

CIDOB International Yearbook 2008
Keys to facilitate the monitoring of
the Spanish Foreign Policy and the
International Relations in 2007

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Lourdes Benavides

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Lourdes Benavides de la Vega, independent adviser, member of the African Studies Group at the Autonomous University of Madrid and doctoral student of International Relations and African Studies

The framework of Spain's relations with sub-Saharan Africa has undergone a rapid transformation during the past decade. While at first these links were virtually insignificant or occasional, the tendency is towards a growing interdependence and increased mutual knowledge. More specifically, the Africa Plan 2006-08 envisages an intensification of Spain's relations with the continent in the areas of politics, economics, trade, culture and the fight against poverty, through a series of foreign policy initiatives and action measures. This pronounced political impulse, which also includes strong institutional promotion, has come about since José María Aznar's government (which enacted the first Action Plan for sub-Saharan Africa 2001-2002) commenced the movement, albeit in what must be described as a more tentative form.

Sub-Saharan Africa – and particularly on its western side – has been gradually making its way to the centre of Spain's foreign policy agenda, in parallel with the increase in the number of sub-Saharan immigrants. Though the total number of immigrants is proportionally very small, Spain's relations with the continent have to a great extent been marked by this acceleration in immigration. Thus, a few weeks after the Socialists' term of office began, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation organised a round of visits to different countries in the region – including Nigeria – to discuss migration-related subjects. Spain has promoted strategic association frameworks in West Africa with countries of origin and those subject to the transit of migration flows; these frameworks involve a number of potential lines of action, including strengthening diplomatic representation, allocating funds, signing bilateral agreements and cooperation with development.

In fact, of the different bilateral co-operation frameworks that have been negotiated with Nigeria, one fundamental step forward was the signing, in

November 2001, of a Bilateral Immigration Agreement, which in fact represents an agreement on the readmission of irregular immigrants in exchange for hiring Nigerian workers¹. With its population of 140 million (according to World Bank figures), Nigeria is the most highly-populated country in Africa, and one of the main points of origin for immigrants to the European Union. In Spain at present there are approximately 23,500 Nigerians², while in 2005, 3,500 irregular immigrants were repatriated to their country (Cruz, 2005). One of the most dramatic events in 2007 was when a Nigerian died in an aeroplane as he was being repatriated.

Spain has been a leading actor in the area of migrations within the framework of EU policy on Sub-Saharan Africa, with the adoption of the Global Approach to Migration (Guerrero, 2008). This study expresses a broader view of the connection between migrations and development, and includes issues such as the fight against people-trafficking – especially of women and children, a phenomenon that is particularly important in the case of Nigeria.

Beyond migration-related issues, bilateral relations between Nigeria and Spain are currently deemed to be favourable, and the signing of a Strategic Alliance in 2005 represents a framework that permits the strengthening of bilateral cooperation, especially in areas defined as strategic for both sides: energy resources, trade, investment and immigration.

Political dialogue between Spain and Nigeria

The Africa Plan 2006-2008 places Nigeria on the list of priority interest countries, given that both Nigeria and South Africa constitute "motors of economic development, in addition to being important points of reference as factors for the stability and promotion" of development programmes on the continent (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation – MAEC – 2006). Previously, political dialogue had been formalised between Spain and Nigeria following several top-level meetings. In 2005, President Obasanjo made an official visit to Spain, and immediately afterwards the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation travelled to Abuja. This year unquestionably represents a quantum leap in the institutionalisation of relations between the two governments, thanks to the signing of a "Memorandum of Understanding to establish a strategic alliance between the Federal Republic

of Nigeria and Spain", which will involve the holding of annual political consultations.

