

PEACE AND SECURITY

MIDDLE POWER WITH MAGHREB FOCUS

A Spanish perspective on Security Policy in the
Southern Neighbourhood

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Spain is a committed multilateral actor that plays the European card as a way of securing the financial and diplomatic resources that Spain alone cannot mobilize.



Whereas for most EU countries, as well as for the major global powers, the Middle East may be the main priority in the Mediterranean, for Spain the Maghreb is and has been the number one priority and within the Maghreb, Morocco.



Spain's position in Mediterranean affairs is likely to be affected by domestic politicisation, the evolution of conflict and cooperation dynamics in the region and the EU's capacity to articulate a more robust and ambitious policy.

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Executive summary

Spain's geographically strategic position between the African continent and the rest of Europe, its historical and cultural ties to the Maghreb, the emergence of the Sahel as a priority, its privileged relations with Turkey and its history as a constructive partner in relation to the Middle East Peace Process, make it a highly useful partner to the EU institutions and likeminded member states who might be willing to upgrade the EU strategy towards its Southern Neighbourhood. Spain will be among those promoting a comprehensive and integrated approach to security and development, which gives due importance to human security and is guided by a long-term vision.

Spain's national priorities in the Southern Neighbourhood are likely to remain as follows:

- Foster cooperation and dialogue with its **Maghreb neighbours** (Morocco and Algeria above all) and among them.
- Keep alive the **Euro-Mediterranean** framework of regional cooperation, which is intended to complement larger bi-regional dialogues (EU–African Union) and with privileged bilateral relations.
- Support any attempt to **de-escalate tension in the Middle East**, with particular attention to the countries with which Spain has stronger economic ties (Turkey), but also where Spanish troops are currently deployed (Lebanon, Iraq and, once more, Turkey).
- Formulate a long-term strategy for migration and development, with a particular focus on the **Sahel**.
- Advocate for a more ambitious EU response to counter the social and economic effects of **COVID-19** that extends to its neighbours.

In order to advance those interests, Spain is keenly aware that it does not have the tools to act alone. Working at the EU level is the optimal pathway for Madrid and to do so, it will seek **alliances** not only with other Southern European states, but also with **Germany**. Past cooperation between Madrid and Berlin in this specific priority, such as during the Barcelona Process of 1995, indicates that it is a path worth exploring.

1 A NEW MEDITERRANEAN, A NEW SPAIN

The Mediterranean is often depicted as a ring of fire flanking Europe's south. That is, a volatile neighbourhood in which old conflicts simmer and new conflicts erupt, whose consequences can easily spill over national borders and also shake political, economic and social dynamics in Europe. Spain, much like other countries in Southern Europe, perceives itself as particularly vulnerable to those regional crises but has consistently defended the view that the only way to prevent or face them is by building up a more robust and ambitious European strategy. The 2017 National Security Strategy argued that »the fragmentation of the Mediterranean makes it more complicated for Spain to address this strategic priority, within which so many potential security challenges are concentrated. Moreover, Spain has on its southern border a major differentiating feature: its land borders on the African continent«. It also referred to the need to cooperate with immediate neighbours, such as Morocco (Presidencia del Gobierno, 2017: 38–39). Although Spain will continue to maintain strategic bilateral relations with key countries, projecting a unified and overarching European policy towards North Africa and the Middle East is seen as naturally serving Spain's national interests. By the same token, Spain has favoured and, in some cases, promoted the launch of all sorts of multilateral initiatives in the Southern Neighbourhood.

The year 2020 marks the **twenty-fifth anniversary of the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)**. In 1995, still under the effects of the Oslo Accords, European and Southern-Mediterranean ministers met in Barcelona and laid the foundation stone of a new and ambitious framework of cooperation. Twenty-five years later, the regional situation has deteriorated and the feeling among European and partner-country leaderships is much gloomier. Instead of achieving progress in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the possibility of the two-state solution has become an ever more distant prospect, new conflicts have proliferated in the EU's vicinity (Libya and Syria), migration has become a contentious issue impacting domestic political developments, new threats such as transnational terrorism have favoured an overtly securitised approach to Mediterranean affairs and the hopes generated after the 2011 uprisings have been replaced in many decision-making circles by the pragmatic conviction that stabilisation is the first or even the only priority.

Moreover, despite all the attempts to revamp Euro-Mediterranean relations – the latest being President Macron's *sommet des deux rives* – these initiatives have not met expectations and a generalised feeling of fatigue has followed. In fact, the new EU leadership seems to be less inclined to revamp the idea of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and, instead, has fixed the whole of **Africa** as its main foreign policy priority. On the other side of the table, leaders of Arab countries, Turkey and Israel also have completely different priorities with regard to Euro-Mediterranean relations and are absorbed by domestic struggles or by new geopolitical dynamics that expand well beyond this geographical sphere.

Not only has the Mediterranean changed in the past 25 years, so has Spain. **Spain has undergone a multifaceted crisis:** economic (with high levels of unemployment, growing inequalities and persistent public deficit), political (corruption scandals, the eruption of the *Indignados* movement in 2011, the fragmentation of Spain's political system and five general elections in less than 10 years) and territorial (facing the challenge of a persistent pro-independence movement in Catalonia since 2012). Spain's travails have undermined the country's capacity to position itself as a driving force in the development of the EU's foreign policy. Many analysts from Spain-based think tanks and international observers concur that these elements have caused Spain to punch below its weight (Powell, 2012; Molina, 2013) and some consider that Madrid's diminished profile in Mediterranean affairs preceded these crises (Kausch, 2010). By the same token, many have urged during this period that Spain needs a more assertive and ambitious policy (Ortega Carcelén, 2013; Torreblanca, 2015).

The election of **Pedro Sánchez** as head of the executive after winning a motion of no confidence against the conservative leader Mariano Rajoy in 2018 raised many expectations about the role the »new Spain« could play in European and international affairs. Unlike most of his predecessors, Sánchez speaks foreign languages and had a professional career abroad (he worked as an assistant in the European Parliament and in the office of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina). Moreover, it has been said that Spain could take advantage of Brexit to upgrade its status, mainly in the EU but also at the global level. This was the main idea behind a celebrated article published by *Político* entitled »Madrid's moment«. The failure to get the budget approved and the repetition of the 2019 elections, however, prevented Spain and Sánchez himself from playing such a role.

Since January 2020, **Spain has had a new, more stable, government.** The Socialist Party and *Unidas Podemos* – including Podemos and other leftist movements – signed a coalition agreement. This document does not mention the Mediterranean as one of Spain's top priorities. The text refers instead to Spain's commitment to multilateralism and European integration, but also to the need for deepening relations with Latin America (*Iberoamérica* in the original Spanish text) and Africa. Moreover, one of the very few specific foreign policy commitments concerns »working to make Africa a priority of European foreign policy and proposing initiatives in the EU to contribute to the sustainable development of the continent«. The professional background of the new Foreign Affairs Minister, **Arancha González Laya**, could also reinforce this African turn. González is more familiar with African affairs – mainly on trade-related issues – than with the Mediterranean agenda. She is a member of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and the only Spanish member of the EU-Africa high-level group. In her first appearance before the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, however, she restated Spain's traditional foreign policy line, mentioning the Mediterranean as a priority, singling out Morocco and Algeria as key neighbours and citing the 25-year commem-

oration of the launch of the Barcelona Process as an occasion to revitalise policies towards this region.

