

EU-28 WATCH No. 11 / October 2015: Spain

Salvador Llaudes | Research Assistant, Elcano Royal Institute | @sllaudes 

This document analyses the Eastern Neighbours and Russia (mostly the Ukraine crisis that has been developing since 2013) and the EU enlargement from a **Spanish perspective**.

It is part of the *EU-28 Watch*, a project coordinated by the Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) and Institutes from all 28 EU member states –including the **Elcano Royal Institute**– as well as the candidate countries (Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey).

The EU-28 Watch is part of the EU-CONSENT, a network of Excellence for joint research and teaching comprising more than 50 research institutes, which has been monitoring debates on EU policy for 12 years and provides a rich set of material compiling national debates on European policy and thus a source for diachronic analyses. IEP joined forces with TEPSA once again this year in order to publish this number. This publication is part of the Europe for Citizens project Eastern Neighbours and Russia: Close links with EU Citizens (ENURC). The full document with the country reports from across Europe including the candidate countries is available at: *EU-28 Watch No. 11*.

1. The Eastern Neighbourhood and Russia

Spaniards against EU's sanctions but with a very poor image of both Russia and Putin

Following last year's trends, there are divided opinions about bilateral relations with a country such as Russia. On the one hand, the Spanish Government, and particularly its MFA, José Manuel García-Margallo, has a favourable opinion of the country and tends to underline the importance of having good relations with it and its leader, Vladimir Putin. García-Margallo himself, in 2015, has travelled to Moscow and hosted the Russian viceminister for foreign affairs in Madrid.

However, on the occasion of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Spanish Government stood firmly against Russia's violation of international law. There is a strong consensus across the Spanish political spectrum that this kind of behaviour is very negative to the global governance.

On the other hand, opinion polls show us that Spaniards have an unfavourable image of both the country and Putin. According to the Pew Research Center (Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey), Spaniards lead the ranking of lack of confidence in Putin: 92% of Spaniards have no confidence in him, while only 6% have confidence in the Russian leader. Similarly, in the 36th wave of the Elcano Barometer (May 2015), Putin obtained a punctuation of 2.9 out of 10, far away from other international leaders such as François Hollande, with a 5.2, Barack Obama, with a 6.1 or Pope Francis, the best valued,

reaching a 7.2 out of 10. In the same study, Russia finds itself with a 4.1 out of 10, worse than Germany (6.2), the US (6.1), Italy (5.3), China (5.2) or Greece (4.5).

The majority of Spaniards (59%) consider Russia as responsible for the war in Ukraine. Notwithstanding this, only 10% of them believe that the EU should sanction Russia, according to the aforementioned barometer. This position against EU sanctions and in favor of an arbitration between Russia and Ukraine is also broadly shared by the Spanish Government, who, paradoxically, has preferred to follow the European path and build on an existing consensus that could even harm its own economy. Moscow is considered a key partner in tourism (in 2013 Spain was the main European destination for Russian tourists) and is also very important regarding exports of food and agriculture (heavily hit by the Russian embargo in August 2014).

Links:

- Salvador Llaudes: Spanish contribution to the EU-28 Watch No. 10: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/dbb848804695eb6aad86bd32e3f308d0/Llaudes-EU-Watch-2014-Spain.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=dbb848804695eb6aad86bd32e3f308d0>
- 36th Elcano Barometer: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/73037a0048b71bdd9f479fc2d8a74536/36BRIE_Informe_Junio2015.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=73037a0048b71bdd9f479fc2d8a74536
- Pew Research Center, Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/08/05/russia-putin-held-in-low-regard-around-the-world/russia-image-03/>

More engagement with Eastern Partnership countries

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is composed of two elements: the Southern Neighbourhood (where for obvious geographical and historical reasons Spain has always situated its focus) and the Eastern Partnership. In a recent non-paper (November 2014) proposed to the Commission by a number of countries including Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, Slovenia and France, it is considered that the ENP should remain a single policy maintaining the same instruments for the two dimensions aforementioned. At the same time, the document applies for the need “to work towards mutually acceptable objectives based on common interests” (of both EU countries and our neighbour partners).

The crisis in Ukraine and the events that have taken place since, have obliged Spain to increase its engagement in the region. Spain, which now holds a non-permanent seat in the UN Security Council for the period 2015-2016, considers that Russia’s concerns have to be more seriously taken into account when the EU negotiates with Eastern Partnership countries. Therefore, it has tried to nuance the EU’s position towards Russia. At the same time, Spain considers that the EU should only grant incentives to Eastern Partnership countries if there is progress in the reforms required, which is not always the case.

In this troubled scenario, energy issues are particularly interesting for Spain. The European Union as a whole is in need of natural gas, which is mostly imported from Russia. Likewise, Spain imports gas, but from Algeria and other providers. If the so needed interconnections between Spain and France are promoted, our country could consolidate itself as an energy hub. This seems more likely than ever, as the creation of a so-called Energy Union in the continent is one of the priorities of the European Commission.

Link:

- Borja Lasheras: “Six key aspects of Spanish policy towards the Eastern Partnership”, Commentary, ECFR:
http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_six_key_aspects_of_spanish_policy_towards_the_eastern_3031

An Eastern Partnership more divided than ever into two souls

The poor perspectives before the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga on 21/22 May 2015 were confirmed when the meeting was over. As it was thought to happen, no major or strategic steps were taken and nobody was entirely satisfied. The reason for this to happen was the necessity of a balance between pleasing those countries while still remaining cautious towards Russia.

But the most paradoxical issue was the clear difference between the group of countries that favour closer integration with the EU (that is, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, all of them having already signed Association Agreements) and those which clearly want less integration and never beyond punctual agreements on commercial and economic issues (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus).

