

Spanish and Russian Approaches to European Security: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is describing the ideas that have influenced current Russian and Spanish relations with the European Union (EU), determining the extent to which it has been perceived as a security issue, and explaining the contents of those perceptions. This is achieved by applying textual analysis to some of the main official statements by the top foreign and security policy decision-makers in both countries, Vladimir Putin and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. After studying Spain and Russia’s identification with Europe, their foreign policy interests for relations with the EU, and the security component of those interests, I use Buzan’s concept of *security sectors* in order to explain where Europe has been located by both countries in the *continuum* “source of threat – provider of security”.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is describing the ideas that have influenced current Russian and Spanish relations with the European Union (EU), determining the extent to which it has been perceived as a security issue, and explaining the contents of those perceptions. This is achieved by applying textual analysis to some of the main official statements by the top foreign and security policy decision-makers in both countries, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin and President of the Spanish Government —i.e. Prime Minister— José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, as well as several other major documents approved by them in the period 2000-2006 and 2004-2006, respectively.² It is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of either Russia-EU or Spain-EU relations, but only an overview based on state-approved narratives.

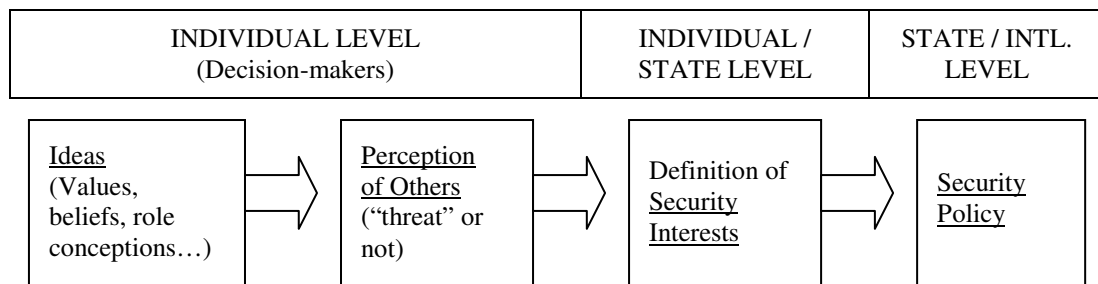
I start from the assumption that the ideas that security policy-makers have about the outside world, and more specifically their views on other actors in the international system, influence their threat perceptions and the security policies elaborated by them. This approach has been used by Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) scholars³ and, more recently, by the constructivist approach to International Relations (IR). While both agree that ideational factors are at least as important as material factors in order to explain state behaviour, their concept of the former is different. FPA takes foreign policy decision-makers as the ultimate cause of policies; in this case, we specifically focus on their ideas about an “Other”, the EU, and how these perceptions determine the security policies they implement (fig. 1). Constructivists prefer to emphasize the constitutive power of ideas themselves, internalized as “identities” by human groups and societies; according to their holist ontological conception, identities cannot be

² They are listed in the references section at the end of the paper.

³ Goldstein, Judith and Keohane, Robert O.: “Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework”, in Goldstein, Judith and Keohane, Robert O., eds. (1993): *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, Ithaca / London, Cornell University Press, pp. 3-30; Webber, Mark and Smith, Michael (2002): *Foreign Policy in a Transformed World*, Harlow, Pearson Education, p. 58.

reduced to the ideas of individuals, even political leaders.⁴ However, I believe that these social identities only have a real influence in actual decisions *as long as* they are accepted and internalized by decision-makers; therefore, I study official documents rather than a broader range of sources, as other authors have done.⁵

Fig. 1: The influence of ideas on the making of security policy



The interest of choosing Spain and Russia as case studies for comparison, in spite of their obvious differences, lies in the history of their relations with Europe. Having sometimes been “inside” and sometimes “outside” Europe,⁶ this has been one of the main “Others” in relation to which these two countries have shaped their threat perceptions and sense of security.⁷ Further common features are their location in the periphery of Europe and their readaptation to a new, democratic identity after decades of authoritarian rule. The question of Russia’s and Spain’s European identity has