What the new government could not have foreseen is that all its priorities would be turned upside down because of the spread of **COVID-19**, whose effects in Spain have been particularly damaging, not only in terms of victims, but also the economic costs. The management of this unprecedented emergency has captured all the energies of the Spanish leadership and yet in public appearances the president of the Spanish government and the minister of foreign affairs have referred to the need to help African and Latin American countries to cope with the effects of the pandemic. The Mediterranean is particularly vulnerable in this new situation. First, Southern European states – which are the traditional advocates of closer Mediterranean cooperation – are politically and economically weakened. Secondly, those economies that are more dependent on tourism – and with few exceptions this is the case of both Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries – will also suffer the economic costs of the limitations on international travel. Thirdly, energy-producing countries will also have to introduce budget cuts due to the decrease in global demand and prices. This affects some countries directly, such as Algeria, but others indirectly, such as Egypt, which rely substantially on remittances sent by Egyptian workers in the Gulf and on direct financial support from those countries. In these circumstances, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation is more important than ever before, but it may be more difficult to mobilise political energy and financial resources.

2 THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

The literature on contemporary Spain tends to agree that **democratisation, membership of the European Union** and the **modernisation of Spanish society** are the three processes that have driven the transformation of the country as well as its foreign policy (Mesa, 1988; Barbé, 1999; Powell, 2000; Torreblanca, 2001; Pereira, 2010; Barbé, 2011; Pacheco Pardo and García Cantalapiedra, 2014). In that respect, the framing of Spain's policies towards its Southern Neighbourhood as a ›Mediterranean policy‹ and Spain's consistent attempts to push for a more ambitious European policy in this region were meant to mark a major rupture with the policies developed during the Francoist period. At that time, Spain's approach towards its south was framed as ›traditional friendship with the Arab world‹. Relations with different Arab regimes were key to countering Spain's diplomatic isolation, particularly in the 1950s (Algora Weber, 2007). By establishing friendly relations with almost all Arab leaders, regardless of their ideology, Spain also sought to secure oil supplies and obtain the support of the Arab countries in the UN regarding Gibraltar.

All Spanish governments since the transition back to democracy in the late 1970s and accession to the EEC in 1986 have identified the Mediterranean as a top priority. This region has conventionally been described as one of the three vertices of **Spain's triangle of priorities**, together with

Latin America and Europe (Barbé, 1998). The latter is at the apex of this triangle, dominating and determining the relationship with the other two regional priorities. The then president of the Spanish government, Mariano Rajoy, argued in the preface of the 2017 National Security Strategy that ›the country's European, Mediterranean and Atlantic profile determines the importance of these regions for its security, stability, and prosperity‹ (Presidencia del Gobierno, 2017). The new foreign minister, González Laya, has borrowed a similar conceptualisation, with a few nuances, referring in her first speech to ›Spain's influence in both the Northern and Southern Mediterranean‹ and characterising Spain as a ›nodal country‹ (González Laya, 2020).

2.1 BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL

A good example of historically loaded bilateral relations is Israel. Diplomatic relations were only established in 1986. Madrid's anomalously late recognition is to be explained by the animosity between the hardliners in the Francoist regime and Israel. Israel played a major role in the campaign to isolate Spain due to the links of the former regime with the Axis' powers during the Second World War (Algora Weber, 2007). This partly explains why Spain would join the UN only in 1955, once Cold War dynamics had become the dominant force. Indirectly, Spain took advantage of these tensions with Israel to upgrade its Arab policy. King Abdullah of Jordan was the first international leader to visit Spain after the Second World War, in 1949.

Although contacts between Spain and Israel became warmer during the latter years of the Francoist regime, particularly when technocrats started to occupy ministerial positions, it was only after the recovery of democracy and Spain's integration into NATO (1982) and the EEC (1986) that Spain fully normalised its relations with Israel. Analysed in hindsight, these circumstances may have helped Spain to be seen both by Israelis and Arabs as a neutral actor and this is one of the reasons why Madrid became a mutually agreed location to host the 1991 Middle East Peace Conference (Moratinos and León, 2003; Cassinello, Reyes and Khoury, 2011).

The year 1992 was also symbolic because it marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. That year saw many cultural and political initiatives, including a high-level ceremony chaired by King Juan Carlos and Israeli President Chaim Herzog, as well as the approval of Law 25/1992 regulating relations between Spain and the Federation of Israelite Communities of Spain. The most symbolic and practical decision came in 2015, however, with the approval of Law 12/2015 granting Spanish citizenship to Sephardic Jews.

Although in recent years, Israel and Palestine have become less central to the Spanish agenda, it remains a politically sensitive issue. Figures on the right and far-right of the political spectrum, such as Jose María Aznar or Rafael Bardají, the architect of the international policy of the recently emerged far-right party VOX, are actively involved in initiatives supporting current Israeli policies, but also because left-leaning groups such as Podemos and some segments of the Socialist

Party have traditionally been very supportive of the Palestinian cause. In 2015, the Socialist Party affirmed that, following the path initiated by Sweden one year previously, they would recognise **Palestine**, regardless of the evolution of the Middle East Peace Process, if they won the election. Podemos' leaders, for their part, also stated on several occasions that they would make sure that the Socialist government upheld this commitment.

2.2 BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO

The second case in which there is a huge historical legacy is **Morocco**. It is worth recalling that in 1912 Spain and France established a protectorate in Morocco, which lasted until 1956. The importance of Morocco to Spanish domestic politics dates back to the unpopular colonial wars in Northern Morocco during the first quarter of the twentieth century, which prompted the consolidation of socialist and anarchist movements among Spain's working class. The military campaigns in Morocco also played a major role in the political rise of two military men who ruled Spain as heads of dictatorial regimes, Miguel Primo de Rivera in the 1920s and Francisco Franco from the late 1930s until 1975.

Although the retrocession of the Spanish protectorate to Morocco in 1956 was a relatively peaceful process, tensions did not dissipate and Moroccan nationalists always claimed that Spain should also withdraw from **Ceuta and Melilla** and other islets and enclaves on the North African coast. As explained below, this issue remains central in Spain's foreign and security policy. Morocco's irredentism also aimed at taking control of Spain administered **Western Sahara**. In the mid-1970s Spain planned a referendum on self-determination for this province, trying to replicate the rapid decolonisation process of Equatorial Guinea, and with the blatant hope that this territory would become a friendly independent state, under Spain's influence. But this never materialised. When Franco was on his deathbed in 1975, Hassan II decided to launch an unprecedented operation dubbed 'the Green March', which called on thousands of civilians to march towards Spanish territory. This could have triggered a colonial war with Morocco precisely when Spain was poised to start a delicate political transition. In order to avoid this risk, Spain's leadership withdrew from this territory and signed the Madrid tripartite agreements with Morocco and Mauritania, through which Spain transferred the administration of the Western Sahara to the two countries.

