

Spain and Islamist Movements: from the Victory of the FIS to the Arab Spring¹

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Although concerns about political Islam in the western world can be traced back to the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Spain's need to articulate a position was delayed until the end of the 1980s, coinciding with the reactivation of foreign policy towards the Mediterranean after decades of international isolation. After Spain's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, its diplomatic goal became making the Mediterranean an area of influence that would allow the Iberian nation to buttress its status as a middle power.

Since 1995, Spain has led a renewal in Euro-Mediterranean relations. By Europeanizing its agenda towards the Mediterranean, Spain sought to channel European resources to a region that is vital for its security interests. The philosophy that inspired the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in Barcelona that year held that it was not sufficient to maintain trade relations alone, but rather that relations with the southern Mediterranean needed to include political, social and cultural elements, following the model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). This new framework emphasized the importance of civil society participating in the Euro-Mediterranean process. However, the democratization and human rights objectives were merely rhetorical and in practice remained subordinate to an economic agenda. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, economic affairs gave way to security concerns, and civil society had no active role to play in what were basically intergovernmental relations.²

Political Islamism first posed a challenge to Spanish foreign policy at the end of the 1980s. The dynamics of political liberalization initiated by Arab regimes to counteract their legitimacy deficit placed the question of whether Islamist movements should be integrated into the politics at the

¹ The research for this article was conducted under the auspices of the R&D&I projects “Nuevos espacios, actores e instrumentos en las relaciones exteriores de España con el mundo árabe y musulmán” (CSO2011-29438-C05-02) and “El mundo árabe-islámico en Movimiento: Migraciones, reformas y elecciones. Su impacto en España,” CSO2011-29438-C05-01.

² As part of Europe's Mediterranean policy, civil forums have been held concurrently with successive Euro-Mediterranean conferences and, beginning in 2005, institutions like the *Anna Lindb Euro-Mediterranean Foundation* for the Dialogue between Cultures have been formed to promote the creation of national networks made up of representatives from civil society. However, the opportunities created before the Arab Spring were not open to all, but rather suffered from a lack of representatives from Islamist movements. See Isaías Barreñada and Iván Martín: “La sociedad civil y la Asociación Euromediterránea: de la retórica a la práctica”, *Papeles de Cuestiones Internacionales*, No. 92, Winter 2005-2006, pp. 79-89. ECHART MUÑOZ, Enara: *Movimientos sociales y relaciones internacionales. La irrupción de un nuevo actor*. IUDC/Los Libros de la Catarata, Madrid, 2008, pp. 215-282.

center of these processes.³ The legalization of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria in 1989, as part of the process of political openness championed by President Chadli Bendjedid, presented a significant predicament for Spanish foreign policy in the Maghreb. This is a region where—due to both geographic proximity and historical relationships—Spanish interests in the Arab world are concentrated.

The question of integrating Islamist movements into politics in Arab countries entered a new phase in 2001. After the 9/11 attacks, the George W. Bush administration defended the need to promote democratization in the Arab world, believing that the continued existence of authoritarian regimes created favourable conditions for jihadist terrorism. The military intervention in Iraq in 2003 was justified, *a posteriori*, as an instrument to foster a democratization process that would reach the other Arab states by osmosis. In this context, the integration of Islamist parties—the main opposition forces—constituted a challenge for Arab regimes with close ties to the United States. Their status as allies in the American “War on Terror” allowed the regimes to decrease the pressure put on them, claiming that democratization could not be imposed from outside, but had to be the result of processes of change taking place inside each state. However, the dynamics of change had already begun in the region. During the last decade, Islamist movements won seats in legislative elections held in Algeria (2002 and 2007), Morocco (2002 and 2007), Jordan (2002 and 2007), Egypt (2005) and Lebanon (2000 and 2005), and claimed victory in Palestine (2006). This was the second electoral victory for an Islamist movement and thus represented a second challenge to the foreign policy of Spain and the rest of the European Union.

The Spanish position on Islamist movements

Spanish governments, regardless of their political stripe, have not formulated a defined strategy in the last two decades with which to address either relations or dialogue with Islamist movements. The Spanish policy toward these movements, which during this time have established themselves as important actors in opposing the authoritarian regimes in the region, has been fundamentally reactive. Islamist movements have not been perceived as agents of democratization, but as a threat to stability. Consequently, they have not been included in a bilateral program to promote democracy and strengthen civil society financed by the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Bustos 2007). Neither have they been included in international visitor programmes organized by Spanish public institutions like the Fundación Carolina, which has given priority to exchanges with Latin America.

Spanish politicians have often used the positions adopted within the framework of the European Union as cover and have subordinated any movement or proposal to a higher objective: preserving relations with political regimes perceived as guarantors of regional stability. Thus, the Spanish position has been conditioned largely by the status and recognition that different Islamist movements have had in each of the Arab and Muslim states. Thus, they have been determined on a

³ Bernabé López, Gema Martín and Miguel H. Larramendi, *Elecciones, Participación y Transiciones Políticas en el Norte de África*, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Árabe, Madrid 1991.

case-by-case basis. After the terrorist attacks of March 11, 2004 in Madrid, an internal security dimension was introduced in the Spanish position. Although a distinction was established between Islamist movements and international terrorism at that time, after the attacks, concerns about the radicalization of young Muslims in Spain intensified, leading to the creation of new instruments for dialogue and diplomatic initiatives.⁴

Spain and Islamist Movements in the Maghreb

News of the legalization and subsequent victory of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in the municipal Algerian elections in June 1990 was received with concern in Spain. The country regarded the situation as a risk that could jeopardize the stability of the western Mediterranean, destabilizing the other Maghreb countries, especially Morocco, which is separated from the Iberian Peninsula by only 14 kilometres⁵. Spanish apprehension about an eventual FIS victory in the legislative elections, planned for December 1991, was focused on the implications for petroleum and natural gas supplies to Spain if an Islamist party came into power (Abid 2001). Spanish diplomacy, thus, sought guarantees that international treaties and agreements would be respected. In 1990, Jorge Dezcallar, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for North Africa and the Middle East, went to Algeria where he met with Abbassi Madani, one of the FIS leaders, who reassured the Spanish diplomat, asserting that “energy is the blood that runs through the veins of Algeria” (López and Hernando de Larramendi 2011: p. 264).

