

SPAIN'S END OF THE CENTURY

Víctor Pérez-Díaz

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Summary

1. Changing the vantage point and finessing the conceptual schema
2. Three modalities, and three understandings, of politics
3. Back to the narrative: the events leading to the PP's absolute majority in the 2000 elections, and their aftermath
4. A provisional assessment of the PP's rule: a grand liberal strategy for the economy
5. Reactive politics and policies on the domestic front
6. Three weak spots in Spanish politics at the end of the century: the politics of the future; the politics of identity; and Spain's place in the world
7. Going towards a civil society, but *who* does the "going"?

References

ASP Research Papers

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1. Changing the vantage point and finessing the conceptual schema

Civil society broadly understood

I must confess (and I hope the reader will be understanding enough to accept my confession even if it comes, in a properly Catholic-Spanish way, after committing the sin...) that this is not the book of an objectivist or naturalistic social scientist, but of one with a reflective bent of mind and trained in the detours of what we may call, in a rather loose way, a subjectivist philosophy.* By this I mean one which suggests that the observers' perspective (the author's, the readers', the historical agents') and the actual traits of the situation to be observed are linked together, can be dealt with as *different* aspects of the reality-to-be-explained only to a certain extent, and cannot be completely disentangled. In this approach, the matters of perspective and timing become crucial.

In the first chapter I advised the reader that the vantage point for this book was the kind of *civil society* Spain had become *by the mid 1990s*, twenty years after its democratic transition. There are two emphases here.

I use the term "civil society" understood in its broad sense as I link my argument to a tradition that dates back to the Scottish Enlightenment, and to the normative ideal and the analytical model of "a polite and commercial society" -- the emergence of which is linked to (and follows on from and asserts itself against) an older Western set of traditions leading back to the medieval order and the Greek *polis*.¹ There is a display here of (relative) archaism, a will to come back to at least the beginning of our contemporary world, which implies an explicit attachment to a liberal tradition and a detachment from the radical and conservative traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which claimed to have overcome it.

Civil society understood in its broad sense recalls the inner connections between the spheres of free and open markets, liberal democracy, a public sphere and those social networks and associations to which the label of "civil society" is usually attached -- and which I refer to as "civil society in a restricted sense". In my view, these are spheres which, though different from each other, should be seen in a unitary way, as

* This essay was written as a complement, or alternatively as the last chapter, to the Italian version (Il Mulino, forthcoming), of *Spain at the Crossroads: Civil Society, Politics and the Rule of Law* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹ On the emergence of the Scottish tradition, understood in contradistinction to classical, Aristotelian, and medieval, Augustinian and Thomist, traditions, see MacIntyre (1988: pp. 209ff.). See also Pocock, 2002.

part and parcel of an order of freedom -- more or less the way the Scottish philosophers saw them.² The task of understanding the emergence and the maintenance of a civil society is that of considering the whole; and therefore, of looking into the specifics of each of those spheres, and trying to ascertain to what extent do they fit in together, as components of this order of freedom. There is room, then, both for analysis and for criticism (from that normative viewpoint); just as there is also room for suggesting ways to remedy the un-civil character of the markets, democracies, public sphere and social networks that actually exist at any given place and time.³

Reintroducing historical time, shifting perspectives, and speaking in the first person

My emphasis as regards timing in this book is deliberate too, and has some bearing on my understanding of the nature of my task, and on the way I deal with it. Firstly, as regards the nature of my task. I use a theory of civil society *not* in order to explain a general tendency or law-like developments in Spanish society in modern times, and thereby to identify general tendencies and the law-like development of supposedly similar societies, *but* in order to identify the conditions that may add to our understanding of the fairly contingent or infra-determined responses of a variety of specific social and political actors to their perceived situation at hand in the unique circumstances of a given time, and this only from the viewpoint of a particular intellectual inquiry aimed at a better understanding of the conditions that may foster, or hinder, the emergence and the persistence of a variety of forms of civil societies in the modern world. This is not meant to imply that my purpose is strictly confined to explaining Spain. It is rather one of explaining Spain by way of pointing out to ever wider connections, reflections and speculations.⁴ Thus, an understanding of the present Spanish case leads to parallels and analogies with those of other European countries, and possibly of the United States, and, in particular, with the avatars of the European, and American, counterparts of the Spanish generation of 1956/1968 that came to power, so to speak, in so many other countries during the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, it is not my purpose, in this book, to pursue these

² And not in antagonistic conflict with each other, the way the Marxist and post-Marxist traditions see them.

³ For my views on civil society in a broad sense see Pérez-Díaz (1995). On the contrast between civil society broadly understood and a restricted or "minimalist" view of civil society see Pérez-Díaz 1998, and for a contrary view, see Alexander (1998). On civil remedies or civil repairs see *infra*, and Alexander 2001.

⁴ As suggested by Graham, following Oakeshott (Graham, 1997: 219).

intimations in any full and systematic way. In other words, focusing on the recent Spanish historical process and trying to understand it in a reflective way has led me to emphasize the specific locations of both the subject matter and of the author, and to invite the readers, as well, to situate themselves in the game, and, hence, to give room for a double reference to analysis and to normative statements.

Secondly, and deriving from the previous point, timing, and time itself, has some bearing on the way I handle my undertaking, the points I emphasize and the kind of moods, dispositions and sentiments⁵ which I bring to my task and which find their way into the general tone of the book. Of course, I could have contemplated the events of the time in a more philosophical mood had I chosen to see them as transient events along the path that led Spain from civil war to becoming another member of a club of civilized societies, which is how most Western European countries look to today's observer. For a benign, sympathetic observer of the first ten to fifteen years of democratic Spain, this could have been sufficient, and in fact, by 1992, it was just what most foreign observers were doing, while at the same time, the central events of that year taking place in Spain (both the Olympic Games in Barcelona and the World Fair in Seville) looked like an unending ceremony of Spanish self-congratulation. In this view, a series of mistakes (high rates of unemployment, a whiff of financial or political corruption here and there) could be assimilated as learning episodes, so to speak; and it is said we learn by trial and error...

Instead I decided on a different approach. I decided to take a close look at the events without attempting to fit them into a pre-established pattern that would automatically indicate progress, and left the future open to *dénouements* of all kinds, including some that were not very promising at all. I focused on the drama of the present and, instead of offering a morality tale with the gradual lead up to a happy ending, I let the drama of the current events to stand on its own and left the end uncertain. I made the double possibility of constructing a civil society or drifting into incivility explicit, with the final result hinging on a variety of circumstances.

Thus, I took a hard look at democratic Spain. Suspicious of the explicit premises and background assumptions of most academic and political discussion about the consolidation of democracy, and rather convinced that any achievement in the field of civil society (or civility, if you like) is a precarious and fragile thing that can easily slip through our fingers, I looked at the other side of the success story of the

Spanish transition, and drafted a first assessment of the early nineties that portrayed a situation in Spain of low-intensity disorder (see Chapters 2 and 3 of this book). And from this there followed, logically enough, an increasing alertness on my part to the shadow (to use a Jungian term) of the Spanish persona, to the persistence of unemployment and the increasing gravity of the accusations made by many, and in due time acknowledged by a variety of judicial courts, that the government had allowed itself to be dragged through a quagmire of illegal acts that involved death squads and a massive cover up -- no "mistakes" here, just crimes.

As the drama was played out by a variety of actors in the public eye, and the public itself was forced to abandon from time to time its role of mere spectator of the political show, the emphasis was on the public sphere, on political accountability, and on the way in which the logic of the rule of law, of party rivalries, of judicial restraint or judicial excess, of the media's political involvement, and of the vagaries of public opinion interacted with each other in the public arena. The proceedings were confusing, the actors' motivations were quite mixed, and the results (in any case, the electoral results of 1993 and 1996) may leave room for various interpretations.

However, the book did not end with the elections of 1996 and, as it moved on, the emotional climate of the human landscape and its observers changed. There was a touch of fatigue in the political body, and an air of anti-climax was attached to the plot's *dénouement* whereby the leader of the PP, José María Aznar replaced González at the helm of the Spanish state. This was reflected in the moderate expectations and wait-and-see attitude that seemed to prevail in the public mood at the time vis-à-vis the new government.

The time was, then, ripe for summing-up past events, but any judgement about the PP experience risked being premature. Except for the party enthusiasts on both sides (some were full of exalted hopes and others, of bitter resentments) any assessment of the events of 1996-1998 could not be other than tentative. Time was required for the moves and countermoves to be seen as parts of a pattern (if in fact this were the case) and for the intricacies of the plot to be deployed. Thus, the PP's initial moves in the field of economic policy and regional politics seemed to hold some promise, and in the medium term they did lead to remarkable economic success (membership of the European Monetary Union in 1999, and a halving of the unemployment rate of 1995 by 2000), although they also put the government on a collision course with the Basque nationalists.

As I look back at the trajectory (so far), what strikes me now, at the beginning of 2003, is the realization that while the domestic drama of the 1980s

⁵ Or "affectedness", in Dreyfus's translation of Heidegger's *Stimmung* (Dreyfus 1991: 168ff.).

and 1990s has subsided, the international arena has become a much more dangerous and riskier place -- and one which might even have ominous consequences for Spanish politics. In retrospect, we may suspect that the Spanish developments during the 1990s, including the final stage of the socialist rule and the PP's six to seven years in power, all together, were like a window of opportunity to put a stop to some dubious undertakings, to solve some problems and let others to follow their course; in brief, to put the house in a state of partial order, and no more, the door then being left open to new avatars.

In summary

Mapping the transition and going back to the formative years of the generation of 1956/1968 was a way of preparing the reader for contemplation of the conflicts of the 1990s, when a low intensity disorder changed into high drama. The tampering with the rule of law and the confusing noises of the public space (which can be as the reverse side of an otherwise successful democratic polity), as well as the continuing high rates of unemployment (as the counterpoint to economic growth) were both the results and the signs of a crisis in the way politics, society and the economy worked at the time, and had been working for some considerable period of time before. Spain was at a crossroads, I suggested, and Chapter 8 may be read as the concluding remarks for all those developments just at the moment when a few tentative steps beyond that point were apparently being made. But life, both personal and social, is, of course, an ongoing, unfinished business, or at least it is until it comes to a definitive end; and the general thrust of the preceding chapter was to remind us of the open-ended nature and intrinsic frailty of liberal democratic institutions, and of civil society understood in its broad sense. So, as soon we let time unfold, the Spanish drama we have witnessed in the past becomes a preparatory act for the next play. The theater opens its doors to new audiences, the lights go down, the stage is filled once again with old and new characters, and the commedia continues.

The plan of this chapter

This final chapter (written in March 2003) provides an overview of the next stretch along the road by focusing on the interplay between politics and the other (economic, societal, cultural) dimensions of social life.

I will start with a brief theoretical discussion. Politics and policies being a fairly heterogeneous field of social practices and institutions, I will outline a conceptual schema for sorting out three dimensions of politics (and policies): politics as usual, politics as grand strategy, and politics as a dramatic contest. This is intended to help set the standards for, and to clarify,

the discussion that follows. Next, I will complete the narrative of the main events of the period 1996-2000 (see Chapters 6 and 7) leading up to the elections of 2000, which gave an absolute majority to José María Aznar, followed by a broad sketch of what came afterwards. And I will take stock, provisionally, of the economic and social policy of this six to seven year period. After some hesitation, the PP settled for a liberal economic policy *cum* social dialogue, that meant, in fact, *cum* reactive and defensive policies in the social field. Then, I will consider three weak spots in the over-all record of Spanish politics and policy in this *fin-de-siècle* period: namely, those concerning the future, the politics of identity and Spain's position in the world. This leads me to some concluding remarks on what I call Spain's "autobiographical self", the repairs needed for Spain to draw closer to the normative ideal of a civil society, and the role that politics may play in this respect.

2. Three modalities, and three understandings, of politics

Politics and policies operate within a larger scenario which surrounds and underlies the restricted arena in which political agents operate, and which they imagine they control. Local (national) politics and policies are ways in which a political community responds to challenges that result from the combination of external pressures and internal tensions. And it responds to them in a manner that fits in with a given set of normative criteria (in other words, from the viewpoint of a normative theory of civil society: in a manner that reinforces the degree of civility of society's practices and institutions). But, as the nature and the intensity of these challenges diverge, people engaged in politics may interpret the situations they face in quite different ways, each requiring a different type of politics. I will focus on three modalities, and understandings, of politics: politics as usual, politics as grand strategy, and politics as drama.

Politics as usual: responses to moderate challenges

In some situations political life seems to flow in a regular way, institutions work as predicted, elections take place in due course, and an alternation in power takes place between governments of different persuasions but similar views on basic domestic and foreign policies. There is no sense of radical change (other than the use of the very words "radical change" as a *ritornello* of political campaigns), and no trauma. Meanwhile, the public space is full with the noises of the conflicts of interests, identities and values, but the tacit understanding underlying most of them is that those conflicts are like wrestling matches between contenders who take for granted that they will keep wrestling for a long time, because they are either interested in living together or resigned to doing so.

They may dream of ultimate victories, but most of the time they expect their conflicts to lead to compromises and to gradual alterations in their rapport de forces. On the surface, the “system” (say, the institutional framework) works by itself. In reality, it does work only because it is made to work by people acting according to their habits and understandings. In other words, the system works because there is a basic consensus in society, and because politics reflects and reinforces that consensus.

Thus, most of the time, the majority of the electorate makes its choices within a range of “normal” parties (i.e., parties with a realistic chance of coming to power) and “normal” policies (i.e., policies with a realistic chance of being implemented). Certainly, there is some room for the political entrepreneurs to maneuver and offer different political products. For instance, in contemporary European settings, they come up with a wide range of political options that may include those of liberal-conservatives, social-democrats, social-liberals, social-conservatives, democratic-reformists, or liberals tout court, and so on. This suggests a large repertoire of options, each neatly distinct from the rest. But in fact those labels should be taken *cum grano salis*. Their actual contents refers to various ways of dealing with forthcoming events while managing the status quo of liberal political institutions (division of powers, a free open space with a plurality of parties and associations, etcetera), markets, welfare arrangements, and a traditional, and “bipartisan”, foreign policy. They come hand-in-hand with discourses of justification that are variants of a mix between three intellectual traditions, those of liberalism, conservatism and socialism, which have been gradually borrowing ideas, phrases and gestures from each other over the course of two centuries. In the end, it is hard for the political audiences to disentangle the amalgam that has resulted from the parties’ imitation of each other over such a long period. In fact, mutual imitation parading as disagreement is the key for understanding much of party politics.⁶

In situations of “politics as usual” many get accustomed to this confusion, and may react to it in one of two ways. Some people, the “self-consistent” type, react by reverting to some simple, basic ideological schema (for instance, the contrast between “left” and “right”), and by anchoring their choices in loyal commitments to this or that party, and in deep seated beliefs, or *idées fixes*. Others, the “volatile” type, learn how to overcome their initial bewilderment in the face of parties that pretend to be strikingly different while being strikingly similar, by deflecting

their rhetoric and looking for cues in their actual behavior. They endeavor to imagine what might really be expected from the political leaders and parties were they to be elected. Thus, they are caught up in a sequential game of high expectations, lingering doubts, and final disenchantment, possibly leading to a change in their allegiance or to political apathy; only to start all over again at the next opportunity.

Politics as grand strategy: increasing the stakes of politics

From time to time, politicians who aim higher than merely sticking to “politics as usual” appear on the stage. Their ambition is to become “true statesmen”, and they are prepared to challenge the status quo. They appeal to the inner convictions of their party followers and the general public, and try to mobilize their enthusiasm. They talk of far-reaching goals to be attained, and, more to the point, they act out such talk. This “acting out” is the key which distinguishes the rhetoric of change of “politics as usual” from the “real thing” of a grand strategy that translates into an effective performance in the real world.

History contains an inextinguishable repertoire of grand strategies, and, in contemporary times, the builders of the post-war Europe have been engaged in a variety of them: the setting up of the European mix of a state- or corporate coordinated market economy and a welfare state was the result of ambitious policies by social-democratic and Christian-democratic parties. The policies of privatization and deregulation, later on, reflected the political grand vision of European liberals, while containment of the Soviet threat was the key to Western nations’ bipartisan foreign policy for a long period of time. In general terms, grand strategies come in all shapes and sizes depending on local circumstances and under various guises: “modernization” may mean building up a nation-wide rail system for the first time, a critical expansion of the welfare state, a large program of privatization of public companies, or the setting up of an entirely new system for primary education; “redesigning the state” may be translated into a politics of the systemic devolution of power to local authorities; “peace building” may refer to a durable realignment within the geopolitical system of international alliances, etcetera.