This issue, which is still considered by the United Nations as an unresolved decolonisation affair, is a major obstacle to regional integration in the Maghreb and a mobilising issue among large segments of Spain's civil society (Ojeda-García; Fernández-Molina and Veguilla, 2011; Barreñada and Ojeda, 2016). There is an abundance of grassroots initiatives in support of the Sahrawi population, including initiatives involving Spanish families hosting children living in the Tindouf refugee camps (more than 4,000 in 2019) for summer vacations. The pressure exercised by these social movements, together with the political support of left-wing and the Catalan and Basque nationalist parties, has been a permanent factor in Spanish

politics, to the extent of creating intermittent episodes of tension between the two countries (Vaquer i Fanés, 2007). An example was Morocco's protest in early 2020 against the fact that a state secretary from Podemos had met with a minister of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and publicised the encounter via social media. The Spanish minister of foreign affairs also took to social media to explain that she had reassured the Moroccan authorities and that Spain does not recognise the SADR. In turn, this infuriated the Algerian authorities, which perceived this statement as too pro-Moroccan and unilaterally cancelled the Spanish foreign minister's visit to Algiers. This incident illustrates the degree of sensitivity around this issue, but also the challenge of holding a unified foreign policy line in a coalition government, in which a number of ideological sensitivities coexist, and in which international affairs are no longer the exclusive domain of the foreign affairs minister.

The conflict over the Western Sahara also demonstrates that this issue concerns not only Spain, but also the EU as a whole (Fernández Molina, 2016). One of the latest developments was the verdicts of the **European Court of Justice** in 2016 and 2018, confirming that the EU's fisheries and agriculture agreements with Morocco are not applicable to the Western Sahara territories and its products. The approval by the Moroccan parliament in January 2020 of new legislation expanding its **territorial waters** and the Economic Exclusive Zone not only came into collision with Spain's interests in the Canary Islands, but also added a new layer of complexity, because part of those waters correspond to the Western Sahara and Spain has been forced to enter negotiations with the Moroccan authorities on this, which may set a precedent for the EU. These unresolved bilateral tensions threaten EU–Morocco and Spain–Morocco relations at a time when Rabat's cooperation on migration issues has become even more vital for Brussels and Madrid. Neutralising this tension will be a major challenge for the new leaders of EU and Spanish diplomacy.

3 A MIDDLE POWER COMMITTED TO MULTILATERALISM

One thing all Spanish political parties would agree on is that the country can be regarded as a **middle power**. In the past four decades, politicians and academics alike have widely used this term to characterise Spain's current or potential position in the international system. The consensus in the literature on middle powers seems to be that countries that define themselves as such are particularly open to supporting multilateral efforts and more likely to be actively involved in the creation or development of **multilateral organisations** (Nolte, 2010; Jordaan, 2010). Spain's policies towards its Southern Neighbourhood fit perfectly within this pattern.

Even before joining the EEC, Spain was one of the driving forces of the first multilateral initiative in the Mediterranean: the 1976 UN Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean. Its entry into the EU – and to a lesser extent its NATO mem-

bership – reinforced these multilateral reflexes. The presence of Spanish representatives in top decision-making positions in the EU and NATO dealing directly with Mediterranean-related portfolios helped to increase Spain's importance in this field. One might mention Abel Matutes and Manuel Marín, as EU Commissioners; Miguel Ángel Moratinos as the first EU special envoy for the Middle East peace process; Javier Solana as both NATO Secretary General and later High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy; and more recently Josep Borrell, as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission.

As a result of Spain's activism in Mediterranean affairs, several initiatives came to the fore or, at least, were put on the table. Examples include the Renovated Mediterranean Policy of the EEC in 1989; the 1990 Spanish-Italian false-start launch of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean that would replicate the paradigm of the Helsinki process in this area; the hosting of the 1991 Madrid conference for the Middle East; the inception of NATO's Mediterranean dialogue in 1994; the launch of the **Barcelona Process** in 1995; the agreement at the Valencia Euro-Mediterranean conference of 2002 to set up a Euro-Mediterranean Foundation to promote further dialogue between cultures and civilisations, which finally translated to the creation of the Anna Lindh foundation; the inclusion of the EU in the Middle East Quartet that held its first meeting in Madrid in 2002; the proposal, together with Turkey, to launch the Alliance of Civilizations in the UN framework; and the successful attempts to Europeanise Sarkozy's initial idea to create a Mediterranean Union, which finally became the **Union for the Mediterranean**.

Spain understood that its capacities as an individual state for playing a role in this region were limited, and thus concluded that the best way to defend its interests was through a more robust European policy. Playing the European card is a way of securing the financial and diplomatic resources that Spain alone cannot mobilise. Spain is also convinced that multilateralism, political dialogue and regional cooperation are needed to avoid replicating Cold War dynamics in the Mediterranean and that, in turn, this positively contributes to improving Spain's international and European standing.

3.1 THE BARCELONA PROCESS

The most visible success was the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, depicted as 'an important diplomatic triumph for Spain, that helped her emergence as a southern force within the EU, comparable with Italy' (Gillespie, 2000: 156). This framework, which aimed at building an area of peace and stability, shared prosperity and people-to-people contacts, was made possible by a number of contextual factors (such as the Oslo accords, which opened up a window of opportunity and infused hope in all members) and the proactive role of certain states and individuals. Spain played a major role because it held the EU rotating presidency during the second half of 1995, but worked hand in hand with European institutions, particularly with the European Commission, as well as with France, Italy and Germany, to launch

this process (Barbé, 1996; Bicchi, 2007; Morillas and Soler i Lecha, 2017). The agreement between Helmut Kohl and Felipe Gonzalez was key to providing the Barcelona Process with sufficient resources to make it attractive to all the participants and to convince partners such as the United Kingdom or the Netherlands that were reluctant or sceptical towards it (Tovías, 1999: 228–29).

Spain was among the actors that pushed for the opening of the **European Neighbourhood Policy** towards the south. Madrid argued that this policy should complement rather than replace the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. At the same time, Spain understood that this policy could be the right platform through which the EU could deepen its relations with those neighbours that were willing to go faster or further (Barbé, Mestres and Soler i Lecha, 2007: 42–46). In that sense, Spain was one of the driving forces behind the idea of negotiating advanced status for Morocco.

