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The evaluation of the Spanish EU-Presidency

In my essay my endeavour was to present the experiences of the Spanish EU Presidency and the results achieved in the first half of 2010. In my study I focused on four important parts: the implementation of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon; the strengthening of economic coordination between the Member States; the extension of rights and liberties of European citizens and Europe as a global actor in the international arena. I strived to highlight the difficulties and problems occurred at European level during the Spanish Presidency.

In my view, the Spanish Presidency succeeded in implementing the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon without any problems. In the area of home and justice affairs progress was made especially with the implementation of the Stockholm Programme. From an economic perspective we should not forget to mention the enforcement of the supervision of financial systems and the establishment of the economic coordination between Member States.

Spanish diplomacy always emphasized the importance of the Latin American region in the context of EU policy on foreign affairs. On 18 May 2010 the European Union signed association agreements with Central American states and negotiations restarted with the Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay) to achieve an association agreement between the parties.

Introduction

From 1 January to 1 July 2010, Spain assumed its fourth rotating Presidency of the European Union.

After the three successful presidencies held by Spain in 1989, 1995 and in 2002, we had to state that this semester was one of the most difficult not only for the Iberian country but also for the whole European Union as well.

Because of the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force on 1 December 2009, several institutional and legal amendments were set into motion what Europe really needed: a stronger, more united and efficient Europe to respond to citizens' concerns.

The Programme of the Spanish Presidency concentrated on four important elements. Firstly, it focused on the fast and full enforcement of the Treaty of Lisbon, especially on the appropriate functioning of the new European institutions such as the new President of the European Council and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Secondly, emphasis was given to economic recovery and job creation through the Europe 2020 Programme, which was launched by the European Commission on 3 March 2010. Behind the better coordination of economic policies of the EU, Spain – together with other Member States – wanted to reform the financial system's supervision as well.

Thirdly, the Spanish EU-Presidency emphasized the preservation of human rights of European citizens in such fields as fighting against gender-based violence and reinforcing Europe's social dimension.

¹ BGF, Külkereskedelmi Kar, Külgazdasági és EU Intézeti tanszék, főiskolai tanársegéd

Fourthly, Spain always endeavored to play an active role in international politics and this coincided with the initiatives taken by the Treaty of Lisbon that main aim was to extend the European Union's role globally. The Spaniards supported the development of economic, political and cultural relationships with Latin America and backed the Union's enlargement in the Western Balkans, as well as the strengthening of cooperation with the Maghreb-countries.

In my essay, I will evaluate the achieved results of the Spanish Presidency, focusing on the above mentioned four fields. I will strive on highlighting the difficulties and problems occurred at European level during the Spanish Presidency, but I would not like to deal with the domestic policy and the different stages of foreign affairs policy of the Iberian country.

I. The difficulties faced by the Spanish Presidency

The title of the fourth Spanish Presidency of the European Union was called as "Innovative Europe". In this context, the motto of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union was a quite good choice to answer of the global challenges and difficulties occurred in the international economics and in politics. [1]

In institutional field it was essential provide the appropriate functioning and cooperation of the standing President of European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The Spanish Presidency succeeded exercising this function well because it ensured the division of work between the two posts without having conflicts.

If we evaluate the economic dimension of the Presidency, we don't have to forget to mention the debt crisis in Greece, which poses new challenges to the EU-Member States. The Spanish Presidency had to face an unprecedented economic and financial crisis that had serious impact to the stability of the eurozone. Although crisis could have provided a very good opportunity to be expanded the leadership's role of the rotating presidencies, this hadn't happen because of the bad economic situation of Spain. Because of the structural problems of the Iberian country² (high unemployment rate that exceeds 20% and more than 10 % budget lack of the GDP and inflexible labour market regulation), concerns and doubts emerged how the country would be capable to tackle with the most serious internal crisis of the eurozone. However it was true that the great balance of the semester was to be given a joint response to the economic and debt crisis defending the euro's stability and strengthening the economic coordination. The critical economic and fiscal situation of some Member States such as Greece, Ireland, Latvia and Portugal also influenced the latitude of the Spanish Presidency.

