

Inner Tensions vs. Outer Change: Political Agency Impact on Cohesion Funds Implementation in Spain in the Context of the Maastricht Treaty

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Introduction: The 1992 momentum

This article focuses on the power of compellingly diffused political ideas as catalyst agents and policy-making triggers for actual ‘implementation’. More particularly, it delves into EU cohesion policy in the case of Spain from the angle of the history of ideas, mapping feasibility factors to clarify the impact of underlying concepts as a coherent-bound sustainability net within the multidimensional European integration process.

The context of change of the end of the Cold War had a significant impact in the way the crucial EC cohesion funds were debated and implemented in Spain.¹ However, the external agency of such political changes was deeply intertwined with a period marked by inner tensions challenging the post-transitional political spectrum.² This article aims to correlate both factors and to assess how they particularly influenced the way the implementation of cohesion funds was designed and effectively applied during a multilevel game changing turning point in the European integration process: the Maastricht Treaty.

Another significant factor in this period was how the reunification of Germany – which involved the appropriation of cohesion funds to harmonise living standards in the two Germanys – was perceived and presented in relation to these funds in Spain.³ For instance, in 1991, right before the meeting in Maastricht of the Heads of state or government of the Twelve, the Spanish government projected an increasing political concern over the fact that the Spanish cabinet’s proposals in this realm had not been accepted in the preparatory negotiations and anticipated a pessimistic view with regard to the conclusion of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

The Spanish government then became one of the staunchest champions of the TEU and the concepts of economic and social cohesion in this period. Indeed, Felipe González would actively back the Delors II package, which proposed increasing the Community budget between 1993 and 1997, doubling the structural funds and es-

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1. SEUE [Secretaría de Estado para la Unión Europea], Box 1016.2.2, La cohesión económica y social en el Acta Única Europea, 04.1989.
 2. E.M. BAKLANOFF, *La transformación económica de España y Portugal*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1980.
 3. SEUE, EP Resolution on the implications of German unification for the EC, OJEC, N.C 2331, 17.09.1990.

establishing a new cohesion fund which would increase appropriations to Spain. The situation was a good illustration of the twofold nature of the commitment of González's government to the general European interest and the national interest. During the Lisbon European Council of June 1992, the United Kingdom vetoed the increase in the Community budget; the response of the Spanish government was to threaten to block the enlargement scheduled for 1995, a clear example of the government defending the national interest despite its deep-rooted pro-European attitude. The Edinburgh European Council consolidated the enlargement process and guaranteed the establishment of the cohesion fund and a doubling of the structural funds, meaning that Spain was in a position to become a contributor to the Community budget in 1999, although it should be noted that the situation in 1992, when unemployment stood at 20%, made it extremely difficult to anticipate Spain being able to comply with the convergence criteria.⁴

This article will very much concentrate in the 1992 momentum.⁵ It will do that not only by showing Spanish modalities of directly striving to obtain a material gain after accession, but also by studying key Spanish political actors seeding the political ground with concepts which would aspire to generate a favourable and receptive context to make tangible benefits eventually possible and, above all, hopefully sustainable.⁶

However, it must be emphasised that, seen in hindsight as part of a critical historical analysis, it is imperative to examine the triggers of a persistent Spanish systemic fragility based on the neglected unfolding of the potentialities offered by EU cohesion policy via unsustainable innovation model choices and sharpened gaps in the national institutional system.⁷

Inner and outer factors will be equally present in all the following sections, with the objective of shedding light on precise ambivalences, dilemmas, choices, and their vast array of still lingering consequences.

The following sections will stress all aspects related to a willingness to bend already running patterns and vectors by attracting a conducive milieu through the diffusion of implementation enabling concepts of a particular compelling force. Among them, socioeconomic cohesion and a precise notion of 'citizenship' stand chiefly as pillars of wider influence and generation of theoretically binding commitment. This binding commitment towards compelling arguments in favour of supporting post-accession Spain with ample funding resources on behalf of the Community is first

4. DSS [Diario de Sesiones del Senado], Efectos para España de los nuevos Fondos de Cohesión, N. 215, 26.10.1992, pp.1-19.

5. SEUE, Box 1016.2.1, Estudio preliminar del TEU, Civitas, Madrid, 1992, pp.XIX-XXIX; SEUE, Box 1016.2.1, Boletín diario 'Europa Información Internacional', N.2966, 16.10.1992, p.9.

6. SEUE, Box 1016.1 III Esp-1, Negociaciones y contenido del trabajo y del Acta de Adhesión de España a la CE, 12.06.1985; DSS, Efectos para España de los nuevos Fondos de Cohesión, N.205, 26.10.1992.

7. N.N. TALEB, *Antifragile: Things that gain from Disorder*, Penguin, London, 2013; F. MORATA, *La europeización de la crisis financiera en España*, in: C. BLANCO SÍO-LÓPEZ (co-editor), *Converging Pathways: Spain and the European Integration Process*, PIE Peter Lang, Brussels, 2013, pp. 219-245.

examined under the light of inner tensions, to be completed with the challenges of key contextual outer changes. The analysis of these developments – as well as their discursive reflections and oblique strategies – will then be undertaken from the angle of traditional interpretations on the impact of the European integration process on Spain's modernisation and institutional consolidation.⁸ Last but not least, these traditional 'profitability-oriented success story' perspectives will be contrasted with new critiques from the most contemporary experience of the multilevel crisis from 2008, in search of neglected silent triggers capable to explain the tenacious pervasiveness of Spain's seemingly systemic socioeconomic fragility.