Politics as drama: responses to dramatic, even traumatic experiences

Moments of strategic choice, important and emotional as they may be, are to be distinguished from instances of politics as drama proper. Dramas trigger off the expression of sentiments of collective identity, and lead to the renewal of people’s allegiance to the basic institutions and symbols of their country. They may come in a benign form or a critical one. Benign

⁶ On the logic of “mimetic rivalries” in general, see Girard (1978: 379ff.).

dramas are linked to long expected, uplifting events in the life of a nation. The demise of an authoritarian leader and a democratic transition is a drama of this kind. Sometimes, a transition in a different direction, from a weak, divided and half-legitimate democracy to a unified political community led by a strong and charismatic ruler, may be perceived in the same way. Being accepted as a nation into a club of respected, admired nations, and thereby changing or adding up a new impersonation to the repertoire of roles the country is to play in the theater of the world (as occurs with membership of the European Union, from the viewpoint of new member states) may be seen as the end-result of a grand strategy but should also be considered as an uplifting, benign drama.

Somber, critical dramas refer to historical occasions (which are usually hard to foresee in advance) when the very grounds of politics and policies are shattered. The combination of external threats and internal divisions lay bare the fragility of the institutional framework of the everyday living together of society, or of the sentiments of collective identity which are taken for granted, thus endangering the very meaning of a common public space and common policies. Then, politics becomes a high stakes drama, a matter of life and death.

A foreign invasion or war in general, not to mention civil war are examples of politics as drama, or tragedy. Short of that, low intensity disorders such as street violence, local terrorism, the authorities' very contempt for the rule of law and performing acts of state terrorism, political secession, generalized political and social alienation of various segments of the populace, a gradual invasion of foreign immigrants unwilling or unable to join in the mainstream of the country's social and cultural life, or a state of generalized corruption may create situations to which the response may be either a state of political apathy (people witnessing a disintegration of the political community happening before their very eyes, as in a slow motion picture) or a dramatic version of politics.

Various combinations of types of politics, and different standards

These three modalities of politics are connected and intertwined in any single historical experience. For instance, at the time of the democratic transition, Spanish politicians portrayed the transition as a high-pitched drama, the counterpart of the tragedy of the civil war forty years earlier. They also made it clear that they were engaged in a grand strategy of transforming the political institutions and habits in the country, not to mention carrying out a number of social and economic reforms. But the main point of these transformative politics and policies was that they aimed at a "normalization" of Spanish politics, the

"norm" being the Western European standard of politics as usual, wherein Social-democrats and Christian-democrats would rotate in power, with both of them apparently agreeing, at the time, on a consensus regarding the basic political and socio-economic institutions (a liberal polity, markets *cum* corporate arrangements and the welfare states, a plural social fabric, and others). As a result, when the basic institutions were finally in place, most (but not all) politics and policies reverted to the modality of politics as usual: that of normal politics. Since then, Spanish politics and policies have been played out at the three levels of politics as usual, grand strategy and drama, but each political performance (such as those of the governments of the UCD, of the PSOE and, currently, of the PP) has combined those dimensions in different ways, and should be understood, and judged, accordingly.

However, making these distinctions involves evaluative and prudential judgements, and we should be aware of the (usually implicit) political philosophy and ethical standards applied by both the participants and the observers (including the author and the readers of this book) in passing these judgements. Here, a few comments are in order.

Firstly, the rhetoric of the participants should be taken into account. In noisy times such as ours political persuasion works quite often by way of systematic overstatement. Some attention should be given to avoiding being trapped by the tendency of political leaders and parties to indulge in grandiose rhetoric and to exhibit so called grand strategies at the slightest opportunity. The trappings of grand designs should not deceive us, any more than the emperor who had no clothes. At the same time, the opposite may also be true. There may be a grand strategy implicit in caring that institutions work properly, and in proceeding in a style of political moderation, particularly when this occurs after a period when the institutions did not work well and the political sphere was agitated by extremely bitter antagonisms.

Secondly, there are different ways of defining what a grand strategy is all about. What may be the proper subject matter of a grand strategy from one viewpoint, may look like mere politics as usual from another viewpoint. Thinking in terms of ideal-types, there is a stark contrast between liberals (in the classical, European sense of the word) and people of, say, a more collectivistic bent of mind. Many liberals think that their grand strategy should aim at keeping in place the institutional framework (the rule of law, a liberal political regime, a market economy) that allows people to act out their own projects of life unimpeded, and in a climate of mutual respect for one other. This is so because their view of politics is based on their understanding of a political community as a "civil

association”.⁷ By contrast, many people of a collectivistic or semi-collectivistic cast of mind (from the political right or the political left) see society as a collective enterprise in which people are united by their common goals, and think that a grand strategy should display itself, ideally, as a sequence of events. These commence with a political leader’s definition of broad social objectives (achieving economic growth or regional hegemony, engaging in war against poverty, flying to the moon, conquering the oceans, etcetera), and appeals to society to achieve them (by mobilizing social resources, spreading the right doctrine, shaping public opinion and attitudes), followed by their coordination of society and leading it on a (long) march which should overcome all sorts of difficulties, and ending, hopefully, in a collective rejoicing and victory celebrations.

Thirdly, there may be, also, quite different definitions of what qualifies as a dramatic situation. What some people understand as belonging to the stuff of drama, or even of tragedy, may be interpreted by others as a minor affair. Granted that a modicum of violence, corruption and lying is a fact of life in all societies, including democratic ones (in their markets, their judiciary systems, their everyday life... and in their politics), some differences may arise concerning the threshold above which people consider the level of violence, corruption and lying to be “intolerable” or “dramatic”. At this point, different people may apply different standards, or take a different view on the subject matter, the proceedings, or the circumstances.

For instance, some people thought that the illegal counter-terrorist activities that resulted in twenty-some assassinations that took place in Spain between 1983 and 1987 (see Chapters 4 to 6), together with the accompanying misuse of public funds and subsequent cover-up, amounted to a radical attack on the foundations of a liberal polity (irrespective of their left, right or otherwise partisan sympathies). In contrast, other people have asserted that it was a most regrettable turn of affairs but one whose importance should not be exaggerated. Some would even argue that such tactics fall well within the definition of politics as usual, provided we subscribe to a lucid assessment of real-life democratic politics. In González’ apt expression, they would belong in the “sewers” of politics: that is, they are a somewhat unsavory but highly necessary part of political life. According to this view, abuses of power should be seen as a matter of degree allowing for a wide range of dirty tricks that are generally known and currently used by all real practitioners of politics, even though the general public is ignorant (or fakes ignorance) of them. However, once these abuses, usually played out

in the shadow of politics, come into full view, they become “scandals”, and are transfigured by the interplay of the media, party politics and other actors (for instance, judges in search of notoriety or driven by ideology), and, at that point, the relative importance of these abuses of power can be overblown by interested parties acting under moralistic or legalistic disguises. For some commentators, this is what happens in the Spanish case. In their view, *exposure* of events such as the above mentioned twenty plus assassinations, their illegal funding and the subsequent cover-up, should be considered less as a reassertion of the rule of law (as I suggest) than as a manipulation of the rule of law by interested parties, acting in a more or less conspiratorial manner, and imposing their disingenuous practices upon an unsophisticated public and a set of naive observers of public life.⁸

The fact is, however, that once those abuses of power are uncovered, quarrels about conspiracies and interested parties may be more or less useful for partisan politics and for the purpose of finessing the historical record, but are rather tangential to the heart of the matter. From then on, the facts of the case become liable to public scrutiny and deliberation (and, eventually, to judicial proceedings). A strategy of denial and stonewalling against the charges is self-defeating, since it seems to suggest that once the facts of the case are uncovered they should be, immediately, covered up again, and that once they start being a matter of public dispute they should be immediately forgotten. This argument insinuates that the political body may have either a severe case of split personalities, the one undoing what the other is doing, simultaneously, or a case of acute moral and emotional subservience to the authority.⁹

However, there may be, of course, nuances of judgement that result from combining considerations of substance with others concerning proof and procedures, and circumstances. For instance, people may ponder and weight differently President Clinton’s proven lies to a grand jury in (light) matters of personal misconduct, and the merely alleged and suspected lies of President González to an anonymous public opinion in (grave) matters of illegal counter-state activities resulting in some twenty assassinations. There is room, then, for applying a sense of proportion, that makes a distinction between major or minor and more or less proven breaches of the rules of the game (with all the range of shades in between).

In the end, dramas should not be confused with melodramas, much as deep feelings should not be confused with sentimentalism, but it is up to the

⁷ On the concept of “civil association” see Oakeshott (1990).

⁸ See for instance Maravall (2001).

⁹ See *supra* Chapter 6.

interested parties to apply the distinction as they see fit. For instance, for a detached European observer the political drama around the impeachment of President Clinton looked like an over-dramatization of the event, as if the players were overacting their roles; but this was not the view of a number of American participants. Or, to take another example, to some skeptics, many of the ideological battles between the European left and the European right look increasingly “old hat”, as they observe the high moments of the performance, when the ritual appeals to the revolution are made in a high-pitched tone, with a mixture of bemusement and embarrassment. But, of course, this is not the way a number of politicians, journalists, clerics, intellectuals, union leaders and many others see the situation; for them, those are moments of great emotional resonance. In other words, what looks like a real drama for some may be considered as a fictitious drama by others, a sort of distraction, or *divertissement* (to use Pascal’s word when he refers to mundane concerns that lead us astray from the matters of true importance).

An anticipation of the argument

Bearing in mind those distinctions (between different kinds of challenges and types of politics) I will map out the road followed by Spanish polity and society, and it will be my contention that, during the nineties, a general drift took place in three directions: away from the kind of high drama built on revelations about the GAL and the political scandals of the early nineties towards a state of political “normalcy”; away from a grand strategy that still comprised important elements of statism and corporatism (at least in the way the economy was managed) towards a somewhat more liberal grand strategy;¹⁰ and away from a confrontational style of politics to a more moderate one.

This drift can be interpreted either as the accomplishment of a grand design, or (as I am inclined to think) as a mixture of situations wished-for and engineered by human agents, and of their practical adjustments to on going experiences for which the latter are barely responsible for. Thus, in this sense, socialists and *populares* can be understood as players who, only half aware of the general trend, try to find their ways and swim with the prevailing stream. This is not to say that they were merely opportunistic; the opposite may, in fact, be closer to the truth as it cannot be claimed that Spanish people’s attitudes at the time were overtly liberal. In spite of a note of uncertainty,

¹⁰ For the different modes of governance and coordination of market economies see Hall and Soskice (2001:1-68). An assessment of these authors’ positions with a discussion of the Spanish case is to be found in Pérez-Díaz, Rodríguez (2002: 63-90).

if we take at face value the public’s explicit answers to questions put to them in a number of surveys, the impression that comes across is that of a population inclined to think the state should take responsibility for the solution to most economic (and social) problems.¹¹ Yet, this attitude seems at odds with the “real life” in which that public was very much involved: with the dynamism of the markets and the increasing integration of the Spanish economy in the world economy. On the whole, it may be suggested the political leaders chose the path of “reality”, and, therefore, that of an increasingly liberal mode of coordination of the Spanish economy. Thus, contrary to prevailing opinion, according to which catch-all parties tend to be merely pragmatic and adapt to voters’ preferences in order to maximize votes and power, I think these particular catch-all parties (the PSOE and the PP) have been both pragmatic and ideological all along.¹² They have their philosophy and their goals. But also, they have also gradually redefined their roles, using rather freely their repertoire of inherited beliefs and cultural tradition to meet the challenges of the day, and to adjust to the problems at hand and the mood of the country. In their attempts to do so, they have been more or less successful.

Caught up in the middle of a number of contradictory moves and counter-moves of partisan politics and judicial proceedings, the last socialist government tried partly to resist and partly to move along (particularly in its economic policies) with the general trend, while the *populares* understood the situation sooner and were in a better condition than the PSOE to use it as an opportunity to further their aims. In the end, there has been a (relative) de-dramatization of political life, a greater degree of a liberal grand strategy in economic matters (though not in many social policies), and an attempt to establish a style of political moderation which has been only partly successful.

Nevertheless, the general drift of Spanish polity and society does not (necessarily) have to be interpreted as if only the PP could benefit from it in the long term, or even in the middle term. There are some indications that the PSOE may have joined in the trend, at least to some extent. If and when the shift to a less dramatic (in certain respects), more liberal and more moderate polity is accomplished, the floor may be open for the next political contest, now on different terms. This might be understood as an invitation for both the PP and the PSOE to redefine themselves in the years to come.

¹¹ See Mezo (2000) and Alvira Martín, García López and Delgado Lobo(2000).

¹² This is also the view of Elena García-Guereta in her monograph on the PP (2001).

A final warning, however, should be given concerning the dramatic dimension of politics. Because although Spain has put behind certain dramatic developments (in relation to the state's disrespect for the rule of law) behind her, she may now be facing other dramas, such as those involved in the Basque question, or an international war.

3. Back to the narrative: the events leading to the PP's absolute majority in the 2000 elections, and their aftermath

By 1998, as already indicated (see Chapter 7), Spain's economy was growing at an annual rate of around 4%, meeting all the Maastricht Treaty requirements and qualifying for membership of the euro zone in January 1999, while the rate of unemployment was falling. The series of judicial proceedings after the political scandals of the first half of the nineties were coming to completion, appeals had been heard and final sentences, mostly confirming the previous ones, were being handed down. Approaching election time (due in March of 2000), the contending parties braced themselves for battle. But they each chose to pitch their theatrical performances on a different key: the PP played it cool; the PSOE tried to convey a sense of urgency and drama.

The view from the PP: projecting an image of good management and normalcy

Viewed from the perspective of the government, the situation looked as follows. The PP acted on the impression that its economic reforms (an important reduction of public debt and public deficits, the far-reaching privatization of public firms, and a modicum of deregulation) had been successful, and had resulted in economic growth, a big rise in employment and increasing numbers of people investing their money in the capital markets and involved in Spanish multinationals' massive investment in Latin-America. The fact is, people's general optimism about the country's economic performance and prospects had been gradually increasing as time went on, and was widely shared by people of (almost) all ideological persuasions.¹³

¹³ Survey data on the Spanish adult population's perception of Spain's economic situation at that time as compared with the situation before suggest a clear (and increasing) perception of improvement as we move from 1998 to 2000. In March 1998, 43.9% considered Spain's economic situation had improved compared to that of two years earlier, while 25% thought it had worsened (ASP, 1998a). In December 1999, 57.8% compared their situation favorably to that of three years before, versus 16.4% who thought it was worse (ASP, 1999e). By March 2000, those who thought it was better than four years before had risen

At the same time, the *populares* thought that the government had succeeded at portraying itself in a moderate guise. The first item in any social policy being employment, it followed from the very success of its economic policy that the government's record on the matter looked fairly good: the number of people employed rose from 12.5 million in 1996 to 16 million in 2000. On the other hand, from an impartial observer's view, nothing much had been done in the sphere of education and health policies, justice and research, water and infrastructure. But the government, always inclined to take a positive view of its own performance, obtained some satisfaction from the fact that the public pensions had been renegotiated and kept largely at the same levels which had been agreed to in the past. It also felt confident it had been careful enough to avoid big social conflicts (such as the general strikes that took place against socialist governments in 1988, 1992 and 1994).

The results of government action in the fields of regional politics and foreign policy looked inconclusive, but no great political loss was expected from that. The always dramatic issue of the future of the Basque Country looked increasingly difficult, as the terrorists resumed their activities while the moderate nationalists gave a new impetus to their traditional grand strategy for national independence. But facing these challenges was a thorny issue from which no Spanish national party, neither the PP nor the PSOE, could benefit anyway.

