

Spain and Poland: strategic partners in a Union in flux

Elcano Royal Institute and the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) |
@rielcano - @PISM_Poland.

The Directors and analysts of the Polish Institute of International Affairs and the Elcano Royal Institute held a meeting in Madrid on 11 December 2014. At the encounter, which was also attended by the Polish and Spanish Secretaries of State for European Affairs, the two think tanks (which maintain a strategic partnership) discussed their countries' future in the EU, security issues in the common neighbourhood and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Spain and Poland: two allies that can benefit from being stronger in the EU

- (1) Poland and Spain share a relatively large size as member states, a clear pro-EU inclination and (so far) stable political systems. They can take advantage of this by influencing policy-making in the EU's various institutions and by helping to shape foreign policy.
- (2) Within the EU Council, Poland and Spain are very interested in a strong General Affairs Council that can act as an effective network of EU ministers/junior ministers. Furthermore, both countries should pay much more attention to the early stages of policy making.
- (3) At the European Council, the position of a head of government depends on his/her country's power plus his/her time in office. Because the Prime Ministers of Spain and Poland have a tendency to remain in power for long periods of time, the office's institutionalisation is a positive development for both.
- (4) At the European Parliament, Spanish and Polish parties should not only try to shape decisions and fill top positions, but also be much more active as regards occupying the positions of committee chairs, vice-chairs and rapporteurs.
- (5) At the Commission, a college of 28 portfolios is dysfunctional for middle-to-large pro-European MS. The two countries are interested in a strong, functional and politically powerful Commission. The challenge for both countries is to shape decisions at an earlier stage, with the aid of think tanks and national experts.

- (6) As for EU foreign policy, Spain and Poland have a significant diplomatic power (staff, missions, expenditure) and can thus shape the EEAS and contribute a clear added value to ENP (Eastern and Mediterranean dimensions), Russia, Latin America and transatlantic relations.

Security issues in a shared neighbourhood

- (7) There is a focus on the future shape of neighbourhood policy because the new EU High Representative, Federica Mogherini, and its Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn, have announced a revision to be finalized in Autumn 2015 that could be an opportunity for Poland and Spain to propose common ideas.
- (8) Western governments have pursued –and continue to pursue– stability in North Africa and the Middle East almost at any cost. This implies an uncritical support for repressive and internally de-legitimised regimes in return for keeping their societies under control, allowing access to resources (chiefly energy) and trade and economic relations. On the other hand, Western policies towards the region have often been centred on fighting real or perceived threats such as terrorism and illegal immigration. This has allowed Arab authoritarian regimes to restrict their populations' freedoms and political and social rights with almost complete impunity.
- (9) There is a growing feeling that the EU is not acting decisively to help shape a more democratic future in its southern neighbourhood. European countries are the main trading partners and creditors of the Arab region. The EU should play a central role in giving full support to the democratic aspirations of those who have made immense sacrifices to rid themselves of dictatorial regimes.
- (10) The European security agenda is being driven by structural factors such as the US pivot out of Europe, the reduction of military budgets, the competition for defence markets, new ways of warfare, the stagnation of multilateral security organisations and the change in national strategic cultures.
- (11) The Ukraine conflict has adjusted but not reversed these trends. Spain will show its solidarity with the Central and Eastern European allies by contributing to NATO's air policing operations in the Baltic, providing additional assets if necessary. Future modernisation programmes for the Spanish Armed Forces are not designed to reinforce NATO's collective security but to help nationally-owned defence industries. Such legacy programmes will add little value to the fight against Anti-Access/Area Denial systems or hybrid ways of warfare.
- (12) Since developments in the Eastern Ukraine are unpredictable, the EU and NATO need to work on a joint vision regarding their relations with Russia. It might be advisable to aim for true unity and solidarity and to exercise strategic patience, modernising their armed forces and increasing defence spending to

2% of GDP (currently at 1,95%), and fostering an energy union. A gradual reduction of EU's dependence on Russian energy resources would also be advisable.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

- (13) Finalising an ambitious trade and investment accord could provide the EU and the US with a double dividend. On the one hand, and this matches the official discourse of both powers, the treaty could boost economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic. And, furthermore, at zero cost, which is especially important in the current scenario of budgetary cuts. For this reason alone, the TTIP is a good idea. However, there is an unspoken reason why the transatlantic authorities have decided to launch the initiative right now: to restore economic and geopolitical leadership to a Western World that is increasingly concerned by the prevailing narrative in international relations, according to which the future belongs exclusively to the emerging nations.
- (14) To the extent that the TTIP manages to set the regulatory standards for trade and investment of the areas with the greatest potential for growth and which are only weakly regulated by the WTO –such as services, the protection of investments and technical and health standards–, the emerging nations will be more willing to adopt them also in order to ensure their access to the transatlantic market. This would additionally allow a weather-beaten WTO to be revitalised reflecting the interest of the West.
- (15) Public opinion and domestic debates will be more important for this trade agreement than for any other the EU has negotiated in the past. It has been repeatedly said how vital the TTIP is for the EU and the transatlantic relationship, but the fact is that it is hard to sell to Europe's public opinion and that it will require a huge amount of political will. In any case, it remains to be seen what the relative strengths of the advanced and emerging countries will be in the world economy, thereby revealing how much elbow room the emerging nations will have to turn their backs on the TTIP if they consider they can go it alone.

The Elcano Royal Institute and the Polish Institute of International Affairs will continue their fruitful cooperation as partners both bilaterally and as members of the EPIN network. The next meeting between the two think tanks will take place in 2015 with the aim of evaluating what has been achieved so far.