1. Single European Act Precursor Discussions and Political Agency Impact

Going back to the accession period, in 1986, in the European Single Act (SEA), the cohesion principle was translated into a legal text, developing the Economic and Social Cohesion Policy. In the TEU, this policy was later enhanced by means of a protocol. Subsequently, the Structural Funds for the period 1993-1997 were strengthened and a new Cohesion Fund was created. Spain could benefit from a significant part of this fund. In addition, the reform proposed by the European Commission in Community finances for 1993-1997 also benefited Spain's impact from these funds.⁹

In this initial period, it is important to note that the political discourse was used as a key meeting point and as a way of learning to speak the same language in search for a sustainability of expected post-accession material benefits.¹⁰ From a complementary perspective, regional policy became one of the strongest pillars of the principle of Community social cohesion, setting not only the disappearance of regional disparities, but also the creation of economic, social and cultural rights in particularly deprived regions, which would allow an effective convergence of their living standards with those of more developed regions.¹¹

In this context, as Carlos Bru Purón- the former President of the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement – indicated, the SEA was the great lever of European integration. He also significantly alludes to the relevant push by González, then Prime Minister of Spain, for the inclusion of the concept of socioeconomic cohesion in the TEU and for the search for the necessary balance between acknowl-

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8. HAEU [Historical Archives of the European Union], Box AS-257, Colloque organisé par la revue *Réalités européennes du présent* sur le thème: 'L'Espagne nouvelle face à l'Europe', 1975.
 9. SEUE, Box 1016.2.2, La cohesión económica y social en la unión política, económica y monetaria: el punto de vista español, 1996.
 10. SEUE, Box 1016.1 III Esp-1 (20-14.101), Perspectivas de la economía española en el contexto de la CE, 05.1986.
 11. A. FERNÁNDEZ TABALES, B. PEDREGAL MATEOS, J. RODRÍGUEZ MATEOS (et al.), *El concepto de cohesión territorial. Escalas de aplicación, sistemas de medición y políticas derivadas*, in: *Boletín de la Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles*, 50(2009), pp.157-172.

edgement and commitment regarding the implementation of structural and cohesion funds in Spain:

“The rise from 62.5% of GDP to just over 92 with respect to the European per capita GDP that we have today is something that’s actually due to the Structural Funds, but it’s also due to our work. It’s due in particular to Felipe González’s idea of including cohesion in the Single European Act, but also, in particular, in the Maastricht Treaty”.¹²

One illustrative example on the indicated political agency conceptual seeding impact could be found in the arguments defended by González in the midst of the SEU implementation process.¹³ He then contended that the historical tempo at which the idea of Europe was developing was too slow to give results in good time. Hence, he conceptualised the notion of ‘implementation’ in terms of future vision beyond contextual needs, imbued with a ‘Community shared-responsibility-burden’ implication. This argument proved to be an overarching ‘rhetorical entrapment’, extrapolating, *avant-la-lettre*, the term later used by Frank Schimmelfennig to explain the fixing ties of a ‘moral obligation’ argument towards Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) to justify EU’s eastward enlargement policy.¹⁴ In this case, the ‘rhetorical entrapment’ that González was trying to sediment was based on subsequent strategic actions and sustaining narratives solidly engineering the conditions for a sustainable benefit from the indicated cohesion funds.

González advocated a momentum shift, discursively focusing on a critical rethinking of institutional schemes, structural shortcomings and political lacks.¹⁵ In his eyes, these elements were directly related to less development in Spain, in comparison with other EC member states. Against this backdrop, the opening of the Spanish political frontiers was seen as a consistent response in search for a democratically stable and economically developed Spain, which could also bring a positive impact to its neighbours.¹⁶ González presented this idea as the real foundation for Spain’s wish to join the Communities.¹⁷

In his opinion, the critical context of this particular period was featured by a double crisis of supranationality and intranationality. In this sense, 1992 appears as the essential reference date, potentially enhanced by the compelling force of cohesion elements and by the interrelated structural vehicles of the Schengen Area four freedoms. In this respect, González criticised those actors emphasising the existence of an actual

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12. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Carlos María Bru Purón, former President of the Spanish Federal Council of the European Movement, San Sebastián de los Reyes, 13.01.2010.
 13. HAEU, Box CPPE-1088, Élections européennes, Espagne, parti socialiste, majorité absolue, 06.1987.
 14. F. SCHIMMELFENNIG, *The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action, and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, in: *International Organization*, 1(2001), pp.47-80.
 15. F. GONZÁLEZ MÁRQUEZ, *Europe, from the Community of twelve to European Union: The objective for 1992. EUI Jean Monnet Lecture 1987*, Florence, EUI, 1987, p.12.
 16. SEUE, Box 1016.1 III Esp-1 (11.180), R.S. Taylor, Spanish membership of the EEC will affect Spanish and non-Spanish corporations alike: the impact on 13 key sectors, EVAF 16 Conference, Madrid, 19.05.1981.
 17. F. GONZÁLEZ MÁRQUEZ, op.cit.,pp.13 sqq.

common European space – except for the free movement of goods, capital or services – because that vision excluded the notion of a common space for European citizens, thus rejecting the idea of a ‘citizens’ Europe’. In this context, González relevantly presented the socioeconomic cohesion argument as an implementation trigger rationale:

“Economic and social cohesion is not merely the compensation given to the less favoured for accepting advances in the internal market. It is something more. Looked at from the viewpoint of the internal market, it is the price of achieving it”.¹⁸

He also acknowledged that some regions in Europe could hardly put up with the cost. As a result, the development of the resources of the internal market within a Europe with very marked regional imbalances in income, competitiveness etc., logically meant the triumph of the stronger over the weaker. Very importantly, the so-called ‘convergence’ element also started to emerge then as a key factor in many discussed considerations for a feasible and ‘common’ – and commonly coordinated – implementation in this context. One of the most powerful theoretical arguments in this realm was that cohesion did not act solely in terms of solidarity among the citizens and regions of Europe: It also meant the need for rigour by each member state and for an effort at convergence in economic policy. As González also stated,

“it would not be reasonable for countries with no budget discipline or lax inflation policies to feel entitled to have the others pay the costs of their wrong approaches”.¹⁹

At this time, a main issue of concern was the possibility that the Community could fail to understand the intimate relationship between internal market and economic and social cohesion, which, within his narrative, could bring about Europe’s disintegration. Indeed, cohesion and deeper integration were effectively argued as a feedback cycle and not as a contradiction in terms. Thus, they were presented as mutually fuelling elements, in the same manner as the key interdependent European integration binary systems of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, and widening and deepening.

