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Multi-Dimensional Security

The migration flows: An opportunity for cooperation in the Mediterranean.

The phenomenon of migration in the Mediterranean: The case of Spain.

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THE PHENOMENON OF MIGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: THE CASE OF SPAIN

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“**T**he fortress has fallen”, announced European Commissioner Franco Frattini in early October 2005, expressing his view that the European Union could no longer prevent the arrival of foreigners by using “barbed-wire fences”¹. His comments came after repeated attempts, between late August and early October 2005, made by hundreds of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa to scale the wire fences built by Spanish authorities around Ceuta and Melilla, Spain’s enclaves on Moroccan soil. These immigrants are living in Morocco for increasingly long periods of time in the most absolute poverty, and, above all, they are seeing their hopes of gaining access to the other side of the Mediterranean progressively fade, despite having the lights of the El Dorado of Europe in sight, as all manner of control systems are reinforced on both sides of the sea.

1. *Le Monde*, 8 October 2005.

A declaration like this by the main European official in charge of migration policy then constituted an acknowledgement of the failure of the security-based policies followed by countries such as Italy, and especially Spain (in particular, between 2001 and 2002) to protect Europe’s southern borders. These policies existed both separate from and within the framework of the externalisation policy for migration flow management, conceived and introduced by the European Union in the mid-1990s.

In fact, this failure was highlighted even more starkly by the explosion in the number of immigrants in an irregular situation who arrived in Spain during 2006, most of whom entered the country via the Canary Islands, instead of the Andalusian coast. This seems to indicate that the purely security-based protective measures adopted have not only proved to be inoperative, but that they have led to somewhat more complex situations, which is virtually the opposite of the original aim. Immigrants (and the trafficking networks to which some of them resort) constantly manage to slip through or go around the mesh of the protective systems.

This situation was confirmed between November 2005 and May 2006 with the advent of what could be called the “Dakar-Canary Islands” sea route.

Thus, the almost total closure of the Straits of Gibraltar to immigrants seeking to enter illegally, together with the combination of various Spanish and Moroccan land and maritime surveillance services (which

2. Between 1,167 and 7,000 immigrants have lost their lives by drowning or have disappeared during this crossing, according to data collected by APDHA Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía in its report for 2006.

have also been more effective in the stretch between Morocco's Saharan coast and the islands of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote) have led almost automatically to the opening of the "Dakar-Canary Islands" maritime route, which is longer and more hazardous², though cheaper and more direct. Though it had been foreseeable for some time, the opening of this new route surprised everyone with the speed with which people began to use it, as well as with the volume of immigrants that have used it, particularly during the summer of 2006.

In fact, the considerable reduction in the flow of immigrants through the Straits of Gibraltar into Europe can be largely explained (and has been widely compensated) by the fact that migration corridors have moved towards Western Africa, from Mauritania to Guinea. In this sense, Mauritania became a new point of departure in November 2005, followed by Senegal in spring 2006, for what seems to be an authentic explosion in the number of immigrants that have entered Spanish territory in an irregular way, with the Canary Islands becoming the main point of entry into Europe, on its southern flank.

As the following tables show, during 2006, over 31,000 sub-Saharan immigrants reached the coast of the Canary Islands (and mainly the island of Tenerife, the most populated and most tourist-oriented island in the archipelago). They arrived on board small vessels called *cayucos* that usually transport between 100 and 170 immigrants, whereas the smaller *pateras* that cross over to the Andalusian coast carry an average of 20 to 40 immigrants. The 2006 figure is virtually four times the number of arrivals recorded in the Canary Islands in 2002, the year in which it was believed that a historical peak had been reached since the beginning of the current migration phenomenon.

Table 1. Detentions of immigrants (of all nationalities) on arrival in Spain (via southern maritime routes) between 1993 and 2006

Year	Point of arrival			% of arrivals via Canary Islands/total
	Straits of Gibraltar	Canary Islands	Total	
1993	4,952	*	4,952	-
1994	4,189	*	4,189	-
1995	5,287	*	5,287	-
1996	7,741	*	7,741	-
1997	7,348	*	7,348	-
1998	7,031	*	7,031	-
1999	7,178	875	8,053	10,86
2000	16,885	2,387	19,272	12,38
2001	14,405	4,112	18,517	22,2
2002	6,748	9,756	16,504	59,11
2003	9,794	9,382	19,176	48,92
2004	7,425	8,426	15,851	53,15
2005	7,066	4,715	11,781	40,02
2006	6,976	31,106	38,082	81,68

Source: Mehdi Lahlou, from Spanish newspapers, including *El País* and the report for 2006 from the *Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía (APDHA)*.