Another obstacle that caused uncertainties was the institutional functioning made by the Treaty of Lisbon. It was known well that Spain had to define its priorities for 2009 in an unusual position because the exact deadline of entering of the Treaty of Lisbon wasn't sure.

² For the economic crisis in Spain see [1].

Between December 2009 and late February 2010, three circumstances hindered the Spanish government to be implemented its agenda. These hindrances were the followings:

- 1) the lack of clear definition of the role and objectives of the new President of the European Council in relation to the rotating presidency;
- 2) the slow and hesitant start of the High Representative and the confusion concerning the roles each actor had to exercise in foreign policy;
- 3) The two-month delay of the new BARROSO-led Commission, with the consequent delay in all initiatives.

From logistical standpoint, the Presidency has been scarcity of public resources, because the organization had only 40 people – it was less than half used by Sweden in 2009 – and a quite austere budget was adopted with 55 million euros (one third that used by France during its Presidency in 2008). [8]

As far as I'm concerned this difficulties cannot be dispraised if we want to evaluate of the activities of the Spanish Presidency.

II. The implementation of the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon

The primary task of the Spanish EU-Presidency was to provide the appropriate implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. However it wasn't an easy target because the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union emphasized the introduction of 30 additional measures for the full implementation of the Treaty.

Despite some minor episodes of friction in the division of responsibilities with the new figures, suitable amplified by the press that confused the complexities of the new system with a supposed rivalry between HERMAN VAN ROMPUY and JOSÉ LUIS RODRÍGUEZ ZAPATERO or between CATHERINE ASHTON and MIGUEL ANGEL MORATINOS, the fact was that the semester succeeded in providing the coexistence of stable management bodies. The distinction between the Council of General Affairs and External Affairs was completed without major problems. The preparation of the agenda and its conclusions in the European Council was based on an agreed consent of the Heads of State or Government of the Member States. The division of tasks within the working groups related to Spain and the High Representative didn't suffer any lack of coordination. MORATINOS worked tightly with ASHTON in formulating the foreign policy of the EU, while the Spanish President of the Government accepted the leadership's role and acted as an intermediary between HERMAN VAN ROMPUY and Heads of State or government, showing a harmony with him and the President of the European Commission at the press conference followed the European Council's sessions held in Spain. [8]

The holding of direct personal contacts and meetings especially on major European or international events paved the way for the further collaboration between the High Representative and the President of the European Council.

It must be noted that the Treaty of Lisbon was implemented without any major problems with regard to the legal changes introduced by the extension of the ordinary legislative procedure. In this field we have to mention that Spain had got a collision with the Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship, VIVIANE REDING, concerning the ability of Member States to share with the Commission the initiation of legislation in the fields of justice and home affairs. Spain succeeded in achieving an intergovernmental agreement for a mini- reform of the Treaties within the European Parliament, without waiting the ac-

cession of Croatia. Thanked to the endeavours of Spain, the European Parliament extended the number of MEPs from 736 to 751 four of which belonged to Spain.

Another important achievement of the Presidency was that the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Spanish Presidency reached an agreement on the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) on

21 June 2010. We have to emphasize that on 26 April the Council adopted a political agreement about the outlines of the service, submitted by the High Representative. In June, ASHTON and MORATINOS negotiated on behalf of the Council about issues of political control, budget and staff with key groups in the European Parliament. According to the agreement the EEAS, the future diplomatic representation of the EU will be led by CATHERINE ASHTON and will have a staff consisting of six-thousands diplomats made up in equal parts of people from the European Commission, the European Council and the twenty-seven Member States. The European External Action Service will also help to the High Representative to fulfill her task in the field of foreign policy. [5]

The EEAS will operate on 1 December this year with more than 138 diplomatic missions worldwide.