2. Inner tensions amid internal market counteractions

In order to understand the arguments and choices related to the Community’s cohesion policy funding implementation in the case of Spain it is necessary to deepen our view of the inner tensions affecting this member state during the studied period.

The TEU, which was signed on 7 February 1992, marked a very influential turning point in Spain’s assimilation and integration of the process of Europeanisation. This process took place during a three-year period spanning from 1993 to 1996 and was

18. Ibid., p.17.

19. Ibid., p.18.

characterised by rising domestic political tensions which would ultimately result in a change of government in 1996, when the People's Party (PP) acceded to power.

Strategically, at the beginning of the nineties, issues perceived as national interests were seen as 'protected' by backing the standpoint on the Single Market adopted by the European Commission.²⁰ In other words, the establishment of the internal market was seen then by Spanish new political leaders as a process which would increase the gap between rich and poor, a tendency which could be countered via measures which would promote greater 'cohesion' within the Community.²¹ Accordingly, the aim of playing a greater international leadership role using the resources available under Community policies manifested itself in the effort to transfer some of the individual aspects of Spain's international agenda onto the agenda of the Community.²²

The years 1989–1991 were key in the so-called formulation of the Spanish model of European integration, centred on the argument of 'Europe as an area of solidarity' and on its determination to achieve a distinguished international profile against the background of the transformations that Europe had undergone in the wake of the end of the Cold War.²³ Both objectives relied – to a certain extent – on an unanimous pro-European attitude among the political forces and public opinion in Spain.

Conversely, changes in the European policy of Spain occurred as part of the intergovernmental negotiations between 1989 and 1991 that were to give rise to the TEU: namely, two simultaneous intergovernmental conferences, one focused on a study of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) and the other on the Political Union, culminating in the Maastricht European Council in December 1991.²⁴ Such vectors would crystallise in the formulation of a Spanish model of the European Union (EU) whose prominent feature was the defence of an inner major objective, economic and social cohesion, and an outer prestige objective, European citizenship.

The setting up of a new European agenda in Spain focused on the Maastricht challenges was subsequently affected by rising external and domestic political tensions in the period from 1991–1996. Indeed, this period can essentially be described as a difficult stage in the European policy of Socialist governments: within the EU, the new Community agenda and the economic crisis of the first half of the 1990s posed difficulties which were aggravated by the enlargement to Fifteen, when the Socialist governments' political influence within the Union fell, despite the fact that they continued to have a power of veto within the Council; problems also arose through difficulties in meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria.²⁵ Domestically,

20. E. GAZZO, *The completion of the large market is mainly a political question*, *Europe*, 04.02.1988.

21. Speech by Jacques Delors, in: *Bulletin of the EC*, 09.09.1985.

22. SEUE, Box 1016.2.2, Nota sobre el proyecto de informe de la Comisión sobre la cohesión económica y social, 29.10.1996.

23. Address given by Jacques Delors to the EP, in: *Bulletin of the EC*, 17.01.1989; SEUE, Box 1006.5.2.3 Esp (89) 2.501 a, Declaración del Presidente: el ejercicio del Consejo sobre el Programa de la Presidencia española, 17.05.1989.

24. SEUE, Box 1016.4.2, La UEM: el estado de los debates, 25.09.1990.

25. DSCD [Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados], Consecuencias para España de la ampliación de la UE, 09.03.1994.

the anti-Maastricht offensive – which extended Europe-wide – had an influential effect in Spain, where there was political exhaustion and recession. Also, in some sectors ‘Maastricht’ was synonymous with economic crisis and threatened to break domestic consensus on European integration (as summarised by the ‘yes’ to political union; ‘no’ to its monetarist aspect slogan).²⁶

That situation was a result of various factors: the changes arising from the post-Cold War period and the economic crisis in Europe post-Maastricht; criticisms of the model advocated by Spain, which had become apparent in the course of the TEU ratification processes; the changes in the Community priorities of its allies in Maastricht; the inevitable enlargement of the Community to Fifteen and the upsetting of the delicate balance between North and South; the eastward shift in the Community’s centre of gravity; a new agenda dominated by the conflicts which had sprung up in post-Cold War Europe and led to the failure in the Balkans of a stuttering Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).²⁷

Similarly, because of the exacting conditions established in Maastricht, and more specifically because it coincided with the economic recession of the first half of the 1990s, the process of convergence towards the third stage of the EMU (inflation, cost of money, public deficit, debt, membership of the European Monetary System) became a vehicle for criticising the economic policy of a government worn down by corruption scandals.²⁸ Because of the domestic situation, the Socialist government gave priority to European policy, perhaps looking beyond its borders for a resolution to domestic problems.

There is no doubt that European policy in this period was distinguished by both pragmatism and willingness, and, accordingly, Spain made economic and social cohesion the foundation stone of its pro-European discourse.²⁹ The basis for attaining that objective was the protection of the Community acquis and the rejection of any initiative which could lead to the introduction of a ‘two-speed Europe’ or a Europe with ‘variable geometry’. However, these positions gradually became more flexible in the course of the broader negotiation process, which included the financing of the ‘Delors II’ package, under which resources were provided to the Cohesion Fund, the main priority of Spain’s European agenda at the Edinburgh European Council of December 1992.