As for matters of foreign policy, never a particularly salient issue in Spanish national elections, the government was able to benefit from the delayed and collateral effects of its success in securing Spain's entry in the euro zone. A few observers followed the gradual rapprochement between Aznar and Blair, but other than that, foreign policy was barely mentioned. All over Europe there was a sense of lethargy induced by the lack of direction of the foreign policy of the US administration and, in general, of the Western powers, during the nineties. President Clinton and his entourage indulged in a sequence of micro-

to 62.8% while those who thought it was worse had dropped to 12.9% (ASP, 2000b). As for the view of the economic situation according to ideological position: in December 1999, people from the left were reluctant to acknowledge that the economy was in better shape than three years before; but already a large majority of people from the center left, the center, the center right and the right had acknowledge the economy's improvement, and what is more, while people from the center left were reluctant to admit that the government was responsible for that improvement (38% "yes" versus 49% "no"), a large majority of people of the center (55 vs. 29%), the center-right (70 vs. 16%) and the right (82 vs. 10%) thought the government was indeed responsible for it (ASP, 1999e).

managements of local crises (Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, et alia) together with endless talk about a new world. This discourse grew out of a composite of trivia, of the brave new world of the new technologies and the new economy, and of the mantras of globalization, social capital, sustainable development, managed trade, democratic transitions, and other well intentioned, politically correct clichés –and was shared world wide by politicians right and left. But in point of fact, its political impact on national electoral contests such as the Spanish one seemed negligible up to that point.

As a result of this view of the situation, there followed an unspectacular but no nonsense style of campaigning that focused on messages of good management of the Spanish economy and of political moderation which seemed to be in tune with the general mood of the country. This was intended to provide a contrast to the current uncertain state of the socialist party's leadership and program, its emotional rhetoric and its alliances with the immoderate left. Moreover, the contrast could be extended to the troubled years of the recent socialist past. The speculation was that discontented Socialist voters had been reluctant to punish the PSOE in 1996, but now there could be a delayed effect of that discontent as those voters, still sensitive to the scandals that had come to light only a few years before, and with their fears of the PP substantially reduced, could decide either to abstain or even to vote for the PP in the forthcoming election.¹⁴

The view from the PSOE: the search for a new leader, a tactical turn to the left and a touch of drama

Having lost the 1996 election in the heat of a rancorous campaign, in moral and emotional disgrace in the view of many because of the nature of the political scandals of the time, and yet having lost only by a narrow margin, the socialists were prone to mixed feelings, and projected an image of lack of direction for far too long. To set them on the road to recovery, many thought they had first to get rid of González, who was reluctant to go as he seemed unable to find an alternative position in the international arena that suited his ambitions, although he was even more reluctant to play the role of the leader of the opposition to José María Aznar. Then, the socialists initiated the search for a new leader,

which led them through a comedy of errors that involved both the leadership and the rank-and-file. First, the inner circle of leaders around González chose the new General Secretary, Joaquín Almunia, as his successor, then tried to legitimize that choice by way of a plebiscite parading as primaries. They then found that the rank-and-file took the primaries seriously, and woke up to find that the party had elected Josep Borrell (see *supra*). The insiders, left with the choice of submitting to the new leader or outmaneuvering him, chose the second road. Taking advantage of the general climate of aversion to political scandals, they found it to their benefit to exploit Borrell's merely personal connections with some corrupt officials and forced his resignation. They then came full circle back to Almunia. The performance had lasted about two years.

Once Almunia was back in place, his leadership abilities in question since he had been unable to win the primaries of his own party, and with time running out, he had to plunge straight into the national campaign. He then decided to emphasize the left-wing component of the PSOE center-left stance, and to dramatize the tone of the campaign. In many ways, these decisions were easy to understand at the time, but proved to be counterproductive.

In the first place, most pollsters and academic advisers close to the party, well aware of the relative proximity between the positions of the electorate and that of the party on the ideological scale, pointed out that both were located on the center-left of the scale. Years of "centering" the (socialist) party had worked beautifully, they suggested. By contrast, the PP's image was firmly located on the right side of the spectrum. From then on, they concluded, a PP government could be nothing more than an anomaly, the result of a particular set of accidental circumstances (temporary frustration at political scandals, or fatigue arising from the Socialists' so many years in power). Therefore, they argued, there was a (natural) elective affinity between the party and the country as a whole, and sooner or later power would revert back to the country's "natural leaders". As the PP was trying to position itself at the center, moving the PSOE slightly further to the left was thought to be a way of reminding the electorate that the PP *should* be viewed as clearly positioned on the right.

In the second place, it happened to be the case that a dramatic campaign based on heated denunciations of the PP's supposedly rightist (or oligarchical) leanings, squared well with the intense feelings of rage and resentment of the old socialist leadership at the sight of its rivals, of people it used to despise, in power. It also expressed the prevailing mood of many socialist party cadres and local candidates. These were attuned to the positions taken by several social-democratic

¹⁴ In fact, in December 1999, people of almost all ideological positions declared the PP government had been performing better than expected (the ratio of better/worse than expected being 25/10 for people from the center left; 33/9 for the center; 40/4 for the center right; and 46/6 for the right). In a scale of 1 to 5 of less to more corrupted, PP was awarded an average of 2.58, and PSOE was 3.55 (ASP, 1999e).

parties still existent in continental Europe, intent as the latter were to distance themselves from Tony Blair's brand of social-liberalism. Deep down, many of these Spanish socialists still subscribed to a *soixante-huitard* understanding of European politics and society, and were prone to misinterpret, once again, the way most ordinary people were reacting to the "good news" of more employment, growth and political stability -- as if ordinary people *really* shared their own view (which they did not) whereby this "news" was merely a bit of political propaganda that "the system" was broadcasting against a background of social and political malaise which it was up to the socialists to exploit to the full.

Additional factors related to certain misconceptions current in the media, and some miscalculations made by the socialists regarding the extreme left. The socialists' misunderstanding was reinforced by a parallel misunderstanding of the situation by segments of the media which shared some of the same premises, had their own scores to settle with the PP government (see *infra*) and misread the public mood. On top of that, Almunia might have thought that, by moving to the left, he could take some votes away from the IU (*Izquierda Unida*: a coalition of parties organized around the Communist Party) -- a segment of the political spectrum which, though apparently on the verge of extinction from the viewpoint of the moderate left, has proved resilient enough to gainsay the premature news of its demise, over and over again.

The election results: the absolute majority of the PP, and the socio-demographic profile of its voters

In the 1980s the PSOE had won three consecutive elections with an absolute majority, but in our interpretation of those results we have to take into account its rivals' extraordinary weakness. In 1982, the UCD was disintegrating, and AP was still trying to put its act together. In 1986 and 1989 AP (by then having changed its name to PP) was still in the process of neutralizing its competitors (CDS and the Reformist Party) within the political space of the right and the center of the electorate, and of finding a national leader and a plausible program with which to do so. The real contest started in the 1990s, once the CDS has disappeared and Aznar was in control of his party. Beginning with the results of local, regional and European elections in early 1990s, there was a gradual realignment of the electorate and a balance of sorts in the rapport de forces between PSOE and PP, as the PP's participation in the national vote climbed steadily from 34.8% in 1993 to 39.1% in 1996 -- and then, to 44.5% in 2000: 10 points ahead of PSOE (34.2%). Table 1 summarizes the electoral results for the last three elections.

Table 1
Spanish general elections, 1993 -2000

	1993		1996		2000	
	% of votes	Seats	% of votes	Seats	% of votes	Seats
IU	9,6	18	10,6	21	5,4	8
PSOE	38,8	159	38,0	141	34,2	125
PP	34,8	141	39,1	156	44,5	183
CiU	4,9	17	4,6	16	4,2	15
EAJ-PNV	1,2	5	1,3	5	1,5	7
Other	10,7	10	6,4	11	10,2	12
TOTAL	100	350	100	350	100	350

Sources: www.eleweb.net.

According to a survey which was conducted one month after the elections (ASP, 2000c), the differences between PP and PSOE voters by gender were negligible, and the difference by age-groups was modest -- there was some over-representation of 40-49 year-olds among PSOE voters (people who come of age in the 1980s, at the time the PSOE was at the height of its power) while the 60 year-olds seemed more inclined to vote PP (those were people who came of age in the 1960s, at a time when the PSOE was playing a marginal role even in the Francoist opposition, and who, by the year 2000, were entering the ranks of the retired people).

Socioeconomic and educational characteristics among PP and PSOE voters were somehow more marked, but not by much -- nothing that might suggest two different worlds. The proportion of working people, housewives and students voting for either PP or PSOE was not very different -- though there was some overrepresentation of pensioners among the PP voters (once they had overcome their fear that a PP government would lower their retirements benefits), and students were more inclined to vote PSOE. Neither were the differences very large by monthly household income.¹⁵ In terms of education, PP voters were only slightly better educated than the PSOE voters (16.1% of PP voters compared to 14.5% of PSOE voters had a university degree; overall 38.9% of PP voters had at least a secondary school diploma compared to 34.6% of PSOE voters). As for what is called socioeconomic status (which is a composite of education and occupation), again we find significant but modest differences: 23.5% of PP voters and 17.8% of PSOE voters were people of medium-high and high

¹⁵ Among PP voters providing an answer to the question (90% of those interviewed), 57.6% had a monthly household income of less than 100 thousand pesetas (compared to 63.4% of PSOE voters); 25.6% had an income between 200 thousand and 300 thousand pesetas (25.1% of PSOE voters); and 13.8% had an income of more than 300 thousand pesetas (11.6% of PSOE voters) (ASP 2000c).

status; 40.9% of PP voters and 37.4% of the PSOE voters were of medium status; 22.8% of PP voters and 30.2% of PSOE voters were people of medium-low status; and, finally, the proportions in the case of people of low status were 12.8% of the PP voters and 14.5% of the PSOE voters.

Religious beliefs and the workings of the political imagination appeared to be a better way of distinguishing PP voters from PSOE voters. Regular church-going believers accounted for 22.1% of the PP voters and 10.6% of the PSOE voters; while non believers made 4.3% of the PP voters and 19% of PSOE voters. Self-placement along an ideological spectrum from left to right seemed also fairly significant. In this survey, the scale ran from 1 (extreme left) to 7 (extreme right). For the positions at the extreme of the scale, the contrast was clear: 19.6% of PSOE voters placed themselves in positions 1 and 2 (extreme left, and left) and virtually none in positions 6 and 7 (right and extreme right); while 15.7% of PP voters placed themselves in positions 6 and 7, and virtually none in positions 1 and 2. As regards the intermediate positions (3, 4 and 5: center-left, center, center-right), things become somehow more complicated, even though the ideological profile of the two parties looked different. Position 4 (the center) attracted (almost) the same percentage of PP and PSOE voters; but most PP voters saw themselves as belonging to the center-right, while most PSOE voters perceived themselves as belonging to position 3, that is, to the center-left.

The reasons given (at the time of this post-electoral survey) by the electorate for voting either PP or PSOE were different according to the party.¹⁶ PP voters justified their vote by mentioning “the economy” or “the good management” of the PP government, while PSOE voters referred to their attachment to “the party”; hardly any of them mentioned either the leaders or the programs.¹⁷

¹⁶ This partly reflected the ideological make up of their respective electorates. Thus, according to a survey by ASP in February 1999, people from the center right and the right tended to side with the PP on economic and social issues; those from the left and the center left tended to side with the PSOE also in economic and social issues (though with some hesitancy on the part of the center left, which moved slightly closer to the PP on economic issues, particularly concerning the employment). Lastly, people from the center tended to side with the PP on economic issues, and share their support almost equally between the PP and the PSOE on social issues (ASP, 1999a).

¹⁷ The voters mentioned: the economy (36% of PP voters; 12% of the PSOE voters referred to the past socialist policies), the “good management” (34% of PP; 8% of PSOE voters), the party (9% of PP; 52% of PSOE), the leader (6% of PP; 2% of PSOE), not wanting their political

Voting preference and expressed ideological positions: on the relative relevance of the ideological scale and the “ideological refraction effect”

The rise of the PP came in conjunction with changes within the ideological spectrum of the electorate. The evidence put forward by Isidre Molas and Oriol Bartomeus (2001),¹⁸ relative to the evolution of the average position of the Spanish voter between 1986 and 2000, indicates that this position had always been to the left of the arithmetic center of the scale but that there has been a gradual displacement to the right. In a scale from 1 to 10, in which 5.5 is the center, the average position went from 4.44 in 1986 to 4.9 in 2000. Leaving aside the extremes, if we examine the positions 3 to 8, we notice the following. Voters in positions 3/4 (should we say “center-left”?) dropped from 35% in 1986 to 24% in 2000, whereas voters in positions 5/6 (which presumably refers to the “center”) rose from 23% in 1986 to 35% in 2000, and those in positions 7/8 (the “center-right”) rose from 8% to 12% over the same period. In sum, there was a long-term move to the center/center-right on the part of the electorate which benefitted the PP since, as Molas and Bartomeus show, the PP had gradually expanded its electoral base from voters of the right to one that easily encompassed the center as well.

Even so, in the above mentioned ASP post-electoral survey of April 2000, the average PP voter of 2000 placed himself in the position 4.78 (on a scale 1 to 7, from left to right) while that same PP electorate as a whole placed the PP in the position 5.37: a difference of 0.59 points.¹⁹ This does not apply to the PSOE electorate, which perceived itself to be located in position 3.10 and located the PSOE in position 3.14. Thus, there is a puzzle here given the difference between the perceived ideological position of the PP and that of its own electorate.

The puzzle may be explained in terms of the well known tendency of many people to vote according to their real preferences but state their ideological positions according to their eagerness not to deviate from their groups of reference, and the discourses prevailing in those groups, rather than according to that real preference (or supposedly, their “inner convictions”). One way of developing this argument would be as follows.

adversaries to return to power (7% of PP; 14% of PSOE), the program (3% of PP; 4% of PSOE) (ASP, 2000c).

¹⁸ See Molas and Bartomeus 2001. A similar picture emerges from the study of the PP by García Guereta (2001: 542ff.).

¹⁹ In a scale of 1 to 10, that means the PP electorate placed itself in position 6.82 and located the PP in position 7.67: a difference of 0.85 points.

Let us assume the existence of a phenomenon that I propose calling an “ideological refraction effect”. Optical refraction is the process by which there is a change in the direction of the ray of light that passes at an oblique angle, from one medium to another of a different density. By analogy, we may talk about an ideological refraction effect if and when a person holding a certain ideological position, possibly in a tacit way, “in private”, changes that position when stating it “in public”. This explanation comprises four steps.

Firstly, people may have a “real” ideological position, more or less reflecting their real preferences and fitting in with their everyday experience. Their “tacit background assumptions” or their “inner convictions” are part and parcel of their actual experience. They are implicit in the way they behave, and, in general, the way they live, and tend to fit in, to a greater or lesser degree, with the composite of passions and interests that guide most of their activities. As people vote “in private”, their vote express those real preferences.

Secondly, as soon as people state their ideological position in public, their “inner convictions” enter another medium. Like a ray of light entering the medium of water, their position undergoes a refraction, a distortion, so that its angle deviates and its projection onto a plane is displaced according to the character of the discourses prevailing in the public space, and to the nature of its underlying social networks. Hence, when people find themselves in an interview position, before witnesses, the ideological position on the scale that they are willing to admit to accords partly with their real ideological position and partly with the moral and political stereotypes which are considered to be the correct ones, the norm, in the debating societies they are part of -- which may sanction their deviance from the norm. This ideological distortion will be the greater and the more likely, the greater are the rewards of conformity, or the punishments to deviance, or (alternatively) the lesser it is the strength of the people’s inner convictions. In the end, the “real”, “implicit” ideological location (according to people’s actual practice) and their “publicly stated” ideological location (according to people’s compromise between their inner convictions and their proclivity to conform to the prevailing discourse) may differ more or less significantly.

Thirdly, in a particular historical location, let us say Spain in the 1980s and 1990s, it may well be that cultural and institutional conditions combine to enhance the plausibility of a public discourse with a leftist slant. After the democratic transition, the right was tainted by its association with Francoism, while, at the same time, the Francoist experience had already served to weaken the plausibility of the liberal

tradition, which, though excluded from Francoism, had also been marginal in the opposition to it. However, it may be argued that a large part of Spanish society, well aware of its long acquiescence to forty years of Francoism, wished to distance itself from that past and reconstitute herself, in some measure, under different terms: by suggesting, for example, that it had been a mere passing bystander of the political regime -- without going to the very extremes some politicians felt obliged to go, so as to insinuate they had been through a significant experience of moral suffering and moral resistance. There was, then, a certain affinity between this disposition of society to cast itself on a more favorable light and the prevailing (hegemonic) moral and political discourse in the public space, which was made up of a mix of mainstream democratic statements and loosely leftist oriented ones with a degree of social Catholicism.²⁰

Lastly, if this were the case, then, we should expect that the ideological refraction effect would be that of a tilting of the ideological scale to the left. Thus, for example, the Spanish middle classes which, to judge by most indices, had been largely (and vaguely) acquiescent to Franco’s rule during a large part of the sixties and early seventies, found that a political discourse with leftist overtones was most suited to their self-image in the new avatar of a democratic Spain from the late seventies onwards.²¹

The aftermath of the elections (2000-2002)

Once the elections were over, the PP went back to the business of government in a mixed mood of exuberance and lethargy that lasted till well into the end of the following year. Aznar had the impression of having outwitted his opponents and even his own comrades-in-arms, who had not expected such extraordinary results. It fueled a sense of self-confidence in him and in his party together with,

²⁰ On the other hand, to complete the argument we should consider, also, the density of the social networks and the severity of the punishments in case of deviance as well as the predisposition of most people to conform to it. Punishment does not seem to have been severe; and, in fact, the prevailing emotional tone of the public sphere at the time of the transition and thereafter was one of caution and reconciliation. However, there are some indications of a proclivity on the part of a significant sector of the Spanish population to yield rather easily to a politically correct discourse even if the pressure to do so seems comparatively weak. Thus, for instance, survey data show that, in May 1999, 63% of people acknowledged they were reluctant to express their true opinions in a meeting when these ran counter to the prevailing opinion (ASP, 1999c).