In the field of implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon, Spain promoted the appropriate application of the provisions of the Treaty and achieved a compromise in questions such as the extension of the MEPs and the establishment of the European External Action Service.

III. Strengthening the economic coordination between Member States

The activity of the Spanish Presidency was overshadowed by the serious debt crisis occurred in Greece and the poor state of the Iberian country's economy as well. Because of the collapse of the real estate and construction sector, Spain was hit severely by the financial and economic crisis. The unemployment went up 20% and the budget lack of the country was 11.2 % of the GDP in 2009. [4] The bad macroeconomic data limited the capability of Spain to dispel uncertainty among international investors to the Iberian country.

Spain started its Presidency with the need of strengthening economic governance of the European Union and to respond to the challenges posed by the financial and economic crisis. In January, the Spanish government didn't think to enforce the role of European institutions in short-term fiscal consolidation, but insisted rather on mechanisms that served medium and long-term fiscal supervision and the coordination of structural reforms.

Despite the lack of leadership observed between February and April, Member States decided to rescue debt-ridden Greece by granting an initial 30,000 million euro loan on 25 March 2010. [13] According to the agreement of the eurozone countries (Eurogroup), financial aid was given to Greece that included the participation of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and bilateral loans given by eurozone Member States. Another important decision was taken by Economic and Finance Ministers of the Member States with the creation of a European Financial Stabilization Mechanism, capable mobilizing up to €750 billion in order to support countries undergoing extraordinary difficulties. The Spanish Presidency backed all initiatives that were essential coordinate of national economic and financial policies of the Member States such as the rigorous application of rules of the Stability and Growth Pact that included sanctions for failure to comply with its conditions.

The economic coordination linked to the better financial supervision as well. In this context we have to mention the creation of the European Systemic Risk Board and the implementation of the European Supervisory Authorities. While the former tool will be able to assess possible threats to financial stability and issue risk alerts, the latter will intervene in financial emergencies. The European Security and Market Authority was also established to supervise credit rating agencies in the EU. [6]

The financial rescue of Greece was welcomed by all leaders of the European Union including JOSÉ MANUEL DURÃO BARROSO, the President of the European Commission, HERMAN VAN ROMPUY, the President of the European Council and ELENA SALGADO, Minister of Economy and Finance. They emphasized the principle of solidarity between the Member States that strengthened the eurozone's stability. HERMAN VAN ROMPUY also highlighted that "structural reforms and a comprehensive strategy would be needed to maintain the European model." The strategy, which was mentioned by the President of the European Council, was named as "managing economic policy" with the pursuance of fewer, but more quantified and monitored objectives by the European Commission and the Council. [12]

Another top priority of the semester was the so-called EU 2020 Strategy that replaced the failed Lisbon Strategy. The EU 2020 Strategy aim is to define a way out of the current economic crisis through sustainable economic growth and job creation. It consists of five priority areas such as the creation of new jobs (to increase the rate of employment of citizens aged 20 and 64 to at least 75% from the current rate of 69%); to increase spending on technological research and development from 1.9% to 3% of EU's GDP; to reduce CO₂ emissions by 20% with respect to 1990 levels; to boost the number of young people with higher qualifications from today's figure of 31% to at least 40% and finally to reduce the number of Europeans at risk of poverty from 80 to 20 million. [19] Despite the ambitious targets, it still remains unclear how the Member States will fulfill these requirements and what will happen if they cannot keep on them.

As far as I'm concerned the Spanish Presidency made reasonable efforts to fight against the economic and financial crisis. The real problem is that European leaders always emphasize the importance of structural reforms but they always postpone them so to boost their popularities and to avoid social tensions. I think to improve the competitiveness of the European Union a better coordination of economic policies must be worked out to fight against asymmetrical shocks in the world economy. Notwithstanding, the European Union should pay more attention to research and development and innovation policy – in compliance of the EU 2020 Strategy – if it wants to reduce the backwards comparing with the USA, Japan and Southeast Asia. Because of the globalised and transnationalised economy the importance of the application of sophisticated technologies and the quality of human capital will be appreciated. That's why it's essential work out and implement a coherent strategy to improve the competitiveness of the EU for a long-term.