3.2 UNION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN

When Sarkozy launched the idea of the Mediterranean Union in 2007, Spain was somewhat caught between a rock and a hard place. It saw the initial proposal as a threat because it was presented as an alternative to the Barcelona Process. At the same time, Spain did not want to antagonise France, whose cooperation was needed well beyond foreign policy matters (for example, in counterterrorism, energy, infrastructure or coordination in multilateral settings, such as the G20). Madrid did not oppose France but welcomed Merkel's push to open up the initiative to all EU countries and to fully involve EU institutions in it (Barbé, 2009). In this context, Spain managed to host the secretariat of the UfM, a decision taken in Marseilles in the autumn of 2008. As host country, Spain has also been one of the main backers of this initiative ever since.

3.3 NATO'S MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE AND CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE OPERATIONS

When it comes to commitments to multilateral security initiatives, the role of Spain extended to the inception of **NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue** (Núñez Villaverde, 2000) and active involvement in all the security-related actions undertaken under **the 5+5 dialogue**, an informal setting in which ministers of defence and interior, among others, from the five Maghreb countries and their Southern European counterparts, regularly meet and launch largely technical projects (Albareda and Soler i Lecha, 2012). Spain is also actively involved in most **EU, NATO and UN peacekeeping missions** and operations in the region. While one of the consequences of COVID-19 is that Spain may need to downscale its contribution to international missions, starting with those in Afghanistan and Iraq it is worth mentioning that in January 2020 Spain was one of the largest contributors to UNIFIL 2 in Lebanon (610 men and women) that the second largest contingent of Spanish troops (555) was deployed in Iraq, as part of the Global Coalition against Daesh and that Spain was also contributing to CSDP missions in Somalia (Operation Atalanta against piracy), Mali (EU Training Mission) and the Mediterranean Sea (EUNAVFOR Med Sophia). In the

Map 1

Spanish contributions to international missions**EUROPE AND MEDITERRANEAN**

- 350** Latvia (Enhance Forward Presence, NATO)
3 Bosnia-Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea, EU)
SNMG/SNMCMG
 (Standing NATO Maritime Group /
 Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group)
Baltic Air Policing (NATO)
Sea Guardian (NATO)

AFRICA

- 280** Mali (EUTM)
45 Mali (Air support from Senegal)
8 Central African Republic (EUTM)
45 Central African Republic (Air support from Gabon)
38 Somalia (EUTM)
375 Somalia (Atalanta Operation, EU)

ASIA AND MIDDLE EAST

- 149** Support to Turkey (NATO)
610 Libanon (UNIFIL)
555 Support to Irak
 (International coalition)
70 Resolute support, Afghanistan

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- 5** Colombia (UN Mission)



Numbers relating to military personnel engaged in missions. This graphic has been created on the basis of the following data:
<https://www.defensa.gob.es/Galerias/gabinete/red/2020/01/infografxa-misiones2020.pdf>

post-COVID-19 context, Spain is likely to focus its limited resources in missions in the Sahel, that has become one of the country's top priorities.

4 THE MAGHREB: PROXIMITY AND VITAL INTERESTS

Whereas the Middle East may be the main priority in the Mediterranean for most EU countries, as well as for the major global powers, for Spain – as for France – the **Maghreb** is and has been the number one priority, and within the Maghreb, Morocco (Hernando de Larramendi, 2009; Vaquer i Fanés and Soler i Lecha, 2011). **Proximity** partly explains it: only 14 kilometres separate Andalusia's coast from Northern Morocco and Spain has a very sensitive land border with its Southern neighbour around the cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Many are not aware that the distance between Barcelona and Algiers is exactly the same as between Spain's second city and Madrid, or that daily ferries cover the route between Alicante and Oran, which is only 300 kilometres. Spain is also Mauritania's closest European country. Only 700 kilometres separate this country from the Canary Islands. The distance

between those islands and Morocco's southern shores is less than 95 kilometres.

But proximity goes beyond geography. Historically and socially, the links between Spain with this part of the Arab world are particularly intense, to the extent that there are long-lasting social and political affects in the form of prejudices, grievances and unresolved bilateral issues. In that sense, Morocco is a special case, which cannot be compared with relations with any other country. These relations are not only strategic, but also politically loaded and have occasionally been weaponized in the confrontation between the two main political parties (Fernández Molina, 2009). Proximity has also been seen as one of the elements explaining Spain's cautious attitude when it comes to democratisation and human rights in this region (López García and Hernando de Larramendi, 2002).

The 2019 Strategy for External Action confirmed that the Maghreb is considered a 'priority strategic region' for Spain. But the way in which this document characterises the relations with each of its components is even more revealing. Morocco is referred to as 'our closest neighbour to the south

and an essential partner», Algeria as a »strategic partner«, Mauritania as a »stable and reliable partner«, while with regard to Tunisia Spain announces the intention to enhance bilateral relations, saluting its progress in the democratic transition. In the case of Libya, Spain says that it is »committed to the international effort to stabilise the country«. The choice of words is already indicative of Spain's differentiated approach, but it is useful to dig deeper to understand better the nature of these relations and what they mean for Spain's security policies.

4.1 MOROCCO

Morocco is by far Spain's most important bilateral relation when it comes to non-EU countries. It is also the most sensitive. Morocco is a preferential partner for Spain, but their bilateral relations have experienced ups and downs due to diverging positions on sensitive issues, such as migration and fisheries, and, above all, the contested sovereignty of the two Spanish North African cities, Ceuta and Melilla. In order to mitigate the risk of a major crisis erupting with Morocco, Spain has combined two different and complementary strategies.

On one hand, Madrid has seen its EU membership – and thus **Europeanization** – as a means of protecting its sovereignty over these two cities. Unlike the ways in which other EU countries approached their overseas territories, Spain made sure that the Accession Treaty would explicitly state that Ceuta and Melilla were to become an integral part of the EU. Thus, since 1986 these two cities have not been a »Spanish problem« only, but a European one (Gillespie, 2000). The same logic applies to other controversial matters, such as migration and fisheries (Vaquer i Fanés, 2003). Not only the central government, but local actors too are pursuing this strategy. For instance, in February 2020 the Ceuta local government announced that it will demand integration into the Schengen area to compensate for Morocco's hostile policies towards the autonomous city.

On the other hand, Spanish governments have incentivised bilateral investment and trade and upgraded institutionalised political dialogue, in the hope that this would limit the scope of bilateral tensions and bottle up the crises that periodically stir tensions. This policy is still referred to as »*el colchón de intereses*«, that is, »**the mattress of interests**« (Hernando de Larramendi, 2009). In 1991, the two countries also signed a treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation and instituted the practice of organising government summits regularly, which are attended by the two heads of the government, but also by several ministers. This model is known in Spain as *Reuniones de Alto Nivel* (RAN), a format also used in relations with a select group of countries: the big EU countries, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey and, on one occasion only, in 2009, with Egypt.

