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Immigration to the EU Through Spain

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Immigration to the EU Through Spain

Introduction

Over the past decade, boatloads of illegal immigrants have been arriving on beaches near Gibraltar and since then, Spain has been placing more obstacles to stop this flow. Spain is part of the European Union and geographically is 14 kilometres from North Africa at the Strait of Gibraltar. There are also direct land borders at the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, and the Canary Islands are one hundred kilometres away from the West African coast—see maps below. Furthermore, the population boom in much of the African continent is outstripping economic growth so the number of illegal immigrants arriving to Spain has been rising.

This trend began in 2005 when the number of the illegal immigrants *–sin papeles–* crossing the Strait of Gibraltar was uncontrollable and rose an amazing 191 per cent in only six months. This situation led to the implementation of new border protections, but the result was that illegal immigration, like water flowing downhill, found a new path of least resistance that have taken them to Canary Islands. Just in the first five months of 2006, the number reaching the islands is already 8,000 people.

This increase in international illegal immigration, especially from African countries, is challenging the social and political structures and solidarity of Spain and the European Union. In this paper I will discuss some immigration trends in international migration coming to Europe through Spain, a “new” country of immigration, which recently is becoming a waiting “room” for international illegal immigration.



Migration Trends In The European Union: The Case Of Spain

The European Union is formed by 25 countries with an approximate total population of about 450 million¹ people. Since 1950 the EU has continued to receive immigrants from all over the world. Nowadays, according to *Eurostat*, there are about 20 million foreigners² (i.e., not nationals of their country of residence) in the EU that represents around 5 per cent of the total population. Immigrant trends in the EU have been changing over time but nowadays the statistics show that they come primarily from the Maghreb countries,³ (Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, [Algeria](#) and [Libya](#)), West Africa, Turkey, and South America, and to a lesser extent from India, and East Europe. These immigrants settle primarily in Germany, France, the U.K, Spain and the Netherlands.

In the last thirty years, many migratory studies⁴ have shown that migratory trends in Europe have completely changed. While the Northern European countries faced immigration mostly during the 1950s-1970s from southern European countries such as Spain, Portugal and Greece these southern countries have recently changed from being countries of emigration to countries of immigration. This turnaround and the increase in international immigration are challenging the social and political structures in Southern Europe, which is becoming the most important immigration region in the world.

Spain, during the last twenty years, and since the end of the dictatorship—and helped by becoming a member of the EU— had left behind the stigma of traditionally being a country of emigration to South America and to Northern Europe as *guestworkers*. During 1950s-1970, Spaniards substituted Italian migrants as a labour force supply, and now Turks, Africans, South Americans and South Asians have substituted Spaniards as a cheap labour force for the European Union countries.⁵ Hence, by the late 1970s, Spain became more a country of immigration characterised by the so-called⁶ “double flow” - there was the return of those Spaniards that had left the country during the dictatorship, while the immigration from foreign countries started to grow.

¹Eurostat.http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1996,39140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailref&language=en&product=Yearlies_new_population&root=Yearlies_new_population/C/C1/C11/caa10000

²Eurostat.http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int/portal/page?_pageid=1996,39140985&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&screen=detailref&language=en&product=Yearlies_new_population&root=Yearlies_new_population/C/C1/C11/caa14608

³Arab Maghreb Union. <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/maghreb.html>

⁴BBC News. Analysis: Europe's asylum trends <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4308839.stm>

⁵Adler, Katia. Spain stands by immigrant amnesty <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4579127.stm>

⁶Rodriguez-Diaz, Dan. CERIS (Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement) Public Seminar: “From *Emigration* to *Immigration*: Changing Trends in International Migration in Europe and the Case of Spain”http://ceris.metropolis.net/events/seminars/2005/January/Jan05_Dan.htm

Some Immigration Facts in Spain

During the last few years, there has been an important change in the origin of immigrants in Spain since immigration from EU countries has decreased and immigration from non-EU countries has increased. Because of traditional colonial links, the Moroccans and South Americans are the largest foreign nationalities in Spain and immigrating to Spain. This immigration trend is directly affecting the population structure in Spain since foreign residents are much younger than the host population. The number of children born to foreign parents⁷ has increased dramatically during the last few years from 4.9 per cent in 1999 to 45 per cent in 2002 because the “ius solis” rule applies in Spain to children of non-Spanish nationals born in Spain and since Spain has the lowest birth rate in the EU with a low 1.3 per cent in 2004. This low fertility rate, called a demographic deficit, is also faced in many other countries of the EU since most of the countries cannot reach the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman causing a decline of the working age population in the EU-25.⁸

In Spain in 2004, according to El País⁹, there are 1,647,011 legal foreigners in Spain, 323,000 more than last year, that represent 2.7 per cent of the Spanish population. This proves that, in fact, Spain has had the fastest growth in foreign immigration among EU countries but still it has to be considered a ‘new’ country of international immigration.