IV. Extension of rights and liberties of European citizens

The third major action area of the Spanish Presidency was the enforcement of direct political participation and the commencement of the implementation of the Stockholm Programme Action Plan.

From political point of view we have to mention that the European Citizens' Initiative was adopted by the Council. In compliance with the Regulation, citizens can directly propose legislative reforms to the European Commission if they collect

one million signatures from three Member States of the European Union, representing at least 0.2 percent of the population of the EU.

During the Spanish Presidency, the implementation of the Stockholm Programme Action Plan was started, encompassing actions regarding the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, to be carried out between 2010 and 2014. In the field of home and justice affairs the achieved results were the followings:

- The Home Affairs Security Strategy was also elaborated, which defined the European security model on the basis of citizens' rights and freedoms, and with the application of preventive approach.
- Progress was made on the discussion of the European protection Order. Agreement was reached on the text of the proposed directive on the battle against human trafficking and protection for the victims.
- The police cooperation and operating coordination capacity was improved so that to fight better against organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking. The establishment of the so called police "Erasmus" makes it possible police forces to attend training courses in other countries. [14] The Standing Committee on Internal Security (COSI) was also set up on 25 February. Its objective is to strengthen the coordination of the operational actions between the EU Member States in relation to internal security. To fulfill its task COSI must coordinate the action of European agencies with responsibilities in areas of justice and home affairs, such as EUROPOL, EUROJUST and FRONTEX. [15]
- Finally the European Institute for Gender Equality was created against gender violence and to take care of victims of abuse. The objective of the institute is to contribute to the promotion of equality of men and women, including the integration of the gender perspective in community policies. This strategy consisted of setting up a sole European telephone to give victims information, advice and social assistance to both mistreated women and minors who live in violent environments. [16]

Thus we can state that in the field of home and justice affairs thanked to the achieved compromise of Spain and other Member States, the implementation of the Stockholm Programme Action Plan started without major problems in order to guarantee the security and prosperity of EU citizens.

V. Europe as a global actor in the international arena

The fourth important field of the Spanish government's agenda was to strengthen the EU's role in international politics. The Spanish Presidency focused on the following priorities related to foreign affairs policy:

- 1) Because the European External Action Service wasn't set up at the end of the semester, the Spanish diplomacy put more emphasis on Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) issues. The Spaniards worked out a number of initiatives in the first half of 2010, such as empowering of groups of fighting (Battle Groups), searching a greater synergy between civilian capabilities and military, strengthening the role of European Defence Agency and the consolidation of a global crisis management. Thus, the European Defence Agency received the task of capacity planning, and programme management. Thanked to the Spanish efforts, the operation Atalanta was launched to intensify surveillance of ports and bases from which Somali pirates operate. The mission of training of the Somali security forces (EUTM Somalia) was adopted by the Council on 4 February and

became fully operational on 1 May in close cooperation with the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In short, we can state that the most tangible achievements of the Spanish Presidency were to start the mission EUTM-Somalia and the adoption of an integrated European Strategy for maritime safety. [9]

- 2) The Mediterranean basin was always a priority for the Spanish foreign affairs policy. We don't have to forget that the so-called Euro Mediterranean Process between the EU and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states began in Barcelona in 1995. A conference of Euro-Mediterranean foreign affairs ministers, Barcelona was chosen as the location for the headquarters of the Secretariat for the Mediterranean. It was established with the target of identifying strategic areas (such as the depollution of Mediterranean, maritime and overland highways; civil protection; alternative energies and renewable energies; the creation of Mediterranean University and business development in the region) and monitoring their progress along looking for sources of funding to finance them. [17] The main aim of the Spanish diplomacy is to promote the stability and prosperity in the Maghreb region.
- 3) In the field of enlargement Croatia took irreversible steps to join the European Union in first half of 2011 because it succeeded closing chapter 5 (Public Procurement) and 16 (Taxation). For other Western Balkan states Spain organised a conference in Sarajevo on 2 June with the participation of 27 EU foreign Ministers of the EU. The importance of the event was highlighted by the presence of representatives from the USA, Russia and Turkey and by international organisations such as NATO, OSCE and the Council of Europe as well. The Parties reiterated their commitments to integrate the Western Balkan into the UE, and called on the pursuance of economic and social reforms, and strengthening of regional cooperation. [18]
- 4) Lastly it became an urgent task to deepen the economic, commercial and political relationships with the Latin American countries. As earlier experiences of Spanish Presidencies showed, strengthening of the contacts between the EU and Latin America played an important role. Spain's accession to the European Union was meant the extension of the Latin American dimension to EU's foreign affairs policy.

