

ICPS newsletter[®]

Ukraine and Spain: A promising partnership

The International Centre for Policy Studies has published conclusions and recommendations from the working group on "Spain and Ukraine: Prospects for partnership", which met in Barcelona over December 2007 at the initiative of ICPS, the CIDOB Foundation and the Madrid branch of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This document presents the five main spheres for eventual cooperation between Kyiv and Madrid

1. Bilateral relations: The great leap forward

In 2007, the year of their 15th anniversary, Spanish—Ukrainian bilateral relations reached a turning point, as the two ambassadors attending the workshop confirmed. In June of that year, the Spanish Foreign Minister visited Ukraine and his counterpart returned the favor in November—the first time Ukraine's Foreign Minister went to Spain since 1994.

The two ministries worked hard the entire year and reached some important milestones. These include a Memorandum, signed on 16 November 2007, to assist in Ukraine's efforts to move closer to the European Union, establishing concrete mechanisms of governmental and non-governmental cooperation and providing for a transfer of knowledge in European integration.

Other areas of interstate cooperation include consular affairs, especially concerning Ukrainian migrants in Spain, and joint work in other international organizations, such as the OSCE. Institutional declarations in Spain's parliament and in some regional parliaments commemorated the 75th Anniversary of Ukraine's Holodomor and a parliamentary friendship group was set up between the two country's parliaments—both unprecedented gestures.

Deeper dialog on migration issues and visa policy

This progress in formal cooperation should be extended to more and more areas of joint interest. Migration and visa policy are the most obvious issues in which Spain

and Ukraine should deepen their dialog and joint efforts. The growing number of Ukrainians in Spain—70,000 in 2007, according to local registers—is a high priority, and both countries need to not only ensure full respect for the rights of these Ukrainian citizens, but also proper official support to make the Ukrainian communities in Spain a factor that contributes positively to bilateral links.

Given that Ukraine applies a visa-free regime to Spaniards—incidentally, a very positive element in bilateral links—, focus should be on ensuring that the enforcement of Spain's Schengen commitments is handled in the most efficient manner, allowing for a smooth arrival of tourists, students, businesspeople, academics, and other Ukrainian visitors to Spain, with as few delays and bureaucratic constraints as possible. Facilitating visa procedures for Ukrainians who do not live in Kyiv would be very helpful.

Expanded contact in academia and the arts

Contacts in the educational and cultural spheres should be expanded exponentially. There is very little contact at the intellectual and academic level between the two countries, as among their artists. Ukraine is attracting a large number of western experts to conferences, seminars and festivals, but Spaniards are strikingly scarce among them.

Even in those areas of direct shared interest, such as migration, cooperation among scholars from both countries is disappointingly low. In addition, the level of knowledge about Spain in Ukraine and,

even more so, knowledge about Ukraine in Spain, is disappointingly low for two major countries that share not only important roles in Europe but some striking similarities.

2. Consolidating democracy: The great debate

The events of recent years have been a major challenge to Ukraine's democracy. The country has made clear its preference for democratic solutions through successive crises, and has averted any threats of violence or authoritarian clamp-downs. However, some key areas of Ukraine's constitutional order, including the Constitution itself, are still far from satisfactory.

Spain's institutional transformations have worked

Spain has gone through a remarkably successful process of institutional transformation, which consolidated its democracy in two steps. First was the transition from the Franco dictatorship to democracy and then came integration into EU institutions. The lessons Spain learned in this process could potentially be useful as points of reference, rather than a model to be copied.

Two debates in particular resonate in Ukraine similarly to Spain. The first one is about the Constitution and the country's institutional "architecture." The second one is over the issue of regionalization and decentralization—one that is crucial in such two such diverse and geographically large countries. In particular, the diverse political aspirations of the different regions and additional factors such as regional economic imbalance and linguistic diversity come up in both countries. Spain provides a unique example of democratization through decentralization that might be of special interest to Ukrainians.

3. Public administration: Delivering to the public

The ultimate test of good governance is always the ability of governments at all levels to deliver services to their citizens. In Ukraine, the soviet heritage continues to burden political culture and administrative practice in the country. Spain also faces considerable challenges in terms of providing its citizens with adequate services, but its various administrative structures have developed remarkable capabilities in this regard.

Bilateral opportunities are endless...