⁴ See for example Wendt, Alexander (1999): *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Probably, the best known work on Russian foreign and security policy from a constructivist approach is Hopf, Ted (2002): *Social Construction of Power Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press. I follow Kassianova’s idea that the state is also a producer of discourse, rather than just a mediator between narratives produced by other actors. See Kassianova, Alla: “Russia: Still Open to the West? Evolution of State Identity in the Foreign Policy and Security Discourse”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 6 (2001), pp. 825-826.

⁶ On the problematic relationship between Russian and European identities, see Morozov, Viatcheslav: “Inside/Outside: Europe and the Boundaries of Russian Political Community”, *PONARS Working Papers*, No. 23 (2004), at <http://www.csis.org>.

⁷ Kassianova, *op. cit.*; Neumann, Iver B. (1996): *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations*, London / New York, Routledge.

therefore been determined by political circumstances rather than just their geographic position; during those authoritarian periods, they were excluded from the political concept of “Europe” as a community of shared values, developed by European institutions such as the EU or the Council of Europe.

The first part of this paper deals with issues of identification with Europe, that is, the extent to which the current Russian and Spanish leaders have considered their countries to be “European”, especially with regard to the values associated with European integration. Secondly, I study how these conceptions have been translated into specific foreign policy interests for relations with the EU. Third, I focus on the security component, describing how the EU has been seen with regard to national security and defence policy. Finally, I use Buzan’s concept of *security sectors*⁸ in order to explain where Europe has been located by both countries in the *continuum* “source of threat – provider of security”.

Are We Part of Europe? Areas and Degrees of Identification

Since the very beginning of his term in office, Zapatero has usually referred to European integration in completely positive terms: “a process of peace, liberty, progress and welfare”.⁹ According to him, Europe acted as a major reference for Spaniards during their historical *fight for freedoms* over the past centuries;¹⁰ more recently, membership of the EU constituted the legal basis for Spain’s stable and prosperous

⁸ Buzan, Barry; Wæver, Ole and De Wilde, Jaap (1998): *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder / London, Lynne Rienner. I only take the military, political, economic and societal sectors, omitting the environmental sector for the purposes of this paper.

⁹ *Discurso de Don José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero en la Sesión de Investidura como Presidente del Gobierno* [Address by Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero at his Inauguration as President of the Government], 15 April 2004, at <http://www.la-moncloa.es>.

¹⁰ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Pleno del Congreso para presentar el Proyecto de Ley para ratificar el Tratado por el que se establece una Constitución para Europa* [Address by the President of the Government at the Plenary Session of the Congress to Present the Law Project to Ratify the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe], 28 April 2005, at <http://www.la-moncloa.es>.

evolution, together with the 1978 democratic constitution.¹¹ With regard to the economy, the “European social model” and the emphasis on inter-territorial cohesion, based on the solidarity between the most and the least developed areas, are seen as having greatly helped Spain’s growth and development.¹²

The potentially most problematic issue, a perception by Spanish citizens that EU membership restricted their rights or national/regional identities, is considered not to be the case. On the contrary, it has been repeatedly emphasized that the Union allows for a Europe “united in diversity”, where the different cultures are to be respected:¹³ “Europe is not, then, a risk for our cultures and identity, but the best way to preserve and promote them”.¹⁴

A consequence of this conception is Zapatero’s stated foreign policy objective of bringing Spain back to “Europe’s core”,¹⁵ in contrast to the greater emphasis given by his predecessor José María Aznar to relations with the United States. Aznar’s support for the war in Iraq —apart from the many reasons against the war itself— is regarded as having been contrary to Spain’s natural place in international politics: together with other European powers and EU members, like France or Germany.

