

# Spain pressured to strengthen border with North Africa

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The Spanish Socialist Party government has come under increasing pressure from the European Union (EU) to crack down on illegal immigrants and strengthen its border with North Africa.

While recently the Socialist Party (PSOE) has declared it would provide amnesty for immigrants already in the country, the increased militarisation of this area between Spain and North Africa should disabuse any notion that it has the interests of immigrants at heart.

The fact that it gave no opposition to the call by the EU shows that its overriding interest is to implement measures that will defend and control its own economic interests in the border area at the expense of immigrants.

The PSOE plans to spend 130 million euros over four years to extend its use of the SIVE (Integrated System of Exterior Surveillance). SIVE has already been in use along a small part of the Spanish border with Morocco, but will now be extended to cover Ceuta and along the coast of Andalusia and the Canary Islands.

The surveillance system already operates in Cadiz, Malaga and Lanzarote and is planned to be introduced in Granada by the end of the year. The Interior Ministry also plans to increase sensors at the border and will purchase an additional 59 patrol boats and 11 mobile radar stations.

The strengthening of the border with Morocco will cause even more deaths, despite PSOE attempts to cut the numbers of immigrants attempting the hazardous trip. Only recently, a mother and her baby were among five people killed when their boat capsized trying to reach the Spanish coast.

So far this year 47 people have died trying to reach Spain from Morocco. Every year thousands of migrants risk their lives in an effort to cross the 20-kilometer

Straits of Gibraltar to reach Spain. Many migrants pay up to 1,000 euros per person for the crossing in inflatable rafts. Most crossings are made in summer due to the better weather conditions.

According to Manuel Fenix of the Red Cross, which helps immigrants once they reach the mainland at its centre at Barbate, "Usually people are very frightened and some really sick ... they often have burns or infected wounds or they maybe trembling and half dead with cold."

Research by a Dutch-based refugee support group has said that over 4,500 refugees and migrants died last year trying to enter Europe, and that the most deadly way to enter was across the Mediterranean. Most of the 4,500 deaths occurred between Africa and Spain.

The International Center for Migration Policy has estimated that 3,600 have died trying to reach Spain from Africa since 1997. This somewhat conservative figure has been confirmed by the Madrid government, which has also admitted that for every body found, another two people are likely to be dead.

The PSOE is far from basing its immigration policy on alleviating pain and suffering. According to Spanish Secretary of State Consuelo Rumi, it is "necessary to link immigration with the labour market".

This statement was echoed in a recent editorial in *EL Pais*: "Spain has gone from being a producer to a receptor of emigration, radically changing our scale of values. Before discussing the meaning of this change we should make it clear that immigration is necessary in a country with a low birth rate in order to maintain our labour force and defend the well being of our growing passive classes. We need immigration to keep up the standard of living we have attained and the upcoming step from 40 million to 50 million inhabitants foreseen for 2005 is a positive one".

The PSOE is also using the question of immigration as a weapon with which to aggressively put pressure on countries such as Morocco to give Spain economic concessions along its border region. The area closest to the Spanish coast is some of the richest parts of Morocco. It is an area over which Spain would like to increase its economic and political hold.

The Spanish prime minister, Jose Zapatero, recently lauded an agreement that would see greater cooperation in the “strong and continuous” fight against illegal immigration. The two countries police forces will have closer ties and will have judges appointed in liaison.

He said the agreement was the product of closer relations over the last year. The by product of this close relationship between the PSOE and the brutal and corrupt Moroccan royal family was seen recently. The First Catalonia-Morocco economic forum closed in Barcelona last week. Four agreements were signed—one between the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce and the Moroccan Banque Centrale Populaire (BCP) and another one between the Barcelona Chamber and l’ Agence Speciale Tanger-Meditarranee.

The third agreement was signed by the Catalan Caixa Bank and the BCP, while the fourth was signed by the Moroccan agency for the land registration department and the Catalan Cartography Institute.

Trade between Morocco and the Spanish region of Catalonia dramatically increased from 525 million euros in 2000 to 812 million euros in 2003. The 300 Catalan companies working in Morocco make up 40 percent of Spanish firms established there, while 30 percent of trade between Morocco and Spain is operated with the Catalan region. Over a third of the Moroccan population live in this area

Historically the Catalan region, along with Basque region, has had shortages of labour and has used illegal immigrants from North Africa to increase its economic revenues.

The latest economic agreement with Morocco will mean this will continue, but will be regularised and controlled by the Spanish and Moroccan government.

The fact that Spain and its regional friends have no qualms in dealing with this semi feudal monarchy is indicative to the type of foreign policy that is now being pursued by the PSOE. For Spain the benefits are enormous. It means far more control of illegal immigrants and further access to Morocco’s resources

in the form of trade concessions.

While much was made in the Spanish press when the PSOE took its troops out of Iraq, it would be foolish to believe that Spain was lessening its colonial appetite. Its dealings with Morocco and other North African countries is an attempt to pull these countries in to the European bloc with a virtual new colonial status.

This is not being opposed by the Moroccan monarchy, which presides over a country in which protesters are tortured and regularly disappear and which sees its dealings with Spain as a way for its products to get into Europe.



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