

ICPS newsletter®

The Path to the EU: Spain's recipe for Ukraine

To build consensus on the most important issues in Ukrainian society through broad public debate among politicians, business professionals, trade unions and independent experts—this was the advice of Spanish experts that was heard at a roundtable called “On the Way to Europe: Spain’s experience.” Spain is prepared to share its not-so-simple experience in democratization and following the path to the European Union—and to assist Ukraine in overcoming the main hurdles. This event took place under a joint initiative of the International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS, Kyiv) and the Center for International Relations and Development Studies (CIDOB, Barcelona). The main objectives of the initiative are to disseminate the process of Spain’s democratization in Ukraine and to establish active relations between the government, business and non-government sectors of both countries

Despite obvious historical differences between the countries and the specific nature of Spain’s process of Eurointegration, the experts agreed that today’s Ukraine faces challenges and problems that are similar to those Spain worked its way through after the collapse of the Franco dictatorship.

According to the Spanish experts, Ukraine today is in better economic shape and has a more positive social situation than Spain had at the start of its drive to the European Union. In those days, unemployment in Spain was 20–25%, for instance. The population was desperate and depressed. More than two million Spaniards had emigrated in search of work abroad. GDP was contracting sharply. But it was at that very moment that voters and political leaders alike pulled themselves together in order to decide what was to be the future of their country.

In the 1980s, Spain was at a crossroads, faced with the choice of how it would develop further and where it would integrate. The first option was to return to cooperation with Latin America, countries with whom Spain shared a common past. But these countries were all suffering high levels of inflation and economic decline. The second option was to integrate with the European Community. The choice was made to go to the EC as it appealed to Spaniards because of its level of economic development, its democratic principles, and new opportunities.

Still, as in Ukraine’s case, joining the EU was seen by Spaniards as being bound to NATO membership. Popular opinion was negative towards NATO at that time, as the Alliance was associated with the United States, which had supported the Franco

regime. Only certain concessions on the part of NATO members regarding specific conditions for Spain made it possible to persuade the general population that joining was necessary.

How did Spain overcome its crisis to become a model EU member?

Spain’s path to democracy and EU membership looks similar to Ukraine’s. In contrast to candidate countries from Central Europe, Spain had neither clear criteria from the EU, nor pre-accession assistance of any kind. The country’s political leadership perceived the transition to democratic governance and the introduction of market economy principles as a domestic policy objective. The most important lessons of democratization that the Spanish population learned was this: “If you don’t do it for the sake of your own country, nobody else is going to do it for you.”

The country moved towards consensus through debate and public discussion among the main players in the country. Finally, agreement was reached on three of the most critical issues: the principles underlying the political system, the model of economic development, and foreign policy. It was decided to put the resolution of the most controversial issues, such as the role of the provinces and language policy, beyond the pale of primary negotiations.

In order to take these issues beyond discussions that involved only the political leadership and to find nationwide consensus, other stakeholders were engaged in the process. Politicians of every stripe, government workers from

the old Franco regime, business owners, unions and non-government organizations all sat down to one table. The list of participants was formed by selecting 25 persons who were among the most well-known Spanish activists at the time from various spheres. And it was they who formed the platform for further public debate.

After adopting a Constitution, the next major document was a Law on administrative reform. This document established three levels of administration—central, regional and local—, without establishing any hierarchy among them. Each level had its own areas of competence. A list of functions was drawn up that belonged exclusively to the state, such as monetary policy, national security, and so on. At the same time, decentralization encouraged more effective regional policy, in response to the needs of the various regions. Economic reforms were undertaken in parallel. Unlike Ukraine, there was a middle class in Spain even during the years of the dictatorship. And this became the foundation for modernizing the country’s economy.

Having carried out a slew of reforms within the country, improved the economic situation and reached national consensus on the issue of NATO membership, Spain chosen a course towards the European Union. For the ordinary Spaniard at that time, integrating into the EU meant stronger economic growth, cooperation with other countries, peace and security, and the rooting of democratic principles in Spain. Having gone the path from dictatorship to democracy, from economic decay to blossoming, today’s Spain is 8th in the world for economic growth indicators.

Spain’s EU Presidency in 2012: What opportunities does this offer Ukraine?

The Agreement on the European Union states that heading the EU, which is often called the presidency is systematically done by each head of state of member countries for a six-month term, on a rotating basis established by the EU Council. The main purpose of the

presidency is organizing the work of the council, yet it is also to successfully resolve current political, economic and security issues. Within each country, the central government is responsible for this position and can also influence the evolution of EU policy during this period in accordance with its national interests.

Spain's EU presidency begins in January 2010. The country's government has already begun to formulate its priorities. There will be consultations with the governments of Czech Republic and Sweden, who will be in the presidency prior to Spain, as well as with Belgium and Hungary, who will take over the presidency afterwards. Countries that are outside the EU but want to become closer should cooperate with the member states that are in the presidency. Consultations prior to the start of each presidency and events undertaken during the presidency are additional means to promote aspiring countries.