For Spanish politicians and analysts, the rise of political Islamism was considered a consequence of the economic, social and political crisis that shook the region and turned it into a “time bomb” (Gillespie 2000: pp. 148-149, 165). The stabilization of the region, in the Spanish view, lay in encouraging development and improving living conditions for the population.⁶ This commitment to socio-political stability in defending Spanish interests gave rise to a realistic position that would preserve the status quo in the region, represented by authoritarian leaders in the Maghreb. The Spanish position was conceptualized as endorsing a “dynamic stability” and emphasized the conviction of “supporting democratic changes as long as they do not interfere with Spain’s strategic interests.”⁷ Following this line, in January 1992, the Spanish government refrained from condemning

⁴ See the analyses of Juan José Escobar, one of the Spanish diplomats who has accomplished the most to draw attention to Islamist movements (Escobar 2004, 2006 and 2007, among others).

⁵ Minister for Foreign Affairs Francisco Fernández Ordoñez noted that the election result was bad news, while a statement by defense minister Narcis Serra suggested immediate concern about security implications: “Spain has always maintained that NATO must concern itself with the south to give stability to the Mediterranean,” quoted by Gillespie 2000: 101.

⁶ Jorge Dezcallar concluded an article on “El Fundamentalismo islámico en el mundo árabe: las razones de su éxito [Islamic Fundamentalism in the Arab World: the Reasons for its Success]” published in the journal *Política Exterior* in 1991 by affirming that “the more political participation —read democracy—there is and the more economic development there is—and here our assistance is essential—the fewer the temptations (so common today) to find solutions there for problems here”. See Jorge Dezcallar, *Textos sobre cuestiones conflictivas de África y Oriente Medio*, Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, Madrid, 1993, p. 140.

⁷ Bernabé López and Miguel Hernando de Larramendi (2002), “Spain and North Africa Towards a Dynamic Stability,” *Democratization*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 170-191.

the coup d'état in Algeria that brought an end to the electoral process and unleashed a gruelling civil conflict, lasting for almost a decade⁸. During this period, the Spanish government maintained a low profile, shielding itself behind the positions established by the European Economic Community under the leadership of France, the former colonial power in Algeria.⁹

Although the Spanish government supported the right of the Algerian regime to combat Islamist terrorism, it tried to balance this position with appeals to the respect for human rights and dialogue with “all the political forces that wanted stability, including the more moderate of the groups that had defended the Islamist rebellion” (Gillespie 2000: p.105).

It would seem that the priority given to relations with the Arab regimes limited the establishment of contacts with Islamist movements that were illegal or the object of political persecution. In Tunisia's case, the Spanish government granted political asylum to some leaders of the al-Nahda party when repression of the movement intensified at the beginning of the 1990s, but declined to condemn these practices officially. In March 1995, the Spanish authorities succumbed to pressure from Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's regime and expelled the party's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, from the country. Ghannouchi was preparing to participate in a conference in Cordoba on the relationship between Islam and modernity organized by the Universidad Islámica Internacional Averroes de Al-Andalus (UIIA)¹⁰. Years later, the link between al-Nahda and the al Qaeda terrorist organisation, which the Tunisian authorities alleged after the 9/11 attacks, was one of the arguments the Spanish legal authorities invoked in 2005 to withdraw the political asylum status of Ridha Barouni, a leader of the al-Nahda party and former president of the Centro Islámico de Valencia.¹¹

In Morocco, the integration of the branch of Islamism that did not question the role of the king as Amir al-Muminin, or “commander of the faithful,” into national politics created the right conditions to establish contact with Islamist leaders who, in 1996, were incorporated into the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement (MPDC), later the Justice and Development Party (PJD).¹² The

⁸ Minister for Foreign Affairs Francisco Fernández Ordoñez justified the coup d'état, saying that it was about “avoiding a certain evil” since “some Algerian political forces had announced their anti-democratic intentions”. *El País* 18/02/1992

⁹ This position was questioned by some Spanish diplomats like Gabriel Mañueco who argued that the Spanish position should not follow the French one since the internal security challenges presented by the crisis for France were not the same as in Spain. Gabriel Mañueco “España ante la crisis argelina” *Política Exterior*, Vol. 6, No. 27, pp. 116-128

¹⁰http://www.cidob.org/es/documentacion/biografias_lideres_politicos/africa/tunez/rashid_ghannouchi

This did not occur in the case of the Sudanese Hassan al-Turabi. This leader of the National Islamic Front and ideologue for the military regime established by General Omar al-Bashir came to Spain in August 1994 to participate in a summer course organised by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. “El islamismo barrerá el norte de África”, *El País* 02/08/1994.