However, these considerations should not conceal the complex context of Nigerian politics. The third State and national elections since the end of successive military dictatorships in 1999 took place in April 2007³, and were expected to represent the consolidation of the democratic transition, and to ensure a change of leadership. Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, the candidate for the governing party, the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), was declared the winner in an election that (and just like in 2003) failed to comply with international standards. The EU sent a team of observers to monitor the elections, and their report notes massive irregularities and widespread evidence of fraud. The Transition Monitoring Group (the civil society coalition that deploys 50,000 observers) called for the elections to be annulled and for Parliament to intervene (Navarro, 2007). Even the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which is normally prudent in such matters, denounced the mistakes made by the National Independent Electoral Commission in all stages of the electoral process.

In spite of the commitment of the EU and its Member States to promote democracy and good government (formalised in the new Strategy for Africa and more recently in the Joint Strategy EU-Africa), no political measures were taken after the elections. The European Parliament merely voted on a resolution that demanded the suspension of aid to Nigeria's federal and State institutions until new elections were held⁴, but Europe's governments could not reach an agreement, and the mechanisms envisaged in the Cotonou Agreement to call for special reviews were not put into motion (Khakee, 2007).

In this context, the visit to Spain by Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs on 8th February 2008 held a special significance, given that it took place a few months after the investiture of the new president Yar'Adua. In its first section, the Africa Plan envisages "Spain's participation in the consolidation of democracy, peace and security in Africa", and particularly in the area of "democratic governments and the strengthening of institutions" (MAEC, 2006). Nevertheless, as in the European case, the maintaining of good relations with a partner with Nigeria's significant political and economic

weight took priority over the criteria of democracy and good government. This is especially the case if we consider the country's energy potential.

Energy resources

Nigeria is the largest oil producer on the African continent, and possesses the seventh-largest natural gas reserves in the world. In 2006, the country produced more than 2.4 millions of barrels of oil every day, generating net exports of 2 million barrels, making it the eighth-largest exporter of oil in the world (it was the sixth in 2005, with net exports of 2.3 million barrels) (EIA, 2008). Several Spanish companies are involved in the Nigerian energy market: Gas Natural and Iberdrola purchase natural gas and Repsol-YPF and Cepsa buy crude oil.

At present, the energy sector represents the major proportion of trade relations between the two countries. Spain is Nigeria's second most important customer in the oil sector, the first being the United States. Meanwhile, for Spain, Nigeria has also become a strategic partner: 25% of oil and gas imported by Spain comes from Nigeria.

The philosophy of strengthening relations with Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly with Nigeria, also tends to ensure and diversify an energy supply that guarantees the needs of the Spanish market, which is in constant growth and is highly dependent on oil and gas. However, since the early 1990s, violent attacks on the interests of large oil companies have been increasing in the Niger Delta region, an area that has become a major source of energy for Spain. In the months leading up to the 2007 elections, the scale of violence led to increasingly uncontrolled protests, theft and sabotage of oil pipelines and kidnapping of workers, etc., to the extent that the EIA (the American government's Energy Information Agency) estimates that there has been a 20% reduction in total oil production in the main production area owing to the escalating violence (EIA, 2007).

In Nigeria, the fight for the control of oil contributes to the instability of political organisation and of the multi-ethnic federal system. The resistance in the energy production area is connected with the way in which the sector's profits are shared out between federal and state governments, as well as with deep-seated social inequality. This crisis of legitimacy and government in the Niger Delta has led to the emergence of "hard-line"

armed groups (Obi, 2007), in addition to an increase in criminal activity that is widely interrelated with the political movements (*Financial Times*, 2006). Bearing in mind Nigeria's importance for Spain's oil and gas supply, this regional instability could affect levels of energy vulnerability if imports are increased from a country which, as I have mentioned previously, is marked by a significant lack of democracy and an internal fragility (Isbell, 2006). Furthermore, China is emerging as a privileged actor on the Nigerian stage, as well as on the rest of the continent, and its volume of trade and investment is growing constantly and rapidly. These two factors could affect the terms in which the trade in hydrocarbons with Spain develops; this is the reason why the search for stronger bilateral relations with Nigeria has prevailed over other considerations such as good government and democratic participation.

