Spain's catching up with EU core: the implausible quest of a 'flying pig'?

Luis Moreno

In contemporary times, Spain offered a good example of a very compressed transition to post-industrial socioeconomic structures passing from peripheral to core status within the EU and the international economic order. The article reviews developments and outcomes in Spain since 2000 by paying attention mainly to the impact of the European Union on Spain's political economy of welfare. The adoption of EU recommendations in labour activation policies and the increase in female participation in the formal labour market is singled out as highly relevant for policy change. Explanatory accounts on welfare development focus in continuity and change considering the analytical constellation of ideas, interests and institutions.

Keywords: economic catching up, Europeanization, labour activation, social policy change, welfare political economy

1. Introduction

The impact of Europe and Europeanization on Spain's domestic political economy and public policies has been paramount. Decades of international isolation and ideological and economic autarchy led the country to believe that complete modernity was unattainable. Becoming a developed European country was regarded as a necessary condition for political and institutional modernisation. For most of the twentieth century, Europe had been perceived as everything that Spain was not. Spaniards are now among the most optimistic about the future of the European Union.¹

After a long hyper-centralist dictatorship (1939-75), a peaceful transition to democracy (1975-79), and an active involvement in Europe after its accession to the EEC (1986), Spain has undergone deep and far-reaching social transformations. A cross-party and cross-sectional common aspiration to become a core European country was widely put into motion. Such a political drive meant to strive for a democratic status away from the shameful memories of a tawdry despotic dictatorship. Culturally, the desire to return to mother Europe was articulated to reverse the anti-European sentiment of 'let them invent!'²

Europeanization has particularly been meaningful given the Spanish historical context, something which has involved incorporating objectives, indicators and procedures

defined by European institutions. There has also been a tendency to look to Europe in order to legitimate or de-legitimize certain policies or political proposals. The general framework of analysis of this article concerns the influence of the EU on Spain's welfare political economy through the examination of changes in the constellation of ideas, interests and institutions. The main area of observation relate to the development of the welfare state. Following the framework set out in the Introduction for this special issue (Balkir, Blukbasi & Erugal, 2012), this article also considers the extent to which ideas promoted by the EU (labour activation) have contributed to far-reaching transformations in the particular domain of female employment.

The consolidation in contemporary times of a fully-fledged European welfare state can be considered as the main challenge Spain had to accomplish in order to rub shoulders with other large EU's member states. The examination in this article of reforms in the social policy area seeks to contrast matrices of the recent past concerning the 'catching up' of Spain with EU core countries (Moreno 2009). As a member of the so-called 'Southern European Periphery' (Featherstone & Kazamias 2001), Spain has been regarded as part of the 'Achilles heel' in the European integration project (Verney 2009). Contrary to this view, the fact that Spain has been successful in improving economic and welfare developments during 2000-2010 can provide a useful case in point to other new-entry EU countries.

Spain's welfare has come close to European medium figures in socioeconomic indicators in parallel with a general convergence of social spending in all EU countries (Adelantado & Calderón 2006). Since 1986, and according to Eurostat time-series data, public social spending --the simplest economic indicator-- has grown at a quicker and higher pace as compared to any other EU member state. As in other European countries, the effects 2007 global financial crisis have casted doubts on whether Spain can sustain its previous expansion of welfare expenditure. The broadening of social entitlements as a result of welfare policy innovation in the 2000s appears to have been stopped. Shifts in the general direction of the political economy of the country concerning regulation of the labour market and the 'pay-as-you-go' pension system follow similar patterns of reforms as in other matured European welfare systems. All these developments seem to foretell a phase of further welfare recasting in line with a closer coordination and economic 'fine-tuning' with other EU member states.