¹¹ “La oposición tunecina pide a Zapatero que dé asilo a El Barouni”, *Levante*, 1/7/2005 available at <http://www.levante-emv.com/comunitat-valenciana/2837/oposicion-tunecina-pide-zapatero-asilo-barouni/119525.html>

¹² Eva Wegner, *Islamist Opposition in Authoritarian Regimes. The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco*, Syracuse University Press, 2011.

first contacts were made by diplomats based in the Spanish Embassy in Rabat. The incorporation of Islamist deputies in the Moroccan parliament after the September 1997 legislative elections facilitated the development of contacts both at institutional and civil society levels.¹³ The first institutional contact with Spanish political parties was the initiative of the PJD which, after the 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca, tried to break the links between political Islamism and terrorism that had been invoked by part of the Moroccan political class as a reason for its illegalization. In the face of silence from European and Spanish diplomats, the PJD put together a communication strategy designed to establish ties with political, social and economic actors in Europe and strengthen its image as a political party with democratic credentials.¹⁴ As part of a true communication campaign, a delegation from the PJD visited several European countries, including Spain. In April 2005, a delegation headed by the Secretary General of the party, Saadeddine Othmani, went to Madrid. It was received by the President of the Spanish parliament and held meetings with representatives of the three main Spanish political parties (the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party, the People's Party and the United Left)¹⁵ along with leaders of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers in Spain (ATIME) and the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations (CEOE)¹⁶. The PJD delegation also participated in a ceremony in memory of the victims of the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks.

Two years later, Saadeddine Othmani visited Spain again, a few months before the September 2007 legislative elections. On that occasion, he was invited on par with other Moroccan political parties (the Istiqlal Party and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces) to introduce his group's economic program.¹⁷ The invitation was issued by the Arab House, a public diplomatic institution under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation in collaboration with the Spanish section of the Averroes Committee—a joint Spanish-Moroccan committee created by both countries to promote better mutual understanding¹⁸—and by the National University of Distance Education (UNED), with the participation of Spanish businesspeople.¹⁹

¹³ Some party leaders like Amin Bujubza—a councillor on the Tetouan city council—participated in academic seminars like the one organized in July 1998 by the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid's Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos (TEIM) on *Marruecos 1998, un nuevo rumbo. Economía, sociedad, cultura y política*. Researchers at this center have held periodic meetings with party leaders in Rabat since then.

¹⁴ Amel Boubekur and Samir Amghar, "Islamist Parties in the Maghreb and their links with E.U: Mutual Influences and the Dynamics of Democratisation," *Euromesco Paper*, No. 55, (2006).

¹⁵ Irene Fernández Molina "Le PJD et la politique étrangère de Maroc. Entre l'idéologie et le pragmatisme" *Documentos Cidob*. Serie Mediterráneo No. 7, (2007), pp. 72-74.

¹⁶ Saadeddine Elotmani also spoke at a conference hosted by FRIDE, a Spanish think tank. The transcript can be read at: <http://www.fride.org/evento/82/seminario-con-representantes-del-partido-de-la-justicia-y-el-desarrollo-de-marruecos>

¹⁷ *ABC* 25/08/2007. The video of this conference can be found at: <http://www.casaarabe.es/mediateca/show/215>

¹⁸ Bernabé López García "La sociedad civil y las relaciones con Marruecos: el comité Averroes. ¿un instrumento para el acercamiento entre las sociedades o la retórica de la mediación civil?" in Miguel Hernando de Larramendi and Aurelia Mañé (eds.), *La política exterior española hacia el Magreb. Actores e intereses*, Real Instituto Elcano, Madrid 2009, pp. 195-207.

¹⁹http://www.casaarabe.es/uploads/html/Alertas/alerta_02/0707ConferOthmani-Alerta2.pdf

Conversely, in this same Moroccan context, the extra-legal nature of al-Adl wa al-Ihssane (Justice and Charity)—at times tolerated and other times violently repressed—has influenced Spanish attitudes towards the movement, which refuses to engage in the political game in Morocco and questions the role of the monarchy in the system. Contacts with Nadia Yassine, the daughter of the founder of the Justice and Charity movement, Abdesslam Yassine, and leader of the party's women's wing, go back to the late the 1990s. They were initiated in a discreet fashion by Spanish diplomats working in the embassy in Rabat. Since 2003, when she recovered her passport, Nadia Yassine has visited Spain and other European countries, developing a “transnational opposition mode” that has brought outside attention to the organization (Boubekeur and Amghar 2006: 15). Nadia Yassine's visits generally take place in an academic context that allows her to participate in university exchanges focusing on questions related to Islam and Islamic feminism.²⁰ The contacts she established with an active group of Spanish Muslims, the Junta Islámica de España, led this organization to call for legalizing the Justice and Charity Movement in Morocco in May 2006.²¹ However, because of the movement's illegal status in Morocco, establishing institutional contacts with the Spanish authorities, who are concerned about creating friction with the authorities in Rabat, has been limited. Pressure from the Moroccan Embassy in Spain, for example, was successful in preventing the movement from participating in the “La Mar de Músicas” festival, organized by the Cartagena City Council on the Mediterranean coast, which dedicated its fifteenth festival in 2009 to Morocco.²²

The trips taken by Nadia Yassine and other movement leaders like Mohamed Abbadí, a member of al-Adl wa al-Ihssane's higher council, are also used to maintain contact with the socio-cultural associations created by Moroccans living in Spain. The organizational platform of Justice and Charity created in Spain takes advantage of the presence of the nearly 800,000 Moroccan immigrants in the country alongside a group of associations joined together in the Organización Nacional para el Diálogo y la Participación (ONDA), which has a strong showing in the regions of Murcia, Andalusia and Madrid. Although this organization maintains close ties with al-Adl wa al-Ihssane, it has called for these ties with the Moroccan organization to be formally broken.²³ The Spanish legal system has argued that membership in the Moroccan organization should disqualify Spanish nationality to several organization members who applied for it after residing legally in the country for more than ten years.²⁴ Al-Adl wa al-Ihssane has become increasingly involved in Spanish religious matters, challenging attempts made by the Moroccan authorities to control this sphere. The clash between

²⁰ In 2004, she participated in conferences in Madrid, Granada and San Sebastián. In October 2005, she attended the 1st Conference on Islamic Feminism held in Barcelona. In May 2006, she participated in a conference for the Cátedra Emilio García Gómez at the Universidad de Granada. In November 2008, she took part in a course organized by the Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo in Tenerife.