Because of those different approaches, the negotiation with all the Eastern Partnership countries together does not look viable anymore. It is quite clear that for the years to come, the European Union should come up with a new perspective in its Eastern policy as a whole.

Link:

- Elisa Lledó: “Spanish foreign policy monitor: April-June 2015”, FRIDE:
http://fride.org/descarga/Spanish_Foreign_Policy_Monitor_April-June_2015.pdf

Far away from an EU army but keen on reinforcing a union of security and defence

Juncker’s statement on the need of a European army to face Russia’s threat has brought again the question that comes and goes in the short history of the EU: the need of a EU army. However, the debate in Spain has not been whether this is desirable or not, as it is commonly thought that by no means this is going to happen in the next few years. Spain’s approach to this issue has been more in line with Javier Solana’s (former EU’s High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy) report for the Brussels-based think tank, CEPS, titled “More Union in European Defence”.

What is really needed for the EU is to have a real Foreign Policy, which cannot work without a Defence Union. This Defence Union would not compete against NATO but be complementary with it. Some data will help understand the measure of this Defence Union if it were to happen: when added, the expenditure of the 28 Member States in Defence budget becomes the second biggest in the world. That means that the European Union could be the second military power in the world if that Defence Union existed. In any case, the European Union still lacks a single voice in the international concert and that implies that there is no real intention of having the so-needed European Defence Union. The mere idea of an EU army is an utopia at the moment.

Link:

- Andrés Ortega: “A European army? But first a Defence Union”, Elcano Blog: <http://www.blog.rielcano.org/en/global-spectator-a-european-army-but-first-a-defence-union/>

2. EU Enlargement

Against EU's path for Eastern neighbours

Spain has never foreseen as a scenario with the member countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood as members of the European Union as a real possibility. The Ukraine crisis, with the conflict with Russia, has only reinforced Spain's views on the question of enlargement towards these countries. That does not mean that Spain thinks there should not be close economic and political ties between those countries and the EU, but rather that the Eastern Partnership is not and should not be the first step towards a EU perspective for them.

In any case, not even all of the countries that are part of the Eastern Partnership share the will of one day reaching the European Union. In fact, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are not comfortable with that prospect. Only Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine desire to join the EU.

For Spain, enlargement policy should at this stage be limited to the Western Balkans and Turkey, now that Iceland has decided unilaterally not to follow Brussels' path. It is worth mentioning here that Spain is quite comfortable with the decision made by Juncker's Commission not to enlarge in the next four years. Juncker's decision underlined the need of consolidation after the previous entrance of 13 states in only 10 years.

Links:

- Nicolás de Pedro and Elina Viilup: “Misunderstandings and Tensions, a new Normality in EU-Russia Relations?”, Notes internacionales CIDOB, 115: http://www.cidob.org/en/publications/publication_series/notes_internacionales/n1_115_incomprension_y_tensiones_como_nueva_normalidad_en_las_relaciones_ue_rusia/misunderstandings_and_tensions_a_new_normality_in_eu_russia_relations
- Jean-Claude Juncker: A New Start for Europe: My Agenda for Jobs, Growth, Fairness and Democratic Change: http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/docs/pg_en.pdf

Traditionally (and still) in favour of accession, but worried about the context

Since the end of the Balkan Wars, Spain has had an active role in the region, particularly in Bosnia, where numerous troops were present for about 20 years. That presence has increased Spain's interest in the Western Balkans. Spain has had, broadly speaking, quite a favourable position towards the enlargement process in the Western Balkans.

At the moment, Montenegro and Serbia have started membership talks and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Albania (since last year) are candidate countries. In all four cases, Spain supports their candidacies to, once they meet the Copenhagen criteria, join the European Union. However, there are several issues that should be solved before the accession, such as the relations between Serbia and Kosovo, or the current political instability in FYROM.

The rest of entities are potential candidates for EU membership. Bosnia is still struggling 20 years after the Dayton Agreement, but has recently concluded a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU that should help improve its economic situation and move forward in its relations with the EU. Spain also supports Bosnia's path towards the EU, despite knowing that it will be long and arduous. In Kosovo (not recognised by Spain as an independent state; the same position of Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Slovakia) the EU's EULEX mission is trying to support the authorities in upholding the rule of law. Spain, as a non-recognising state, cannot support EU's perspective for Kosovo.

As for Turkey, there has traditionally been strong consensus across the Spanish political spectrum (unlike other European countries such as France, Austria or Germany) that its candidacy for the EU was good for all the actors in place. There is a broad perception in both countries that there are similarities in the process of modernization, Europeanization and democratization, together with the growing economic interests (Turkey has become Spain's second largest non-EU export market after the US since 2011).

However, there have been no great steps in Turkey's accession talks in the last few years due to the resistance of some European countries and the authoritarian drift of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the current president of the Republic of Turkey. Erdogan has shown very little commitment to European values and to the reforms demanded by the EU in the last few years. This authoritarian drift has been very criticized by Spanish policy-makers.

In fact, only one EU accession chapter (on regional policy) has been opened since 2010. Since membership talks started in October 2005 only 14 out 35 accession chapters have been opened. For geostrategic reasons, Brussels wants to keep Turkey on board, but it is not clear at all whether there is a real commitment with that country to make it ever a member of the club. Schengen visa liberalization would show at least some prospect to Turkey. But one thing is crystal clear: Turkey's EU membership is not likely to become a reality in the near future.

Link:

- William Chislett: “Turkey: Should the EU suspend Turkey’s accession negotiations?”, Expert Comment 69/2014, Elcano Royal Institute: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/europe/commentary-chislett-should-the-eu-suspend-turkeys-accession-negotiations#.VeM3kHjN8tx