²¹ Of course, this theory might be tested against other European experiences for the period after the Second World War.

perhaps, the temptation for hubris -- soon to be met by a nemesis of sorts. At the beginning, Aznar had committed himself to serving as President of the Government for no longer than two electoral mandates. After the 2000 elections, he confirmed this decision, apparently leaving the way open for a new leader of the PP to run in the following elections (in 2004). However, since the game rules were uncertain and he made no move to designate his heir while simultaneously inhibiting others from proposing themselves, the result was the growing sense of a vacuum at the heart of the PP that favored a socialist party which, by then, had been able to solve its own particular leadership problem.

In fact, Almunia resigned immediately after learning of the electoral results and two provincial leaders contended for the job. José Bono had been president of the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha for about twenty years, having achieved five consecutive electoral victories. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was a virtually unknown local PSOE officer of León and had been a marginal member of Parliament for twelve years, with no particular credentials or government experience. Zapatero was supported by key sectors of PSOE, and he won by a narrow margin. Belonging to a younger generation, Zapatero was untouched by the political scandals of the 1990s, and, once elected, rectified Almunia's two critical mistakes: he moved the party back towards the center and displayed a moderate style. On most economic and social issues, Zapatero tried to tread a path between rhetorical statements that sounded similar to British Tony Blair's social-liberalism and others more attuned to French Lionel Jospin's type of social-democracy, depending on the audience he was addressing. In doing so, he followed the training of leadership, which was ritual and well-proven among continental European social-democrats, to master the arts of ambiguity in looking as a tough challenger of the government while suggesting a sense of the state, and in leaving his words open to varying interpretations either of a social liberal or a social democratic kind. Zapatero was learning the craft and working hard at projecting an image of moderation and determination, his weakest spot being the balancing act he had to perform regarding the various regional policies of his party's local apparatuses, because the demise of González and the lack of strong leadership located at the center of the PSOE had boosted the party's traditional centrifugal tendencies. While in opposition, the PSOE's internal tensions regarding the general design of Spain as a territorial state might be glossed over, but they were going to be harder to avoid as a national electoral campaign approached.

In the meantime, the PP government suffered not only from a vacuum of prospective leadership, but

also from a process of policy fatigue. The world economy started to falter, in a climate of growing uneasiness about the unfulfilled promises of the new economy, and in the middle of a financial crisis, corporate scandals and troubling news about the Latin-American economies. Even though predictions of the rate of growth had to be revised, the Spanish economy proved to be in fairly good shape; and yet, the prospects were disquieting, and the government engaged in tentative moves for reforming the labor market which, in the face of a general strike (in 2002), it was then forced to abandon. The battle for the political center between the PP and PSOE became ever more acute and complicated, and it was uncertain which party would reap the political benefits of a series of moves and countermoves on most domestic issues. Both parties tended to follow the public mood as they hardened their position on matters of law and order, immigration policy and Basque terrorism, and came close to a common position vis-à-vis the PNV (see *infra*).

The political tempo quickened throughout 2002, as both parties approached a period of almost uninterrupted political campaigning (local and regional elections in May 2003, and national elections in March 2004). Both became increasingly eager to score political points, with mixed results. They took opposing sides on a policy of modest educational reforms which were, however, hotly contested. The government's initial handling of the sinking of the oil tanker *Prestige* on the Galician coast in November 2002 was awkward,²² but the PSOE's response was also unconvincing. Initially, they both tried to look cautious and reliable in a field of foreign policy dominated, after September 11, 2001 by the prospects of the war on terror. However, by the time of this writing (March 2003) a very dramatic fight between the parties has been building up as regards the best way to implement the 1441 UN resolution on disarming Irak of its weapons of mass destruction, and later about Spain's support of American and British policy to disarm it by force -- against a background of increasing hostility to that policy on the part of Spanish' public opinion. This is leading already to a very serious political crisis, and one that may well suggest we enter a new stage in the Spanish politics.

²² The government refused to let a salvage team to bring the *Prestige* into A Coruña Bay and Portugal did not allow the tanker within its territorial waters either, thus sealing the ship's fate. Aznar did not even visit the coast for more than a month. For a critique of the Spanish government's handling of the *Prestige* affair by an international newspaper which seems otherwise rather supportive of Aznar's foreign and economic policies see *The Wall Street Journal Europe*, November 20, 2002; November 25, 2002; December 11, 2002.

But this crisis exceeds the time limits of this book, and, irrespective of what the future may bring with it, my main goal here is to understand and explain what has already happened. So, as the political duel proceeds, ever faster and harder, this is the time for us to detach ourselves from it and look at the entire picture of the PP's performance over the past six to seven years.

4. A provisional assessment of the PP's rule: a grand liberal strategy for the economy

A long-term gradual shift in the mode of governing the economy: hesitant policies (1976-1993) and Pedro Solbes' tentative steps in the "right" direction (1993-1996)

As already indicated (see Chapter 6), the government had, with some hesitation, been moving away from a rather developmental, interventionist state towards a more regulatory one, from a statist-corporatist mode of coordinating and governing the economy to a more liberal one, for a very long time. The logic of this trend lay in the initial decisions (of the late fifties and the sixties) to locate the Spanish economy within the Western economies, and to join in the subsequent process of change undergone by these economies as a whole, but particularly the European ones, as they overcame the crisis of the mid seventies through the mid eighties. But the particular way Spain came through this period of adjustment led to hesitations and misjudgements that resulted in very high unemployment rates and serious macroeconomic imbalances by the early 1990s.

The mistakes of the seventies were caused by the *akrasia* or weakness of will (and/or lack of political resources) of the UCD governments to resist the pressures of labor (supported by the socialists and with the acquiescence of a majority of the public) in favor of the rigidities of the labor market (high severance costs and centralized collective bargaining) and the achievement of increases in real wages, the result of which was a high rate of unemployment and subsequent huge increases in unemployment benefits, and other social spending and public spending in general, as well as a high rate of inflation, which made for a monetary policy to fight inflation which led, in turn, to increases in interest rates.

The mistakes of the eighties were of a variation of the preceding ones. On the positive side, the policy of continuing Spain's long-term commitment to be part of the Western world included signing up the entry into the European Union and ratifying Spain's membership of NATO. In the wake of these decisions, the liberalization of trade and financial services resulted in huge foreign investment in Spain. On a less positive note, there was a partial reform of the labor market that created a dual labor market, an

expansionary fiscal policy that led to continuous increases in public spending, public debt and public deficits, a rate of inflation higher than the one prevailing in Western Europe, and the exclusive use of monetary policy for containing inflation that resulted in high interest rates (this leading to a gradual reevaluation of the currency, and, in time, to a drastic devaluation forced by the markets on the Spanish government in 1993).

Such pattern of economic policy, intended to pander to the interests of the political constituency of the socialists and win them the next election, resulted in an attempt to fine tuning and adjustments of the economic and political cycles. If we examine the 1986-1993 period, the failure of this policy, as far as the economic cycle is concerned, was made all the more evident by the rate of unemployment, which dropped from 21% in 1986 to 16.3% in 1991 (in the upwards phase of the cycle) and then rose to 22.6% (and 3.6 million unemployed) in 1993 (in the downwards phase of the cycle). (Unemployment reached a historical high of 24.1% and 3.9 million unemployed in 1994.)²³ The inherited rigidities of the labor market persisted, and the unions' resistance to any change in this respect led to a general strike (1988), to which the government's response was to shelve a reform of the labor laws and to increase public spending. In fact, public debt went from 44.1% of GDP in 1986 up to 58.7% in 1993.²⁴

As far as the political cycle is concerned, the economic policy of 1986-1993 was a mixed blessing, as it helped to win the 1989 election (in the upwards phase of the cycle and against a weak political adversary) but placed in jeopardy the PSOE's more narrow victory in the 1993 elections, which González called in advance in order to avoid the consolidation of the downturn in public opinion, caused by the worsening economic situation and the political scandals of the time.

The new minister of the economy, Pedro Solbes (who was later to become Commissioner in charge of economic affairs at the European Commission), tried to restore some measure of credibility to the economic policy of the socialist government. He was intent on tackling some of the worst problems engendered by the previous policies, with a view to Spain fulfilling the Maastricht Treaty criteria, especially those pertaining to public spending, and thereby qualifying for its early entry into the European Monetary Union. Thus, Solbes tried to reduce spending in

²³Labour Force Survey, 2002 edition, revised historical series (available at www.ine.es).

²⁴The source for data on public finances is the statistical annex to *European Economy*, published by the European Commission and available at its web page.

unemployment benefits, public pensions and other public expenditures: he made it more difficult to claim unemployment benefits and cut the amounts paid out, decreased public funding of temporary disability and public pensions, froze public employees wages for two years and curtailed the growth of public employment by taking on only one new public official for every two retirements.²⁵ Meanwhile, there was a modest reform of the labor market, and the Bank of Spain was given autonomy: an invitation to its civil servants to use its powers to fight inflation with greater determination.

In the end, Solbes' sound, cautious moves had a limited effect due to the political weakness of the government, as González became increasingly entangled in the legal and political battles connected with the GAL affair. The chain of political scandals ultimately led to CiU's withdrawal of its support for the PSOE in Parliament, to Solbes' inability even to pass a new budget for 1996, and to new elections.

Enter the PP

The PP's victory brought a new minister, Rodrigo Rato, to the department of Economic Affairs, and led to a substantial strengthening of the trend already initiated by Solbes' tentative performance. This becomes quite clear if we compare the different approaches to economic management of the socialist governments between 1985-1993 and of the *populares* from 1996 onwards, and consider Solbes' approach to be an intermediate stage.

Let us assume there are two basic, highly simplified government's approaches to the economy. First, one of managing and adjusting the steps of economic policy to the combined rhythms of the economic cycle and the political cycle, giving fiscal stimuli to the economy when the time is ripe, manipulating the exchange rates and so on, much in the spirit of the Keynesian teachings which framed the formative years (say, the 1960s) of most ministers of UCD and PSOE, and the civil servants who worked for them. Second, one of creating a sensible framework for private initiatives (deregulation), putting as many resources as possible into private hands (privatization), and setting a precedent of

predictable policies for the future (aiming in a consistent way at containing/ reducing public spending, liberalization of all sorts of markets, reducing the tax burden, and so on); and doing this in a consistent and sustained manner, without *akrasia* or weakness of will; all this more or less in line with the lessons drawn by many economists from the liberal experiments of the 1980s. *Grosso modo*, the socialists hesitated between these two approaches, but, being state interventionists by creed and political temper, adopted the first approach most of the time; whereas *grosso modo*, the *populares* came to power determined to adhere to a more liberal understanding of the role of economic policy as much as possible.

This said, the idea was to translate a philosophical position into a sustained policy, and do it successfully. From the perspective of the PP, the argument would run as follows: although the socialists had repented their previous policies and made sound moves in the right direction after 1993, they either could not or did not press hard enough; while, by contrast, the PP set out along the road in a persistent and determined manner. Granted that the economic cycle was favorable, still things do not necessarily work out automatically. Many countries fail to take advantage of favorable international circumstances to put their houses in order. At home, the socialists had been unable to profit from the upwards phase of the previous economic cycle, between 1986 and 1991, in order to drastically reduce unemployment as well as the public debt and the public deficits, or to put the economy on a sound basis so as to attenuate the effects of the downturn of the cycle later on. By contrast, the PP claims (rather plausibly, at least in view of the behavior of the Spanish economy both in the upturn of 1996-2000, and the downturn of 2001 and 2002) that it managed to do just that.

The *populares* were able to do it, despite their narrow victory in 1996, because they engineered a deal with CiU almost immediately. Confidence in the new government's economic policy was the critical factor both in the domestic arena and in the international markets. In fact, in anticipation of that policy, as soon as it was clear that the PP would win the elections, international confidence in the Spanish economy, as measured by long term interest rate spreads, began to improve, and kept improving in the following months.²⁶ Once in power, the PP sent clear

²⁵ Most of Solbes' spending cuts were made in the 1994 budget and resulted in the public deficit being 6.1% of GDP in 1994 down from 6.6% in 1993, and public expenditures amounting to 45.9% of GDP down from 47.6% in 1993. But even though economic growth in the first half of 1994 was stronger than expected, the proceeds were not used to reduce public deficit, which rose again up to 7% of GDP in 1995. (From 1995 on, there was a European-wide change in the accounting rules. According to the new rules, the public deficit of 1995 was 6.6%.)

²⁶The spread between the Spanish and German bonds had grown from 177 basic points in February 1994 to 478 in March 1995, down to 389 in November 1995 and then down to 297 in February 1996 as the elections approached. In March, the differential still stood at 285 (maybe because of the narrow victory of the PP), but it dropped to 224 in April, and finally almost disappeared by January 1997 (29 points). INE, *Boletín mensual de estadística* (www.ine.es).

and sustained signals to the markets, always in the direction of fulfilling the Maastricht Treaty criteria and joining the European Monetary Union from the beginning, ready to let Spain share in the economic upturn envisaged for the next years. According to OECD's observers, by moving fast and by keeping to a steady course over the two years following the elections, the government allowed for a "virtuous circle" to develop: "As the reduction of the public deficit to about 3% of GDP in 1997 (down from 6.5 % in 1995) was achieved without raising taxes, the burden of adjustment was borne by discretionary expenditure... The prospect of joining monetary union from the outset ...as well as an improvement in the policy mix... spurred a reduction in interest rates and provided a boost to business and consumer confidence... private investment, economic growth and employment creation. These developments ... created a virtuous circle whereby fiscal consolidation is furthered by lower interest payments and cyclical factors. Moreover, fiscal policy tightening facilitated the task of the monetary authorities" (OECD, 1998).

Public spending, privatization, liberalization and regulatory reform

By 1996, public deficit was already at 4.9% of GDP, down from 6.6% in 1995²⁷. By the following year, 1997, the figure was 3.2% of GDP, fairly close to the 3% required by the standards of the Maastricht Treaty. And from then on, the deficit continued to go down till a balanced budget was reached (almost: 0.1%) by the year 2001. Over the period 1995 to 2001, Spain started out with a deficit of 6,6% and ended up with a balanced budget, while the average for the euro zone was a deficit of 5.8% of GDP at the outset, and of 1.3% in 2001 (Chislett, 2002: 68).

Several factors account for this success. First, it may be argued that the government's determination and the coherence of its new policies fostered the "virtuous circle" in general, and international confidence in particular, leading to lower interest rates. Second, the government was ready to exchange old (and more expensive) debt for new (and cheaper) debt, thus lowering the burden of interest payments, which fell from 5.2% of GDP in 1995 to 3.1% in 2001. Third, the government kept the growth of public consumption growing below the rate of growth of GDP for at least ten quarters in a row from the second quarter of 1996 to the third quarter of 1998.²⁸ Social spending oscillated around 20% of GDP (see below),

²⁷ Even though the new government alleged it had to provide for expenditures incurred in previous years which had not been accounted for. 6.6% is the figure according to the new EU accounting rules (see note 20).