²¹ <http://www.webislam.com/noticias/46337->

[la-junta-islamica-de-espana-defiende-la-legalizacion-del-partido-islamista-marro.html](http://www.webislam.com/noticias/46337-la-junta-islamica-de-espana-defiende-la-legalizacion-del-partido-islamista-marro.html)

²² <http://www.acsur.org/Las-organizaciones-sociales,671>

²³ Elena Arigita “Al-‘Adl wa-l-Ihsan en España: ¿Un proyecto nacional para un movimiento islámico transnacional?”, *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares*, Vol. LXV, No. 1, pp. 113-136.

²⁴ *Al-Ayam*, May 21, 2007

the two sides has led to disputes over control of the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI), one of the Muslim associations that is part of the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE), the official mediator between the Spanish state and Muslims in the country.²⁵

The Spanish position on Hamas and Hezbollah

The true test for Spanish and European policies appeared when the Hamas Islamist movement won the legislative elections organized by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in January 2006. The degree to which Spanish foreign policy was independent in thought and action and its commitment to democratic processes were put to the test by an electoral process that, despite the results, could not be termed fraudulent and received the backing of international organizations like the Carter Foundation.

The Spanish position evolved from initial acceptance of the results²⁶ to alignment with the positions of the so-called Quartet (the United States, European Union, Russia and the UN), which conditioned recognition of Hamas on its accepting the agreements signed as part of the peace process, renouncing violence and recognizing the State of Israel.²⁷ The victory of Hamas—an organization that, it is important to remember, was included on the European Union’s list of terrorist organisations—was considered by the Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, Miguel Angel Moratinos, as a direct attack against the peace process. But it did not stop there. The boycott of Hamas interfered with official aid for development in the Palestinian territories. Spain cut off relations with the ministries controlled by Hamas and took steps to ensure that any affected projects would henceforth be the concern of the office of President Mahmoud Abbas.

The Spanish position regarding Hezbollah has been different. Facing the boycott of Hamas, the Spanish government opted for a strategy of dialogue with the Hezbollah Islamist movement, which has given voice to part of the Shiite religious community in the Lebanese parliament since 1992. The Spanish government opposed including Hezbollah on the European Union’s list of terrorist organizations. It has also not hesitated to maintain direct contact with the movement’s leaders. During his tour of the Middle East in August 2007, Minister Moratinos met with Hezbollah’s number two leader, Naim Qassem.²⁸ Various factors explain Spain’s inclusive position toward Hezbollah (Tomé 2011:232-233). The fact that Hezbollah is not included on the EU’s list of terrorist

²⁵ “Rabat pierde su principal instrumento de control de la inmigración marroquí,” *El País*, January 5, 2012

²⁶ Minister for Foreign Affairs Miguel Ángel Moratinos declared in a statement to the Spanish parliament that the “elections were free, with great participation, transparency and every democratic safeguard”, concluding that “the results must be respected”. *Boletín Oficial del Congreso de los Diputados* No. 147, August 2, 2006.

²⁷ Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvariño “España ante el Gobierno de Hamas”, *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, No. 79-80, pp. 189-206

²⁸ This position was criticized by the Spanish People’s Party in the words of Gustavo de Aristegui, the spokesperson for parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission, who called it “an immense mistake that is going to take its toll on the credibility of the EU as a whole and on Spain in particular.”

http://www.webislam.com/noticias/49958-el_pp_critica_la_reunion_de_moratinos_con_un_dirigente_de_hezbollah.html

organizations makes it possible to argue that there is a need to speak with all the actors to justify dialogue with an organization which stresses its political and representative character. Maintaining dialogue also fulfils the need to ensure the security of the contingent of 1,100 Spanish soldiers in Lebanon since September 2006—Spanish troops that form part of the United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL II) are deployed in the southern part of the country in a Shiite majority region controlled by Hezbollah.²⁹

The Relationship with Political Islam, a Marginal but Real Debate

The issue of a relationship and dialogue with Islamist movements was not a subject of political debate in Spain until the 9/11 terrorist attacks. During the 1990s, the principal political parties' view was determined largely by the evolution of the Algerian civil conflict. During this period, the position of the Socialist Party (PSOE), which was in power between 1982 and 1996, and the People's Party, in power between 1996 and 2004, converged, both perceiving the emergence of Islamism as a source of risk and a threat. In 1992, the Cánovas del Castillo Foundation, which has ties to the People's Party, organized a seminar on "Islamic Fundamentalism" featuring the participation of future Prime Minister José María Aznar.³⁰ Years later, the electoral program that the People's Party ran and won on in 1996 stressed the course of "recommending that simplistic formulas of a generalized rejection of these movements be eschewed and imaginative channels for relationships and dialogue be found with its moderate manifestations."³¹

Spain's transformation into a country of immigration during those years and the acceptance of neoconservative thought, which argued a link between jihadist terrorism and Islam after the 9/11 attacks, by groups like the People's Party transformed the terms of the debate. The positions of the People's Party in this respect—although not monolithic—tended to be ideologized³² (Fernández Molina 2009: pp.56-59). The Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis (FAES), a People's Party think tank created by Prime Minister Aznar, played an active role in accepting neoconservative ideas from the United States and maintaining positions that were critical of Islamism.³³ However, the People's Party contains other leaders like Gustavo de Aristegui, a diplomat and spokesman for the

²⁹ Amaia Goenaga Sánchez "El compromiso español en Líbano: ¿un nuevo papel para España en Oriente Próximo?, *Revista Cidob d'Afers Internacionals*, No. 79-80, pp. 227-246.

