



223

FEBRUARY
2014

CEUTA, MELILLA AND THE EUROPEANISATION STRATEGY

Elena Sánchez-Montijano, Research Fellow, CIDOB

Eduard Soler i Lecha, Research Coordinator, CIDOB

Spain, similarly to Italy and Greece, wants to Europeanise its border management. These countries insist that the arrival of irregular immigrants to their borders is not a Spanish, Italian or Greek problem but rather a European one. Therefore it calls for a European response. Hence, with regards to the current crisis in Ceuta and Melilla the requests to Brussels have multiplied and there has been an attempt to shift part of the responsibility towards the European institutions. In the Spanish case, the Europeanization strategy has three objectives which are shared with the other southern European countries: first, to increase material and financial aid, second, to share the responsibility of controversial decisions, and third, to obtain support from the public opinion. A Spain-specific objective is to be added to this list: to reaffirm the Spanish sovereignty over the two autonomous cities, insisting that they are EU cities and therefore that their borders are European.

Currently, Spain is facing its second biggest migratory crisis in the last decade. After the first one in 2005, which was marked by both the phenomenon of the Cayucos in the Canary Islands and the significant increase in the number of attempts to enter Ceuta and Melilla by immigrants, it seemed that the situation had stabilised. However, this second crisis, which began in the fall of 2012, demonstrates that the phenomenon has far from ended. On the one hand, the entry routes to Ceuta and Melilla have diversified, with new methods such as “kamikaze cars”, coordinated attempts to swim or jump fences by hundreds of people, or the opening of new entry points through other territories and islets (Chafarinas, Alboran and Ahucemas). Furthermore, the mafias are becoming increasingly professional and are comprised of organised groups working not only in the countries of origin and transit but also of destination. There are evidences of fixed rates for the trafficking of people. In addition, sub-Saharan immigrants no longer see Ceuta and Melilla only as an entry point to the EU, but rather as the coveted “Eldorado”.

Given this reality, Spain has tried to limit as much as possible the entry of immigrants to these two enclaves. First, by increasing security measures: raising

the height of the fences that separate the autonomous cities and Morocco and installing the controversial “concertinas” (razor wire) and infrared cameras that detect and defer the movement people. Second, by increasing cooperation with Morocco in the management of immigrants who are settled this North African country. And finally, by asking for more collaboration to an EU who continually reminds Member States that they, and they alone, are responsible for managing their own borders under the Schengen agreement.

To justify some of the most controversial measures, the government is relying on figures reported by the Ministry of Interior, according to which around 40.000 people settled in Morocco might be trying to enter Ceuta and Melilla. However, NGOs working in the field categorically deny these numbers, and estimate that those willing to cross are not more than several hundred people. Regardless of these contradictory statements, the feeling of invasion is spreading, especially among the residents of these two cities. This is due not only to political declarations but also to media coverage of the entry of immigrant groups and to the infrared images of people waiting to cross the border. In Ceuta and Melilla, this fear takes on a special dimension when the ongoing Moroccan claim to these two cities is taken into consideration.

Political tensions in irregular migration issues have always existed, yet throughout this particularly crisis there has been a notable increase. There has been no self-criticism by the Popular Party in relation to the death of the fifteen immigrants who drowned when they were trying to enter Ceuta by swimming around the port fence and were deterred with rubber bullets by the Spanish Guardia Civil. Most of the other political parties have condemned this action, and demand responsibilities and for those in charge to resign. The European Commission, and in particular, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Cecilia Malmström, have also asked the Spanish government for explanations.

The Spanish government neither can nor wants to face these responsibilities alone. Hence, it is doing everything it can to share this burden with the European Union. This might help to reduce political tension in Spain and particularly in the two autonomous cities. However the problem, Europeanised or not, will still be there. In the end it has to be jointly managed, and if Spain wants the EU to take on part of the responsibility the government must recognize that something went wrong in dealing with the latest crisis in Ceuta and that the respect of legality and human dignity is a red line that neither Spain nor the EU can cross.