



# Spain

Assessment: Good

Trend: ↑↑

Capital: Madrid

Type of Government: Parliamentary Monarchy

Head of Government: President Jose Maria Aznar  
(since 5 May 1996)

Minister of Foreign Affairs: Ana Palacio

Population: 40,037,995

Human Development Index Ranking: 21

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Spain has a **good** record of support for democracy abroad, as evidenced by its willingness to condemn non-democratic regimes, its support of election monitoring efforts, and its active participation in numerous international democratic fora. The Spanish Government has become a strong supporter of democracy within the EU's emerging common foreign policy, an organization within which Spain plays a prominent role. In recent years, Spain has begun to broaden its foreign policy focus beyond neighboring countries and traditional Latin American allies, to include the development of new ties to non-democratic regimes in Asia and the Middle East.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

Since emerging in the late 1970's from the relative international isolation that endured under the dictatorship of General Franco,<sup>1</sup> Spain has become an active player in the international system. In the last decade, Spain's foreign policy has focused on the promotion and support of democracy and human rights, and it has condemned political regimes that deny citizens' freedom.<sup>2</sup> According to former Foreign Minister José Piqué, "the role that we have ahead is not easy, but efforts must continue without hesitance in order to achieve democracy, development and human rights."<sup>3</sup>

Spain's key foreign policy objectives are centered on promoting its national interests within Europe and specifically within the European Union (EU), maintaining close ties with Latin America, and sustaining its important bilateral relationships with France, Portugal, and Morocco. The Aznar Government has signaled that increasing Spain's profile and influence in the Asia-Pacific region will be a key foreign policy priority over the coming years, and a strategic plan has been formulated to coordinate these efforts.

Spain is the EU's fifth largest country in terms of both economic size and population, and as such it has played an increasingly prominent role in EU policy debates. In its early years of EU membership, Spain focused on promoting and defending the interests of the "southern" EU states, but its outlook has broadened in recent years. As its political and economic status and influence have grown, Spain has declared its desire to be considered a major actor within the EU, a position currently held by Germany, the UK, France and Italy. Spain held the EU's rotating Presidency from 1 January until 30 June 2002, during which time it emphasized such themes as promoting freedom, security, and justice on the continent,<sup>4</sup> as well as "consolidat[ing] the European Union's weight, visibility and credibility" at the international level.<sup>5</sup>

Spain's presidency of the EU coincided with a worsening of the conflict in the Middle East. Spain called for the revitalization of the Barcelona Process of mediation between the parties to foster collaboration and dialogue in the region. The Barcelona Process, adopted in 1995 at a conference of EU and Mediterranean Foreign Ministers, calls for extended multilateral and bilateral cooperation based on exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity.

Spain's close relationship with Latin America is based on its history as a colonial power, a common culture, language and religion, and in more recent years, by increasingly strong trade and investment ties. It



has sought to improve its relations with Latin America through the annual Ibero-American Summit, which aims to identify trade and investment opportunities, and to promote dialogue on issues such as human rights. Spain also played a major role in planning the inaugural EU/Latin America and Caribbean Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in July 1999. At the second such summit in Madrid in May 2002, European Union, Latin American and Caribbean leaders confirmed their commitment to reinforce democratic institutions and the rule of law throughout the region and particularly in Haiti.

Spain joined NATO in 1982, but its early years of membership were marked by controversy over its appropriate role within the organization and its claims of sovereignty over Gibraltar. With the appointment of a Spaniard, Javier Solana, as Secretary-General of NATO from 1995 to 1999, and the country's full integration into the NATO military command during 1998, Spain now plays a more active role in military activities sponsored by the Atlantic alliance.

#### **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

Spain has strongly condemned military coups and the overthrows of democratically-elected governments. In doing so, it has generally acted under the auspices of the European Union, which during the 1990s became progressively more active in promoting democracy and strengthening good governance. Spain supported the EU declaration regarding the coup in Cote d'Ivoire in 1999, which voiced great concern about the situation and called for an immediate restoration of the democratic government. When Fiji (after the George Speight coup of June 2000) announced its intention to hold elections in 2001, Spain joined the EU in declaring its support for the restoration of democracy and efforts to reconcile Fijian society. In addition to rhetorical criticisms of interruptions of democratic rule, Spain has, on various occasions, broken off relations with countries that have overthrown democratically elected governments. In its response to the 1996 crisis in Niger, for example, Spain joined the EU in terminating cooperation with the country for six months.