Table 2. Arrival of immigrants to the Canary Islands in 2005 and 2006		
	2005	2006
Tenerife	637	17,261
Gran Canaria	1,416	5,460
La Gomera	72	3,371
Fuerteventura	2,249	2,232
El Hierro	0	1,974
Lanzarote	329	822
La Palma	48	0
Total	4,751	31,106

Source: *Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía* (APDHA) (report for 2006, January 2007) and *El País*, 28 August 2006.

These tables confirm, for the year 2006, the new process of migration that began in Africa in autumn 2005 and which has resulted in the shifting of migration routes to more than 2,500 kilometres away from the Spanish coast of Andalusia. These new routes have forced Spain to extend its surveillance and security operations to cover areas that have never fallen within the country's sphere of political, economic or cultural influence, with all the diplomatic problems that this involves.

Thus, until late 2005, migration routes followed the traditional South-North axis, crossing the Sahara (via Gao, followed by Kidal in Mali and Agadez in Nigeria), on to Algeria, continuing to Morocco and ending in Spain, via the Straits of Gibraltar. A variant of this South-North axis bifurcated, on reaching Morocco (or, from approximately 2003 onwards, southeast Algeria), toward the Atlantic, *en route* for the Canary Islands. More recently, these routes have changed to a South-West or East-West axis, bringing with them immigrant populations from most of the sub-Saharan region who make straight for the Canary Islands, which has become a springboard onto continental Spain and Europe. There is one important difference in the routes: while previously, immigrants had to make the crossing in a zone that was very heavily patrolled (and easily controllable), the 15 kilometres of sea between Tangiers and Tarifa, for example, the route is now over 1,200 kilometres long, from Senegal to the Canary Islands, across an ocean that requires entire fleets of ships to maintain a minimum level of surveillance.

This can be explained by several direct reasons, the most important being:

- The psychological effects of the dramas of autumn 2005 on would-be immigrants. The bloody events of September and October 2005 on the outskirts of Ceuta and Melilla, which resulted in the deaths of at least 11 immigrants³, generated great fear, and not only among the immigrant communities living in that country. What became clear was that the danger of being shot and killed by Moroccan or Spanish security forces on the migration route could no longer be discounted, which caused a certain degree of fear among both immigrants present in Morocco in late 2005 and early 2006 and their families.
- The strengthening of the *Sistema Integrado de Vigilancia Exterior* (Integrated Overseas Surveillance System, or SIVE) by the Spanish security and defence authorities. One of its essential ground components was the raising of the "protective" walls around the cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

3. On 3 July 2006, five immigrants died from gunshot wounds, in very similar situations, on the outskirts of Melilla.

4. *Agence de Presse AP*, Algiers, 5 February 2005.
5. These manoeuvres took place in 2003, 2004 and 2005. In 2006, they were carried out from 10 February to 24 March, and subsequently from 10 May to 15 June.

- The tightening of land and marine controls on the Moroccan side, following the mobilisation (in September 2006) of almost 9,000 police and soldiers entrusted with the task of implementing the immigration policy of Morocco's *Direction des Migrations et de Surveillance des Frontières* (Directorate-General of Migration and Border Control). This body was created in November 2003 by the authorities in Rabat in an attempt to apply the 02/03 Migration Law passed by the Moroccan Parliament in May 2003, and which came into force in November that same year.
- The significant tightening of controls at Algeria's borders with Mali and Nigeria in October and November 2005. This included, for the first time, massive expulsions of sub-Saharan immigrants in an irregular situation (particularly around the city of Maghnia)⁴ by the Algerian authorities, as well as an attempt by the authorities in Mali to improve controls for the issuing of national passports. This was because a Malian passport allowed the bearer to enter Algeria easily; until 2004 this situation produced a booming trade in this particular travel document, which was highly sought after by immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa.
- The large increase in the number of U.S. military manoeuvres in the Sahara region as part of the American initiative (dubbed PSI Ian Sahara Initiative) to fight terrorism in Africa. In the first half of 2006, the U.S. and Mali carried out two joint manoeuvres in the Gao region⁵, thereby turning it into a high risk area for would-be immigrants passing through, given the presence of numerous well-equipped and highly mobile military forces. This new foreign presence has become increasingly visible in Mali, where the Americans are building (2006/2007) their third-largest embassy in Africa, after those in Pretoria and Cairo.

Thus the migration flow, which experienced a certain lull between mid-May and mid-July 2006, changed its starting point (from Nuadibú, in northern Mauritania, to Dakar) and became, this time, a veritable flood of people heading for the Canary Islands (and particularly Tenerife). As a result, the archipelago received almost 12,000 new sub-Saharan immigrants in less than two months, between 15 and 16 July and mid-September 2006.

