

International relations during the Transition to Democracy

Since its inception, the Spanish Kingdom has had rocky relationships with the countries around it and those that they would go on to discover. To explain the entire history of Spanish international relations would take a lot more than this paper, so for now I will delve into the international relations developed during the transition to democracy after Francisco Franco's reign. More specifically, examining the relationships that were built between Spain and the European community and the relationship between Spain and the United States.

The desire to be part of the European community really began to grow during the 1960s, still under the rule of Francisco Franco. Supporters and opponents of Franco alike wanted to be part of the larger community. Supporters of Franco wanted to integrate into the community because that would bring more legitimacy to the reign. Opponents wanted membership because they believed it would bring the much-needed political change they longed for (Tusell 2005). Either way, membership during the Franco regime was something that would not happen for Spaniards, made clear by Francisco Franco himself. However, when Franco died in 1975, hope began to glimmer again for the Spanish people at the possibility of joining their European counterparts.

There were a multitude of reasons as to why Spaniards longed to be part of the community around them. One of the reasons for wanting to join the European community was the obvious economic benefits that come from an internationalized economy. However, Spaniards mainly yearned for entrance into the community because of the isolation from the world that they had experienced during Franco's nearly 40 year reign. The organizations that Spaniards wanted to be included in were the Council of Europe, the European Common Market and ultimately the European Union.

Spaniards believed that once they got rid of Franco in 1975, they would automatically be welcomed into the European community. The European community and subsequent organizations, however, were hesitant to form relationships with Spain. Spain's first admittance letter to the community came from the Council of Europe in November of 1977 (Manuel & Royo, 2003), approximately two years after they had begun the process to become integrated in the community. While membership in the Council of Europe certainly aided Spain in becoming a full European nation, the next step of joining the European Common Market would present itself harder than thought. All Spaniards agreed that joining the market is what would be best for the country, but French President Giscard D'Estaing strongly disagreed. D'Estaing openly opposed Spanish entry causing a delay in their acceptance by other nations (Tusell 2005). But by

the end of 1980, Spain would be permitted to enter the market. The light at the end of the tunnel seemed closer for Spaniards. Nevertheless, it would not be for another 6 years that Spain would be allowed entry into the formal organization of the European Union (Manuel & Royo, 2003).

As for the relationship between the United States and Spain, there were a lot of layers to this. But most of Spain did not support the United States and there were strong Anti-American and Anti-Reagan sentiments in Spain and across Europe.

One part of the relationship between the U.S. and Spain is that there were significant improvements made during the beginning of the transition to democracy. In 1953, America made a deal that gave the U.S. military bases in Spain. Spanish politicians worked to change that agreement so that the U.S. would lessen their military presence in Spain and make the agreement more equilateral. Even so, the earlier agreement still resonated with Spaniards and affected their opinions towards the United States (Chislett 2005).

In addition to the unequal agreements, the U.S. also showed weak support to the new government when a threat came across. President Reagan consistently pushed to the public that Spain was a “close and important” ally (Weisman 1981). That sentiment did not come across when they needed help defending their democracy. On Feb 23, 1981 General Antonio Tejero charged the Spanish parliament building to create a militaristic rule in the country again (*IV. Spain, the United States and NATO* 1986). This was the first attack that the new democracy had faced, and the history of Spanish democracy showed to be weak against coups in several different cases. As an ally and the world model of democracy it was assumed that the U.S. would come to the aid of the Spanish government to help defend its democracy. Rather the U.S. did nothing to aid its “close and important ally”. The only thing that the U.S. government did say was that it was a “Spanish Affair” and that there is no role for the U.S there (Schumacher 1985).

Lastly, a critical aspect of understanding relations between Spain and the U.S is their differing roles in Latin America. The relationship between Spain and Latin America was moving to be strong and more positive. The relationship which the U.S. had with Latin America was not the same. The United States, like Spain, had a long history in the affairs of Latin America, but unlike Spain made minimal efforts to better relations. Not only did they not make efforts to better the relations, feelings between the U.S. and Latin America got continually worse throughout the 70s and 80s. One example of this were embargoes placed on Nicaragua that sparked outrage around the world (Meisler 1985). This demonstration of power over Nicaragua enraged many Spaniards as they wanted their allies to show support towards the Latin

American countries. The combination of the United States as an unequal and unsupportive ally lead to a growing Anti-American sentiment in Spain during the time of the transition.

Overall, Spanish foreign affairs during the period of transition into democracy was mainly dominated by the re-entrance into the European Community and taking mostly an anti-U. S stance consequently. The main priority of transitional foreign affairs was admittance into their surrounding community after years of isolation. This period of growth in international relations was critical to Spain because it helped bring them into treaties and organizations that would shape their foreign policy for years to come.

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