This policy has paid off and bilateral relations are wider, deeper and increasingly interdependent (Amirah Fernández, 2015). By 2019 Spain was Morocco's number-one trade partner and Morocco was Spain's second client outside the EU, surpassed only by the United States. Spain does not rank

as highly when it comes to foreign direct investment and, according to provisional 2018 figures, Spain was only the sixth largest investor, but Spanish FDI there is not negligible, as 800 Spanish firms are operating in Morocco, many of which are small and medium-sized enterprises. They have created about 20,000 direct jobs and are present in strategic sectors such as transport, renewable energy, the car industry, agriculture or tourism. People-to-people relations are also an important factor, with more than 800,000 Moroccan citizens living in Spain, sending about 500 million euros in remittances back to their families each year. Two million Spaniards, half of Moroccan origin, visit Morocco annually and 900,000 Moroccans travel to Spain every year. Morocco also represents the second largest network of the Cervantes Institute, the Spanish language and cultural promotion centre.

Periodic eruption of bilateral crises

These linkages have not been able to prevent the periodic eruption of bilateral crises, but may have impeded their escalation. The worst of all of these crises occurred in 2002 in a dispute over the sovereignty of the **islet of Perejil/Leila** which even required US mediation to end the military stand-off over what then US Secretary of State Collin Powell called »a stupid little island« (Gillespie, 2006). This military clash was preceded by a political escalation, first around the renewal of the fisheries agreement but also with Spain's complaints that Morocco was not cooperative enough regarding the control of irregular migration and drug trafficking, which led Morocco to recall its ambassador from Madrid in October 2001 (Feliu, Lorenzo and Salomón, 2003; Szmolka, 2005). The intensity caught everyone by surprise, including EU partners and institutions, but was indicative that such territorial disputes are sometimes more than a historical anecdote and that their effects can also call into question the limits of solidarity and the efficacy of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (Monar, 2002).

After this crisis, both countries were able to redress the situation and intensify cooperation at the bilateral level in areas such as the prevention of human trafficking, narcotics, organized crime and terrorism. In parallel, Spain has also been a vocal advocate of the strategic soundness of boosting Morocco's relations with the EU. The surge in the arrival of **irregular migrants** – both Moroccans and from Sub-Saharan Africa – in 2018 and 2019 worked as a powerful reminder of the strategic importance of this cooperation. By February 2019, after a long-awaited visit of the Spanish king, Felipe VI, to Morocco, the arrival of boats to the Spanish coasts dropped immediately. Before being appointed HR/VP, Josep Borrell not only advocated more generous Spanish and European support for Morocco in border control related issues, but also suggested the need for visa-facilitation mechanisms.

Migration and domestic polarization

During the two consecutive electoral campaigns of April and November 2019, migration was one of the top agenda items. **VOX** used this issue not only to oppose the Socialist Party, but also to differentiate itself from the softer positions of the mainstream Popular Party and Ciudadanos. VOX has

borrowed president Trump's rhetoric on walls, migration, invasions and sovereignty. Unsurprisingly, one of the party's main proposals was the building of a higher wall in **Ceuta and Melilla** on the border with Morocco. The fact that VOX won the only seat in Ceuta in the general elections and that it is also represented in the municipal councils of the two cities as an opposition force indicates that this issue will gain prominence in the Spanish political debate and in bilateral relations with Morocco. Rabat's latest actions to stop informal trade on the borders of the two cities, together with unilaterally closing the official customs office in 2018, risk the economic suffocation those cities and the ignition of an already sensitive issue. VOX – and other right-wing opposition parties – are already criticising Madrid's soft response and the supposed abandonment of the local residents in the two cities.

Morocco is not a classical foreign policy matter for Spain

The politicisation of territorial disputes with Morocco, the weight of the historical grievances and the intensity of bilateral links explain why Morocco is not a classical foreign policy matter and it is not dealt with as such. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is just one among many ministries that intervenes in the decision-making process. Most ministries have direct cooperation and dialogue platforms with their Moroccan counterparts. The Spanish embassy in Rabat is also one of Spain's largest, comparable only to those in Brussels, Paris and Washington. This state of affairs, within the framework of a broader presidentialisation of Spanish foreign policy (Lemus de la Iglesia and Amirah Fernández, 2009) gives a major role to the presidency of the government when dealing with Morocco, particularly when dealing with cyclical crises. Another peculiarity is that in certain circumstances, the Spanish King is asked to play a role in these relations, basically by establishing a king-to-king relationship with Morocco's Mohamed VI, as his father did with Hassan II. In critical situations the monarchy is asked to either support de-escalation efforts or create better conditions for functional bilateral cooperation.

Relations with the other countries from the Maghreb are also important, but cannot be compared with those with Morocco's. This is reflected in the relatively low levels of political controversy around them. Also, in the fact that while some sectorial ministries could still play a role, this generally involves only one or two of them (for example, energy in the case of Algeria) and thus confers on the ministry of foreign affairs a far more prominent role.

4.2 ALGERIA

The case of **Algeria** is an example of this single-issue approach. Relations in the **energy** field date back to the late 1960s. As explained by Francis Ghilès (2013), Pere Durán Farrell, a Catalan businessman, articulated a strategic vision of relations with Algeria by pioneering bringing Algerian liquefied gas (LNG) to Barcelona. In 2000, his name was given to the first gas pipeline linking Algeria, via Morocco, to Spain and Portugal, inaugurated in 1996. Interestingly, this project came to light at a very difficult time for this North African

country. In the 1990s, often known as the Black Decade or the Dirty War, resulted in 100,000 to 200,000 casualties, depending on the source. Spain's government, but also its companies were confident that their interests in the country would not be harmed in this phase of acute instability and Spain was one of the few European countries not to close its diplomatic and cultural centres in the country. Spain's energy dependence vis-à-vis Algeria – 46 per cent of its natural gas imports – and to a lesser extent the ups and downs in both countries' relations with Morocco are the key drivers of these relations (Escribano, 2012; Dris-Ait Hammadouche and Dris, 2007; Thieux and Jordà, 2012).

More recently, a new element has been added to the list of bilateral priorities. In 2018, Algeria issued a decree extending its **Economic Exclusive Zone** that rejects Spain's claims regarding the Balearic Islands, but this issue made it into Spanish political debate only in February 2020. Similar to what happened with the controversy on the Canary Islands, this issue mainly mobilised regional political elites, but was also used by opposition media and parties to accuse the Sánchez government of being too weak in the defence of Spain's national interests. Moreover, proximity and energy explain Spain's cautious attitude to political developments in Algeria. Madrid's silence vis-à-vis the 2019–2020 civil protests in Algeria, but also Spain's rapid welcoming of the results of the December 2018 elections are the latest examples of a pre-existing trend that prioritises security and stability over any other concern.