³⁰ *El Fundamentalismo islámico*, Fundación Cánovas del Castillo, Madrid 1992.

³¹ People's Party, *Con la nueva mayoría. Programa electoral*, Madrid 1996, p.. 235.

³² In a text dealing with Spanish-Israeli relations, Florentino Portero, an analyst at the Strategic Studies Group (GEES), asserted that "the People's Party, from its experience in the fight against ETA, rejects any compromise with extremist groups and governments [...] Islamists do not arouse sympathy in our left, however anti-American they may be, and the concern that they arouse has not resulted in a firm position. Quite to the contrary, in the face of the threat posed by Iranian Ayatollahs or Palestinian Islamists, they defend the option of searching for new channels of understanding." "Las relaciones hispano-israelíes," *Araucaria Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía, Política y Humanidades*, Year 10, No. 19, 2008, http://institucional.us.es/araucaria/nro19/monogr19_6.htm

³³ The FAES dedicated one of the sessions in the course "The Tyranny of the Politically Correct" held in July 2008 to analyzing the threat of political Islamism.

http://www.fundacionfaes.org/es/ Mesa_redonda_sobre_la_amenaza_del_islamismo_politico

Spanish parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission who is very knowledgeable about the Arab world. While establishing a link between ideology and terrorism (Aristegui 2000: p. 185), he has distanced himself from the thesis argued by some FAES researchers who speculate about "the impending establishment of a Caliphate in Europe" (Bardají 2006: p. 185). The branch of the People's Party represented by de Aristegui has maintained more nuanced positions. While presuming a more or less direct tie between Islamism, understood as a "totalitarian ideology," and terrorist acts, they have admitted that some forms of "political Islam," such as those represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, are not necessarily illegitimate (Aristegui 2003: p. 117).

For its part, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, while rejecting the ideologized positions of the neoconservatives, has not succeeded in elaborating a clear position regarding dialogue and political cooperation with moderate Islamist movements (as has been the case with a large part of the European left) (Mathieson and Youngs 2006: pp. 13,19). Thus, although some socialist representatives have suggested the advisability of "supporting forms of moderate Islamism that have important social support" (Aburto 2008: p.25), they have not taken any steps in this direction. The links established through the Socialist International Mediterranean Committee with parties from the same political family (the Algerian Socialist Forces Front and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces in Morocco), for example, have not helped to add nuance to the negative view of Islamist parties in general. Not included among them, however, is the Turkish Justice and Development Party (JDP), which is believed to share "broad similarities" and whose plan of action is seen as "progressive in many aspects" (Fernández Molina 2009: p.55).

Tools and Opportunities for Interaction with Political Islam

The lack of any clear policy toward Islamist movements has not impeded contacts and opportunities for interaction and dialogue, which have intensified over the last decade. In this process, the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks, resulting in 191 fatalities in Madrid, acted as a salutary lesson, leading the Spanish authorities to pay more attention to Islam, Islamism and jihadist terrorism. The subsequent trial showed that many Moroccan immigrants participated in the attacks and, thus, intensified concerns about radicalization processes among young Muslims and the role that transnational Muslim movements might be playing in this process.

The socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, which won the elections held three days after the attacks, pushed through a battery of diplomatic and institutional initiatives designed to change the course of Prime Minister Aznar's government, which had supported the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. In September 2004, Zapatero officially argued for the creation of an "Alliance of Civilisations" between the western world and the Arab-Muslim world before the General Assembly of the United Nations (Barreñada 2006:pp. 99-104). This diplomatic initiative, which was inspired by the earlier proposal by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami for a "Dialogue of Civilisations," was presented as a soft power tool with which to combat international terrorism. The initiative was approved by the United Nations in 2007, and supported by 107 states and 20 international

organizations.³⁴ Zapatero's government was able to get Turkey—a country whose candidacy to join the European Union has been supported by all Spanish governments, regardless of their political stripe—to co-sponsor the initiative. The endorsement of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan³⁵ and his Justice and Development Party (JDP), which while defined as a conservative democratic party in its statutes,³⁶ is seen in Europe as a moderate Islamist party (Cajal 2011), was intended to give greater credibility to the initiative. In an interview with CNN, Prime Minister Zapatero described it as a “grand alliance with moderate Islam to isolate violent members.”³⁷ In January 2008 in Madrid, the Spanish government hosted the first Forum for the Alliance of Civilisations and drafted two National Plans for the Alliance of Civilisations, designed to instill the initiative's principles in Spain.³⁸

The U.N. Alliance of Civilizations, along with the U.K. based group Forward Thinking,³⁹ sponsored The Nyon Process,⁴⁰ launched in Switzerland in 2008 as a forum for informal direct dialogue with Muslim activists. With the support of Switzerland, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, this initiative has provided a platform for discreet dialogue between western political leaders, policy advisors and activists. The third meeting was held in Madrid in March 2009 and was hosted by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Domestically, concerns about the eventual radicalization of Spanish Islam have not only led to the fortification of police and security resources allocated to monitor the issue, but have also resulted in other initiatives aimed at strengthening the public presence of Muslims through the development of their own cultural and social action programs. In October 2004, the Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence⁴¹ was created. Part of the Ministry of Justice, the foundation's goals are to promote religious freedom through cooperation with minority religions, especially those that are specifically recognized by the Spanish state: Islam, Protestantism and Judaism. Although its purview is broader in scope, the foundation was originally founded as an international response to the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks. The foundation offers subsidies to build up the bodies responsible for social dialogue within each of the religions that have cooperation agreements with the Spanish state. It also facilitates financing for cultural, educational and social integration projects proposed by religious associations. By following the foundation's subventions and its support for academic research, it has yielded a snapshot of Islam in Spain,⁴² its organization and operation and the role played by movements like Tablighi Jamaat, in the case of Pakistan, and the Moroccan al-Adl wa al-Ihssane.