²⁸ Own calculation with data from Spanish Quarterly National Accounts, available at www.ine.es.

but cuts in corporate welfare were significant (European Commission, 2001). Overall, public spending dropped from 45% of GDP in 1995 to 39.9% in 2001. Fourth, fiscal revenues rose reflecting the economy's more robust performance and big increases in social security contributions, so that, in spite of some tax cuts, total revenue actually increased every year from 1996 reaching a high of 39.8% of GDP in 2001. Fifth, a thorough privatization program produced revenues to be used in reducing public debt, thus alleviating the weight of interest payments.²⁹

The PP was anxious not to appear to be slashing social expenditures in the eyes of the public, and leveled it off at around 19/20% of GDP. This had been the level of social expenditures during most of the eighties and early nineties,³⁰ under socialist rule, and was fairly close to that of the socialist budget of 1995 (21.7%). As unemployment fell, savings in unemployment benefits could be applied to other chapters of the social budget; and in any case, expenditure on social protection per capita at constant prices continued to grow in the second half of the nineties. Similar trends can be ascertained in many other European countries.³¹

There is, of course, much debate on whether increasing the level of social welfare in the country should be done by public or private means. But the fact is, the PP governments, while unwilling to increase the relative size of the welfare state, were also reluctant to take measures to reduce social public expenditures or public provisions, such as those for health or pensions. Public health care expenditures grew steadily³² while the PP reinforced the system of public pensions (even though it was able to persuade the unions to accept a new calculus of the pensions by taking into account the last 15 years of social security

²⁹ Some 37% of these revenues were used this way, while 45% went to finance the rest of the public firms (Pampillón, 2002).

³⁰ With a peak of 24% of GDP in 1993, a year of recession.

³¹ See Abramovici (2003). [Gérard Abramovici, "Social protection in Europe", *Statistics in focus*, Theme 3 - 2/2003.] Looking at the ratio of social protection expenditure to GDP in EU 12 for the period 1970-1999, Sosvilla-Rivero, Herce and de Lucio (2003) point to the convergence of a cluster of countries (France, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Belgium) at around 25/30%, and that of another cluster (notably Italy, Spain, Portugal, Ireland) around 20/25%. [Simón Sosvilla-Rivero, José Antonio Herce, Juan-José de Lucio "Convergence in Social Protection Across EU Countries, 1970-1999", *FEDEA. Documento de Trabajo*, 2003-01.]

³² Though some attempts have been made at promoting the use of generic pharmaceuticals and of a reference price system; OECD 2000: 89.

contributions instead of the traditional 8 years); meanwhile, the volume of private pensions was growing.³³ At the same time, public employment grew through the eighties and well into the nineties. There were 1.3 million public employees in 1976 and 2.2 million in 1992. The numbers did not change much between 1993 and 1996 (2.3 million public employees in 1996); then, they rose to 2.6 million in 2002, the bulk of this increase having taken place in the regional governments.³⁴

The privatization process initiated by the socialists during the eighties was continued at a much faster pace by the PP governments. It gained momentum in 1993-1995 and intensified in the second half of the nineties. Proceeds from this process rose from 0.5% of GDP during the period 1993-1995 to 1.6% of GDP in 1996-2000 (while the number of employees in public companies fell from 430.000 in 1990 to 196.000 in 2001).³⁵ But increasing the size of the private sector came hand in hand with a change in the rules of the game, the main aim of which was supposed to be that of freeing the private sector from the state's discretionary interference. Thus, the PP offered an extensive liberalization program along the guidelines coming from EU institutions, sometimes going beyond the agreements signed at the European level. Liberalization came in several packages, one just at the beginning, in June 1996, as a way of signaling to the markets the main orientation of the new cabinet. In fact, reforms covered many sectors, and came at different times, in different guises and with different results.³⁶

³³ By 2001 there were 5.4 million participants in private pension plans up from 1.5 million in 1995. Data collected by the trade association INVERCO, available at www.inverco.es.

³⁴ In fact, *pari passu* with the power devolution of the last fifteen years, the numbers of public employees in the central government diminished very slightly (600 thousand in 1987; 520 thousand in 2002) while employment in the Autonomous Communities tripled (from 360 thousand in 1987 to 1.05 million in 2002). Labor Force Survey, data in www.ine.es.

³⁵ The PP completed privatization of Telefónica (telecommunications), Repsol (energy), Tabacalera (tobacco), Endesa (electricity), Aceralia (steel), Argentaria (banking), Iberia (airlines) and many others companies; so that by the year 2000 the state's share of the market capitalization of the Spanish stock market had fallen to less than 0.5% (Chislett, 2002: 79; and OECD, 2000: 68).

³⁶ In telecommunications, for instance, most fixed lines (except local ones) were liberalized in 1998, ahead of the 2003 deadline originally granted to Spain. By 2003, all fixed lines were liberalized even the local ones, and Telefónica has been (slowly) losing market share every year, though still retained control of (in the year 2000) 94% of the local market and 86% of that of national and

But liberalization does not free markets from rules. On the contrary, all it does (or should do) is to free them from the state's discretionary, unpredictable, ad hoc intervention. It opens the way for new game rules that should allow for civilized forms of competition, cooperation, reliability of contracts and promises, predictability, and trust. Hence, the need for well designed regulatory agencies, mixes of self-regulation and external rules, established limits on administrative proceedings, etcetera.

In this respect, however, PP policy has been a heterogeneous mixture of things. There is an array of general statements referring to a liberal philosophy; the ad hoc management of regulatory agencies inherited from previous socialist governments (such as the *Comisión Nacional del Mercado de Valores*); a tendency to apply the principle of self-regulation with caution to matters of corporate governance, so that, although the emphasis is on transparency, the transparency rules are only weakly monitored and implemented; some controversial application of the rules of defense of competition in the case of attempted mergers;³⁷ a move (in 1997) to press on with minor reforms of the labor market, to be followed by another attempt to impose more reforms that were soon abandoned in the face of union resistance (in 2002); and remarkable timidity on the part of the central government to impose reforms on regional and local governments intent on restricting zone permits and free shopping times, and on burdening prospective businesses with an inordinate amount of red tape. The conclusion one draws from this miscellanea is that there is a propensity for pragmatic adjustment to local, regional and corporate resistance with an eye at the immediate political consequences of any change in the status quo.

Economic performance: growth, employment and human capital

Spain's economic growth has been quite remarkable. Between 1996 and 2002, the Spanish GDP grew 25% in real terms, at a rhythm of 3.5% per year. Both in the upturn and the downturn of the cycle, Spain's rate of growth outpaced that of the European Union. Spain grew at an average annual rate of 4.1% in 1997-2000, and 2.5% in 2001-2002; the

international calls. See European Commission 2003. By contrast, changes have been more drastic in the mobile phone market. The sector boomed and the number of subscribers went from 0,9 million in 1995 (2.4 per cent inhabitants) to 24.7 million in 2000 (62.7 per 100 inhabitants), with Telefónica Móviles having a market share of 56%. See Deiss (2002).

³⁷ In fields such as energy, for instance, in which the government discouraged the merger between Endesa and Iberdrola in the year 2001.

EU averaged a rate of 2.6 per year in 1997-2000, and of 1.5 in 2001-2002. As a result, GDP per capita in Spain rose from 77.9% of the EU average in 1995 to 82.7% in 2002.

The economic dynamism of the country has made itself manifest in all sectors of the economy: agriculture, construction, manufacturing, commercial activities, banking, tourism, energy, telecommunications and so on. This has been reflected in the dynamism of the capital markets and the flows of capital inside and outside the country. Stock market capitalization went up from 21.7% of GDP in 1990 to 90.3% of GDP in the year 2000. Spain attracted an average of 17.9 billion dollars per year in 1997-2001, but by 2001 Spain was the world's eighth largest outward investor (and has ranked as the first or second largest investor in Latin America during the last few years).³⁸

This has translated into an extraordinary surge in employment opportunities. According to the Labor Force Surveys there has been a net increase of 3.7 million jobs between 1995 and 2002. That means we are talking of about 12.5 million of jobs in 1995, and 16.2 million in 2002. Accordingly, the unemployment rate has gone down, from 22.9% of the labor force in 1995 to a mere 11.4% in 2002.³⁹

Nevertheless, there is another side to this rather successful story. Some observers point out that the productivity gains have been minor, and that they have in fact lagged behind the (also rather modest) productivity gains of other European countries. I take this observation to suggest that, in the long term, some fundamental problems concerning the stock and the formation process of Spain's physical and human capital may make it difficult for the Spanish economy to prosper in a climate of increasing global competition. I will make just a few remarks on the Spanish human capital.

The Spanish educational system is in need of reassessment and reform. In the field of secondary and higher education, the system's growth in terms of

³⁸ Spanish investment abroad was 2.3 billion dollars per year in 1985-1995, and went up to 12.6 billion in 1997; 18.9 billion in 1998; 42.1 billion in 1999; 53.7 billion in 2000; and 26.2 billion in 2001. See Chislett 2002 (pp. 124, 151, 181).

³⁹ This approaches current average Western European unemployment rates. For instance, the unemployment rate in Germany was 10.1% in December 2002 and 11.3% in February 2003, according to the web page of Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland (updated on 07.03.2003). Also, the unemployment rate among Spanish women went down to 16.4% in 2002 from 30.8% in 1995 (for men, it went to 8% down from 18%). Among the 20-24 year-olds, it went to 20% down from 40%.

students, teachers, schools and universities has not been matched by an increase in quality -- as measured by the application of a variety of tests (on literacy, and mathematical and scientific knowledge), the students' dropout or failure rate, the system's attractiveness to foreign students and scholars, the quality of doctoral studies and many other criteria. The fact is, the requirements to pass from one academic level to the next have been going down consistently over the last twenty years, and there have been minimal filters between secondary education and the university. The recruiting of professors in higher education has been haphazard, and the boards for judging the merits of professorial promotions have been heavily biased in favor of local candidates, so that local endogamy prevailed and about 90 per cent of all teaching posts have routinely been awarded to them. At the same time, professional training has been traditionally lacking in resources, scope, mechanisms for the evaluation of results, and the ability to adjust to the requirements of present day markets. Research and development expenditures are half the European Union average (about 0.9% of GDP in Spain, and 1.9% in the EU), and, above all, indexes such as the rate of inventiveness, the chronic (and growing) deficits in the technological balance, the level of spending in information and communication technology per capita (well below that of other European countries) suggest important deficiencies in the field.⁴⁰ The PP government has played a significant role in focusing the EU attention, as it did at the Lisbon summit of 2000, on this problem, and has made some interesting attempts to tackle the issue, but overall there has been little in the way of a dramatic improvement on the matter.

5. Reactive politics and policies on the domestic front

Trying to look as moderate as possible

Spain's economic performance has been remarkable and the PP's economic policy is to be commended as having helped that performance. We have already pointed out, however, that, on issues of the management of human capital, higher education and vocational training, and research and development, there has been a lack of momentum that has not led to any significant improvements. There appear to be a variety of reasons for this. On the one hand, there is the PP's intent to avoid conflict and to project an image of moderation and social dialogue on all fronts. On the other, there is a sort of myopia, a

⁴⁰ On a general assessment of university education and of professional training in Spain see Pérez-Díaz and Rodríguez (2001, 2002). On the policies of science and research training see Gutiérrez Fuentes and Puerta López-Cózar (2003) and Fernández Esquinas (2002).

tendency to tactical accommodation in the short run on matters that require a strategic long-term view of the situation. As we come to consider social policy, we will observe this same mix of political realism and of strategic timidity, this same reactive and cautious attitude of making no waves, of sticking to the status quo, of making peace or deals with compliant parties -- only to have recourse to open conflict (as we shall see) when, rightly or wrongly, a threat is perceived that requires a response that may be intense but of little consequence.

Managing social affairs: no much substance but no threats to the status quo either

As already indicated, the Aznar government lived with an educational system which was obviously in bad shape, and their peaceful coexistence lasted throughout the first four years of the PP's rule. During this time the government avoided the effects of antagonizing the world of professors and students, or causing open conflicts that might result in the kind of street demonstrations which had plagued, intermittently, previous governments -- only to be faced with them later on when it finally introduced its rather modest reforms.⁴¹ Minor adjustments were attempted, also, in the fields of social policy, health policy and public pensions. The traditional understandings between the unions, the liberal professions, the business associations, and the civil servants which had governed those fields for a long time under different guises, lingered on. The government deliberately acted with moderation, nurturing a climate of social dialogue, thereby catering to the corporatist-statist mentality of the population at large, and, more particularly, not threatening the interests of the different lobbies, and maintaining the status quo.⁴² There was some talk about the family, and shows of concern were relatively frequent in regard to the low rates of fertility, the predicament of the ageing population, and the social exclusion of the immigrants. But in the end, this amounted to a display of confused thinking (and not only on the part of the government: confusion was widespread among the political class and society as well) and led to little action other than the periodical legalization of illegal immigrants. Of course, tinkering with modest increases in family subsidies was not

⁴¹ There had been minor reforms concerning the recruiting of university professors, and more recent and possibly significant changes in the secondary education.

⁴² A similar argument could be made in regard to the government's attitude towards what is known in Europe as "the world of culture", and in the United States as the "cultural industry". The PP was anxious to subsidize and cajole a cultural establishment which had no particular love for the PP but was eager to find a modus vivendi with it and to benefit from the PP's largesse.

going to reverse the demographic trend of the low birth rate among the native Spanish population, which squares well with a largely similar situation in many other European countries.⁴³

As neither the public nor the political class seemed able to up make their minds whether they wanted their ageing population to remain in their jobs or retire from them to make room for the next generation, and whether to support their pensions indefinitely with public funds or make them save and invest in their own future, both the government's policy, and the opposition's proposals, looked conservative, uncertain and rhetorical -- and the way they looked was the way they were. Something similar happened on the issue of immigrants, as the government, the socialists and society at large hesitated between the benefits and the risks and costs of immigration. The government settled for a mixture of law and order measures, ill defined quotas and the periodic regularization of successive waves of illegal immigrants, which it proceeded to parade as policy.⁴⁴

On the one hand, this pattern of reactive and defensive policies hinted at a lack of proper understanding of the way to handle some important common goods in contemporary polities, such as those needed for responding to the situations of dependency and vulnerability of significant segments of the population, even though this limitation was widely shared by the rest of political class -- the implication being that the solution to the remaining problems should be entrusted to spontaneous networks of giving and receiving help by the families and, possibly, in time, by a number of non government organizations.⁴⁵

On the other hand, such worldly wisdom exhibited by the government suggested a style of moderation in its politics and policies which proved useful, however, for portraying the image of the government as a wise manager of the statu quo ex ante -- one whose roots lay in the times of Franco, the UCD and the PSOE (to give them all their due). In a sense, the government seemed to succeed in allowing for established patterns

⁴³ The fertility rate of the European Union fell to 1.47 children per woman in 2001 down from 1.8 in 1980. In Spain, the fertility rate was 1.25 in 2001 down from 2.2 in 1980 (Eurostat, 2002). The tendency of the fertility rates to fall seems (almost) world-wide, and is probably connected with the spread of education and female employment, but the extent of the fall in the Spanish case (and in that of other European countries) looks puzzling. See Pérez-Díaz, Chuliá and Valiente (2001).

⁴⁴ On immigration, public debate on immigration and immigration policy in Spain see Pérez-Díaz, Álvarez-Miranda and González-Enriquez (2001).

⁴⁵ On the moral and political philosophy of the networks of giving and receiving help see MacIntyre (1999).

and traditions to hold their course, and also in appearing to be moderate and un-threatening to the interests (and ideological clichés) of a strategic segment of the middle classes, which was made up of opinion-leaders of various sorts: union cadres, state bureaucrats, business organization officials, professionals, intellectuals, journalists, participants in the art world, clerics, and so on. Being, or trying to be, in the “center”, seemed to require a government commitment to this continuing practice of an inconclusive social dialogue.

Yet, this pattern of caution and prudence was not applied across the board. In fact, it did not succeed in avoiding a series of dramatic incidents between the government and part of the media -- which the protagonists experienced like a clash of titans of sorts, while the rest of the country give it little more than a cursory glance.

“Much ado about nothing”?: the “media wars” of the late nineties

The socialists had been well known for their meddling in the media, their willingness to give radio stations and broadcasting rights to friendly media businesses, and their efforts to make things difficult for less friendly ones. Seeking to establish a contrast, the Aznar government came to power on a platform of neutrality, respect for the rules of the market and a government’s policy of hands off the media world. Yet in a matter of months the government became embroiled in a war of sorts with PRISA (the media conglomerate that owns the leading newspaper, *El País*, and the leading radio network, SER).