4.3 LIBYA

Energy has also been a key element in Spain's relations with **Libya**. The Spanish **oil** company Repsol has been present in the country since the 1970s and in 2019 Spain was Libya's third largest customer, close behind Italy and Germany. Spain's involvement in the 2011 NATO operation was fairly modest and related mainly to maritime surveillance. And since the fall of Gaddafi, the only major Spanish political initiative was the organisation of a regional conference in 2014, involving all of Libya's neighbours, in an attempt to avoid a failed transition, although it clearly did not attain its main objective. Since then, Madrid has opted for a low profile, mainly because other EU countries – France and Italy in particular – have had a stronger role and are actually supporting opposing sides. This explains why, despite its proximity and the intensity of economic ties, Spain has not been involved in the relevant international conferences, at which other regional and global stakeholders have discussed and negotiated the political and security situation in this country. More recently, Libya came back onto the Spanish agenda but from a completely different angle. The increase of **migration** flows in the Strait of Sicily and the stark images of successive, precariously overloaded ships transporting migrants and refugees triggered the mobilisation of parts of Spanish civil society and also of left-leaning political groups. This put pressure on the Spanish government to offer a safe harbour to the rescue operation ships operating in this area. The Spanish NGO Open Arms is particularly active and this has occasionally created tensions with the Italian government, especially when Matteo Salvini was Minister of the Interior. In the future, migration, energy

and the much needed stabilization of this country will be the main factors shaping Spanish policy towards this North African country.

4.4 TUNISIA

Regarding **Tunisia**, Spain has been supportive of the **political transition**, sometimes emulating its own, which has served as a source of inspiration for Tunisian politicians and society. Madrid has backed a more ambitious EU policy towards this country. Yet, the coinciding of the Arab uprisings with Spain's own economic crisis did not help Madrid to mobilise significant additional financial resources or to devote more attention to the political and social changes in this country and the rest of the region (Soler i Lecha, 2013).

4.5 MAURITANIA

Finally, Spain is the only EU country that perceives **Mauritania** as a direct neighbour (Hernando de Larramendi and Planet, 2007). This is due to the proximity of this Maghrebi and Sahelian country to the Canary Islands. Spain also has important interests in the **fishing** sector and bilateral cooperation with Mauritanian authorities in the fight against **terrorism** – a convoy of Spanish aid workers was abducted in 2009, not far from the capital Nouakchott – and maritime surveillance. In fact, migration has been the main priority in bilateral relations with this country since 2006. That year, the Canary Islands saw an unprecedented influx of West African migrants by boat, most of whom embarked from Mauritanian and Senegalese ports. This pushed Spain to negotiate more robust cooperation in maritime surveillance with these two countries in exchange for training, equipment and development aid. Mauritania provides, together with Morocco and Senegal, the best example of what is now described as a form of **‘migratory diplomacy’** (Pinyol, 2009).

5 CHANGING MIDDLE EAST GEOPOLITICS

The Middle East has experienced major **geopolitical shifts** in the past decade. These include the eruption of new conflicts (Syria being one of the most dramatic); overlapping regional cleavages and acute competition among Middle Eastern regional powers; the demise of regional cooperation efforts; and the re-emergence of Russia as a major political and security actor and that of China as an economic partner and investor in major infrastructure projects (Del Sarto, Malmvig and Soler i Lecha, 2019). Compared with other large EU member states, Spain has been less concerned with these developments, mainly because the impact of such shifts has been much greater in the Eastern Mediterranean than in North Africa. Spain's focus on the Western Mediterranean and more specifically on the Maghreb dominates its foreign policy priorities with very few exceptions, such as the aforementioned hosting, in 1991, of the Madrid Peace Conference for the Middle East Peace Process or the first meeting of the Quartet in Madrid in 2002.

5.1 IRAQ AND THE WAR IN 2003

The war of **Iraq** in 2003 was also one of those rare instances in which political and social attention in Spain shifted from the Maghreb to the Middle East (Barreñada, Martín and Sanahuja, 2004; Aixalà, 2005; Sahagún, 2005). It can be argued, however, that Spain's choices in this crisis had less to do with regional dynamics in the MENA region and more with the willingness of the then president of the government, José María Aznar, to get closer to the United States. Spain's vocal support for the British-American intervention, although Spain did not deploy troops until Saddam Hussein had already been overthrown, was met with the disapproval of all local opposition forces and also by large segments of wider society, which mobilised in unprecedented anti-war marches in Madrid and Barcelona. One of the long-lasting effects of this extremely controversial decision is that it contributed to **breaking the pre-existing consensus among mainstream parties** on foreign and security policy matters and made Spain even more reluctant to join military ventures.

5.2 SYRIA

The Iraq precedent, coupled with Spain's economic difficulties, partly explains why, unlike France or the United Kingdom, Madrid showed no appetite to intervene in **Syria**. At the very beginning of the conflict, Spain dispatched Bernardino León, then Secretary General at the presidency of the government, to try (unsuccessfully) to persuade Al-Assad to negotiate with the protestors and introduce some reforms to appease them. Since then, and similar to the case of Libya, Spain has opted for a low profile, particularly compared with the other big EU countries. More recently, Spain's attention has shifted towards refugees and foreign fighters. Regarding refugees, Spain has supported European countries backing a quota system, against the view of Central and Eastern European countries, which oppose it. Despite this position, Spain ended up taking a limited number of Syrian refugees, with the top five nationalities of asylum seekers in Spain still being from Central and South America. Spanish civil society has mobilised on several occasions, calling on the government to be more generous in its response to this humanitarian drama. When it comes to foreign fighters, over a hundred Spanish nationals – many of them from Ceuta and Melilla – joined ISIS ranks and the families of some of these are now in the custody of Kurdish forces. The presence of those fighters pushed the Spanish secret services to keep some communication channels open with the Assad regime, despite the fact that, like almost all EU countries, Spain cut diplomatic relations and closed its embassy in Damascus. Less known is the fact that a small handful of Spaniards also joined the YPG-SDF militias, such as Samuel Prada, a Galician born 25 year old activist killed in Afrin when fighting against Turkish forces, and that two of those who returned to Spain were put on trial, accused of participation in a criminal organisation.

5.3 HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES FOR JORDAN AND LEBANON

Although not part of its immediate neighbourhood, Spain has been attentive to the regional consequences of the Syrian war, particularly regarding the humanitarian chal-

allenges faced by **Jordan** and **Lebanon** in hosting refugees. Not only the Spanish state, but also some local and regional governments, as well as independent NGOs have increased their programmes in these countries. Then Spanish foreign affairs minister Josep Borrell visited Lebanon in May 2019 and promised 25 million euros in aid for refugees. He also visited the Spanish troops in Marjayun, which, as already mentioned, is one of the largest contingents of UNIFIL 2. The presence of 600 Spanish soldiers implies that Spain is particularly concerned about domestic or regional processes that could further destabilise the country.

5.4 ISRAELI-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Regarding the current stalemate in the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict**, Spain's policies are very much conditioned by previous attempts to contribute to a peaceful resolution of this regional conflict. Despite the geographical distance, and taking into account Spain's weight in the international arena, this is one issue on which Spain has stood out and, if the international or regional context favoured it, would be willing to contribute to dialogue and cooperation. It has favoured broad European consensus, but also cooperation with likeminded countries (Álvarez Ossorio, 2007). In Spanish diplomatic circles, president Trump's so-called ›Deal of the Century‹ was met with scepticism and some suggested that the only virtue of such a plan is that it encourages others to come up with an alternative vision (Mora, 2020). By the end of April 2020, the Spanish ambassador was one of the 11 European diplomats who started a demarche to the Israeli government warning that the annexation of the West Bank, or parts of it, would violate international law, harm regional stability and undermine Israel's international standing. While there may be a broad consensus among Spanish political parties if those circumstances were met, in the absence of a prospect of peace and with the persistence of Israeli expansionism and discriminatory policies, this is one of the issues that can easily be politicised, with some right-wing figures defending Israeli positions, and left-wing ones demanding either more pressure on Israel or even a unilateral recognition of Palestine.