What kinds of priorities might Spain have?

Internal policy. Migration policy could be one of the main priorities of the Spanish presidency. The country is known to have a strict visa policy, while at the same time having one of the best social policies in the EU regarding legal workers and immigrants.

The start of discussions of new **financial perspective for the EU** in 2014–2020 will be during Spain's EU presidency. Given the economic crisis that is unlikely to come to an end in 2010, Spain will have a difficult task on its plate. It will be moderating debate on maintaining the course towards becoming the most competitive economy in the world and at the same time on helping national economies recover from the crisis.

According to Spanish experts, third countries will not be able to count on the EU budget to expand external financial and technical assistance programs significantly. This constitutes a potential risk for Ukraine. According to economic data, the country will need around US \$10bn to bring just eight spheres (e.g. energy and transport) up to European standards over the next decade—yet these constitute commitments that Ukraine has made in its Association Agreement with the EU. This means that Ukraine needs to clearly assess its needs and begin lobbying them with the EU as quickly as possible. Spain is interested in ensuring the necessary funding for Mediterranean countries. Still, with the support of Czech Republic, Sweden, Poland and Great Britain, it could agree to some compromises regarding the EU's Eastern neighbors, including Ukraine.

Energy policy will remain among the priorities of the presidency. Spain is

an example of a country that is not dependent on Russia for fuels and has a properly diversified system of energy supplies from North Africa. Thus, Spain is well placed to suggest a new, effective policy of diversification of energy supplies.

Ensuring the stability of the **EU banking system** is an issue that needs greater attention on the part of the EU, given the current world crisis. It is expected that Spain will continue discussions of this issue within the EU.

Last, but not least, a **European Security and Defense Policy** could be a priority as well. The Ukrainian Government has expressed the desire to work more closely with the EU in the context of this policy after the August events in Georgia and it has an opportunity to join Europe-wide discussions during the Spanish presidency.

External policy. According to Spanish experts, Spain is not against a **policy of EU further enlargement**. Still, it is unlikely that anything more than some modest steps towards the Balkan countries will be taken during the Spanish presidency. Given their bitter experience with Romania and Bulgaria, which are largely failing to implement their pre-accession commitments and to reform, the majority of EU member states, like Spain itself, are likely to support further enlargement only after the proper preparation of candidates.

Its historical interests mean that Spain will support further implementation of the **Union for the Mediterranean** project launched during the French presidency in the second half of 2008.

What can Ukraine expect from the Spanish Presidency?

Given that the process of formulating priorities for the Spanish presidency has just begun, Ukraine has time to prepare its own proposals. Still, the first advice given by Spanish experts was to focus on what Ukraine has to offer the EU, instead.

They suggested that Ukraine develop cooperation with Spain based on in three main principles:

- **engagement:** holding joint expert discussions, establishing more active ties not only at the government level but also among journalists and NGOs;
- **sharing:** learning from both the positive and negative experiences of Spain in the process of democratization and EU integration. Spanish colleagues expressed the desire to share their experience in drafting a democratic Constitution, instituting regional policy and undertaking administrative reform with Ukrainians;

- **empathy:** trying to understand both the long-term plans of the EU and Spain as well as their concerns.

This year's expert discussion not only fostered the sharing of Spain's experience in establishing democracy, but also offered new ideas for future bilateral cooperation. During the next month, ICPS and the CIDOB will propose a program of cooperation between Ukraine and Spain whose implementation could involve interested government and non-government organizations in both countries. ■

This event was the second discussion under the ICPS–CIDOB initiative to strengthen Ukrainian–Spanish relations. The first event, "Spain and Ukraine: Prospects for partnership," took place in December 2007 in Barcelona, during which experts discussed the state of Ukrainian–Spanish relations and developed ideas for further cooperation.

One of the objectives of this initiative is arranging cooperation between Ukrainian and Spanish institutions and specialists. ICPS and CIDOB actively encourage all participants in this event and other interested persons to get involved in learning from Spanish experience and to open new opportunities for cooperation with those representatives of government, the press and think-tanks who came to Kyiv in December 2008. These included: José Ignacio Torreblanca, Madrid Office Director and Senior Fellow, The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR); Joaquim Fernández, Institutional Cooperation Programs Director, School of Public Administration of Catalonia, Generalitat de Catalunya (Catalan Government); Rosa Massagué, Journalist, El Periòdico, Barcelona; Juan Garrigues, Policy Unit Advisor, Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Madrid; Jordi Vaquer, Director, CIDOB Foundation, Barcelona; Carmen Claudin, Deputy Director, CIDOB Foundation, Barcelona; Félix Flores, Journalist, La Vanguardia, Barcelona; Rosa Nonell, Professor of Political Economy, Barcelona University; Gemma Pinyol, Coordinator, Migrations Program, CIDOB Foundation, Barcelona.

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