In the second section of this article, a review of Spain's economic performance is meant to illustrate the catching up effort deployed by Spanish society in the last decades. It is contended that the case of Spain validates general 'benchmarking' claims for the achievement of a level of convergent economic development in the EU. Subsequently, the characterization of the Spanish welfare state as a *via media* seeks to identify the main sets of values, institutional procedures and power arrangements with relation to other European welfare regimes. The very nature of policy arrangements and transformations regarding Spain's welfare reflect the aspiration to adapt a pre-democratic system of social protection to a syncretic version of the various types of European welfare states.

The third section reports outcomes in terms of continuity and change. Under the auspices of the EU and other international institutions, such as the OECD, the paradigm of labour activation was fully embraced by Spanish authorities. As a result of this, the quantum-leap increase in the participation of women in the formal labour market is

singled out as the great transformation in Spanish society during 2000-2010. A brief examination of the evolution of labour market helps to explain the degree of Europeanization in a policy area of important implications for the future evolution of the Bismarckian component of the Spanish welfare state (Guillén 2010). Outcomes concerning welfare and social policy are summarized in Table 1. The fourth section discusses the processes of continuity and change by paying attention to the interaction of 'ideas', 'interests' and 'institutions' at both supranational (global and EU) and domestic level in the main areas of analysis. A further look at the international situation, after the 2007 financial crisis, is carried out in order to advance future scenarios. Concluding remarks emphasize the crucial impact that Europe will continue to have in a 'pro-EU' country which has greatly counted on European institutions since its accession to EEC/EU in 1986.

2. EU, the quest to catch up and welfare development

At the time of the approval of the 1978 Constitution, Europe appeared to the Spanish democratic forces as the 'point of arrival' the country needed to aim for. Europe had become a 'master symbol' (Turner 1997), together with the semiotic meanings of 'civilization', and 'modernization' (Moreno & Serrano-Pascual 2011). Spain's main political and social actors had already internalized EEC/EU inputs and practices as the general framework of reference and the institutional source of 'good practices' to comply with. Ideologically, the appeal to Europe had been profusely used by political, social and economic actors as an important rhetorical recourse to convey their interests demanding social justice and/or economic prosperity.

Spain's aspiration to catch up with core European countries implied the formidable material challenge of making up for the 'lost time'. Since 1986, Spain's economic growth accelerated further in order to join the selected group of the world large economies. According to IMF and World Bank datasets, Spain ranked twelfth in the list of countries by total GDP in 2010. Since 2008, Spain has participated in the meetings of the G-20 group of major economies.

Evidence has lent no support to the 'social dumping' explanation for Spain's economic achievements (Guillén & Matsaganis 2000). If anything, Spain offered a good example of a pattern of 'leapfrogging', or a very compressed transition from pre-industrial to post-industrial socioeconomic structures (Espina 2007; Ferrera 2007). From the end of WWII to the year 2009, the per head income in purchasing power parity of the Spaniards went from 49.5 per cent to 95.2 per cent with relation to the EU-15 average. The corresponding figure for EU-27 was 103 per cent (González-Temprano, 2003, Moreno, 2004, Eurostat).

In the referred-to period 1945-2009, Spain passed from peripheral to core status within the international economic order. Since the 1960s the country followed a pattern of 'mixed market economy', a variant of the 'coordinated mixed economy' variety of contemporary capitalism (Hall & Soskice 2001). Spain, together with other Mediterranean market economies (Italy, Portugal and Greece), is in a cluster which incorporates market, non-market and mixed forms of economic coordination (Amable 2003; Royo, 2008).³ This categorization is in line with the polyvalent nature of their

welfare systems, at times Bismarckian or liberal, at times even social-democratic (Moreno 2008).

On the initiative of some influential Anglo-Saxon media opinion leaders (e.g. *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *BBC*, *Wall Street Journal*), it has been argued that the Mediterranean countries named by the acronym PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain) were unable to perform economically as other European states in Central and Northern Europe. This inability was to render those countries hopeless after the crisis triggered by the sub-prime mortgage failure in the US housing market in 2007, and the consequential global financial meltdown. In caustic words, the task for the PIGS countries was impossible to achieve or one that, following the British saying,⁴ would only be accomplished 'when pigs fly'.