Economic and trade relations

In 2005, Spain was Nigeria's second most important trading partner, receiving 8.2% of the African country's total exports, behind the United States, which in that same year received over half of Nigeria's net exports. Currently, Spain has a distinct deficit with Nigeria in terms of balance of trade owing to the amount of energy products that Spain buys from Nigeria – in 2007, Spain imported more than €3,200 million worth of goods from Nigeria, and exported goods to the value of €173.4 million⁵. In spite of this, Nigeria unquestionably represents an attractive market for Spanish businesses, given that it is a market of considerable size and has great consumer potential. Especially – according to the Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (ICEX) – in sectors such as machinery and equipment, building materials, electrical materials, some manufactured plastic goods and transformed foodstuffs. In the aforementioned interview with his Nigerian counterpart in February 2008, Minister Moratinos clearly expressed the government's desire to increase the volume of trade exchange and showed his interest in encouraging more Spanish companies to do business with Nigeria⁶.

Nevertheless, Nigeria, which became a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, has maintained its capacity for national production protected. The country has a highly variable regime of imports,

which includes a long list of products subjected to tariffs and prohibited imports, which are published annually by the Federal Executive Council. Customs processes and the application of regulations also complicate import procedures.

Nigeria is also considered a high-risk country by the business world, a nation that has been criticised for corruption, accusations of fraud and incorrect trade practices. In spite of a certain improvement owing to the recent domestic reforms, the reports published by Transparency International still place Nigeria at the bottom of the list in its Corruption Perceptions Index.

Spain and Nigeria still have an agreement in the area of Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments (signed in 2002), a Bilateral Agreement on Air Services, signed in 2004 and thanks to which IBERIA recommenced operations (the Spanish airline flies to Lagos three times a week) and, finally, an Agreement for Avoiding Double Taxation, which is still awaiting ratification.

Finally, the high risk of political instability has also spread great mistrust among Spanish companies, almost none of whom are involved in direct investment in Nigeria. One exception worth mentioning is the large-scale future project involving Repsol-YPF and Gas Natural; the two Spanish companies, through a joint-venture aimed at the international Liquid Natural Gas business, have signed an agreement with the Nigerian government to build and operate a natural gas liquefaction plant at some point in the future.

The fight against poverty

Despite its economic potential and enormous natural resources, Nigeria is in 158th place out of the 177 countries included in the Human Development Index drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme. Poverty is spread across the entire country, life expectancy is 46.5 years (PNUD, 2007), GNP per inhabitant is equal to \$752 and 54% of the population live below the poverty threshold (World Bank, 2008).

The economy is completely dependent on the oil sector, which represents more than 95% of export revenue and around 52% of the GNP (World Bank, 2008). Nigeria has devised a National Economic Empowerment and

Development Strategy 2004-07 (referred to as NEEDS), with the objective of boosting economic growth, reducing poverty and achieving its Millennium Development Goals. The Strategy contains a number of initiatives, including economic reforms aimed at promoting growth in sectors other than oil (particularly to increase agricultural production, which has been pushed into the background in recent years) and promoting an environment suitable for the private sector. These poverty reduction documents represent cooperation frameworks for donors.

Spain's Official Development Assistance (ODA) organisation does not include Nigeria in its 2005-2008 General International Cooperation Plan as a country for receiving aid. Nevertheless, in terms of destination countries, if we bear in mind debt transactions, Development Aid Fund loans and micro-credits, then Nigeria was one of the main receivers of ODA in 2006, in third place behind Guatemala and Iraq. The explanation for this lies in a broad-based operation to cancel a debt of €108.7 million (MAEC, 2007).

Within the framework of unprecedented negotiations by the Paris Club, a major debt cancellation operation was signed in 2005, for a total of around \$18 billion; or rather, an amount that represented 60% of Nigeria's debt to creditor countries. Furthermore, in late 2006, the Nigerian parliament approved the liquidation of a debt to the value of \$1,400 million with the London Club. These budgetary breathing spaces are aimed at promoting investment and programmes to fight poverty (BAfD/OCDE, 2007).