5.5 TURKEY

When it comes to **Turkey**, Spain is seen by Ankara as a friendly country in an increasingly hostile European Union. The medical support provided by Turkey in response to Spain's call to its NATO allies for aid in the fight against Covid-19, as well as discrete diplomatic negotiations to unfreeze the purchase of Turkish ventilators by two Spanish regions, furnish new evidence that the mood in Spain-Turkey relations is significantly warmer than with other EU countries. Relations with Turkey are very strong on the economic front and Spanish companies have invested in several strategic sectors (Soler i Lecha, 2014). The most prominent example is the purchase of Garanti (Turkey's third bank) by BBVA (Spain's second financial group). This implies that Spain is more vulnerable than other EU countries to an eventual economic or financial crisis in this country. Spain is also one of the few member states still supporting Turkey's accession to the EU and one that feels more uncomfortable with the rise of tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean that could further de-

teriorate EU-Turkish relations. Spain has also maintained its Patriot missile batteries in Southern Turkey, whereas other countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, put an end to this NATO-led operation. Thus, Spain is one of the countries that could be indirectly affected if tensions between Turkey and the Assad regime escalate. These economic and security links explain why, despite the geographical distance, Turkey is important for Spain.

5.6 EGYPT

As detailed above, there was an attempt to upgrade relations with **Egypt** before the Arab uprisings, and the two governments held a summit in 2009. The ensuing political changes in Egypt have watered down these initial plans, however. Economic and political relations have been stable and cordial despite Egypt's political ups and downs as Spain did not play a prominent political role after the 2013 military takeover. One development that threatened to aggravate bilateral relations was the conflict between a private Spanish energy company (Naturgy – Gas Fenosa) and the Egyptian authorities regarding the supply of gas to the Damietta LNG plant, which Egypt stopped in 2014 due to the surge in internal demand. The company considered that this contravened, at least, Egypt's bilateral investment protection treaty with Spain. The 2018 ruling by the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes sustained the company's claim and urged Egypt to compensate the 2 billion US dollar investment. According to sources close to the affair, compensation could be provided in kind rather than cash, which helped to alleviate tensions. Another factor that could have affected bilateral relations is the fact that Mohamed Ali, the well-known contractor who became prominent on social media, where he urged Egyptians to mobilise against corruption, legally resides in Spain. In January 2020, Ali made another appearance but only to say that he was stepping back from politics.

5.7 GULF STATES

Finally, regarding the **Gulf**, Spain has also tried to maintain good relations with everyone, including **Iran**, a country in which two companies, Repsol and Cepsa, also had important business interests in the energy sector. Furthermore, relations with the Gulf monarchies and particularly **Saudi Arabia** are of special significance. This dates back to Francoist foreign policy, as relations with the Saudi state were an important component of the strategy to circumvent international isolation. The other element making these relations special is the involvement of the monarchy in the promotion of bilateral relations in what can be conceptualised as some sort of ›King-to-King diplomacy‹. Notwithstanding the discussion of whether the monarchy is an instrument or an actor in Spanish policy towards the Gulf, what is clear is that these relations are under the scrutiny of Spanish public opinion and civil society (Soler i Lecha, 2018). Spain's U-turn in the summer of 2018 regarding arms exports to Saudi Arabia (the minister of defence announced that Spain would halt them, but the government backtracked because of pressure from Spanish lobbies and Saudi Arabia itself) helped to put these relations in the spotlight.

6 PROBLEMS, POTENTIAL AND MESSAGES FOR BRUSSELS AND BERLIN

The **Mediterranean has been and will remain a priority** for Spanish foreign policy, driven by Madrid's quest for security and status (Vaquer i Fanés, 2014). As a **committed European partner**, Spain frames the relations with its most immediate southern neighbours within the development of a strong EU Southern Mediterranean policy, aiming to reinforce this strand of EU foreign policy, but also to make sure that its bilateral foreign policy interests (particularly towards Morocco) are preserved. Unlike some EU member states, Spain is particularly aware that it cannot walk alone. Madrid needs to anchor its foreign policy priorities towards the Mediterranean within the EU, and also to **seek alliances with likeminded member states and EU institutions** to support more ambitious and robust policies. These alliances are even more indispensable in light of the current and potential consequences of COVID-19.

Spain's involvement in Mediterranean affairs is not restricted to government actors and civil society organisations, sometimes in alliance with international partners, have become increasingly influential. They have made their voices heard – for instance regarding the arms trade – but they are also actors themselves, as is clearly shown by their presence on the ground in refugee-related matters. Thus, any discussion of what Spain thinks and does, and of what kind of partnerships can be established with Spain, should also take those actors into consideration.

6.1 DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN SPAIN'S POSITION TOWARDS THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

When trying to grasp Spain's position vis-à-vis security developments in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood, **three drivers of change** need to be taken into account: (i) the degree of **politicisation** of this issue in Spanish politics; (ii) the evolution of **conflict and cooperation dynamics in the region**; and (iii) the **EU's capacity to articulate a more robust and ambitious policy** towards this area. By considering these elements, but also the strong continuities exposed in this report, which are related mainly to geographic proximity and historical legacies, Spain could further upgrade its cooperation with EU institutions and with key member states.

Spanish foreign policy has been driven by a strong internal consensus when it comes to priorities and the Mediterranean is certainly one of them. Some issues related to **security developments in the Middle East and North Africa, however, have also been weaponised in wider domestic political battles**. The best example is the war in Iraq, back in 2003, but relations with Morocco are equally sensitive. The formation of the first coalition government between PSOE and *Unidas Podemos* might exert some additional pressure because of the latter's support for unilateral recognition of a Palestinian state, the reinforcement of the BDS movement against Israel and solidarity with the Saharawi cause. Despite some initial tensions, it seems that the new government's

foreign policy remains anchored in the PSOE-controlled areas of political responsibility, and *Unidas Podemos* is also holding a more pragmatic line. Another factor is the increasing pressure from the extreme-right VOX party, which could lead to the erosion of a consensual, state-promoted and relatively stable foreign policy towards Southern partners, including on issues such as relations with Morocco, Islam and migration. VOX's politicisation of foreign policy issues could follow the pattern of other European countries in which extreme-right populism has had an increasingly prominent position in foreign policy issues.