Readers may recall that the 1996 elections had ended on a rancorous note, and the PP, having won by a very slight margin, had to engage in a delicate work of coalition-building with the nationalists. Every arrangement looked fragile. González was still in control of PSOE, and the PRISA group was perceived as a close ally of the socialists in general, and of González in particular. So when the government was confronted with the news of a surprise move by PRISA to attempt to take full control of future digital TV services (with its hand strengthened by income generated by the football matches), it perceived that move as a challenge and a threat that had to be met. The government’s response was categorical and resulted in a maze of byzantine economic and legal battles. It used the recently fully privatized Telefónica for setting up a rival consortium to launch another digital TV platform, and introducing by administrative fiat some rather arcane changes in the technical requirements of the connection needed for receiving TV images in the home, both designed to make things difficult for the PRISA project. On top of that, a judge decided to look into the way one of the subsidiary firms of PRISA had put to use the funds deposited by

the subscribers to pay TV, suspected irregularities in it, and pressed criminal charges against its managers.

The government’s dramatic *démêlés* with PRISA looked puzzling and disquieting, but in time the drama would be deflected, first, by the rulings of the Supreme Court, which halted the judicial proceedings, took the judge off the case, and tried and convicted him for improper behavior (the judge was expelled from the judiciary by the Higher Council of the Judiciary Power in 1999), and second, by the converging financial needs of the competing parties, as demonstrated by the 2001 agreement between PRISA and Telefónica to share the benefits that would accrue from a de facto monopoly of satellite digital TV.

In retrospect, it may seem that the government’s reaction was influenced by three perceptual and evaluative (possibly distorting) factors which were fairly typical of the views of the contemporary Spanish political milieu. Two of these factors were of a local character, and concerned the *tout Madrid* traditions of power politics. First, the government thought PRISA’s move was a trial of strength, and, still insecure in its own victory, was over-eager to assert its authority in full view of a skeptical and opportunistic Madrid establishment used to thirteen years of cutting deals with the socialists, reluctant to change its allegiance or run undue risks were the socialists to come back to power, and, therefore, still looking for cues as to which direction things were really moving. Second, the government as well as the political, economic and media establishments were accustomed to seeing the public television channels and the regulatory powers of government used by politicians of all shades to further their political fortunes. This custom was a legacy of sorts from the Francoist regime to the democratic governments, and the new government may have thought that its turn had come to do the same -- following, so to speak, in the footsteps of a flawed but robust tradition.

To these two local factors we can add a third one which had, by contrast, a certain cosmopolitan flavor. In fact, the government shared the usual misconceptions current among the establishment of most advanced societies world-wide, and was prone to over-evaluate the importance of the media, particularly as the latter came to be seen against the background of the political and economic correctness of the time, namely, the current craze for the new technologies, and the cornucopia of the new economy. The presumed logic of the argument was that whoever controls the broadcasting of football matches controls digital TV, and whoever controls digital TV (plus its contents, plus the new technologies attached to it plus the capital markets of the future...) will control the public mind, and, therefore, will control the next elections, and the next, and the next. Consequently,

the world would be, almost literally, in his/her pocket, just a phone call (or an email) away. In fact, the frenzy of the new technologies came to a (possibly provisional) halt in the following years as the share prices of some telecommunications and multi-media conglomerates plummeted in the financial crisis of 2000-2002. By contrast, the belief persists in the mind of the politicians, media people and the public in general that one of the main premises of the media wars still holds, namely, that the media has an almost overwhelming influence on the public's political inclinations.⁴⁶

6. Three weak spots in Spanish politics at the end of the century: the politics of the future; the politics of identity; and Spain's place in the world

From drama to normalcy in the foreground, but a slow motion picture with a contradictory plot in the background

As I have already pointed out, with the turn of the century, Spain seems to have moved on from the dramatic tenor of its politics representative of the mid 1990s. The rule of law seems well established, provided we do not pay too much attention to claims about the justice being slow, sometimes erratic or incompetent.⁴⁷ Anyway, the system is passing the crucial test of bringing political leaders, powerful corporate officers, even judges to justice. The political landscape, or seascape for that matter, has calmed down -- the furor of the current debate on the war in

⁴⁶ This is a controversial and complicated issue I cannot examine here. On the one hand, as most people have a very limited exposure to the written media, read several newspapers, attend to media messages of different orientations, do not read editorials anyway, and often read selectively the kind of opinions that reinforce their previous judgements, it seems likely that, in general, the *direct* influence of the written media on the public's political positions is largely overrated -- even though its indirect influence may be more significant in the long term. On the other hand, the written media is only one of a variety of media, and it may well be that their combined influence, if they have a similar orientation and focus on a particular issue for a period of time, is decisive. Still, survey data suggest the public maintains its distance vis-à-vis the media -- for instance, in the Spanish case, 68% of the public considers the media tend to distract attention away from the (political) issues in themselves and to focus, instead, on the parties' and politicians' positions on the issues; and 76% consider the media do not provide them with relevant information to be used by them as consumers (ASP, 1999c).

⁴⁷ According to survey data, by March 1998, 64,1% of the public thought the justice system worked badly/very badly, and of those who had a personal experience of the system, 71,3% declared the system had worked (in their own case) badly/very badly (ASP, 1998a).

Irak notwithstanding. A style of (relative) political moderation seems to have prevailed in most partisan confrontations; the prospect of another four year stint in government for the PP, or an alternation in power of the socialists after the next elections seems to be considered without fear or undue apprehension by the potential losers. It's a political game, they seem to think, that will keep going on, right to the next play.

Normalcy has come to stay, and in its wake grand strategies of a sort are being tried out. The most remarkable one deals with the task of coordinating, or governing, the Spanish market economy. The long transition towards a more liberal mode of coordination has received a big boost from the PP government -- and it may be argued that such a move has resulted, in conjunction with favorable international circumstances, in a profound change in the employment situation. Here again, the "abnormal", depressing situation of about a quarter of the labor force being unemployed came to an end. But two caveats should be introduced here. They both point to what we could call the problems of the pace of life and the "politics of the future": to the more or less intense proclivity of the Spaniards, in general, and the Spanish politicians and the Spanish government of the time, in particular, to act decisively and fast and to include a long-term view of the future in their calculations.

First, a distinction should be made between different types of markets. In the capital markets and most product markets the reinforcement of the liberal trend is unmistakable. In others, there has been resistance from supporters of the corporatist- statist mode of the past, and this is why the status quo reigns in the labor market and in the field of the social services. Social policy in this respect has been cautious and accommodating, respectful of the status quo and under close observation by the unions (which have adopted a reactive and defensive strategy since the beginning of the democratic transition) and the public opinion -- as well as by the opposition party, and this irrespective of which one. The fact is, for a long time they have both (the PP and the PSOE) tended to be of two minds on this issue: making half-hearted moves towards reform when in government, and trying to exploit social discontent against any attempted reform when out of it.⁴⁸

It is public opinion, however, that goes some way to explaining the timidity of social policy. It is not only that the people's verbal statements suggest their social conservatism, but that their way of life and the

⁴⁸ The exception being the pact on public pensions, that reflects a consensus not to reform the system other than through a long series of cautious and gradual half-measures.

character they have forged for themselves point the same way. Take migratory movements, for instance. Internal migrations have almost ceased. And although unemployment rates may be two or three times higher in Andalusia and Extremadura than in other Spanish regions, people are not moving to where these job opportunities are. A stagnant national market for rented housing on top of a well established pattern of family home ownership (86% of the families own their homes) together with an array of public subsidies make moving an unattractive option. Students attend their provincial universities and live close to home. At the same time, there has been neither sizeable migration abroad during the last two generations nor much personal experience with inwards migration till a few years ago. Now that immigrants have come to stay, they face an increasingly wary native populace, with no clear idea of what to do with them.

Ultimately, the nuclear family has become the cornerstone of social life, or has remained this way, as it used to be. It has been there to care for the small children, unemployed youngsters, the sick, and the elderly. But the other side of the coin is that the overwhelming presence of the family inevitably narrows the horizon of the life interests and the life problems of its members. This translates into a *petitesse* of the heart, that might possibly find an echo in the remarkably low birth rates and fertility rates of the Spanish families, that currently rank among the lowest in the world (see *supra*). Meanwhile, the so called third sector (or civil society in the restricted sense of the word) is growing, but still has a long way to go before making its mark.⁴⁹

The point is, timidity of social policy and that of the social body as a whole come together, and suggest an inclination to play safe, to stay close to home, not to take risks, not to venture too far.⁵⁰ And this leads me to my second caveat as to the success of the Spanish economic story.

The future is a foreign country

Second, although the economic momentum has been, in many respects, impressive, yet, the grand spectacle of big mergers and acquisitions was still done principally in the traditional Court-like manner of inside deals and under the watch of the government of the time -- the gesture of entrepreneurial daring

⁴⁹ On the Spanish "third sector" (that of voluntary associations, or non profit and non government organizations) see Pérez-Díaz (2002) and Pérez-Díaz, López-Novo (2003).

⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, some survey data suggest a low inclination to take risks on the part of a large sector of the public: in June 1999, 71% declared themselves "used to doing whatever possible to avoid risks" (ASP, 1999d).

coming, so to speak, after permission was asked for and granted. Otherwise, there has been a disquieting undercurrent of timidity in the way politicians, the corporate world, the academic establishment and society at large have understood the economic opportunities. It is as if for them, say, for the country, economic growth being, as running fast, wonderful, too much growing, or running at too a great speed would expose the country as being out of its breath. Not a long-distance runner, but a sprinter. This may be the reason why not enough attention has been paid to the country's frail foundations or lack of adequate preparation for the long-distance run, such as the weakness of the educational system (basic education, higher education, professional training), and of the research and development apparatus; or why the horizon for foreign investment, when the time came for this, was mostly restricted to the familiar territory of Latin America.

In other words, it is as if those Spaniards had an inkling of the future, but not the inclination to contemplate it as familiar territory into which they were ready to go, and to venture themselves. The future appears to be for them a foreign land; much as some historians have said the past is a foreign land, in which not many of us would feel at home (Lowenthal, 1985).

The politics of identity and the Basque problem

The PP (known as AP, *Alianza Popular*, in the late seventies and until the late 1980s) started out as a Spanish nationalistic party, and served as a mouthpiece for those who felt uneasy about the regionalization of Spanish politics. In time, however, the PP moved in the direction of what many call a civic or constitutional patriotism, willing to embrace the new state's experiment with Autonomous Communities, provided these were not used by peripheral nationalisms to engage in strategies of self-determination and pro-independence. It is an experiment no party feels entitled to put into question any longer, and the prevailing discourse is that it has been a success, even though it lacks the appropriate mechanisms of multilateral cooperation, it seems intrinsically unstable as the parties tend to test the limits of the initial understanding on a recurrent basis, and it has in fact caused an increase in public debt as well as some other problems.⁵¹

⁵¹ See an assessment of the experience in Máiz, Beramendi and Grau 2002: 379ff. See also Subirats, Gallego, 2002. The other problems some critics refer to include, for instance, the increase in public debt and the (connected) parallel ways of both increasing that debt and concealing the increase by setting up public companies that are practically unaccountable (see Gómez Agustín 2000), the persistence of a number of rigidities in the regulation of

But this politics and policy of *modus vivendi* has one exception in the Basque country. Here we witness, instead of the continuous work of institutions and steady policies, a dramatic performance which neither obeys a clear-cut argument nor is oriented towards a predictable outcome. During the democratic era, the Spanish governments first tried to come to terms with the Basque nationalists by granting a political amnesty to Basque terrorists and reaching an agreement with the moderate nationalists based on the Constitution and the regional Statute; then (when recourse to illegal tactics against terrorists in the early and mid 1980s proved counterproductive and created a profound crisis in the democratic state), it tried the formula of coalition politics between socialists and moderate nationalists from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s. This suggested that a *modus vivendi* could be found, but in retrospect it looked more like a maneuver of tactical convenience on both sides than a permanent or quasi-permanent arrangement.

In the second half of the 1990s, a new trend emerged with the mobilization of a large part of the Basque society (both nationalist and non-nationalist) under the banner of a rejection of terrorist violence, and an increase in the pressure on terrorists by the police and the courts. This came to a halt when the terrorist organization suspended for a time its violent activities, and the trend then seemed to work in reverse when what followed was an alliance between the political leaders of PNV and of Herri Batasuna (the pact of Estella, or Lizarra), with the ultimate aims of rejecting the Spanish Constitution and moving towards Basque independence. Then, having achieved its tactical goals (the loss of momentum of the anti-terrorist social movement, and the pact between the nationalist parties), ETA returned to its terrorist activities, while the PNV stuck to its pro-independence strategy.

At this point, the non-nationalist parties faced a narrow range of options. Two past alternatives had been discredited: the illegal counter-terrorist activities employed in the eighties, and a coalition between

commercial hours and in the availability of land for housing construction, the difficulties in coordinating educational, water-related, or health policies, and the lower quality of some statistics on these and other related matters. This experience should be envisioned in the very long run as a learning process on the part of both the political class and the citizenry which might be truly successful, provided the institutional deficit Máz, Beramendi and Grau refer to is dealt with, a culture of cooperation is introduced, and the rules of the game are made to last for a fairly prolonged period of time. These conditions could apply to most of the Spanish territory; but is an open question as to whether they apply to the Basque country and a few other Autonomous Communities.

socialists and nationalists, which was at odds with the PNV's pro-independence strategy. The time seemed to have arrived for the only remaining possibility, which was a coalition among non-nationalists, that is, between socialists and *populares*.⁵² This was hard to achieve, however, in the short run, as the 2000 national elections were approaching, but would be feasible afterwards. In fact, socialists and *populares* joined in an attempt to dislodge the PNV from the Basque government in the regional elections of May 2001. They missed their target by a short distance and left the field wide open for a second attempt. The socialists had mixed feelings on the matter, and some were tempted to support a renewal of a coalition of sorts with the Basque nationalists, but the nationalists stuck to their barely disguised pro-independence strategy, and the series of terrorist assassinations of Basque socialist politicians continued. In the end, *populares* and socialists jointly supported a new law on political parties that made any extremist party that could be convicted of complicity with terrorist organizations illegal, and they both recommend lengthening prison sentences for terrorists.⁵³

What this may eventually lead up to is an open confrontation between nationalist and non-nationalist political parties, which could implicate their electorates were it not for the fact that a majority of the Basque population seems to cling to a wished-for alliance of moderate nationalists and non-nationalists, shows no strong inclination to independence, and seems to have achieved a *modus vivendi* between their two collective identities of being both Basque and Spaniards.⁵⁴ This situation may or may not endure,

⁵² According to survey data, in January 2000, 82% of adult Spaniards thought very/fairly necessary for the socialists and the *populares* to work together in the Basque country (ASP, 2000a).

⁵³ Batasuna was declared illegal by the Supreme Court (by an unanimous decision of the judges of the Court) in March 17, 2002, in application of the Law on political parties. On the other hand, judge Baltasar Garzón, proceeding along a different track, prohibited the activities of the coalition of extremist nationalist groupings (by then known as Batasuna) for three years, and barred it from receiving any public financing. The judgement handed down by judge Baltasar Garzón, of August 26, 2002, is available in www.elmundo.es.

⁵⁴ The reader should note that all this was at a time (the second half of 1998) when the grand strategy of the nationalist coalition that aimed at constitutional changes was still in its infancy -- the point being, the nationalist coalition engaged in that trajectory was working against the current of prevailing Basque opinion, including the opinion prevailing among Basque natives (i.e. Basques born to Basque parents). As a matter of fact, in a survey in the Basque country, in July 1998, 52.4 versus 26.3% of the population showed a preference for a mixed coalition of

but, at least, may serve us as an introduction to the topic of how a sensible people may live with a very difficult and tricky situation, punctuated by on-going episodes of terror.

The politics of identity and a variety of dramatic contests: the drama of an open confrontation and that of a quiet terror

Spain has been living with the Basque problem even since it became a democracy, and it is no closer to a solution now than it was at the beginning. This has been a sad and frustrating experience no amount of good words can dissimulate for long. The constitutional compromise failed to solve it. At the time of the constitutional referendum, a third of the Basques abstained. People thought that the Statute of Guernica, with its binding power resting as it did on the legal foundations of the Constitution itself, and having been negotiated with the moderate nationalists, had brought the Basque political institutions firmly back within the Spanish constitutional framework. But in fact, "firmly", it did not. The text was plagued with deliberate ambiguities, leading to continuous negotiations to reach a settlement for which the requirement of a minimum of good faith and mutual trust was lacking.