³⁴ <http://www.unaoc.org/>

³⁵ José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Recep Tayyip Erdogan “Forjando una alianza de civilizaciones”, *El País*, November 13, 2006.

³⁶ The JDP was included as an observer for the European People's Party.

³⁷ “Zapatero aboga por una 'gran alianza' con el islamismo moderado”, *El Mundo*. September 23, 2009.

³⁸ <http://www.pnac.gob.es/>

³⁹ <http://www.forwardthinking.org>

⁴⁰ http://nyonprocess.org/?page_id=132

⁴¹ <http://www.pluralismoyconvivencia.es/>

⁴² The Foundation for Pluralism and Coexistence created the *Observatory for Religious Pluralism* in Spain <http://www.observatorioreligion.es/>

For its part, the Ministry of Justice Directorate General for Religious Affairs—currently “the committee on work with religious structures”—has been actively participating by creating networks and sharing experiences with ministries in other European countries responsible for dialogue with Muslim organizations in different countries. The concern about Islam and political Islamism in the Spanish administration is also reflected in the organization of specific educational courses on Islam aimed at civil servants. Organized since 2006 by the Spanish Diplomatic School, these courses have been co-sponsored with the Arab House since 2009, a public diplomatic institution formed in 2006 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. These courses look at the reality and evolution of Islam in its ideological and political aspects, inviting active members from Muslim associations as speakers. In 2010, for example, Rachid Boutarbuch, the president of the Spanish League of Imams and driving force behind the establishment of the al-Adl wa-l-Ihssane movement in Spain, was a participant.⁴³

In 2004, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a working group under the auspices of its analysis and outlook cabinet that led to the publication of an internal report in March 2005 entitled “Islam and Politics in Europe.” In October 2006, an ambassador-at-large was appointed to handle relations with Muslim organizations and communities abroad for the first time.⁴⁴ Affiliated with the Directorate General of Political Affairs, Middle East and North Africa Division, this ambassador monitors and dialogues with Muslims in Europe and Arab countries with a very broad mandate (in contrast to the limited material resources set aside for the role). This ambassador has also participated in interfaith dialogue forums such as those advanced by Qatar and The Nyon Process. Spain also used interfaith dialogues during its presidency of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In that year, 2007, the city of Cordoba hosted an International Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, presented by the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE.

The Spanish government has also participated—though keeping a low profile—in other discreet and informal initiatives for dialogue with leaders of moderate Islamist movements promoted by independent mediation institutions and think tanks. Since 2010, Spanish diplomats have participated in meetings organized in Geneva by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The level of Spanish engagement has been lower than that of other countries like Norway, Germany, France, Canada and Switzerland, who have been represented at these forums by Director Generals, while Spain’s representative is the ambassador-at-large for Mediterranean affairs.

⁴³ http://nyonprocess.org/?page_id=132

<http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Ministerio/EscuelaDiplomatica/Cursosobrer+elacionesinternacionales/Documents/Programa%20Islam%202010.pdf>

⁴⁴ The position was filled by José María Ferré between 2006 and 2010, by Miguel Benzo between 2010 and 2011 and by Ignacio Rupérez since December 2011.

Spain and Islamist Movements after the Arab Spring

The uprisings that began in Tunisia in December 2010 took Spanish diplomacy by surprise and called into question the paradigm of authoritarian stability on which Spanish and European policy toward the Mediterranean had rested (Echagué 2011). The need to respond to the unexpected disturbances that brought down the leaders of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen was complicated by a new dilemma related to the advances in the democratization processes underway by Islamist movements. Although the uprisings were not led by these movements and the demands that drove them were not associated with an Islamist ideology, Islamist parties secured a majority in the elections held in Tunisia (October 2011), Morocco (November 2011) and Egypt (November 2011 – March 2012).

In an article published in December 2011, the then Socialist Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez argued that it was necessary to “give a vote of confidence to the new political forces when they proclaim their commitment to democracy.” For the minister, the uprisings ushered in “the end of Arab-Muslim particularism in terms of the supposed incompatibility between Islam and democracy and Islam and human rights.”⁴⁵ Bernardino León, General-Secretary of the Presidency of the Spanish Government between 2008 and 2011 and EU special envoy to the southern Mediterranean since 2011, argued a similar line. The Spanish diplomat stated that “democracy must not generate fear; it will always be the right choice,” at the same time defending how important it is for “Islamist parties to experience a government that is good and moderate.”⁴⁶ This reassuring viewpoint was also shared by former Minister for Foreign Affairs Moratinos, who emphasized that “moderate political Islamism should not be frightening [...] as long as it creates the right conditions to guarantee public freedom and the state of law.”⁴⁷

When the People’s Party came into power in December 2011, it had not substantially changed its position. Moderate Islamist movements are accepted as political players in their capacity as actors in the transition process. Gonzalo de Benito, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, asserted that “political Islamism was being integrated naturally and reasonably into the power structures in transition countries,” but he advised “not to become obsessed about the rise of this political choice, but to pay more attention to the economic development in those countries to prevent frustration.” The lack of development and opportunity are considered “the breeding ground” where radical Islamist groups can gain strength. At both bilateral and multilateral levels, Spanish diplomacy defends financial assistance to these countries to prevent the growth of Salafi movements that “feed

⁴⁵ Trinidad Jiménez, “La “primavera árabe”: una visión personal”, *El País*, December 16, 2011.