A distinctive indicator characterizing a PIG country was said to be their high level of external debt and the sovereign public debt. This claim is controversial in light of the existing evidence. According to Eurostat figures, the disparities among the PIGS countries concerning the public debt as percentage of the GDP were wide at the end of 2009: Italy, 116 per cent; Greece 115 per cent, Portugal, 77 per cent and Spain, 53 per cent. Other EU's large countries had similar needs for public borrowing, if not higher, as compared to Spain: Germany, 73 per cent, France, 78 per cent, or the UK, 68 per cent.⁵

All things considered, Spain's economic performance since the times of transition to democracy in the late 1970s validates the general claim that Europeanization acted as a general 'bench-marker' for the achieving of a closer convergence at a higher and faster pace than long-standing EU members states (Risse, Cowles & Caporaso 2001). The moneys provided by EU structural and cohesion funds have been an additional incentive to catch up. As a result, Spain was highly successful in articulating the overriding desire to reach an economic level similar to that of other EU large countries. Spain, with a population of 45 million and a GDP per capita of 103 per cent of the EU-27 average compared in 2010 with Germany (82 million, GDP per capita 116 per cent), France (64 million, GDP per capita 108 per cent), United Kingdom (61 million, GDP per capita 112 per cent), and Italy (60 million, GDP per capita 104 per cent) (Eurostat).

During its phase of expansion (1975-1995), the Spanish welfare state witnessed a sharp increase in social spending on social insurance benefits and a widening in the public health coverage. Already in the early 1990s, Spain welfare development appeared as a *via media* not only between both Bismarckian Continental and Liberal Anglo-Saxon worlds of welfare capitalism (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999; Moreno 2001), also incorporated inputs and traits of the Nordic welfare typology (Moreno & Sarasa 1992; Moreno 2008). Later on, while it became more liberal in macroeconomic policies, social policy-making followed a pattern of generalization and universalization of welfare entitlements and provision (Rodríguez-Cabrero 2004). As a consequence, there has gradually been a detachment from the Bismarckian principle of income maintenance⁶ in parallel with an expansion of the social assistance realm financed by general taxation. The welfare state enjoys a high level of legitimacy and public support (Arriba, Calzada & del Pino, 2006).

As a Mediterranean country, Spain belongs to the Southern European welfare typology. Social-demographic trends, institutional peculiarities, political resources, socio-economic backgrounds, patterns of public policy and value-systems are rather similar in

EU's southern countries (Sarasa & Moreno 1995; Ferrera 1996; Moreno 2006).⁷ South European welfare is shaped in a differential manner from other regimes by the role played by the family and its interpenetration in all areas of welfare production and distribution, particularly as regards income and services. The self-perception of different needs and life-styles highly conditions strategic configurations of interests by actors and advocacy coalitions. In the Western world there are countries where families and family ties are relatively 'strong', whereas in others they 'weak'. Both Central and Northern Europe, together with the USA, have been characterized by weak family links, and the Mediterranean region by strong family ties. According to this view, differences have deep historical roots and are not diminishing in contemporary times in any fundamental manner (Reher 1998; Naldini 2003). However, recent developments have put into question some of these familistic assumptions. There have been increases in the rates of couples' informal cohabitation, out-of-wedlock births, divorce and single parenthood in line with the situation in some other European countries, which ask for further analysis in light of recent empirical evidence (Iglesias *et al.* 2010; Marí-Klose *et al.* 2010).

The social protection provided by the Spanish welfare state is relatively extensive in coverage (health, pensions and unemployment protection and, to a lesser degree, personal services), but with a relatively low protecting intensity. There is a noticeable participation of the market and a growing Third Sector involvement, which implies in many cases shifting the costs of welfare provision to the individuals and the households. In sum, the Spanish welfare state can be regarded as an incomplete universal system, of an institutionally mixed nature, relatively fragmented in several levels of social protection and with spending levels close to EU-27 medium. The financial effects of the crisis have brought about a sharp increase in social spending, particularly in unemployment benefits, coupled with a fall and subsequent stagnation of GDP growth (Adelantado 2000; González-Temprano, 2003; Moreno & Rodríguez-Cabrero 2007; Navarro 2009; Rodríguez-Cabrero 2010).