Given Spain's experience with reform, adapting to European rules and standards, and establishing new structures, there is ample room for cooperation with Ukraine's public administration at many levels. Basic and professional training for civil servants, for example, might be a useful starting point. Benchmarking and study visits by both politicians and public administrators could also be useful, provided that the necessary steps are taken to overcome linguistic barriers.

Local and regional government offers a particularly promising area for cooperation. Spain's cities and regions have engaged in systematic and sustained efforts in local and regional economic development and have devised mechanisms to tackle some serious socio-economic problems, such as sub-standard housing, high unemployment, industrial conversion, and more, which are shared with a number of Ukrainian cities, towns and regions.

4. Business and politics: Establishing healthy relations

The relationship between business and politics has two dimensions that are critical to the democratic and economic health of a country. On one hand, private interest should never be allowed to "capture" the exercise of power in its own favor, and public bodies should remain strictly neutral when it comes to economic competition. On the other, public officials should be sensitive to what drives their economy, companies and workers, and foster an environment in which business

can flourish and create wealth and quality employment.

Both aspects are constantly challenged in Spain and in Ukraine alike, in practice and in public discourse. On the whole, however, Spain has achieved a level of economic management and institutional stability in which public policy and economic performance of the private sector reinforce each other, achieving sustained growth and convergence with high European living standards.

The same is not yet true for Ukraine, where too many businesspeople have yielded to the temptation of entering politics while renouncing neither their business interests nor, more worryingly, the pursuit of their own private interest through public means. On the other hand, successive Ukrainian governments have failed to create a stable, business-friendly economic environment.

Double the potential in business relations

Business relations between Ukraine and Spain thus have double the potential. Firstly, a free trade area between the EU and Ukraine will open up a new world of opportunities for bilateral economic links and mutual economic benefit. Secondly, a dialog between businesspeople, business associations and political actors in Spain and Ukraine could help identify ways in which Spain has averted some of the negative developments in the relationship between business, politics and public administration that seriously undermine Ukraine's democracy and its economy.

5. Spain and Ukraine in the process of EU integration

Spain and Ukraine are relatively large but peripheral countries in the European context. Their historical experiences and their geographical neighborhood are very different from those of the countries at the heart of the original European Community.

This means that they have unique contributions to make to debates about the nature of Europe and its future integration. Similar in size and with

shared aspirations in terms of building a stronger, wider Europe with a single voice in the world, Ukraine and Spain can engage in a meaningful debate about the future of European integration, rather than leave this to the countries around the Rhineland or to the capitals of three or four larger EU member states.

Joint contributions to energy policy

Spanish-Ukrainian dialog on European affairs could focus, for example, on energy policy, a relatively new subject in the European context and one to which the two countries can contribute very different points-of-view and expertise: Ukraine, about dealing with Russia as a supplier and redrawing Europe's Eastern supply lines; Spain, with its unique experience in dealing with Arab, African and Latin American gas producers. Both countries are large consumers and transit countries, although Ukraine's experience in the latter role is much more extensive.

Another potential area of joint reflection is the comparison between Ukraine's perceptions and potential role in the Black Sea area and that of Spain in the Western Mediterranean. Ukraine and Spain are bridge countries linking those areas to the main European heartland. Their involvement in building more stable and cooperative sub-regional environments could serve as an example to each other.

In addition, both countries should link their visions in a wider southern European region, one that went all the way from the Caspian Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. ■

You can download the full version of this paper at http://www.icps.com.ua/doc/CONCLUSIONS%20AND%20RECOMMENDATIONS-Spain%20and%20Ukraine-last_UKR_OT_red_fin.pdf.

For more information, please contact ICPS analyst Natalia Shapovalova by phone at (044) 484-4400 or via e-mail at nshapovalova@icps.kiev.ua.

icps newsletter is a weekly publication of the International Centre for Policy Studies, delivered by electronic mail. To be included in the distribution list, mail your request to: marketing@icps.kiev.ua.

icps newsletter editor: Olha Lvova (olvova@icps.kiev.ua)
Phone: (380-44) 484-4400. Fax: (380-44) 484-4402
English text editor: L.A. Wolanskyj
Articles may be reprinted with ICPS consent.

The International Centre for Policy Studies is an independent research organization whose mandate is to promote the introduction of public policy concepts and practices in Ukraine. This is achieved by increasing the know-how of key government officials for policy choices, formulation and debate, and the awareness of the public-at-large of the benefits of policy.
Address: vul. Pymonenka 13A, Kyiv, Ukraine 04050
Web-site: <http://www.icps.com.ua/eng/>