The focus of the Spanish Presidency of the second half of 1995, however, with its pragmatic, managerial profile, perfectly exemplified both the gradualist approach

26. DSCD, Ventajas e inconvenientes de la integración, 13.12.1995.

27. DSCD, Los intereses españoles en la política europea, 21.05.1995; DSS, Ratificación en el Senado de España del TEU, N.215, 16.11.1992, pp.1-14; SEUE, Box Academia Europea de Ciencias Y Artes, C. Martín and J. Turrión, El impacto de la ampliación de la UE en el comercio y en los flujos migratorios y de inversión directa de España, 2003.

28. P. HEYWOOD, *Dalla dittatura alla democrazia: le mutevoliforme de la corruzione in Spagna*, in: D. DELLA PORTA, Y. MÉNY (eds), *Corruzione e democrazia. Sette paesi a confronto*, Liguori Editore, Napoli, 1995, pp.87-106.

29. SEUE, Box 1016.2.2, Balance de la adhesión de España a las Comunidades Europeas, 05.05.1994.

which held sway at the time over its European policy objectives and the efforts to capitalise politically at home.³⁰

In short, throughout this period the stated resolve to be a key country expressed itself principally in two areas: first, in the efforts made to be one of the first countries to reach the third stage of European Economic Union and be part of the ‘hard core’ of the single currency; and second, attempts were made to overturn the perception that Spain was once again on the periphery, following the northward enlargement of a Union which was now also beginning to look eastwards.³¹ This was managed through political initiatives targeting the South and the Mediterranean, the best exponent of which was the Euro-Mediterranean Conference in Barcelona in November 1995.³²

Very significantly, this fact of Spain becoming part of the ‘hard core’ of the EMU in the period 1996–2000, would be marked by the arrival in power of the People’s Party following the general election of 1996. This shift opened a new phase in relations between Spain and the EU, which coincided with the negotiations to review the TEU.³³ Of note in that regard was the predominance of the Christian Democrat strand of ideology within the PP on European matters, the most significant pro-European line in the party.

In this context, the PP focused its criticism on corruption in the González government and on the charge that that corruption was damaging the way the country was perceived abroad, thus undermining the country’s international legitimacy.³⁴ By contrast, the United Left Party criticised the adoption by the government of the concept of a ‘businessmen’s Europe’, where economic aims and arguments took precedence over a Europe of social issues, in which workers’ interests would be at the forefront.³⁵

Nonetheless, 1995 would also be noted for the GAL case, a court case about secret funds allegedly used by the government to finance a group known as the GAL (Anti-terrorist Liberation Group) to fight the terrorist organisation ETA.³⁶ This absence of ethical stance in public life eclipsed the achievements of the Presidency, namely

30. SEUE, Box 2.501 ESP, Discurso de Felipe González, 15.06.1995.

31. SEUE, Box Informes CES, Los efectos económicos y sociales de la ampliación de la UE en España, Informe 1/2008, 23.01.2008.

32. Thus recovering formerly established vectors evidenced, for instance, in AGMAE [Archivo General del Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores], Legajo (Leg.) R 22434 E6 C2 – 1983, Carta de Gabriel Ferrán a Fernando Morán, Política mediterránea y ampliación a la CEE. 28.02.1983. See also HAEU, Box, 98-R311/Med, Conférence annuelle Méditerranée, Procès-verbal. Barcelone, 02-03/10.

33. DSCD, Interpelación del Grupo Socialista del Congreso sobre la política que piensa adoptar el Gobierno respecto al cumplimiento por España de los criterios de convergencia para la UEM, N.6, 22.05.1996; SEUE, 1016.4.2. ESP, La empresa española ante la UEM, Madrid, 12.03.1996.

34. A. ELORZA, *La corrupción en España*, in: *Historia 16*, 237(1996), pp.12-27.

35. SEUE, Box 1016.2.2, Nota sobre el proyecto de informe de la Comisión sobre la cohesión económica y social, 29.10.1996.

36. HAEU, Box CPPE-1275, Espagne, partis politiques, terrorisme, question basque, pacte national anti-ETA, 05.1987-02.1988.

greater openness towards the Mediterranean, progress in transatlantic relations, and so on, and inevitably caused some damage to the international image of Spain.

The priority given to national interests in the subsequent period seemingly resulted in the abandonment of both the pro-European commitment and consensus over the period known as ‘the ten years of the great European gallop’ (1985 to 1995).³⁷ Such characterisation would, however, be read – by more recent critical analyses – as an aesthetic makeover which needs to reconcile with the social claim of actually sustainable change implementation.

3. Outer challenges in post-Cold War Europe

A key challenge during this period was sparked by the enlargement of the EU to include Austria, Finland and Sweden (Norway was to reject the proposal to accede to the EU). The tilting of the Union’s centre of gravity towards the North of the continent led the Spanish government to mount an active defence of its position as a Mediterranean country. Indeed, there were fears that the stronger economies would accelerate EMU, and the conclusion was reached that an increase in cohesion funds should be advocated to counter this evident loss of relative weight within the Council voting system. On 15 February 1995, Spain made a proposal to Coreper to the effect that the net contribution from these new member states should be appropriated to increase the cohesion funds; the proposal angered candidate countries and member states alike and presented an image of a Spain which was more concerned with manipulating the ideals of a united Europe to its own economic advantage rather than sharing and upholding them, even though the proposal was based on a genuine need for economic modernisation.

The year 1995 had a special significance for Spain in terms of its role in the EU, principally during its Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of the year. The Presidency afforded the González government an opportunity to focus attention on those issues which were both vitally important for the future of the continent and also had the potential to generate political success at national level, hence reducing the prominence of the corruption scandals occupying the attention of both the national press and the opposition.

The Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU in 1995 set four principal objectives which were presented to the Spanish Parliament: The economic revitalisation of Europe in a socially integrated framework; a Europe open to the world, enjoying stability; a citizen-friendly Europe and the foundations of the Europe of the future, with a focus on the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference.³⁸

37. DSCD, Box IV Legislatura, 13.07.1992, pp.10.058 sqq.

38. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with José María Gil-Robles Gil-Delgado, former President of the EP (1997-1999), Madrid, 09.03.2010.

A rising outer challenge was constituted by the EMU pressures. Under the convergence criteria, inflation was not to be more than 1.5% greater than the average for the member states with the lowest price growth, and the fiscal deficit could not be greater than 3% of gross domestic product. Essentially, the success of the convergence plan hinged largely on Community aid: Spain was in receipt of 300 billion pesetas, a figure which would double in 1997.

However, if disparities were high among member states, they were even more so at the regional level; thus, the four cohesion countries – Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal – were below the EU average of GDP per capita, with internal differences being observed with extremes that in the Spanish case correspond to the Balearic Islands – close to the average of the EU-15 –, and Extremadura, around 50%. In all regions of the EU-15 during the period 1983-1993, and in terms of per capita GDP, in neither of the two years are there any Spanish regions among those considered to be the richest. However, Extremadura in 1983 was among the poorest 10, with 43% of GDP per capita in the EU-15, followed when the framework was extended to the 25 poorest regions, by Ceuta and Melilla (48%), Andalusia (55%), Castilla-La Mancha (57%) and Galicia (61%).³⁹ A decade later, only Extremadura (55%), Andalusia (58%) and Galicia (60%) were among the 25 most disadvantaged regions.⁴⁰ From a political agency perspective, González then stressed ‘the transfer of credibility’ currency gained by Spain beyond the mounting contradictions predating its recycling international role within the continent.⁴¹

From an outer change perspective, one of the most daunting challenges in this period was constituted by the war in the former Yugoslavia, the largest ethnic conflict within Europe since the end of the Second World War. Apart from the devastating effects of the massacres and the violence of the war in the Balkans, the conflict had indirect effects on the process of European integration, namely a reactivation of nationalist discourse in Europe which, since the beginning of the 1990s, had coincided with declarations of independence in the post-Communist states of the CEECS. In the case of Spain, this debate was reflected in the role played by the Autonomous Communities in the form of direct representation at European level, as illustrated by their active involvement in initiatives and institutions such as the Committee of the Regions, which was established in 1994.⁴²

39. AGMAE, Box 30, Leg. R 22434 E6 C2, Reunión Ministerial, CEE, 21-22.02.1983.

40. SEUE, Comisión Europea, Primer Informe sobre la cohesión económica y social, 1997.

41. F. GONZÁLEZ, *La Europa que quiere España*, in: *Política Exterior*, Número Monográfico: *Europa Duda, África se Hunde, América Despega*, 6(1992/1993), pp.7-20.

42. SEUE, Box 33, Foro de Reflexión Permanente de Europa Futura organizado por la Fundación Pi i Sunyer de estudios Autonómicos y Locales, 10.2003; C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Jordi Pujol i Soley, former President of the Generalitat de Catalunya (1980–2003), Barcelona, 19.03.2010.

4. Traditional interpretations: Sustainable profitability expectations translated into modernisation and democratic consolidation arguments

With a total of more than 100 billion Euros, between 1989 and 2006, Spain was the member state most benefited by cohesion policy and the second recipient of the Common Agricultural Policy subsidies.⁴³ In any case, it is important to note that inner tensions and domestic debates in Spain had a non negligible impact on the challenges of adaptation to the Europeanisation process in this regard. When Spain acceded the EC, it was mandatory to implement Community policies in Spain and there was a very tough internal adjustment period which resulted, according to the interpretation of Manuel Marín – the former State Secretary for Relations with the European Communities and Head of the negotiating team for Spain’s accession to the European Communities (1982–1985) – in “two general strikes and a lot of difficulty in making any progress, but Spain had to modernise”.⁴⁴

In 1992 the TEU made economic and social cohesion a priority objective of the Community, in parallel with EMU and the single market. In setting economic and budgetary convergence criteria for the EU member states, this Treaty imposed, in particular, the control of the public deficit, but it also established a precise correlation between the development of EMU and the principle of economic and social cohesion. In this respect, Marín and Josep Borrell- the former President of the European Parliament – also stressed how the Value Added Tax (VAT) introduction was a key stepping stone to allow the implementation of cohesion funds in post-accession Spain, due to its previous sheer inexistence.⁴⁵

Carlos Bru also interestingly linked these developments to the achievement of a certain cohesion in the area of taxation:

“The only tax we have that appears to be European is VAT, though there are some very significant differences between applying it in the country of origin or the country of destination. Let alone the enormous difference between corporation tax and income tax. In that respect, I think we have to move closer together, we need a certain ‘proximity by majority’, and that undoubtedly applies to social policy too”.⁴⁶

43. SEUE, Comisión Europea, La Mayor Operación de Solidaridad de la Historia. Crónica de la política regional de la UE en España, 2006. See also L. RUANO, *The Common Agricultural Policy and the European Union’s Enlargement to Eastern and Central Europe: A Comparison with the Spanish Case*, in: *EUI Working Papers*, 3(2003).

44. SEUE, Box1016.1 III Esp-1 (11.180), La problemática sectorial de la estrategia de la integración en el mercado Común, 21.11.1978. See also C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Manuel Marín González, former State Secretary for Relations with the EC(1982–1985), Madrid, 13.04.2010. See also HAEU, Box GSPE-69, Note de Thomas von der Vring sur des réflexions à propos de l’élargissement de la CE vers le Sud – à partir de l’exemple de l’Espagne, 24.09.1980.

45. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Marín, op.cit.; C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Josep Borrell Fontelles, former President of the EP(2004-2007), Florence, 13.07.2012.

46. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Bru Purón, op.cit.

From a different perspective, Borrell stressed the influence of psychological, discursive and intangible aspects within the ground preparation for actual implementation:⁴⁷

“We’ve got money, funding, but that’s not the most important thing. We’ve regained a role in the world that we didn’t have under the dictatorship. We have had a significant influence on European integration, but European integration has given us the opportunity to exist in the world, to modernise in material and psychological terms”.⁴⁸

Marín equally reflected upon the meaning of such adaptation regarding the impact of the Community funding in Spain:

“We have received a great deal from Europe: Community policies have been extremely helpful to us in becoming a modern country, the Structural Funds have allowed us to develop beyond our potential, thanks to Europe we have the stability we have and that is good. For Spain, entry into the Common Market of the time, into the European Community, was the most profitable external policy decision we ever made”.⁴⁹

Conversely, one of the most important contributions of Spain to the funding implementation debate is to be found on the concept of social cohesion, remarkably established as reaching far beyond the notion of mere territorial cohesion. Such interconnection is linked, in Borrell’s opinion, to the fact that Spain’s Europeanist feeling grew in a sustainable manner until the 2008 debt crisis. Indeed, this dimension was also marked by a ‘catch-up convergence’ socio-political focus which seemed to then still materialise in visible signs of funding certainty.⁵⁰

From a different perspective, Íñigo Méndez de Vigo- a member of the European Parliament from 1992 to 2011 – addressed the qualitative differential aspects of cohesion and solidarity, as well as the fact that, very significantly, the cohesion return is never measured:

“Spain was aware of the effort the EU was putting into cohesion and solidarity in the 1980s. But it’s no less true that the money goes back to all EU countries. And that money isn’t measured. The return isn’t measured. The funding has this promoting and assisting side to it, but it also requires you to put in something yourself, which seems to me a very important point”.⁵¹

Following this argument, he also indicates that the EU’s annual budget amounts to less than 1% of Europe’s GDP and alludes to a ‘joint undertaking’ concept as the defining element of the European integration process, while emphasising the intra-regional dimension of the Spanish case:

47. J. BORRELL FONTELLES, A. ZABALZA MARTÍ, *El nuevo FCI: un instrumento de política regional*, in: J.A. BIESCAS FERRER, *El Fondo de Compensación Interterritorial*, IEF, Madrid, 1992, pp.251-276.

48. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Bru Purón, op.cit.

49. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with González, op.cit.

50. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Borrell, op.cit.

51. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, MEP (1992-2011), Brussels, 22.06.2012.

“As I see it, being part of a joint undertaking, acting in accordance with our values, defending peace and upholding a vision of the world are of much greater value than a few euros on the balance sheet. I think Spain is a good case study of how a country can achieve cohesion not only through its government but also through its regions and European policy”.⁵²

Indeed, according to these traditional interpretations, the EU is featured as a new structure of opportunity which also generates additional resources and constraints, thus altering the balance of power between the existing multilevel actors in the member states.⁵³ In this respect, the Spanish case is highlighted as an exceptional instance due to the total implementation modality consensus among the whole post-transitional political spectrum.⁵⁴

5. New critiques in hindsight: The effects of the missed chance of cohesion implementation?

New critiques arise in the context of the current multilevel crises opposite the mainly positive outlook of traditional interpretations regarding the impact of cohesion policy implementation in Spain. These critiques focus on the neglected unfolding of the potentialities offered by EU cohesion policy from a dual perspective: the missed chance to build sustainable innovation model choices and to prevent sharpened gaps in the national institutional system.

In the eyes of Morata, Spain is paying – since the beginning of the 2008 debt crisis –

“for the myopia of the years of economic prosperity, during which it did not have the will or the ability to take advantage of the benefits resulting from EU membership to seek alternatives to a development model based on easy profit and not on the productive economy”.⁵⁵

Furthermore, it is also important to note that Spain was the Euro-zone country that had accumulated most imbalances since the single currency began circulating at the turn of the 21st century.⁵⁶ As a matter of fact, since 2001, the Spanish economy has systematically failed to meet any of the parameters that confirm the macroeconomic health of European partners, behind Greece, Portugal or Ireland. In this sense, it is worth remembering the multiplication of ‘pharaonic’ infrastructures in Spain lacking any possible rational justification. Another fact which evidences the faulty imple-

52. Ibid.

53. C. Blanco Sio-López, Interview with Marcelino Oreja Aguirre, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe (1984), Madrid, 24.03.2010.

54. B. ÁLVAREZ MIRANDA, *El sur de Europa y la adhesión a la Comunidad: los debates políticos*, CIS, Madrid, 1996.

55. F. MORATA, op.cit., p.241.

56. DSCG, Comparecencia de Pedro Solbes Mira sobre el proceso de introducción del euro, N.43, 31.05.2001, pp.957-975.

mentation of cohesion funds in Spain is the move from being the main recipient of EU migrants to become, once again, a country of emigration. Although it now affects – unlike during the 1950s and 1960s – highly qualified young people.