Particularly concerned by the turn of events in 2005 and 2006 (in terms of the new countries of origin, the new migration corridors and the enormous scale reached by these flows, especially in August and the first two weeks of September 2006), the Spanish authorities reacted on three levels simultaneously. This reaction can partly be explained by the pressure the country was receiving from its EU partners (including the French, the Germans and the Austrians) to explain Spain's policy on legalising immigrants in an irregular situation, a policy that some EU countries viewed as being rather unfair to them. On the level of domestic policy, the Spanish government began to employ a greater firmness in its declarations and announced major changes that would be rapidly enacted, particularly with respect to repatriation and the duration of periods of detention for the purpose of identifying undocumented immigrants. On the level of its relations with Europe, Spain stepped up its requests for help and support from the other EU countries. And on the level of its relations with countries of origin, Spain

called on them to take responsibility for repatriating their citizens (particularly in the case of Senegal and, to a lesser extent, Mali) and demanded the application of the clauses concerning readmission as specified in the Cotonou agreement (especially article 13).

Indeed, Spain has a great deal to do in this respect, as between July and September 2006, most EU states erupted into a cacophony of declarations and allegations that indicated the existence of a wide range of interests and general confusion. After making an attempt to speak with one voice in Rabat in July 2006, the EU gave particular support to demands that African countries of origin and transit should strengthen their border controls and should accept and facilitate identification and repatriation procedures for citizens of theirs who arrive clandestinely (or who live clandestinely) in Europe, in exchange for promises to increase the number of "legalised immigrants", as well as to diversify and intensify the exchange of students and researchers and to allocate supplementary funds for the development of the migration "corridors".

Given the critical situation Spain (and, to a lesser extent, Italy and Malta) is undergoing in terms of migration⁶, the EU countries as a whole seemed to be reluctant to come to any decision on the problem, and for at least three reasons:

1. The problem of migration has by far exceeded the initial diagnosis and the resources introduced to reabsorb it, especially in Rabat. It therefore involves political measures and funding that the European Union and its Member States are not in a position to apply rapidly or in a significant way. The clearest example of this is the case of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), created in October 2004. This agency, which was formed with the support of eight Member States to establish a naval and aerial surveillance system along the coasts of the Canary Islands, Senegal, Mauritania and the Cape Verde Islands, and which would be "enlarged to include other African countries in a few months"⁷, clearly shows the gap that exists between discourse and reality in Europe. More importantly, it reveals the break between what is possible in theory and what is effectively achievable on the ground (in peacetime) when it comes to managing such an important issue as irregular immigration. Thus, while the Spanish Home Affairs Minister had announced on 11 August 2006 that the Frontex-led operation had begun on that same day, and that "the resources allocated (for this purpose) will arrive in the next few days", the agency, which had just released 3.2 million to launch its plan, refused to announce the exact date when the operation in the area would be set in motion, when said operation "(was) ready for launching", in the words of the European commissioner responsible for the matter, and for whom "it was a historic moment in the history of European immigration policy"⁸. In fact, only four countries⁹ from the Union ? France, Italy, Portugal and Finland ? had agreed, in late 2006, to contribute to an operation that would cover a large part of the West coast of Africa and the Canary Islands, and which would be implemented by a team numbering a total of... 65 people. In early September 2006, there was only one Portuguese corvette patrolling the coasts of Cape Verde in the framework of the Frontex plan¹⁰.

6. Italy and Malta received over 11,000 and 3,000 illegal immigrants, respectively, during the first eight months of 2006.
7. An announcement made in Brussels on 23 May 2006 by the EU Commissioner responsible for Justice, Freedom and Security.
8. Agence France-Presse, 11 September 2006.
9. Germany, together with other countries, categorically refused to support such a project, claiming that Spain is a large country that is sufficiently wealthy to be able to finance such initiatives on its own – initiatives to which it resorts for its own protection. Euronews, 22 September 2006.
10. *Le Monde*, 1 septembre 2006.

2. Variations exist between the economic and demographic interests of different countries, and therefore the same approach cannot be used for solving the problem of irregular immigration. In any case, this problem has not achieved the same intensity in countries such as Sweden, Germany and Malta, and it does not have the same impact on that island as it does on the Baltic countries, for example.

3. National and local policies suffer from so many limitations (including the ones that arise during election campaigns or from particular situations in certain European labour markets) that governments' approaches to what are fundamentally human and political problems are inevitably different, as well as depending to a great extent on the spheres of economics and development (i.e. the factors that generate migrations). On occasions they are even contradictory, especially when an attempt is made to go further on the issue of border control. In this respect, the security imperatives of some countries are not on the same level –nor do they generate the same urgency– as those of other countries.