When it comes to changes at the regional level, the considerations that could have a stronger impact on Spain's positioning are **domestic stability in Morocco**, the prevalent **tension between Algiers and Rabat** – the first gestures of the new Algerian leadership do not suggest a change of position on this front – the unresolved conflict over the **Western Sahara** and the insecurity nexus between the **Sahel** and the Maghreb. Like any other EU country, Spain is also attentive to the political and security developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. In some cases, Europe's collective interest and security coincide with specific Spanish considerations, such as the important **economic interests in Turkey and the Gulf**. The presence of major **contingents of Spanish armed forces** in Lebanon, Iraq and Southern Turkey is also a relevant factor. On all these issues, Spain is aware of its exposure, but also of the fact that, by itself, it does not have the means to influence regional developments or even protect itself from their consequences.

6.2 CHANGES AT THE EU-LEVEL ARE IMPORTANT FROM A SPANISH PERSPECTIVE

This is why changes at the **EU level** are important from a Spanish perspective. The prevalent view in Spain is that there is a renewed window of opportunity to advance its foreign policy interests towards Southern Mediterranean countries and to anchor these priorities in a new phase of EU foreign policy. The appointment of **Josep Borrell** as EU HRVP is expected to contribute to a more active EU role towards the South. **Brexit** has altered the balance of power within the EU, giving Spain and Italy a more prominent position, provided that Madrid and Rome manage to preserve a minimum level of internal political stability. Spain also welcomes the idea of a more **geopolitical Commission**, and insists that in order to act geopolitically the EU needs better and stronger instruments. This is one of the arguments put forward by Spain when advocating a more ambitious EU **Multiannual Financial Framework**, even more so as there is a pressing need to upgrade internal and external solidarity to cope with the effects of COVID-19. Madrid is also on board with the EU's shared interest in Africa and the Sahel, with a small caveat: namely that this should not come at the expense of the EU's attention towards its immediate Southern Neighbourhood.

There is also room for the EU to profit further from Spain's geostrategic position and its commitment to

European collective security and multilateralism. In terms of its foreign policy identity, Spain combines its European essence with a very strong Atlantic and Mediterranean vocation. Moreover, Spain is not only a European country, but also includes territories on the African continent (Canary Islands, Ceuta and Melilla). Thus, Brussels could find an ally in Spain when trying to break silo mentalities, particularly regarding the way it deals with the Mediterranean and Africa. Spain can contribute to putting forward a new narrative, a new geopolitical imagination (one, for instance, that could picture the Mediterranean as a ›Euro-African lake‹) and a new working methodology that pays more attention to the linkages between different regional priorities. Spain can also convey to the EU the idea of the ›mattress of interests‹ (*colchón de intereses*) when dealing with its Southern Neighbours. Emulating the Spanish experience with Morocco, the EU may want to explore ways to increase trade, investment and people-to-people relations, not only between the EU and those countries, but also among Southern partners, so that the potential cost of conflict prevents new escalations in an already distressed region. Spain can also help Brussels to define a more balanced approach towards its South that pays sufficient heed to the demands and needs of the countries of the Maghreb. If the EU follows the line proposed by Josep Borrell and relies more often on the capacities and willingness of some groups of member states to move forward – and so is not limited by the need to reach a consensus on everything – then the EU can count on Spain as a country that will be ready to explore this approach, not only in the Mediterranean but also regarding other foreign policy priorities.

6.3 COOPERATION ON MEDITERRANEAN AFFAIRS WITH NON-SOUTHERN EU MEMBERS

Not only Brussels, but any European capital willing to improve European influence in the Southern Neighbourhood should look to Spain as a preferential partner. This applies, for instance, to Germany. Although Spain is often depicted as a country that joins forces with other Southern European countries – France, Italy and Portugal – when it comes to foreign policy matters, this is only half true. In the past three decades there have been plenty of instances in which Spain has worked with central and northern European countries, such as Sweden and Germany, to promote new ideas in the Mediterranean. In fact, the Barcelona Process would not have been possible without the deal reached by Helmut Kohl and Felipe González back in 1995. The leaders of two geographically different countries, belonging to two rival ideological families, agreed that a more robust Southern policy on the part of the EU was compatible with Eastern enlargement. They also agreed that this needed additional funds so that the EU bid would not be empty rhetoric and that Southern partners could see that there were incentives to leave aside their differences and explore the possibility of dialogue and cooperation. Although Spain and Germany took the lead, France and Italy were fully involved in this process and did not see this agreement as a manoeuvre to leave them out. This episode should inspire the leaderships in Berlin and Madrid to learn three lessons: policies for the Mediterranean that

are supported by European countries outside Southern Europe have more traction; big debates on a more geopolitical Europe will not be credible if they are not accompanied by stronger instruments; and it is important to prevent key member states from feeling marginalised or excluded.

There are also many opportunities for Berlin and Madrid to work together on **specific issues**. The most obvious and pressing priority will be the definition of new strategies to support institutions and societies in partner countries to deal with the economic and social consequences of COVID-19. Besides that, and somehow counterintuitively, it is in areas in which their initial positions and historical legacy may differ where their cooperation could bear most fruit. For instance, Spain's supposedly pro-Palestinian attitude and Germany's special relations with Israel make a good match when thinking about alternative solutions to the plan put forward by Donald Trump on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ankara's positive view of Spain could also be an asset when trying to regain the trust of the Turkish authorities. And finally, Berlin can also support Spain when passing the message to Algiers and Rabat about the importance of generating conditions for intra-Maghreb dialogue and cooperation.

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MIDDLE POWER WITH MAGHREB FOCUS

A Spanish perspective on Security Policy in the Southern Neighbourhood



Spain's geographically strategic position, its historical and cultural ties to the Maghreb, the emergence of the Sahel as a priority, its privileged relations with Turkey and its history as a constructive partner in relation to the Middle East Peace Process, make it a highly useful partner to the EU institutions and member states who willing to upgrade the EU strategy towards its Southern Neighbourhood. Spain is promoting a comprehensive and integrated approach to security and development, which gives due importance to human security, guided by a long-term vision.



Spain's national priorities in the Southern Neighbourhood are likely to remain as follows:

- Foster cooperation and dialogue with its Maghreb neighbours (Morocco and Algeria above all) and among them.
- Keep alive the Euro-Mediterranean framework of regional cooperation, complementing larger bi-regional dialogues (EU–African Union) and privileged bilateral relations.
- Support any attempt to de-escalate tension in the Middle East, with particular attention to the countries with which Spain has stronger economic ties (Turkey), but also where Spanish troops are currently deployed (Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey).
- Formulate a long-term strategy for migration and development, with a particular focus on the Sahel.

- Advocate for a more ambitious EU response to counter the social and economic effects of COVID-19 that extends to its neighbours.



In order to advance those interests, Spain is keenly aware that it does not have the tools to act alone. Working at the EU level is the optimal pathway for Madrid and to do so, it will seek alliances not only with other Southern European states, but also with Germany. Past cooperation between Madrid and Berlin in this specific priority, such as during the Barcelona Process of 1995, indicates that it is a path worth exploring.

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