⁴⁶ Bernardino León: “Es importante que los islamistas pasen por la experiencia del gobierno.” November 28, 2011 <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20111028/bernardino-leon-importante-islamistas-pasen-experiencia-gobierno/471628.shtml>

⁴⁷ “Moratinos afirma que “no nos debe asustar el islamismo político moderado”, Agencia EFE November 29, 2011 <http://www.abc.es/agencias/noticia.asp?noticia=980959>

on populations lacking material hope.”⁴⁸ During his appearance before the parliament’s Foreign Affairs Commission to present his ministry’s general course of action, Minister José Manuel García Margallo stated, “we must make sure that the Arab Spring results in a summer of freedom and under no circumstances in a fundamentalist winter.”⁴⁹ This view could not hide the fact that the Spanish government would prefer other options. When the Islamist Green Alliance coalition came in third in the legislative elections held in Algeria in May 2012, the news was received with relief by the minister, who after learning the election results, declared at a press conference, “Thank God, the Islamists did not win in Algeria.”⁵⁰

This post-revolutionary scenario—a far cry from the image constructed in Europe of the Arab Spring as a group of popular revolutions carried out by young liberals taking advantage of new technologies—has increased concerns about the potential impact that the rise of Islamism might have on human rights, freedom of conscience and, secondarily but always present, the status of women. These questions were presented in an opinion piece published by the Spanish Ambassador to Egypt who, despite emphasizing that the road to democratization would not be easy, noted the example of other countries like Turkey and Indonesia that “have shown that cultural synthesis is the approach with the greatest potential to find viable formulas for modernisation.”⁵¹ The cautious, reassuring positions taken by Spanish politicians and diplomats have been questioned by some intellectuals with connections to the right who have expressed their mistrust in the face of the sudden conversion of the Muslim Brotherhood into moderate Islamists awaiting the favourable changes to come when they exercise power.⁵²

Spain’s official position regarding this dynamic of change in the Arab world is to support the political and economic transitions that are underway, because its national security depends on the stability and prosperity of its southern Mediterranean neighbours. The role that Islamist movements are playing in the transition processes and the uprisings (e.g. in Libya and Syria) has forced the

⁴⁸ “Margallo alerta del avance del islamismo radicar en Túnez si la UE no aporta ayudas económicas” 27/03/2012. In March 2011, the Spanish government pledged a €300,000,000 line of credit and told the European Union that the financial perspectives for 2014-2020 include a line of assistance to countries starting the transition.

⁴⁹ “Comparecencia del señor ministro de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación (García-Margallo Marfil), para informar sobre Las líneas generales de la política de su departamento” *Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados*, No. 42, p. 7.

⁵⁰ “Margallo dice que “gracias a Dios”, los islamistas no han ganado en Argelia,” *Europa Press*, May 14, 2012.

⁵¹ Fidel Sendagorta, “Al Qaeda pierde, los Hermanos ganan,” *ABC*, January 31, 2012

⁵² In this respect, Serafin Fanjul, a specialist in Arabic literature writes: Will the “moderates,” whose party is called the freedom party, legislate in favour of real freedom for women, even regarding marriage? Will they guarantee freedom of worship, including proselytism and the calling of others infidels, or at least stop burning churches? Will they lift the suffocating pressure on society regarding customs, clothing, rites, the omnipresence of the Quran everywhere?” Serafin Fanjul “Gana el Islam, pierden los árabes,” *ABC* January 3, 2012. The same author concluded another of her opinion columns stating, “while goo-goo [good government] and scatterbrained types insist—not many now, it must be said—on praising the Arab Spring, rampant Islamism is gaining ground and every step they take means more slashing of human rights. Watch out.” “Una firma por la Manouba,” *ABC*, May 18, 2012.

Spanish authorities to react. Their status as inevitable actors in the transition processes mean that they must search for stable and official channels for dialogue.⁵³ The Arab Spring has spurred establishing of relations with the Tunisian al-Nahda party and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and intensified the already existing links with groups like the Moroccan PJD. Spanish embassies have increased their contacts with a dynamic Islamist field that is increasingly plural, but also with liberal elites who rose to responsible positions after the disturbances and with whom there was almost no contact before (Majdoubi 2012: pp. 267-268). In Tunisia, Spanish Ambassador Antonio Cosano reached out to Rachid Ghannouchi, the leader of al-Nahda, for the first time after he returned from his exile in London in January 2011. In Egypt, the Spanish ambassador also formalized contact with the Muslim Brotherhood, which had been very limited. In March 2011, Spanish Ambassador Fidel Sendagorta made his first visit to the Muslim Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo. Since then, contacts have intensified with the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), the political wing of the Brotherhood and with the businessmen's lobby with connections to the organization, the Egyptian Development Business Association (EBDA).⁵⁴ Contacts in Egypt have also been made with other Islamist groups like al-Wasat and al-Tayyar al-Masry and the Salafi al-Nour party although in the last case, it is a counsellor and not the ambassador who is maintaining contact. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to participate in dialogue and debate forums sponsored by The Nyon Process, which, thanks to the new context, have been able to take place in southern Mediterranean countries like Tunisia.

The normalization of contacts with Islamist movements carried out from embassies has been accompanied by establishing relations in the political arena. The Spanish authorities are presenting the experience of the Spanish transition—and its inclusive approach towards all the political parties in the country that respected political norms—as a model for the processes of change in the Arab world. Prime Minister Zapatero in his visit to Tunisia in early March 2011—the first made by a European leader after President Ben Ali was overthrown—did just that. Socialist Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez also invoked the Spanish transition model during a meeting with representatives of the 25 January Youth Coalition, a heterogeneous conglomerate including members from the Muslim Brotherhood, during her visit to Egypt.⁵⁵ Spanish political representatives

⁵³ In July 2011, the Spanish government initiated a permanent dialogue with the Syrian opposition, after exhausting possible channels of dialogue with Bashar Al-Assad's regime and trying to mediate in the search for a peaceful solution to the uprisings. See "Bernardino León viaja a Damasco para proponer una conferencia en Madrid", *El País* July 15, 2011. In November 2011, Minister for Foreign Affairs Trinidad Jiménez received, for the first time, a delegation of six members of the Syrian National Council in Madrid, led by its spokesperson Ahmad Ramadan, which included two members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The delegation was also received by Jorge Moragas, the head of international relations for the People's Party. Miguel González "Jiménez recibe por vez primera a la oposición al régimen sirio", *El País* November 24, 2011.