Putin’s Russia could be seen as almost the opposite case to Zapatero’s Spain. While for the latter belonging to the EU is a source of strength that increases its world projection, Moscow still considers itself as a world power that wishes to be a centre of influence in international relations on its own right. In spite of having “lost” its former

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Pleno del Senado para presentar el Proyecto de Ley que autoriza la ratificación del Tratado de la Constitución Europea* [Address by the President of the Government at the Plenary Session of the Senate to Present the Law Project Authorizing the Ratification of the Treaty of the European Constitution], 18 May 2005, at <http://www.la-moncloa.es>.

¹⁵ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Debate sobre el Estado de la Nación* [Address by the President of the Government at State of the Nation Debate], 11 May 2005, at <http://www.la-moncloa.es>.

empire, it does not accept to become just one more of the European or, for that matter, Asian countries, like the other former Soviet republics have done.¹⁶

Furthermore, being “one of the largest Eurasian powers”, Moscow also pursues a multi-vectoral foreign policy which requires “an optimal combination of efforts along all vectors”,¹⁷ not exclusively focusing on any geographic area. The CIS members — being Russia’s traditional area of influence— are still considered the priority partners¹⁸; relations with Europe will be deepened only as long as it advances Russian interests, but not as an end in itself, as in the Spanish case.

Russia’s depiction of Europe is therefore a mixed one: the EU is seen at the same time as a rival for Russia and as a potential partner on specific issues. It is also not as value-laden as the Spanish view, but limited to pragmatic benefits. While Spain accepts the influence of Europe because it is seen as both natural and beneficial to the country, Russia rejects as a matter of principle to be subject to any influence but its own.

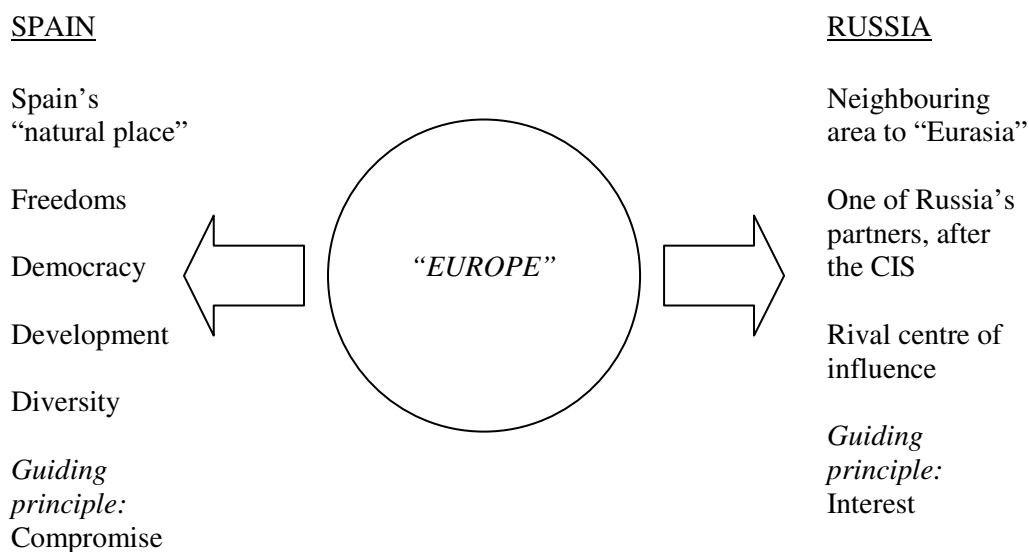
To sum up, Spain’s identification with Europe is complete; while Russia only wholly identifies itself with “Eurasia”, a concept that is roughly equivalent to the territory of the CIS. Therefore, Madrid bases its relations with Europe on the principle of compromise, as a member of the EU and part of the European integration project; Moscow, on the other hand, is not a full member of the “political Europe” —not belonging to its most important organization, the EU,— and logically conducts its European policy according to its own national interest.