There seemed to be no limit to what the Basque regional government thought it was the area of its competence. Again and again, the PNV made clear that its loyalty to the Constitution was limited, conditional, and, indeed, precarious. Coalition politics and policies never assuaged the nationalists' anxiety to change the rules of the game. And so they tried to do, unflinchingly, in coalition with the socialists or at the head of a coalition of nationalist parties, using their government power to engage in a vast operation

nationalists and non-nationalists in the Basque government (the proportions were 43.7/38.2 for Basque natives, and 56.5% for Basques born to non-Basque parents), and an even larger majority expected this would be the case in ten years time (67.2 versus 12.8% for all Basques -- in the case of Basque natives: 84.1/14.1%) (ASP, 1998b). In October 1998, in another survey also in the Basque country, 21.7% expected there will be a vote in favor of independence in the Basque country if a referendum were to take place -- and independence was the stated preference of 19.6% of the Basques (this rose to 31.4% of those born in the Basque country to Basque parents; between 13.7 and 16.7% of those born in the Basque country with one or both non-Basque parents; and 10.2% of those borne outside the Basque country) (ASP, 1998c). In the same survey, 54.4% of the Basque population seemed proud to be Spanish (as against 21.2% who were not). This percentage dropped to 40.8% in the case of Basque natives, versus 29.9%; and rose to 62.7% in the case of those born outside the Basque country, versus 9.6%.

of nation-building, the goal of which was to break the constitutional frame: what they call "going beyond" the Constitution.

The situation in itself is disquieting enough, considering that almost half of the Basque electorate vote for socialist and *populares* (or groups in coalition with them), and that about two thirds of the Basques (including about half who vote for the moderate nationalists) do not state a preference for independence. But what makes it most dramatic has been the endless, on-going killing, over twenty-five consecutive years of democratic rule, at a yearly average of around thirty non-nationalists,⁵⁵ civil guards and policemen, but also professionals, entrepreneurs, journalists, policemen, artists, university professors, local and regional politicians. Not to mention the physical and emotional harassment of, and the economic damage to a much larger sector, as a means of intimidating the community of non-nationalists in general.

However, as people have only a limited capacity to endure things terrible, normalcy of a certain kind, a sort of "pseudo-normalcy", has camouflaged or covered up for this drama. The pattern of assassination and intimidation has been going on for so long that there are now many well-established routines of the most contradictory kind. Some of these are extreme in character, and, overall, have the effect of oppressing and disconcerting many people, and making them less sensitive and almost oblivious to what is going on. Routines have included street fighting, minor but incessant acts of vandalism, arson, graffiti painting, pious clerical denunciations of "all kinds of violence", religious funerals, displays of grief, philosophical statements by well meaning bystanders to the effect that they consider the assassins to be crazy and irresponsible, and emotional declarations of the victims' families to the effect that they do hold these assassins responsible and will never forgive them, etcetera. The point is that, against a background of these pathetic scenes, life goes on "as usual", in a "normal" key. Schoolchildren go to school, business deals are arranged, daily work produces the goods according to the standard operating procedures. People read about the killings, and rarely are a witness to them. There are elections, museums are opened, pastoral letters are issued, trains and cars crisscross the country in all directions. People know terrible things are happening, but never think they will happen to them.

The political tempo has quickened in the Basque country during the last few years, as the result of

⁵⁵ In Spain as a whole, there were 62 terrorist assassinations between 1968 and 1976; and 748 terrorist assassinations between 1977 and 2002.

moderate nationalists and extreme nationalists converging around the goal of independence (though pursuing it, of course, by quite different means), and the socialists and *populares* converging around a common policy of reinforcing their law and order policies and standing up to the nationalists' strategy, and in defense of the Constitution. These developments point to the increasing risk of a dramatic confrontation between two communities. Even if this tragic outcome can still be avoided, this new understanding of the situation implies the return of a sense of drama which had been camouflaged by the air of pseudo-normalcy of the previous period.

This new understanding, however, is still only of concern to a minority in the Basque country, and even fewer people in Spain as a whole. Part of the reason for this hinges on the fact that Spaniards have been slow to make a clear stand on the issue of identity politics. Generally, Spaniards have expressed a patriotism of sorts, a certain attachment to Spain, and a significant measure of pride at being Spanish, but they have balked at defending anything resembling a strong nationalist position -- first, because that nationalism was tainted by its symbolic association with Francoism; and second, because it is doubtful Spanish nationalism has ever been a particularly robust indigenous plant. They have accepted with ease the complexities of dual collective identities, declaring themselves to be, say, Galicians and Spaniards, or Aragonese and Spaniards.⁵⁶ Most of them have seen no incompatibility between the two allegiances, and have paid no heed to the admonitions of politicians and intellectuals urging them to "clarify" their identities. They have been happy enough with a fuzzy dual identity, content to emphasize the Spanish one or the regional one according to circumstance.

This fuzziness is not only a matter of more or less emotional complexity. It is also related to a weak collective memory. Shared and intensely experienced collective memories cannot be traced very far back in the Spaniards' imagination. Historians may speak, or write, about the Roman times, the *Reconquista* or the Catholic Kings, the Habsburg or the Bourbons. But, to the present-day Spaniard, a shared, relatively uncontroversial and relevant history starts, for most practical purposes, with the democratic transition less than a generation ago. Francoism is dangerous ground to tread, since most people (Basques included) would

⁵⁶ For instance, in 2001, 89% of Andalusians, 72.5% of Catalans, 70.5% of Basques and 84.7% of Galicians declared that they combined feelings of belonging to Spain and to their regional (or national) communities, according to the *Observatorio Autnómico* set up by the Autonomous University of Barcelona, the University of Granada, the University of the Basque Country and the University of Santiago de Compostela (OPA, 2002: 37).

have to face the fact of their accommodation with it. The civil war and the Second Republic are extremely controversial; the previous century was apparently plagued by civil wars, *pronunciamientos*, civil unrest of many sorts. There seems to be almost no time, at least in modern history, in which Spaniards have dwelt happily together. This may be why politicians' evocation to history usually starts and ends with the democratic transition. It allows them to make express reference to the shared interest of all Spaniards in giving themselves a Constitution and (as the saying goes) live happily together ever after -- the implication being that they were not so happy in past times, and of those times, better to be silent. As for the idea of Spain being like a historical subject which might follow a historical trajectory, have a past, and live today in the anticipation of the future: this rhetoric does not belong in the political discourse of today's Spaniards.

This explains why most Spaniards react with incredulity when confronted with the resoluteness of those militant pro-independence Basque nationalists, and why they are reluctant to take seriously either the latter's appeals to a living history that takes preference over the short stretch of the last twenty-five years, or their clearly stated intentions to go to the very end of the road. As happens so often, the leaders and militants of the Basque nationalist parties, of both an extreme and a moderate stance, have never shied away from making explicit their aims, the problem being that their adversaries have never listened, or paid enough attention to them.

Europe, Europe

The same fuzziness that affects Spaniards' attitude towards their Spanish identity in relation to their Autonomous Communities is repeated in relation to their European identity. Here, as already indicated, we witness a ready and open disposition towards things European -- that reflects a sentiment of belonging which is expected to increase in the future, although still coincides with both a lack of interest in discussing European politics and policies, and a widespread ignorance of them.⁵⁷ This is not obstacle, however, for

⁵⁷ According to survey data, in March 1999, 55% of the Spaniards had a strong feeling of being Europeans and 52% felt they shared a future in common with other European countries. At the same time, only 27% had the impression they shared a common history with the rest of the Europeans; 12% had frequent discussions about European politics; between 9 and 14% knew the names of the prime ministers of Germany and France, and that of the president of the European Commission; and about 4 to 5% knew the order of magnitude of the percentage of the EU budget devoted to agricultural subsidies (ASP, 1999b). For a discussion of the general views of the European public vis-

most Spaniards to enjoy being part of the club. Joining Europe seemed to become the motto of almost all social groupings, political parties, ideological families or regions. All kinds of governments have used the European Union policies and rules to justify their positions -- and sometimes as an alibi for introducing unpopular domestic policies. Spain's entry in NATO was seen as part of the same European game. The prospects of an ever closer European political community and society raises no fears but only warm feelings on the part of most Spaniards -- notwithstanding occasional reservations, resentments or outright opposition to this or that policy.

Again, this is due in part to a ready, open disposition on the part of many Spaniards to play their part in a fairly complex European-wide social order, and, at the same time, to a sort of easy going, light optimism regarding the functioning of EU political institutions, even though these are not monitored by, and are practically unaccountable to anything resembling a European public -- which neither exists nor seems likely to exist any time soon. Spaniards seem eager to be part of the European process with little awareness of the complexities of the task. The fact is, the European Union is an entity made up of national communities with little more than a superficial familiarity with each other; in which there are between ten and twenty national languages, with a majority of people who do not speak any other than their own and are reluctant to accept any one language as the *lingua franca*; in which most of citizens of each country have no friends or family connections, no business deals or associational links with citizens of the other countries; and in which social and labor mobility is rather low. Moreover, the EU, as a political community, has very porous borders that are hard to patrol and defend, and it is surrounded by countries belonging to very different traditions towards which it exhibits ambivalent sentiments and erratic policies, all of that while refusing to keep up its defense spending and being unable to adopt a common foreign policy.

It is very edifying to see the Spaniards so apparently willing to take on a European collective identity. But admiration is tempered by the suspicion that this may be a matter of lack of understanding of the real conditions required for the European Union to work properly, in which rational analysis is replaced by wishful thinking, or simply magic thinking. There is also the possibility that they may be a people who are not too careful about matters of political accountability and political responsibility; who are all too happy with "things working smoothly" by themselves, and who just expect this to be the case

à-vis the EU and the future of the European polity see Pérez-Díaz 1998a and 1998b.

with the European Union.

A tentative foreign policy, with frail foundations

Foreign policy is "foreign", so to speak, to Spanish contemporary traditions. Spain has nurtured a tradition of isolationism since the War of Independence (against the French) at the beginning of the 19th century, with the only exception of a (brief) war against the United States towards the end of that century, and a minor colonial adventure in Morocco that dragged on intermittently throughout the first quarter of the 20th century. Other than that, the country remained on the side lines during the big European, indeed world, wars of the 20th century. By contrast, it became a playground for foreign powers during its own bloody, three-years civil war in the 1930s. Out of that emerged an authoritarian state that only much later found a place in the Western Alliance, in which it played a marginal role.

The transition to democracy was the opportunity that a political class eager to be part of the European Union, and, to a much lesser extent, of NATO, had been waiting for. But the way in which the new politicians intended to make their mark in foreign policy was telling. They tried to be respected partners of the clubs they joined, to abide by the established rules and conventions, to gain the respect of others by proving they were doing their home work. They submitted to the stiff terms of the original treaty with the European Union as part of the initiation ritual (the *rite de passage*) for joining the club. Once inside, they understood the rules of the game were made for endless distributive conflicts within the club, and they fought for Spain's share of the structural and regional funds, and for the percentage of the votes and influence which was its due. Making their voice heard on matters of substance came more gradually, and while the socialist method was to following the lead of the French and the Germans, the PP would strike a deal with the British. But even these maneuvers, which delighted some insiders, were far from being noticed, followed and debated by the general public, or even the media -- even though it may be argued that the PP government's understanding with the British government during these years goes beyond tactics and suggests a grand strategy-in-the-making vis-à-vis Europe, based on a consensus around an Atlanticist foreign policy and a liberal agenda in economic affairs. The fact is, the intelligence community, made up of diplomats, journalists, academics, politicians, the military, and experts of various kinds, has been slow to form, and still is in its earliest stages.

Until fairly recently, there has never been much of an impulse on the part of the business community to take part in what is going on the world scene. In fact, for more than a century, the sector of the Spanish economy oriented towards exporting goods and

services to the rest of the world has been weak. Traditions take time to root, and the export oriented activities of the Spanish economy I have referred to above (see *supra*) are of recent date. Moreover, most of the export drive has been directed to an area of the world with the least possible cultural distance from Spain. Spanish businessmen have chosen Latin America largely because it looks like Spain in many ways; their familiarity with the cultural subtext of the explicit and formal business deals that they make reduces the transaction costs of the operations. In time, however, this may act as preparation for the business community to become more knowledgeable of the world at large -- but it is not the fastest track, or the *voie royale*, to get there.

The intellectual community of approximately the last twenty to thirty years has not developed as a full fledged cosmopolitan community either (and we must remember that the civil war, and its aftermath, had already weakened the links between the Spanish community and the Western cultural world). The regionalization of politics has reinforced the local preoccupations of many intellectuals. Doctoral theses on local nationalisms and regionalisms have mushroomed as a result of the incentives created by new local universities, set up by a core of local politicians, local bishops, local media, local professionals, local scholars and folklorists, parents eager to keep their children close to home, and children reluctant to leave their parental homes also. This has made for cozy life experiences and little curiosity about the wider world. Nurturing the familiarity with the local languages has prevented more than a cursory knowledge, and little use, of international languages, notwithstanding the Spaniards' growing ability to understand foreign tourists and travel abroad.⁵⁸

The point of all these considerations is to suggest that most of Spanish public opinion has a long way to go before it becomes familiar with the realities of the outside world and of foreign policy. This makes for a proclivity to go along with the crowd (and this applies equally well to the crowd of "the masses in the street" or of the "diplomatic community"), or, alternatively, to take refuge in a simplistic and moralistic stance when facing hard, difficult situations, such as the sequence of events that the public has found itself involved in during the current war on terror since the September 11, 2001 events.

Expressing moral outrage at the attack on the

⁵⁸ According to survey data for 1999, 6.9% of Spaniards have lived abroad for more than 3 months; 13.9% make currently use of a foreign language; 4.5% watch a foreign TV station once a week (or more); and 3.4% read a foreign newspaper once a week (or more) (ASP, 1999b).

World Trade towers in New York was relatively easy from a distance. Supporting the US and other allies at the time of the Afghan war, which took place far away and ended quickly, was not too hard a choice either. Taking a stand on the Irak affair has proved more difficult. In fact, by 2002, a large minority of the Spanish public wanted a reduction in military spending and a large majority had no desire for a strong US leadership in the world even though a similar majority seemed worried that acts of international terrorism could be committed on the Spanish soil. Also, around a quarter of the Spanish public dismissed the idea that military action against Irak could be justified even in the event of proof that Irak had weapons of mass destruction or had participated in the terrorist attacks of September 11.⁵⁹ Moreover, by February 2003, Spaniards were fairly convinced that Irak had those weapons and connections with terrorist networks, but (by a proportion of 9 to 1) were against a military intervention.⁶⁰

These data seem puzzling. It may well be that we are in the presence of a sizable number of people who are sophisticated and suspicious of bellicose propaganda, while applying very high moral standards to the field of international relations. Or, alternatively, that these are people with serious emotional limits to being able to face up squarely to great danger, who may be used to live for a long time with what I have called "the drama of a quiet terror"⁶¹, and prefer this kind of drama to the drama of an open confrontation -- and people with significant cognitive limits in their understanding of foreign policy, that may be the result of not having been exposed to the realities of the outside world for a very long time.

This poses a number of interesting questions. One is not whether the position adopted by these (and other) Spaniards on this particular issue is right or wrong, but rather whether they have adopted their position after *having considered* the entire range of the values involved, the costs and benefits, and the risks and dangers of the situation. The point here is less the decision *per se* (the one people make, or, rather, the one they urge their leaders to make) than the moral,

⁵⁹ According to survey data, 42% of the adult Spaniards wanted a reduction in Spain's military spending (18% favored an increase); 62% judged undesirable a strong US leadership while 65% expressed their concern about the prospects of international terrorist attacks on Spanish soil. And even if there was proof that Irak had weapons of mass destruction, or links with the attacks of September 11, 22% and 26% respectively were against any military intervention there (Real Instituto Elcano de Estudios, 2002).

⁶⁰ See CIS, 2003.

⁶¹ As suggested by the experience in the Basque country (see above).

emotional and cognitive *premises* on which the deliberation proceeds and the decision is based. Another is whether or not those premises are suited to the development of a civil society (in the full fledged, broad sense, of the term) in the conditions of our times. I can provide no robust, much less a definitive answer to these questions, but I will conclude this book by briefly exploring them, and other related matters, in the next, and final, section.

7. Going towards a civil society, but *who* does the “going”?

On the “autobiographical self” of Spain, and Europe

Let me remind you of the sequence of steps in my last section. I made the suggestion that, in *fin-de-siècle* Spanish politics, there has been no strong inclination to anticipate the future, no precise collective identity, no robust sense of Spain’s place in the world..., and maybe no neat memories either.

Now, the point I am driving at is the following. Granted that we want to understand the process by which a civil society emerges, or develops, or increases the degree or the quality of its “civility”, the question is, how can we understand the collective agent engaged in such process? And granted that we are looking for terms to be used in an attempt to understand the workings of that collective self, the question is, how can we make for a self that seems to have a limited ability to understand its own memories beyond a certain point, to anticipate its future other than in the most generic terms, and to place itself in the wider world?