These new critiques also focus on the increase of social inequalities. Indeed, Spain, along with Portugal, Bulgaria, Greece and Latvia, are among the EU's most unequal member states. The result is that poverty has become more intense and more extensive, affecting more than 20% of families in contemporary Spain. This devastating balance is also attributable to the inadequacy of internal policies (taxation and social protection) during the growth years.⁵⁷

New critical cohesion debates also bring about the key dilemma of whether an actual 'union' is feasible or even desirable. In Alain Lipietz's eyes, the pressing problem regarding the case of Spain is mass unemployment, comprising the broader case made by Jacques Delors in the EU White Paper on 'Growth, competitiveness and employment' in 1993.⁵⁸ A reversal of the current state of affairs would possibly require the strengthening of a common European social policy explicitly designed to tackle unemployment, hence repurposing social cohesion and social solidarity as the basis for economic prosperity.⁵⁹

Very significantly, the austerity measures emanating from the EU since the start of the debt crisis were harshly criticised by many economic analysts as they resulted in a drastic reduction of the welfare state, with consequent social repercussions.⁶⁰ These measures were said to suffer from a lack of legitimacy, since they do not arise from a democratic process at the European level, but from intergovernmental decision-making processes.⁶¹ Critics such as Fernández Steinko also see such measures under the light of the actually neglected implementation of cohesion policy beyond the smoke screen of attempting to perpetuate material gains, also linking them to a sustainable domestic political legitimacy.⁶²

Such shadow play is not thought to have caused an admittedly multilevel crisis. However, it made it difficult to guarantee fundamental social rights when they had been primarily used as a justification and not as an end in itself. Also, and, very significantly, this trend can be tracked down to the sheer absence of a common European social policy.⁶³

57. F. MORATA, op.cit., p.234.

58. DSCG, Comparecencia de Pedro Solbes sobre las propuestas de Delors, N.13, 24.11.1993, pp. 135-159.

59. A. LIPIETZ, *Social Europe: The Post-Maastricht Challenge*, in: *Review of International Political Economy*, 3(1996), pp.369-379.

60. G. HORN, F. LINDER, S. TOSER, A. WATT (eds), *Quo vadis Krise? Institut für Markroökonomie und Konjunkturforschung*, IMK Report N.75, Düsseldorf, 09.10.2012.

61. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Enrique Barón Crespo, former President of the EP (1989-1992), Madrid, 31.03.2011.

62. A. FERNÁNDEZ STEINKO, *Del Atlántico al Mediterráneo: Portugal, España y Grecia en busca de una salida*, in: *Mientras Tanto*, 120(2013), pp.53-82.

63. C. Blanco Sío-López, Interview with Barón, op.cit.

Nonetheless, these critiques are not restricted to the case of Spain, but extensive to the Southern European region, which presents the most explicit faulty nodules of a tainted model of seeming change, trading sustainability for rhetoric:

“Europe is ill. How seriously, and why, are matters not always easy to judge. But among the symptoms three are conspicuous, and inter-related. The first, and most familiar, is the degenerative drift of democracy across the continent, of which the structure of the EU is at once cause and consequence. But the Union is not an excrescence on member states that might otherwise be healthy enough. It reflects, as much as it deepens, long-term trends within them. At national level, virtually everywhere, executives domesticate or manipulate legislatures with greater ease; parties lose members; voters lose belief that they count, as political choices narrow and promises of difference on the hustings dwindle or vanish in office”.⁶⁴

These discussions progressively produced radical shifts in the mind-set of national public opinions, which did not only target the social tragedies resulting from the mismanagement of the debt crisis (massive unemployment, rising poverty, evictions, a structural attack to the foundations of the welfare state as a result of the austerity measures undertaken to seemingly tackle the crisis, etc.), but also started to search for causal links coming from the recent past while denouncing the missed chances of a self-proclaimed ‘gradualism’.⁶⁵

Another significant critique is based on the seemingly fictive character of the post-transitional “catch-up convergence”, which is linked to the replay of the peripheralisation of Southern Europe.⁶⁶ Conversely, such interpretation has fuelled the unveiling character of the crisis to make explicit systemic failures in order to discern a possibly effective incarnation of alternatives. The main challenge lies, then, in determining whether the alternatives will be at the level of the revelation of structural systemic failures.

After what these critics consider as ‘lost decades’, the current multilevel crisis poses the challenge of learning from past mistakes by promoting consensus around a more sustainable development model and more efficient and transparent institutions as a condition for regaining European credibility and for aspiring to guarantee a cohesion-based actual positive societal impact.⁶⁷

64. P. ANDERSON, *The Italian Disaster*, in: *London Review of Books*, 22.05.2014, p.3.

65. J.M. MARAVALL, *Transition to Democracy in Spain*, Croom Helm, London, 1982.

66. A. DE LA FUENTE, *On the sources of convergence: A close look at the Spanish regions*, in: *European Economic Review*, 46(2002), pp.569–599.

67. SEUE, Box Fundación CIDOB y Circulo de Economía, *Un proyecto para Europa. Reflexiones y propuestas para la Presidencia española del Consejo de la Unión Europea*, 2009. See also F. MORA-TA, op.cit., 2013.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can observe effective post-accession discourses linked to a seeming sense of vision and an apparently practical sense of agenda in the studied period, something that is later causally connected to our contemporary context of uncertainty and self-sabotage.