¹⁶ *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, 17 December 1999, at <http://www.fas.org>; *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 28 June 2000, at <http://www.fas.org>.

¹⁷ *The Foreign Policy Concept... op. cit.*

¹⁸ The NSC was approved by Yeltsin shortly before his resignation, but had been prepared under Putin’s oversight as Secretary of the Security Council. *National Security Concept... op. cit.* See also *The Foreign Policy Concept... op. cit.*

Fig. 2: Concepts associated with “Europe” by Spanish and Russian leaders



What is Europe to Us? Relations with the EU and National Interests

As we have seen above, Zapatero has prioritized Spain’s European identity above other traditional partners; consequently, showing a “clear Europeanist compromise” was the first in a list of tasks for Spanish foreign policy that he made public in his inauguration address, before relations with Latin America, the Mediterranean and the United States.¹⁹

Spain has wanted to appear in the vanguard of European construction with regard to projects such as the EU constitutional treaty, which received the full support of Zapatero’s government:²⁰ a quick ratification was intended to reflect Spain’s new, more pro-European foreign policy, as well as the gratitude for the political and economic benefits that the country has received since it joined the Union.²¹

¹⁹ *Discurso de Don José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero en la Sesión de Investidura... op. cit.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Pleno del Congreso... op. cit.*

In contrast to the Spanish optimistic view, the views of the Russian leadership on Europe when Putin came to power were still affected by the so-called “Kosovo syndrome”. The NSC expressed concern about the attempts to establish “the domination of Western developed countries, led by the USA, in the international community”.²² EU members were presented as just an extension of American power, and therefore trying to diminish Russian influence in world politics.

However, this was not in itself a complete denial of Russia’s European identity, but only as far as “Europe” or European organizations were seen as dominated by rival powers, not allowing for Russian participation. While it was admitted that “[i]ntegrated associations [...] are becoming a significant factor of regional and sub-regional security and peacemaking”, it was also said that “[i]ntegration processes, in particular, in the Euro-Atlantic region are quite often pursued on a selective and limited basis”.²³

This apparent contradiction was also shown with regard to relations with the EU. While steps such as the enlargement to Eastern Europe and the development of a security and defence policy were seen with caution by Moscow —warning that it would “seek due respect for its interests”²⁴—, the EU was also described as “one of [Russia’s] main political and economic partners”, with which it wanted “an intensive, stable and long-term cooperation”.²⁵

The ambiguity of the official discourse has continued in the last few years. In 2001, the importance of respect to Russia’s national interests was repeated; however, it was also necessary to “breathe new life into our relations with European and other international structures”.²⁶ Furthermore, “efforts to build up a partnership with the European Union will become even more important. Integration with Europe is one of

²² *National Security Concept... op. cit.*

²³ *The Foreign Policy Concept... op. cit.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 3 April 2001, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>.

the key areas of our foreign policy”.²⁷ In this way, the word to describe Russia’s aims changed from “cooperation” in 2000 to “integration” a year later. Did Russia aspire to membership of the EU?

This was clarified in the 2002 address: integration was intended to be limited and restricted to economic issues. “Here our consistent position and numerous steps towards integration with Europe are clear. We will continue active work with the European Union *to form a single economic space*”.²⁸ Free movement of citizens was also mentioned in 2003, with regard to the Kaliningrad issue; together with the economic space, they constituted Russia’s objectives in dealing with the Union.²⁹ In 2004, energy exports —especially through the new “North European gas pipeline”— were included in the main areas for Russian-EU relations.

Therefore, what was being required from Brussels was just the continuation of political dialogue in the most important areas for Moscow’s interests; but there was no aspirations of being accepted into the EU, which for Russia —contrary to what we have said about Spain— would mean downgrading its status as an independent world power. In 2006, the EU was described again as just a “partner” for Russia, although the biggest one.³⁰

These limited objectives, perhaps paradoxically, made it possible for Moscow to accept EU enlargement to the Baltic States as an opportunity, instead of a threat. “The expansion of the European Union should not just bring us closer geographically, but also economically and spiritually. [...] This means new markets and new investment. Generally, it means new possibilities for the future of *Greater Europe*”.³¹ With this new

²⁷ *Ibid.* In the Russian version, “[...] Курс на интеграцию с Европой становится одним из ключевых направлений нашей внешней политики”. Emphasis added.