⁵⁴ "Empresas españolas se reúnen con 'lobby' egipcio ligado a Hermanos Musulmanes", *ABC*, April 25, 2012. To watch the speech by the Spanish Ambassador during his visit to the EBDA: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1iN7z6WYpA&feature=player_embedded

⁵⁵ "Jiménez dice que España "cumplirá sus obligaciones" ante una intervención en Libia" *El País* March 13, 2011

made their first contact with leaders of the Islamist movements in May 2011 by a delegation of parliamentarians visiting Egypt. The Spanish delegation⁵⁶ met with political actors from different affiliations including Saad el Katatni a leader of the Justice and Liberty Party. José Antonio Durán i Lleida, the president of the Spanish delegation and the parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission noted that "the Muslim Brotherhood is part of Egyptian society and **what [?]** a part of the population says cannot be ignored."⁵⁷ His view of the Salafi groups was more critical, as he called them a "mortal danger for democracy." The preferences of the Spanish delegation inclined toward the secular parties, which they encouraged to unite and not run separately in the elections.⁵⁸

Various think tanks and action tanks specializing in international relations, and partly financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, have also taken part in creating opportunities for dialogue with Islamist movements. One of the most active in terms of searching for channels for dialogue with Arab civil society, including Islamist movements, is the Toledo International Centre for Peace (CITpax).⁵⁹ Members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (Toledo, 2006) and Hezbollah leaders (Toledo 2007) have participated in seminars held behind closed doors at the centre. CITpax has also taken part in informal meetings with representatives of Islamist movements organized in Geneva by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. In collaboration with this institution, CITpax organized a closed-door seminar in Madrid in July 2011 with leaders of al-Nahda, the PJD and the FJP, a few months before the first post-Arab Spring elections were held in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt. The place chosen for the meeting, the Centre for Political and Constitutional Studies, was symbolic of the Spanish transition.

The election results and the forming of coalition governments headed by Islamist leaders in Tunisia and Morocco after the electoral victories of al-Nahda (October 2011) and the PJD (November 2011) have institutionalized and normalized contacts with internationally accepted leaders invited to participate in international forums such as the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The People's Party, which won the elections one week before the Davos meeting, issued a press release in November 2011 congratulating the PJD on its democratic victory and declaring their confidence that "their political and democratic commitment will benefit the general interest of the Moroccan people and also foster good bilateral relations."⁶⁰ Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy officially met with Secretary-General of the PJD and new Moroccan Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane during his first visit abroad, which was to Morocco. In February 2012, Saadeddine Othmani visited Spain in his capacity as Minister for Foreign Affairs and also met with members of the government and the King of Spain. That same month, President Artur Mas of the Generalitat of Catalonia, the region with highest number of Moroccan immigrants in Spain, met with Benkirane

⁵⁶ The delegation was made up of deputies from the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the People's Party, the Catalan nationalist group *Convergència i Unió* and the Basque Nationalist Party.

⁵⁷ "Duran i Lleida dice que Hermanos Musulmanes son parte sociedad egipcia", *ABC*, *May 31*, 2011.

⁵⁸ "Delegación española insta a formar coalición laica frente Hermanos Musulmanes," *ABC* 1/6/2011.

⁵⁹ <http://www.toledopax.org/>

⁶⁰ http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/pp-felicita-justicia-desarrollo-por-su-victoria-democratica-electoral_5877.html

during his visit to Morocco accompanied by a delegation of Catalan businesspeople. In March, José Antonio Duran i Lleida met with Saadeddine Othmani in Rabat, coinciding with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean meeting held in that city. In May 2012, the Moroccan Prime Minister made an official visit to Spain where he met with the President of the Government, the President of the Senate and the King and announced a conference on “democratic change in Morocco after the approval of the new constitution” in Barcelona at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMED) headquarters.⁶¹ The normalization of relations has also taken place with the al-Nahda party, which has presided over the coalition government formed in Tunisia since the elections to the National Constituent Assembly held in October 2011.⁶² During his visit to Tunisia in March 2012, Spanish Minister for Foreign Affairs García Margallo met with Tunisian Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali and his counterpart in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Rafik Ben Abdessalam. During the visit, they agreed to hold a meeting between Tunisian and Spanish parliamentarians organized by the Fundación Carolina, allowing the foundation to extend its activities towards the Arab world. García Margallo reiterated Spain’s commitment to ensuring that the EU gives preferential treatment to Tunisia with the aim of consolidating “a democratic regime, with religious freedom, that can show neighbouring countries the path to follow to deepen relations with Europe.”⁶³

⁶¹ In July 2012, the IEMED organized a seminar on “Economic Agendas of Islamic Actors” with the participation of political and business leaders with connections to Turkey’s al-Nahda, PJD, FJP and JDP parties. <http://www.iemed.org/dossiers/dossiers-iemed/desenvolupament-socioeconomic/economic-agendas-of-islamic-actors/programme#top>

⁶² The coalition government is made up of members from the Congress for the Republic, led by Moncef Marzouki who is also President of the Republic, and by the Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (FDTL or Ettakatol) led by Mustapha Ben Jaafar, who became President of the National Constituent Assembly.

⁶³<http://www.laverdad.es/murcia/v/20120327/espana/principes-viajaran-tunez-para-20120327.html>