In Spain, a lot of progress has been made to help illegal immigrants or residents become legal foreigners in Spain. In fact the figures shows that in between 2004 and 2005, 235,895 illegal immigrants were legalized from which 30,000 were for family reunion – the use of the “ius solis” has increased dramatically over the past five years; 25,000 for proving residency in Spain for at more that five years; 80,000 for having a legal work permit; and 100,000 using other ways such the “Quota System” that establishes that under certain circumstance specified by the Government that certain people will not need a visa to come to work in specified fields such as agriculture.

Still, this has another side since in 2003 there were a total of 92,679 illegal immigrants detained in police custody and deported back to their countries of origin, a 20 per cent increase from 2002. The figures explain in detail that 32,306 were Romanian, 24,146 were Moroccan, 8,266 were Bulgarian, and 6,476 were Ecuadorian.

As for the impact that immigration has on the Spanish labour market, the study by Alex Balch¹⁰ explains that foreigners represent 4.7 per cent of the total labour force in Spain. In general, they are concentrated in services (59.2 per cent) and construction (17.2%). But there are many differences by nationality (e.g., Latin-American and Filipina women in the domestic service; African migrants in agriculture). Concerning patterns of settlement, there is a pattern of concentration in the Mediterranean coastal provinces (from Malaga to Girona), Madrid (the

⁷ Anuario El País 2005. www.elpais.es/accesoanuario2004.html (password:QM7A5M9)

⁸ Kirk, Lisbeth. “EU Population up due to Immigration.” <http://euobserver.com/?aid=20184&rk=1>

⁹ El País. La Inmigración en cifras.

http://www.elpais.es/articulo/elpporesp/20021101elpepunac_3/Tes/La%20inmigraci%F3n%20en%20cifras

¹⁰ Blach, Alex. “Immigration as a labor market strategy: Spain.”

<http://www.migpolgroup.com/multiattachments/2561/DocumentName/SpainImmigrationLabourMarketStrategyBalch.dpf>

capital), and the Balearic and Canary Islands, because of their diversified economies. For instance, Cataluña is the region with the highest number of migrants in Spain, and in the Mediterranean area is potentially one of the greatest reception areas of international migration.

Still, there is a negative point of view expressed by Maria Jesus Campos Ladero in her book.¹¹ Since the arrival of immigrants is considered to increase competitiveness on the labour market and this causes integration problems. People in Spain blame immigrants for complicating even more the already difficult employment situation. Some people in Spain view immigration as a threat to their job since these people are believed to work for less money and better than Spaniards.

Migration Legislation in Spain and its relation with the EU

Lately there has been a growing disquiet among EU members over immigration and its problems since the overwhelming majority of migrants are entering South European countries without a legal residence permit. For instance, there was rioting in France in November 2005, groups of immigrants have pushed their way into Ceuta and Melilla in 2005, and as many as 1,000 immigrants may have drowned trying to reach the Canary Islands in the past five months.¹² These events have made the EU leaders realize that something has to be done to solve this situation; however, in practice progress has been sticky and slow since for several years. EU leaders have been promising to come up with policies to solve both illegal immigration and asylum seekers problems, and the only solution has been so far to extend tighter control of external borders, a solution that, in the case of Spain, had to be paid alone by the Spanish Government.

Still, the EU tries to show that a lot of effort is underway; in July 6, 2005, Sarkozy, the French Interior Minister, stated during the EU summit in Evian, France that “we want to send out a very clear signal that only people with the right papers can come to our countries.”¹³ Also, during the meeting of the European Migration Dialogue (EMD) that took place in Brussels¹⁴ the EU members once again met to discuss current EU and national immigration problems and, of course, to set priorities and goals for the future.

In Spain, despite the slow start in recognizing immigration as a new trend, since the early 2000s, immigration has appeared on Spain’s political agenda proving that it is no longer just a technical and administrative concern but a national issue. In fact, the latest study published last 15 of November from the Centro de Estudios Sociológicos¹⁵ (CIS)—a reliable Spanish polling company— shows that the immigration issue is viewed by Spaniards as the second main problem

¹¹ Campo Ladero, Maria Jesús. *Opiniones y actitudes de los españoles ante el fenómeno de la inmigración*. Centro de Estudios Sociológicos. Madrid 2004.

¹² The Economist. “Still they Come” May 13th, 2006

¹³ Wright, Tom. “European tackle illegal immigration.” <http://iht.com/articles/2005/07/05/newsvian.php>. The International Herald Tribune. July 6, 2005

¹⁴ Migration Policy Group. European Migration Dialogue Meeting. <http://www.migpolgroup.com/news/3065.html>

¹⁵ Centro de Estudios Sociológicos. Barómetro de Opinión. <http://www.cis.es/File/ViewFile.aspx?FileId=3034>

with a 37 per cent right after unemployment with 51.1 per cent and ahead of terrorism with 25 per cent and even economic issues also.