Spain also has been willing to respond unilaterally to interruptions of democratic norms, as it did following Alberto Fujimori's *autogolpe*

(*self coup*) in Peru in 1992. The Spanish government expressed its concern that the action would contribute to a worsening of the political situation in Peru, and then used its significant influence in the country to secure the release of a Peruvian journalist, who had been picked up for questioning shortly after the coup.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in response to the coup d'état orchestrated by a coalition of indigenous and military forces in Ecuador in 2000, the Spanish Foreign Ministry issued a communiqué that called on Ecuadorian leaders to resolve the crisis within a constitutional framework and with respect for the rule of law.

However, unlike virtually every other Latin American country, Spain refrained from explicitly condemning the attempted efforts to remove Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez from office in April 2002. Immediately following Chavez's forced resignation, Foreign Minister Josep Pique suggested that, considering the political and economic crises facing Venezuela, Chavez's position as president was unsustainable. While the government voiced its concern over the violence associated with the situation, and stated their support for the normalization of democracy, they did so in the form of a joint declaration issued with the United States, which had also refrained from characterizing the events as a coup d'état. In the weeks afterwards, the Spanish government and the EU repeatedly called for respect for and a return to constitutional procedures, and supported the OAS handling of the crisis, though their failure to defend democracy more assertively was criticized by some opposition parties.

#### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Spain has condemned attempts to manipulate electoral laws and processes by foreign governments, and has supported election monitoring efforts directly and in cooperation with other actors.<sup>7</sup> The government publicly condemned the attempts of the governments of the former Yugoslavia (1996) and Nigeria (1998) to uphold the results of what Spain deemed to be flawed elections. The Spanish Government also helped monitor and report elections results in Algeria in 1997 and Cambodia in 2002. In both cases, Spanish observers concurred with the findings of other monitoring agents in finding few irregularities with the vote on the election day itself. While Spain viewed the 1997 Algerian parliamentary elections as a sign of the progress



the country was making in the reform process, their reserved response to events leading up to the elections can in part be attributed to Spain's important commercial interests in the country. Less than two months before the 1997 elections, the Spanish government expelled the spokesman for Algeria's banned Islamic Salvation Front, who was there to promote a new, democratic image for his party, for making public comments that conflicted with Spain's pragmatic engagement with the Algerian government.<sup>8</sup>

### **PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY**

A primary goal of Spanish foreign policy is to promote democracy throughout the world, and it does so through a variety of means. In addition to frequently speaking out in support of democracy abroad, Spain has rapidly become one of the most important foreign aid donors in the international system (in 1999 it was ranked as the 12<sup>th</sup> largest donor country).<sup>9</sup> More specifically, a significant percentage of Spain's foreign assistance budget is devoted to democracy strengthening programs. Furthermore, Spain participates in international democracy fora and possesses a good record of ratifying international protocols and agreements that deal with respect for human rights and democratic values, including the Warsaw Declaration. Spain is also the eighth largest financial contributor to the United Nations, and currently has peacekeeping forces attached to the UN in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Central America; it also made a small contribution to the UN transitional administration (UNTAET) in East Timor.

In recent years, the Spanish government has focused its efforts on strengthening democratic institutions in Latin America and Asia, as well as in those countries in Europe that are applying for membership in the EU. Indeed, it has designated a sizable portion of its foreign assistance budget to these countries.

Spain has also become active in Africa, where the basic objectives of its foreign policy are to support the consolidation of democracy and to promote good governance. Spain has pursued these objectives by assisting in the establishment of independent national electoral commissions and supplying electoral observers, as well as by contributing to training and technical assistance programs. On the other hand, it is important to mention that in some specific cases, Spain has

been inconsistent in its role as a defender of democracy in Africa, and has allowed its economic interests to take precedence over its concern for adherence to democratic principles or the protection of human rights. For example, in September 1996, then Spanish Foreign Minister Matutes visited Algeria on a trade promotion mission (Algeria was a principal trading partner in the North African region at that point in time 250.000 million pesetas per year), but is not known to have pressed the government on issues of democracy and human rights. Furthermore, in May 1998, at the second round of the Hispanic-Tunisian Summit, Spain focused solely on increasing their investments in the region, and President Aznar did not even mention the human rights violations that were taking place in the country.

