirac. Moreover, the results of the meeting between Rodríguez Zapatero and the Christian Democrat Chancellor, Angela Merkel, in Berlin in April 2006 bode well for the future, given their expressed intention to work together to breathe life into the ailing EU Constitution. From what we have seen, no such emergency measures are necessary for the continued health of the Paris-Berlin axis in Spain's European Policy.

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