The Sixth EU-LAC Summit was held on 18 May 2010 in Madrid in there negotiations ended by concluding Association Agreements with Central American countries. The agreements cover three chapters: trade, political dialogue and cooperation. Another achievement of the conference was that EU and Mercosur decided to resume negotiations to achieve an association agreement. The birregional negotiations started between EU and Mercosur during the First Summit EU-LAC in June 1999. Because of the divergences of views in the field of agricultural products, intellectual property and asymmetries negotiations ended unsuccessfully. [10] The Spanish diplomacy made reasonable efforts to achieve a compromise and finally the four Mercosur countries such as Argentina, Brasilia, Uruguay and Paraguay and the EU signed the association agreement.

In the Madrid Summit an Action Plan was also adopted by the Head of State or Governments underlining the importance of sustainable development and social cohesion in the region. In order to promote the development of infrastructure, environmental conditions and enforce social cohesion in the sub-continent, the Latin American Investment Fund was set up with 125 million euro. [7]

If we want to make a balance about the Spanish Presidency in the field of foreign affairs policy we can state that it succeeded achieving the majority of goals (such as the association agreements with Central America, the creation of Secretariat for the Mediterranean and the Sarajevo conference for the Western Balkan states). However there are still hindrances to deepen the relationship between the EU and Latin America.³ The real problem is that not only the EU but also the Latin American countries don't have a coherent strategy how to develop the birregional contacts. Notwithstanding we have to mention the different interests of the subcontinent's states. Unfortunately the confrontational behaviour of some Latin American leaders as the Venezuelan HUGO CHÁVEZ and Bolivian EVO MORALES can be another obstacle in the development of further relationships. These left-wing populist leaders deny the core values of the EU such as democracy, rule of law and preservation of human and political rights and they emphasize the autarchy of economy instead of free trade. They want to realize the Bolivarian revolution by the nationalization of transnational companies and with a total control of the state as well. These initiatives jeopardize the stability and peace in the region and also impede any further political dialogue between the Latin American countries and the EU-Member States.

Conclusion

The Spanish government assumed its Presidency facing by difficulties posed the debt crisis of Greece. Because of the poor economic and financial conditions of some Member States the strengthening of economic coordination and improving of financial supervision became urgent tasks. As far as I'm concerned the Spanish Presidency and the Member States made reasonably efforts to protect the financial stabilization of eurozone but they weren't capable to resolve the competitiveness problem of the whole EU. At the moment it's unclear what would happen if Member States failed to fulfill the ambitious requirements of the EU 2020 Strategy.

In institutional field, despite the uncertainties with the delay of the formation of European Commission and the European External Action Service, Spain's succeeded providing the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. Spain exercised its role in the Council successfully, achieved consensus and organized the debates properly.

Another major achievement of the Spanish Presidency was reached in the field of home and justice affairs with the commencement of the implementation of Stockholm Programme Action Plan.

Finally we have to evaluate the successes of the foreign affairs policy such as the achieved association agreement between the EU and the Central American countries (Columbia and Peru), the progress in the integration process of Western Balkan states and the creation of Secretariat for the Mediterranean Union.

³ See more about relationship between the EU and Latin America in [2].

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