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Reading Mediterranean dualism from Spain's perspective

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The aim of this paper is to set forth a few considerations about the relationship between Spain and the Mediterranean region. Within the context of the European Union, it is well known that the Mediterranean Dialogue has become an important issue based on the perception of the southern rim of the Mediterranean Basin as cause of international risk. Spain has clearly played a central role in many initiatives in the region over the last few decades: from the launch of the so-called Euro-Mediterranean Process, initiated in the Barcelona Conference of 1995, to the development of current governmental theories about the "Alliance of Civilizations" which should affect this geopolitical context to a great extent.

For Spaniards, the Mediterranean historically typifies a cultural past brimming with interdependencies and ancient contacts. All of this has created in Spanish cultural representations the myth of a region that boasts special creativity, an area of reciprocities and multiple encounters, of combinations, crossings and fusions. Such historical affirmations have given rise to a certain particularism: through a mixture of history and above all imagination, this region is usually presented as an entity. Hence, from this culturalist perspective, the Mediterranean should represent an intimate marriage between history and geography: a kind of affiliation of spaces, memory and future projection.

Spanish literature about the Mediterranean is replete with references to the ambiguity and problematic nature of sketching out the region as a whole. It is well known that the Mediterranean is a spatial entity made up of complex, contradictory and ever flexible contours. And as mentioned above, within the European Community, there is a tendency to adopt a split focus – North/South – of the Mediterranean Basin, taking into account its diversity and the multiple fractures that exist between the two shores.

Yearned for and feared at the same time, gathering together or fracturing apart, perennial and unstable, the Mediterranean multiplies paradoxes. As a result of all its differentiations – demographic, socioeconomic,

political and cultural – and in an international context where nerves are frayed, the Mediterranean is cause for concern in two ways. On the one hand, the mass of tensions and fragilities gives rise to a certain feeling of permanent instability. On the other hand, no one can ignore that this region is a hotspot for problems pushed even further by the new international strategic context and recent terrorist threats. The latter reason might well explain the remarks often repeated in Spain that to read the modern day Mediterranean is also, to a certain extent, to initiate a general reading of the world in which we live, where everything is in play: the weight of the past, new challenges, inequalities and uncertainties, ...but also hopes. As a Sea, therefore, the source of risks, crystalliser of contemporary problems, the Mediterranean always disquiets...

Against this backdrop of contradictions, what, therefore, is the Spanish perspective?

Historically, the political push aimed at orchestrating a series of Mediterranean actions from within Spain can be qualified as inconsistent and imprecise. In the origin of these circumstances, inexplicable when taking into account the geographical position of Spain, various issues become evident. It has been remarked that the gradual abandonment of Mediterranean politics throughout the Modern Era, at the same time as Spain's peninsular unity project began to emerge, determined the withdrawal of economic, social and even political practices that entailed looking towards the Mediterranean¹. From then on, the possibilities for international relations were limited chiefly to Europe and Spanish America. It was only later on, following the collapse of the Spanish empire in 1898, that the ties that reached across the Atlantic were broken and alternative international positions other than Latin Americanism were taken up once again, of which one of the most strongly pursued was precisely the recovery of the Mediterraneanist vocation².

Furthermore, despite the sporadic efforts to develop a global presence in the Mediterranean, Spain has historically focused its attention on the Western Mediterranean and has a particular fixation with Morocco, Spain's former protectorate in the north of the country. In view of the historical circumstances in which Spanish foreign politics developed in the early twentieth century, one can understand why Spanish interest remained limited to the Western area and why the main concerns of Spain's central

¹ Cfr. Mendez Pidal R. *Idea imperial de Carlos V*. Madrid, 1940.

² Marin Castan M^a F. *La política exterior española entre la crisis de 1898 y la dictadura de Primo de Rivera // La política exterior española en el siglo XX* / Ed. by Calduch R. Madrid, 1994. P. 19–46.

government focused on military issues above trade, migratory and diplomatic aspects.

Subsequently, during Franco's regime, there was still no tried and tested comprehensive Mediterranean policy, although there were bilateral initiatives in place, especially with the Arab countries. Such initiatives, however, did not prevent the outbreak of serious armed conflicts in the region: The Ifni War and the Western Sahara Problem³.

Even the international Mediterranean action in the first years of Spain's transition to democracy was not comprehensive and only sought to establish a certain political and diplomatic equilibrium in the Maghreb, once again through bilateral relations in particular with Morocco and Algeria.

It was only when multilateral mechanisms and instruments began to appear following EU integration that Spain became more committed to introducing more comprehensive and dynamic policies. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind the effort made by the different Spanish governments to introduce in Brussels the problems of the southern Mediterranean. Proof of this endeavour can be found in the Madrid Peace Conference, held in October 1991, which initiated the peace process with the aim of controlling the escalating conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Furthermore, there was an initiative to initiate dialogue between NATO and certain southern Mediterranean countries, which began with an informal meeting of Foreign Ministers held in Seville in 1994. The scope of this programme was significant and was recognised as such by the other EU member states. The culmination was the launch of the Barcelona Process of 1995, which led to the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Association and which has defined, in spite of its widely accepted limitations, much of the framework of relations within the EU and between practically all the countries in the region.

It was a unique situation that facilitated the birth of this new framework of relations. On an international level, on the one hand, the consequences of globalisation were becoming clear and one response was the process of regionalisation, including the Euro-Mediterranean area. On the other hand, the notion that the clash of civilisations found in the Mediterranean would be a possible prime setting steadily gained popularity.

³ Huguet M. Descubrir el Mediterráneo: una orientación recurrente en el ideario exterior franquista // Cuadernos de Historia Contemporánea, 19. 1997. P. 89–115. More detailed information can be found in: Algora Weber M. D. Las relaciones hispano-árabes durante el régimen de Franco: la ruptura del aislamiento internacional (1946–1950). Madrid, 1995; REIN, R. Franco, Israel y los judíos. Madrid, 1996.

Simultaneously, the expansion of the EU towards Eastern Europe highlighted with even greater clarity the limitations of the association model with Mediterranean countries, making it clear that Europe as a whole lacked an ambitious policy in its relations with the southern Mediterranean and particularly with the Maghreb. However, the new model of relations with the European periphery designed by the European Commission was set forth on the 11 March 2003 with the publication of the Communication entitled "*The neighbours of an enlarged Europe. A new framework for relations with Eastern and Southern Europe*".

Finally, this framework of Mediterranean relations was renewed around the same time as Spain held the Presidency of the European Union (2002), against an international backdrop that had been transformed by the effects of the terrorist attacks on the 11 September and the crisis in Palestine. The resurgence of war in Iraq and the terrorist attacks on the 11 March in Madrid made it even more pressing for the two shores of the Mediterranean to collaborate. From this new perspective, it is understandable that Spanish politics towards the Mediterranean are increasingly focusing on promoting multilateral initiatives that guarantee peace and stability in the region and promote, in the long term, the economic development and political democracy of the countries around the rim of the Mediterranean Basin. The proposal made by the Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero about the Alliance of Civilisations at the UN General Assembly in 2004 particularly marks the strategy put forward as a means of defending an alliance between the West and the Arab and Muslim world. It is a comprehensive programme that focuses on antiterrorist cooperation, correcting economic inequalities and promoting cultural dialogue.

In conclusion, a global view of the Mediterranean has been gradually emerging in Spain as well as a fair few initiatives aimed at promoting stability in the region. Spain, therefore, has taken on an important role in the Euro-Mediterranean process, confirming the dynamics of Spanish foreign policy that began to emerge with Spain's early democratic governments.