²⁸ *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 18 April 2002, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>. Emphasis added.

²⁹ *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 16 May 2003, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>.

³⁰ *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 10 May 2006, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>.

³¹ *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 26 May 2004, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>. Emphasis added.

concept, Russia tried to replace the idea of “two Europes” —one inside and another outside the Union,— preferring to highlight common interests instead. However, this does not change the fact that, when disagreements arise, Russia will choose the option that best suits its national interest, which as we have said is its guiding principle in relations with the EU.

The often mentioned “Putin’s pragmatism” also means that Russia’s European identity can also be instrumentally used to achieve foreign policy goals: for example, in response to criticism from the West on the state of freedom, democracy and human rights in Russia, Putin replied that the country had accepted those values along with the rest of European nations, with which it shared centuries of a common history.³² This points out that the ideas that political leaders refer to when making decisions are often not determined by their own personal beliefs, but by how useful these arguments are in order to convince their audiences.

Does Europe Make Us Any More Secure? Threat Assessment and Security Policy

Spain considers that the integration project represented by the EU has increased the security of the continent, by “consolidating peace and democracy in Europe, and eliminating once and for all war and dictatorships from our countries”.³³ The priority given to Europe in Zapatero’s foreign policy is also taken to security policy: “In matters of security and defence, Europe is our area of priority interest; we are Europe and our security is unbreakably linked to the continent’s security”.³⁴

The development of a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was seen as one of the reasons for Spain to assume a greater role in the Union, in order to

³² *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly*, 25 April 2005, at <http://www.kremlin.ru>.

³³ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Pleno del Senado... op. cit.*

³⁴ *Directiva de Defensa Nacional 1/2004* [National Defence Directive 1/2004], 30 December 2004, at <http://www.mde.es>.

“increasing the [EU] defence and security capabilities for the benefit of its citizens, and playing a relevant role for world peace”.³⁵ The first task for Spanish defence policy in the international arena was therefore supporting the ESDP, more specifically the 2010 Helsinki Headline Goal, the “Battle Groups”, the European Capabilities Action Plan and the European Defence Agency;³⁶ Spain also promised its full support to the EU —as “one of its more compromised partners”— in the fight against terrorism.³⁷

The EU was not only seen as a security provider for Spain because of the ESDP. Other instruments such as international cooperation policies were also considered to contribute to that aim: for example, helping “the development of our Eastern and Southern neighbours” would make these areas more stable and prosperous, which in turn would increase the security of Europe as a whole.³⁸ Assistance from the EU was also considered very important in order to face the main “soft security” risk for Spain coming from those areas, that is, a growing illegal immigration that increasingly exceeds the country’s material capacity of dealing with it.³⁹

Russian views have been determined by their perception of European powers as potential rivals together with the United States. As the NSC said, “the attempts of other states to hinder the strengthening of Russia as a centre of influence in the multipolar world, prevent the implementation of its national interests and weaken its positions in Europe, the Middle East, the Transcaucasus, Central Asia and Asia Pacific” were no less than a threat to national security.⁴⁰ Although this might be considered a rhetorical statement, what is real is the feeling that Russian leaders had about the danger to their identity as a great power: an European alignment with Washington could potentially

³⁵ *Discurso de Don José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero en la Sesión de Investidura... op. cit.*

³⁶ *Directiva de Defensa Nacional, op. cit.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Pleno del Congreso... op. cit.*

³⁹ *Discurso del Presidente del Gobierno en el Debate sobre el Estado de la Nación* [Address by the President of the Government at State of the Nation Debate], 30 May 2006, at <http://www.la-moncloa.es>.