Nigeria and its regional context

It is important to mention the role Nigeria plays in a continental and regional context. With respect to the continent, apart from its demographic size, Nigeria is the second-most powerful economy after South Africa, concentrating 41% of the GNP of the sub-Saharan region. From a regional perspective, it represents almost half the population of ECOWAS and more than 60% of its GNP. Finally, owing to its great demographic, economic and political importance, Nigeria is hoping for a permanent place on the United Nations Security Council.

Politically speaking, Nigeria is a political leader that has pushed forward several cross-border initiatives. Together with Algeria, Egypt, Senegal and South Africa, it is one of the promoters of the New Partnership for Africa's

Development (NEPAD), the socioeconomic development framework created for the African Union (AU) at the turn of the century, and which Spain has supported since its earliest days.

Nigeria has also played an important role in peace-making and resolution of conflicts in West Africa and in other regions on the continent. Nigerian forces represent, particularly, the central pillar of ECOMOG, the Intervention and Control Force of ECOWAS. Europe acknowledges Nigeria's decisive role in maintaining peace and security in a context in which "Europeans want to see more African forces dedicated to peacekeeping on the continent": Nigeria contributes troops to 12 of the 14 United Nations peacekeeping operations, and furthermore nearly 3,000 Nigerian soldiers participate in AU operations in Sudan and Somalia (Khakee, 2007). Just like Europe, which has renewed the AU fund aimed at peace-keeping on the continent, Spain has recently announced that it will be contributing €30 million to strengthen AU institutions and efforts to achieve peace and security on the continent⁷. Spain has also shown interest in regional integration efforts in the region, the main management organisations of which are in Abuja. In 2005, Spain signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Executive Secretary's office of ECOWAS that covers areas such as the fight against poverty, the empowerment of women in peacekeeping and the fight against irregular immigration and people-trafficking. With this aim, a €10 million fund has recently been created for migration and development programmes, and which was announced at the Lisbon Summit.

Finally, Nigeria plays a central role in regional trade agreements. The ECOWAS treaty envisages the creation of a common market (through the liberalisation of trade exchanges, the establishing of a Common Foreign Trade Tariff and a common trade policy) and the creation of an Economic Union. Nigeria has endorsed a framework of intra-community trade liberalisation, and in 2005 it began the implementation of the Common Foreign Trade Tariff. However, in the hurried and ultimately failed negotiations with the European Commission to sign the Economic Association Agreement between the EU and ECOWAS (which should have come into force in 2008, and put an end to non-reciprocal preferential relations), Nigeria played an important role, which led the European Trade

Commissioner Peter Mandelson to describe it as "an elephant sitting in the middle of the road".

Notes

1. It should be mentioned that this bilateral agreement has been used to devise subsequent agreements with other countries in West Africa such as Gambia, Senegal and Mali.

2. Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs "Boletín Estadístico de Extranjería e Inmigración", No. 15, January 2008.

3. Elections on 14th April 2007 to choose governors and assemblies at a State level, while on 21st April the presidential and the federal legislative elections were held.

4. "European Parliament resolution on the recent elections in Nigeria", B6 0201, point 16.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B6-2007-0201&language=EN>

5. Network of Economic and Trade Offices Abroad, "Balanza Comercial de España con Nigeria en el año 2007".

http://www.oficinascomerciales.es/icex/cda/controller/pageOfecomes/0,5310,5280449_5307910_5309111_0_NG,00.html

6. Office of the President of the Government, "El Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores y de Cooperación recibe al ministro de Asuntos Exteriores de Nigeria", press release, 08-02-08.

http://www.la-moncloa.es/ServiciosdePrensa/NotasPrensa/MAE/2008/ntpr20080208_Nigeria.htm

7. Office of the President of the Government (op. Cit.)

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