The Spanish legislation on immigration is relatively recent with the First Immigration Law -*Ley Orgánica de Extranjería 7/1985*- passed in 1985 and is still developing under the guide of the European Union Immigration precepts. Since Spain is a Member State of the EU, the priorities of the Spanish Government concerning immigration must match those of the EU – from the Schengen Treaty of 1985 and the Maastricht Treaty of 1992– in emphasising the control of flows, while disregarding access to citizenship and the integration of resident immigrants. Indeed, the vagueness of the concept ‘integration’ points to the limitations in access to civil rights.

The Government’s overall immigration policy statement is the Overall Programme for the Regulation and Co-ordination of Alien Affairs and Immigration in Spain (abbreviated as GRECO¹⁶), that was approved in 2000. The Programme includes four basic goals: two relating to control and regulation, and two to protection and integration. However, it does not include any measurable goal for government action, does not specify the human and financial resources allocated to carry it out, and does not indicate time frames to carry out the actions or reach the goals established. Access to citizenship and integration policies are limited because immigrants are still seen as temporary workers (*guestworkers*). Moreover, access to citizenship is easier for certain origins (e.g. Latin-Americans) than others (e.g. sub-Saharan Africans), according to the immigration quota system, which favours the arrival of immigrants with similar social and cultural characteristics.

Still, the situation is very delicate. For instance Germany is always complaining that Spain is not putting enough care in the borders to stop illegal immigration since once in Spain, the migrants can travel throughout a 25-country zone without showing any papers in any border. But the truth is that Spain has been asking for help on many occasions and the only thing that was obtained was more legislation but not more money or help to patrol the borders and even less to provide first aid care to those arriving to the coast, leaving the Spanish authorities with a dramatic humanitarian problem.

For instance, during the informal EU meeting in Hampton Court¹⁷, the Spanish President obtained almost unanimous support from the rest of the countries for the proposal to tackle illegal immigration from African countries. Spain asked the releasing of €400 million for the next financial budget covering years 2007-2014 to finance the plan. However, no final agreement was reached and no money has been assigned. Because of this lack of economic support, last December 8, 2005, Spain’s Prime Minister Rodriguez-Zapatero discussed in a meeting with Blair again the possibility of providing Spain with some economic help to battle illegal immigration. Still, no agreement was reached.

¹⁶ Ministerio de Trabajo y Asunto Sociales. Programa de Regulación y Coordinación de la Extranjería y la Inmigración. <http://www.mtas.es/migraciones/anumigra/contenido/3-4.pdf>

¹⁷ Kuchler, Teresa. “EU Leaders back Franco-Spanish Migrant Plan.” <http://www.euobserver.com/?aid=20212&rk=1>

This deal is extremely important for Spain since in 2005 alone, 6,700 illegal immigrants were caught trying to breach the barriers around the Spanish conclave of Melilla to flee to the Andalusia coast. The cost of stopping this flee amount \$60 million that had to be faced by the Spanish Government. In fact, it was reported by the *New York Times* last November 2005 that Spain's African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla are illegal migrant's portals to Europe, and in the first ten months of 2005, 9,542 immigrants have been caught and 6,557 have been deported back to their countries by the Spanish authorities.¹⁸ Furthermore, since the beginning of year 2006, and due to the strengthening of the frontiers—the fence separating had to be rebuilt and more border patrol had to be sent to the area— in the conclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, illegal immigrants are arriving in the Canary Islands. As of may 22, 2006, a total of 7,872 people have arrived, creating a humanitarian situation in the area.¹⁹

Conclusion

In my opinion, since Spain was until recently a country of emigrants, the new situation of becoming a receiving country together with the massive number of people trying to access Spanish-European ground has proved that Spanish authorities are showing themselves to be incapable of controlling immigration flow. At the same time, the rest of the EU countries are only complaining. For Maghreb and sub-Sahara countries this immigration is a way of getting lots of economic resources from abroad since most of the money made in European countries is sent back to help families in origin countries. Hence, if Spain does not get help from the EU the situation is going to get out of hand; if this happens, the one ones that are going to suffer will be the would-be immigrants that buy a very expensive seat in a weak fishing boat with a high chance of dying in the middle of the sea, trying to make a better life.

¹⁸ El Mundo. "Desembarcados en Cádiz los 31 inmigrantes que iban a la deriva." Wednesday 23, November 2005, Sección Andalucía.

¹⁹ Cruz, Teresa. "El Parlamento canario exige que la Armada blinde las costas ante la oleada de inmigrantes." El Mundo, Martes 23 de Mayo de 2006.