### **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**

Over the past decade, the Spanish Government has supported pro-democracy actors in entrenched dictatorships and voted in favor of international resolutions that impose political or economic sanctions on such regimes, particularly those issued by the EU. The Spanish Government has also adopted policies of non-cooperation with non-democratic regimes, as in the case of Iraq, though recently it consented to allow humanitarian aid to enter that country.

Within Europe, Spain has joined multilateral military efforts to remove dictatorial regimes from power. President Aznar was a firm supporter of NATO's military actions against Serbia during the first half of 1999, and a small number of Spanish military aircraft took part in the NATO air attacks. Furthermore, Spain accepted over 1,000 Kosovar refugees, and later contributed a modest military contingent to the post-conflict settlement force in Kosovo (KFOR). Spain also maintains a substantial peacekeeping representation in Bosnia (682 soldiers) through Agrupación Táctica española (SPAGT XVIII), which has been located in the south of the former Yugoslavia since May 2002.

Despite pressure from the United States, Spain maintains strong relations with Cuba, though increasingly President Aznar has pursued a two-track policy of protecting Spain's economic interests on the island while speaking out publicly in favor of democratic reforms.<sup>10</sup> Overall, three important issues have shaped the Spanish-Cuban



relationship. First, Spain's historical colonial relationship with Cuba created strong cultural bonds. Second, the Spanish government has long believed that it was important to engage rather than isolate Castro whenever possible as the most viable way to promote democratic reform. Thus, Spanish foreign policy took a soft approach towards the Cuban government by making overtures about democracy but failed to follow-up with specific action. Spain even pushed for Cuba to be allowed to participate in the 1994 Summit of the Americas in Miami, despite objections by various countries that did not have official diplomatic relations with it.<sup>11</sup> Third, strong financial and trade ties have developed between the two countries as, beginning in the 1990s, Spain actively began to support Cuban economic reforms. By 1996, Spanish products controlled 15 percent of the market (second only to Portugal and more than Latin America or the EU). Spanish companies were the third largest investors in the country (after Mexico and Canada), and dominated the tourist industry.

Spain's efforts to promote economic relations with Cuba while simultaneously advocating improved respect for human rights have not been without conflict. In 1998 Aznar

arranged for the first visit to the island by Spain's King, Juan Carlos I, since Castro came to power. King Carlos's visit was primarily for the purpose of attending the annual Ibero-American Summit, which coincidentally was being held in Havana that year, but he also used the occasion to speak out against human rights abuses on the island. Cuba's application for full membership in the new EU-ACP agreement in 2000 was strongly supported by then Spanish Foreign Minister Matutes, who argued that it would provide an institutional framework with Havana that could serve to contribute to economic, political, and social changes on the island. This agreement, which is an extensive trade and aid accord between the EU and African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states (mostly former European colonies), is also based on respect for human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law, with consultations designed to address violations of any of these principles. However, when several EU states, including Spain, voted in favor of the April 2000 UN Human Rights Commission resolution condemning Cuba for repressing political dissent and religious groups, Cuba withdrew its application to the multilateral trade and aid pact.

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<sup>1</sup> General Franco seized power following the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and led a fascist regime until his death in 1975. During Franco's 35-year dictatorship, Spain was isolated by economic blockades, excluded from NATO and the UN, and crippled by economic recession.

<sup>2</sup> Felipe Sahagún. "La política exterior española en 1999." Fundación CIDOB <http://www.cidob.org>.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Spain. DEpartment of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mae.es>.

<sup>4</sup> Priorities of the Spanish Presidency, Program of the Spanish Presidency of the EU, 01-01-02/06-30-02.

<sup>5</sup> Spain 2002. Review of the six-month European presidency. <http://www.ue2002.es/principal.asp?idioma=ingles>.

<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gorriti is one of Peru's most influential journalists who at the time of his detention was also the Lima correspondent for Spain's newspaper El País.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Spain. Department of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.mae.es>. 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Abramson, Gary. "Algerian Islamic activist is expelled by Spain." Associated Press Newswires 16 April 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Sánchez, Elvira. "Camino nuevo y sendero Viejo." Fundación CIDOB. <<http://www.cidob.org>>.

<sup>10</sup> Aznar has publicly proclaimed solidarity with the Varela Project campaign, which seeks to reform the political system peacefully within constraints of the Cuban constitution and laws.

<sup>11</sup> Remiro Brotóns, Antonio. "Política exterior y de seguridad de España 1995." Fundación CIDOB. <http://www.cidob.org>.