In order to explore this question, one possibility is to make use of the analogy between the individual agent and the social aggregates, and to borrow from, and use *cum grano salis* and rather freely, conceptual schemas being developed in other academic fields.

We can start with the analogy between the “stream of history” of a collective subject, say, a nation, and the “stream of consciousness” of an individual agent. In both cases, here we have an agent which changes and yet retains its identity. Antonio Damasio, a neuro-physiologist, has proposed a way to resolve the apparent paradox identified by William James, whereby the self in our stream of consciousness changes continuously as it moves forward in time, even as we retain a sense that the self remains the same (Damasio, 2000). According to him, the solution hinges on the fact “that the seemingly changing self and the seemingly permanent self are not one entity but two”. The ever changing self is the “core self”; while the “self that appears to remain the same is the ‘autobiographical self’, based on a repository of memories for fundamental facts in an individual biography that can be partly reactivated and thus provide continuity and seemingly permanence to our

lives” (Damasio, 2000: 217). “Without those autobiographical memories we would have no sense of past or future, there would be no historical continuity to our persons” (Ibidem :218).

An extreme case in which a human agent maintains his core consciousness but has a severe impairment of his autobiographical self is that of what is known as “transient global amnesia”. According to Damasio, these patients are supposed to retain what he calls “core consciousness” for the events and objects in the here and now. But for them, “in spite of adequate consciousness for the current objects and actions, however, the situation fails to make sense because, without an uptodated autobiography, the here and now is simply incomprehensible”. In fact, it is said that “without a provenance for the current placement of objects and a motive for the current actions, [that the autobiographical self provides] the present is nothing but a puzzle”. This is why those patients “constantly repeat the same anxious questions: Where am I? What am I doing here? How did I come here? What am I supposed to be doing? But the patients tend not to ask who they are. They often have a basic sense of their persons, although even that sense is impoverished.” (Damasio, 2000: 203)

A country, such as Spain, is not an individual, and there is (certainly) no insinuation on my part that a neuro-physiological state such as that of transient global amnesia may have affected the contemporary Spanish society. However, by analogy, it may be argued that we are dealing here, in the case of present-day Spain, with something of a kind with a moderate case of partial amnesia: with something of a kind with a fuzzy, and not very strong, attachment to a collective identity; with something of a kind with a weak sense of having an “autobiographical self” comprising a robust memory of fundamental facts; and with something of a kind with an intense sense of the here and now, together with little concern for the past and the future.

Nevertheless, Spain is far from being exceptional, and the next question is: are these traits exclusive of the present-day Spanish society, or are they not unfamiliar to the observers of other present-day European societies? In fact, many of these societies do experience some difficulty in articulating their autobiographical selves with stable, living memories. Most continental European societies have problems when referring to a relevant-for-today history, that is, a history they are ready to activate to face up to their current challenges, that dates back beyond... the last thirty years (in the case of Spain?), or the last fifty to sixty years (in the cases of France, Italy or Germany?). The moment they look at their relevant past, they focus on their post-world war democratic transitions, and leave unfocused what lies beyond. Farther back in the past, there are stories to be told,

but only exceptionally can we find memories that Europeans do actually activate for making sense of what should be done today.

This is a striking situation when we compare it with that of the United States, where people are frequently used to look back, not just a few decades, but over two centuries, right to the original foundation of the country; and where people resort, again and again, to a narrative that links their historical origins with their present predicament. The Americans' activation of their memories of the fundamental facts of that narrative often occurs without specific deliberation, as something that happens to them almost spontaneously, as they engage in the business of making sense of what is currently going on, and it does not usually diminish their ability to handle their problems, while serving to keep the political community more or less intact.

By contrast, despite having a history of at least two millennia, European nations seem embarrassed by and prone to forget their past; and in fact, a solution to their current dilemmas may be hindered, rather than facilitated, by an evocation of that past. Think, for instance, of the struggle for the hegemony in Europe which goes on under the disguise of a diplomatic contest pro or contra a Franco-German leadership. It appears that this on going internal debate requires a delicate and elaborate handling of the past. Otherwise, if it got "out of control", it would invite the activation of intense memories of the intra-European wars which had been (to a great extent) the "fundamental facts" of the "autobiographical self" of all the European nation-states in modern times, and which point to deep cleavages and intense feelings of mutual suspicion.⁶²

In other words, for the Europeans the task of building up a common identity and taking sensible steps towards the future may be helped by their well trod path of gradual adjustments and mutual accommodations over the last sixty years, but hindered by the need to do a "repair job" of their "autobiographical selves", whose "fundamental facts" still point to the first half of the 20th century, and then to a more distant past.

If a society needs to repair its "autobiographical self" to become more "civil", a certain kind of politics might prove useful for the task

Let me return to my main line of argument, and

⁶² Suspicions of this kind have been endemic in the European Union from the beginning. In a sense, the architecture of the EU was designed as an equilibrium of sorts between the leadership goals of France and Germany (and eventually other big nations) and the determination of the small states not to be led by them. On the European public sphere see Pérez-Díaz (1998a and 1998b).

draw together its historical, analytical and normative strands. A civil society cannot come into being unless some social organism, a society or a community does the civilizing work, and for that it has to walk the road that goes from a less civil to a more civil society, to know where it comes from, to find motives for its current moves, and to anticipate where these may lead it. In other words, the task of civility building implies the existence of a builder, and the more the builder has a robust "autobiographical self", the more feasible the task becomes. Therefore, if the "autobiographical self" of the particular society we are looking to is in need of repairs, one or several ways have to be found to do this job. Markets, families, associations of all kinds (including human rights' organizations, women groups, professional associations, churches and others), and an independent press may all contribute to (or detract from) this undertaking -- provided they are already, or they become "civil".⁶³

But politics, in particular, can be crucial in this respect -- and here is one example of the role that might be played by a certain kind of politics. Politics does in fact have two dimensions: a substantive dimension which refers to the design and functioning of political institutions, and the design and implementation of public policy, and a symbolic dimension concerning the shaping of the public space -- and I shall only be referring here to the latter one.⁶⁴

In this respect, politics may provide society with the public space needed to display what we may call "political exemplars" -- from the viewpoint of a normative theory of civil society. These exemplars may be located at the top, where they will be politicians and political leaders -- à la Pericles, so to speak. But more often, they are located among

⁶³ The implication being that all these sets of institutions may be quite "uncivil". To state the obvious: they may all become subject to fraud and violence from within, and from without. Markets can be manipulated by the few. Liberal democracies may fall prey to elites' authoritarian rule as well as to demagoguery and mass-politics of a populist or a totalitarian kind. The social networks (of civil society in the restricted sense of the word) may become transmission bells for totalitarian parties or terrorist organizations. The public sphere may suffer equally from collective hysteria or manipulation of different sorts. All these quite real possibilities ask for continuous vigilance and "civil repairs". A different approach to civil repair is suggested by Alexander (2001) that fits in with his (in my terms) minimalist view of civil society (see Pérez-Díaz 1998b and Alexander 1998).

⁶⁴ This last section deals with some effects of symbolic politics for the future of a civil society; for a discussion of substantive politics and policies (institutional design and public policies of various sorts) as they apply to the future of Spain as a civil (liberal) society, see Pérez-Díaz 2002b.

ordinary people: just decent and sensible citizens scattered throughout the political body, largely indistinguishable from the general public but respected within their own circles. These exemplars do their “repair” or civilizing work by their enactment of political virtue, both cognitive and moral.

From such a normative theory of civil society, it may be said that politicians and citizens of this kind should exhibit the cognitive and emotional virtues most needed, first, for the community to survive and second, for it to develop a civil persona. Thus, as these exemplary citizens tell the truth, they would reduce society’s propensity for that fuzziness in public debate that goes with its obsession with the here and now. They should give to the community a sense of where it comes from, what the motives for its current actions are, and where it is located in a wider field of political communities. By doing so, they would provide a focus, context and perspective for public debate: what the community needs in order to meet and face its present dangers, to act and to make its leaders properly accountable.

At the same time, this kind of exemplary citizens should work on the possible emotional limitations of the members of the political community to face up to the current threats to the preservation of civility, that is, of civil society broadly understood. As they muster their civic courage to undertake their political responsibilities, they exhort their fellow citizens, less by their words than by their example, to do the same. In acting this way, they recreate the political community as a place in which political debate, which may be continuous and intense, does not end in mutual contempt and bitter resentments, in *stasis*. And, by doing so and behaving accordingly, they seem to convoke the community to enjoy and celebrate its very existence, and mourn its losses, and reaffirm its “autobiographical self”, with equanimity, in the face of victory or defeat.

In contrast, the kind of politics which keeps the public mind unfocused and distracted, away from the current challenges and, eventually, from the current danger, the kind that manipulates the emotional keys of the public debate to suite personal or partisan interests, or the kind that corrupts and divides, has highly undesirable effects -- from the viewpoint of a normative theory of civil society. If that kind of politics is allowed to flourish unimpeded, it cannot but weaken a society’s potential for civility in a more or less permanent way, and might even contribute to its ultimate demise. But then we come full circle as we would have to ask ourselves what kind of politicians and citizens were those responsible for that kind of

politics.⁶⁵

A guarded hope and two world-historical scenarios

This is where hope comes in, as we compare the facts of real-life politicians and citizens in contemporary Spain with the ideal of their exemplary counterparts. Even though there is a difference between real life and normative ideal, her historical record still sounds impressive enough, and what we may know of the ordinary Spaniards’s current activities and dispositions suggests that they could have their fair share of civic spirit, drive, resilience and social cohesion. This may augur well for the future however it turns out. But we should be aware of the fact that the future may come either as fair weather or as a rather stormy one -- and the consequences may be vastly different in each case.

The civil accomplishments of the last twenty-some years are worth repeating: the peaceful transition; the defusion of intractable conflicts from the past; a political contest (over the last decade and a half) between the two large parties of the moderate left and the moderate right that has allowed for an ordered alternation in power; the modus vivendi between the political center and the regions, which might make room for the assertion of strong local voices within the common historical heritage; for some, even the way of living with a sequence of missteps (which might be corrected later) and compromises (which suggest possible solutions) regarding the Basque question; the reassertion of the rule of law in the face of political and economic misconduct; the entry into the European Union; and the efforts to keep an economic policy that has, in the long run, avoided hyperinflation and the worst excesses of public debt and public deficits, so that the Spanish economy has expanded, modernized and become more integrated in the world economy, and it seems on its way to substantially reduce the unemployment problem, while, in the meantime, Spain has moderately reinforced its welfare system and maintained a relatively low level of social conflict.

This is not such a bad record for that far-from-perfect Spanish citizenry which, it has been suggested, has a semi-developed “autobiographical self” in need of civil repairs. Maybe the reason for this relative success lies in that once we have relatively sound institutions in place, imperfect people can do the job; and/or maybe these people have good qualities whose merits are worth considering. The fact is, we know that the Spanish people in their different

⁶⁵ And here we may find the “counter-exemplars” of a civil society: predatory political entrepreneurs, fanatic or merely self-interested militants, and subservient political subjects.

impersonations as civil society, market agents, electorate and families have behaved, so to speak: they have exerted themselves in working hard, making sound political decisions at elections times, keeping their families together and so on. And, at the end of the century (but just before the events of September 11, 2001 and the Irak crisis of 2002-2003), we also know⁶⁶ most people in the country lived under the impression that their prospects were fairly good, and envisioned a future of economic improvement, better and more varied work conditions, more cultural activities of all kinds, a fairly intense social life (friends and close circles first, but also a degree of associative life), stronger families (even if they are of a somewhat different kind, with more equal relations between genders and between generations), and showed a trusting openness to parts of the outside world (traveling and working in Europe, being part of the EU, for instance) -- qualified, on the other hand, by increasing concerns about the interconnected issues of immigration, delinquency and law and order. They declared themselves more than ever committed to the basic institutions of a liberal democracy, and seemed to foresee a future in which they would give their votes to the party with a perceived capacity to solve collective problems (which suggests a discriminating and independent attitude on their part) rather than to one for which they feel an ideological, sentimental attachment (possibly indicative of a more tribal approach to modern politics).

We may think these virtues may come hand in hand with short memories, hesitant collective identities and an uncertain sense of Spain's place in the world (see *supra*), but even if they do, they may still offer grounds for a gradual improvement in citizens' capacities in all those dimensions, provided the international context does not interfere too much with such nurturing (or repair job) -- possibly because the world scene may be handled by what we could call "international politics as usual": that is, the usual flurry of diplomatic and media talk, and the usual management from a distance of the recurrent local tragedies of the world the Western public becomes usually aware of by switching on the TV set at dinner time, while the expansion of the world markets continue unabated and major wars are avoided. In such a relatively benign scenario, Spanish local democracy should flourish, its market economy should prosper, the rule of law should be expected to become more deeply rooted, people's human and social capital should be expected to develop, their environmental and consumer awareness would

⁶⁶ All the following observations, in the rest of the paragraph, may be supported by data gathered in 1998-2000 (their main sources being ASP, 1998a, 1999b and 1999d).

improve, and so on -- on the practical assumption that what's needed is just time.

But now, what if time is running in another direction? What about more dramatic circumstances?

Let us suppose, for instance, that September 11 and the Irak crisis are the ominous signs of a change in the world-historical scenario. In this alternative, the largely optimistic saga of globalization and its (equally optimistic) discontents would be replaced by an open game in which there was a real possibility for deep confusion and lasting institutional disorder with no clear end in sight. Things might move in the right direction, but not by themselves. They will have to *be moved* this way by people coping with tragic circumstances, and doing so by making enormous investments of understanding, civic courage and endurance -- which amounts to a very exacting test of their character. This may do, and it is indeed the challenge of the present generation to make it happens -- but let us imagine that things take a turn for the worse. Then, the Western community would split in several directions, with the EU and other multinational institutions diving for cover, so to speak, and worst-case local scenarios, which had been written off as science-fiction nightmares, would materialize with their apocalyptic cortege of war, illness, hunger and death. And, as a result of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorist networks and all sorts of malignant institutions taking advantage of new technologies and scientific accomplishments, we would end up with a situation in which humankind had become an endangered species of its own making.

This is certainly not a rosy scenario, but neither is it unthinkable any more. Nor would it come with a big bang, so to speak; rather it would come, if and when it does, gradually, by imposing a sort of accommodation to an increasingly difficult reality on people attuned to the hopeful prospects and prone to the easy optimism of sorts which we just noticed in the Spanish case. And then, how is it that being the way they are could help them to cope with a malignant scenario? Well, there may be just a fifty-fifty chance that these people will either give in or adjust to the new situation taking advantage, in a paradoxical sort of way, of their limited autobiographical selves. I say this because, in a way, it could be helpful for people to have an open identity, "in flux" as they say, when the time comes to redefine geopolitical alliances, to move from one level of governance to another on a continuous basis, and to vote, live itinerant lives, litigate, be part of associations and share in debates across boundaries. Also it may be useful to focus on immediate or near-immediate concerns once the future becomes unknown once again, as in the old days before the Enlightenment persuaded us there was human progress, forceful and full of promise, in the making. And, what is the use of knowing our place in

a world that is out of joint? It makes no sense trying to find out, in any precise manner, what our place is in a chaotic universe where the name of the game is survival -- other than re-learning the tricks of the trade of fight and run away and hide, much as our ancestors did: not the denizens of the Christian medieval world, and not even the citizens of the Greek *polis*, but the hunters and gatherers of a very, very ancient past.⁶⁷

Fully developed autobiographical selves (of the modern, western variety) with long memories, well defined identities and a sustained attention to the future require certain political conditions and an institutional framework than make their world passably predictable and ready to be managed, at least to some extent. We must fight for it. But if it should happen that this ordered world is *not* the one we are entering into, then we would be well advised to do our duty while, at the same time, we take a second, more detached and somewhat whimsical look at our own character and our own experience. Because it may well be that, in our enthusiasm for a *civitas mundi* we have lost sight of the fact that the world of civil society has always been and will remain a frail possibility, an elusive endeavor, a quest with no guarantee of mastery and rest.

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⁶⁷ That is, people "whose journeys in life depend on not quite knowing their destination": Brody (2000: 311).

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ASP, Gabinete de Estudios S.L.
Quintana, 24 - 5º dcha. 28008 Madrid (España)
Tel.: (34) 91 5414746 • Fax: (34) 91 5593045 • e-mail: asp@ctv.es