The main criticism in this respect is based on the discernment of structural missed chances around a project of political unity triggered by economic means with a penchant to advance through responses to crises.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, one of the most heavily felt generational betrayals in this respect is the actual disregard for the unfolding of a ‘human dimension of European integration’, which could solidly aggregate synergic elements such as: human rights, common or compatible legal systems, public administration, education – including technical and management education –, social provisions, political cultures and institutions.⁶⁹

Such conceptual dimension, based on mutually enhancing mechanisms, would fit the aspiring definitions of the so-called ‘European model’, comprising: a united Europe capable of sustaining and developing a prototype based on a harmonious balance of freedom, democracy, economic efficacy and social solidarity. Nevertheless, such a model could only be materialised via a committed implementation in which actions do mirror self-portraying principles. Otherwise, the result would be an ever fragmenting universe “in which galaxies become so rapidly separated that they are no longer observable as verifiable parts of the same continuum”.⁷⁰

In any case, the fundamental role of European funds development impact in Spain cannot be ignored. Since its accession to the EU, Spain has contributed 117 billion Euros and received 211 billion Euros, which gives a positive balance of 93,350 million Euros (in 2004 prices).⁷¹ These funds constituted – on average – 8% of the annual GDP of Spain, that is, around 5,275 Euros per inhabitant during the 1986-2006 period (about 260 € per inhabitant each year).⁷² This flow has led to the financing of a large number of infrastructures and social and regional projects. As a result, over the period

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68. P. ATIENZA MONTERO, L.A. HIERRO RECIO, D. PATIÑO RODRÍGUEZ, *Evaluando los instrumentos de solidaridad interterritorial en el ámbito de la financiación autonómica, Cuadernos de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales*, N.54, Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales, Málaga, 2008, pp.115-138.
69. CIS [Centro de Estudios Sociológicos], Barómetro de mayo de 2014, N.3024; CIS, Barómetro de junio de 2014, N.3029; CIS, Barómetro de julio de 2014, N.3033; INE [Instituto Nacional de Estadística], Encuesta Social Europea, Ficha IOE actual, N.79003, 2014; HAEU, HW-17, 1991-1994.
70. L.M. KRAUSS, R.J. SCHERRER, *The End of Cosmology?*, in: *Scientific American*, 3(2008), pp. 46-53.
71. C. SERRANO LEAL, B. MONTORO DE ZULUETA, *Un nuevo horizonte para la Política Regional de la UE. El Tercer Informe de Cohesión*, in: *Boletín Económico del ICE*, 24-30.05.2004, pp.3-14; SEUE, Consejo de la Unión Europea, Consejo Europeo de Bruselas 22 y 23 de marzo de 2005. Conclusiones de la Presidencia, Bruselas, 7619/1/05 REV1, 03.05.2005.
72. SEUE, Box 1016.1 III Esp-1 (11.180), Síntesis del segundo informe de seguimiento del proceso de integración de España en la CEE publicado por la CEOE, Euronoticias, N.55, 17.11.1986; J.I. TORREBLANCA, S. PIEDRAFITA, F. STEINBERG, *La europeización de España (1986-2006)*, in: *Política Exterior*, N.118, 07-08.2007, pp.153-166.

1986-2006 a significant reduction in the dispersion of per capita income of the different Spanish Autonomous Communities has taken place with respect to the Spanish average, which implied a reduction of inequalities between regions.⁷³ Despite these seeming successes, the transformation of the economy is far from being fully consolidated. Indeed, in Spain, before the 2008 multilevel crisis,

“social protection expenditure (unemployment, pensions, family allowances), including the contributions made by autonomous communities, local corporations and other social welfare institutions, represented more than 21% of GDP. The EU average is 25.7 per cent of GDP”.⁷⁴

From the perspective of political agency impact, the examined underlying seeding ground ideas might not have directly provided immediate tangible benefits, but they did trigger the favourable conditions so that the expected levels of funding implementation would be achieved. However, the studied rhetoric seems to have become a spent force. Therefore, it makes us wonder if the ideas it incorporated are still able to reconcile outer challenges with potential inner feasibility factors.

One important hindrance for any possible recovery of these reasonably devalued semantics could be the fact that the current multilevel crisis was not addressed as a possible opportunity for a creative and positive structural change, beyond any possible notion of risk. Indeed, the use of this critical mirror for an innovative and committed re-ignition would be hard to enact by basing it on similar arguments as those of a ‘smoke-screen past’. In addition, we can observe a lingering lack of political accountability.⁷⁵ In this respect, there is a need to deeply research on the actual impact of multilevel corruption and of privatisations’ mainstreaming in these funding schemes to determine the actual impact of funding aid in consolidating and stabilising democracy in post-transitional periods. One of the main questions in this realm is then: Can a compendium of oblique discourse strategies act as a robust institutional consolidation and innovation-generating amalgam? And, more importantly, are the fruits of such strategies sustainable in time?

This article has shown a distance between the arguments used by key Spanish political leaders in the post-accession phase to obtain Community funds, as well as the lack of a level of implementation which would guarantee the unfolding of the potentialities of an innovative institutional, R+D and productive structure able to guarantee the sustainability of socioeconomic rights.

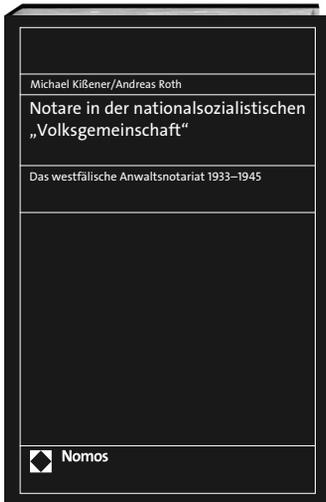
Future hopes could be placed, nevertheless, on the fact that the experience of fruitful interdependence that the integration process provides could consciously produce a committed European sphere willing to become the mirror of its self-stated principles.

73. SEUE, Box EuropaFutura.org, *La delimitación de competencias entre la Unión y los estados, con especial consideración al nivel regional*, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2003.

74. SEUE, Comisión Europea, *La Mayor Operación de Solidaridad de la Historia. Crónica de la política regional de la UE en España*, 2006.

75. K. BUSCH, C. HERMANN, K. HINRICHS, T. SCHULTEN, *Euro Crisis, Austerity Policy and the European Social Model. How Crisis Policies in Southern Europe Threaten the EU’s Social Dimension*, *International Policy Analysis*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Bonn, 2013, pp.3-32.

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