⁴⁰ *National Security Concept... op. cit.*

marginalize Russia from the most important issues, forcing them to resort to a “balancing” strategy by, for example, strengthening relations with China.

However, relations with some European countries, especially France and Germany, have also been emphasized in order to try to counter U.S. policies, most recently with regard to the Iraq War. In this way, the Moscow-Beijing and the Moscow-Paris-Berlin axes are used as alternative ways of balancing the West or the United States, respectively; but this points out to the limitations of these agreements, which tend to be short-term and limited to specific issues. Europe appears, in this way, as a threat to Russia’s great power status and as an ally against that very same threat, when it comes from the American superpower.

With regard to security institutions in Europe, Moscow’s aim has been creating “a stable and democratic system of European security and cooperation”,⁴¹ which adequately took into account Russia’s status and interests. The OSCE, for example, was defended because it was perceived as an institution where Russia and Western countries enjoyed the same status. On the other hand, NATO —of which Russia was not a member, but only a “partner” with limited rights— was considered the main military instrument for extending American and Western European influence, therefore ignoring Russian interests; the Alliance’s enlargement was even described as a “military threat”.⁴² This is why Russia tried to develop the role of the OSCE in order to make it the cornerstone of the European security architecture, instead of NATO.⁴³

The wave of “colour revolutions” in the CIS space, especially those in Georgia and Ukraine, has nonetheless changed this scenario. Despite their recent disagreement over the Iraq War, Brussels joined Washington in supporting these regime changes; which Moscow perceived as a blow to Russian-European cooperation. Therefore, now

⁴¹ *The Foreign Policy Concept... op. cit.*

⁴² *Russia’s Military Doctrine*, 21 April 2000, at <http://www.armscontrol.org>.

⁴³ *The Foreign Policy Concept... op. cit.*

Europe's discourse on issues such as the state of freedom and human rights in Russia is seen in a new, potentially threatening sense by Russian leaders; especially given the rhetoric of the current U.S. Administration about the "spread of democracy". While it seems clear that Russia's case is not Ukraine's, once again it is the feeling of threat, rather than the actual danger, what really matters for the level of security that is perceived from the Kremlin.

Conclusion

Following Buzan, we can classify Spanish and Russian security perceptions about the EU into several groups, according to the military, political, economic and societal sectors.

First, with regard to the traditional or *military sector*, as we have seen, Spain considers that membership of the EU contributes to improve its national capabilities, fostering cooperation among members in the framework of the ESDP. Russia does not consider any European country as a military threat, but only shows caution about the future course of the EU defence initiatives, which are still uncompleted,

Secondly, in the *political sector*, Madrid identifies the EU with support to its democratic system; it also considers that its member status contributes to increase its world projection and power, which would be well below their current level had it not joined the Union. On the other hand, Moscow bases its self-perception a great power on its own national resources; accordingly, when dealing with the EU or other European organizations like NATO, it does not want to be assimilated to less powerful states, but enjoy a special status that acknowledges what Russia is. This is related to the consideration of critical remarks on the current regime by foreign governments as

interferences in Russia's internal affairs, which threaten the same great power status that Moscow wants to promote.

The *economic sector* is the only one that is clearly viewed in a positive light by both Madrid and Moscow. While the former is conscious of the role played by EU funds in the development of the Spanish economy, the latter is also confident about its role as an energy supplier to Europe, which is decisively contributing to its current high growth rates.

Finally, regarding *societal sector* problems, Spain considers once again that EU assistance is decisive, as in the case of controlling illegal immigration flows; Russia, on the other hand, finds in the EU regulations an obstacle for the free movement of the citizens of Kaliningrad. EU membership is also seen by Spain as compatible with the national/regional identities of Spanish citizens, while Russia's Eurasian territory and history prevent itself from fully accepting Western European culture as its own.

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