3. Continuity and change in welfare outcomes

Welfare state studies have not paid much attention to EU inputs. The European Union has been generally absent because, apparently, it has appeared not to be part of the welfare state 'problem', and because it has lacked powers and resources, or has been incompetent and unable to impose any uniform solution to reform national welfare states. If it is true that dimensions of social protection, such as the health care system or family policies, show a degree of dissimilarity between EU countries, the same cannot be said as regards old age pension or employment policies, where common approaches have been progressively adopted by most member states facing reforms with a similar range of options and little degree of variance. The undisputed moral authority of 'Europe' was reinforced, as with the European Employment Strategy (EES), despite the lack of a tradition for labour activation in some EU countries (Graziano 2009). Other areas which appear to be 'peripheral' in the development of the welfare state, such as gender equal opportunities, health and safety regulations, or poverty and social inclusion programmes, have been progressively harmonised on the initiatives of the European institutions by putting into practice of the Open Method of Co-ordination (Moreno & Palier 2005).

Welfare is said to be a policy domain of the sovereign competence of the member states. EU inputs have been nevertheless important in Spain during 2000-2010. Table 1 summarises outcomes in terms of continuity and change, and according to a combination of classifications already available in the literature and discussed in the introduction of this monographic issue: Transformation, Accommodation, Absorption, Inertia and Retrenchment (Radaelli 2003; Börzel & Risse 2003; Bache 2008).

Among the outcomes summarized in Table 1, one deserves a special attention because of its knock-on effects in Spain's political economy: the increasing participation of Spanish women in the formal labour market. This development is of particular relevance as it cross-cuts all areas of welfare and, thus, can be singled out as the most important factor in continuity and change in the decade 2000-10. Spain championed the EU the strategy of activation, particularly as regards greater female participation in the formal labour market. If Europeanization can be regarded as the most important exogenous factor in the increase of female activity rates, the improvements in the levels of female education is to be identified as the crucial endogenous variable.⁸ The following analyses of the longer period 1976-2010 aim at providing the reader with a broad picture of the deep changes in Spain's labour market, and in particular those concerning female participation.

In 1977 Spain's female activity rate was lower than half of male activity. In 2010, Spain's female activity rate equalled that of the male employment rate. During the whole period of 1976-2010, female activity rate nearly trebled in the central ages of women's vital cycles (25-49 years). This process has had far-reaching repercussions as has affected women at a stage in the life-cycle when they confronted not only demanding job careers, but also a greater household involvement related to reproduction and child care activities. In 2010, almost 3 out of 4 Spanish women aged 25-54 years were active in the formal labour market. Furthermore, and contrary to other patterns in Central and Northern Europe, Spanish women participated primarily in the labour market on a full-time basis,⁹ something which made the reconciliation of domestic and paid work all the more difficult (Salido & Moreno 2009).

In fact, sorting out the apparent conflict between society's expectations of women's role as mothers and active workers remains a crucial dilemma in familistic Spain. The challenge is dual so as to increase labour productivity growth to and preserve social cohesion (Salido & Moreno 2007). Within families the role of women has traditionally been pivotal, as they have often cared particularly for children or older relatives at the expense of erratic careers or full withdrawal from the labour market. However, as the hyperactivity of cohorts of 'superwomen'¹⁰ has vanished gradually, there is a serious vacuum emerging in welfare provision which will have enduring effects in social care. The increasing externalization of personal care services traditionally provided by the family has taken a particular turn in Spain, as in other South European countries. Such services are often purchased from immigrants at low cost (sometimes in the underground economy), particularly as regards care for the elderly (Da Roit, González-Ferrer & Moreno-Fuentes, 2008; Moreno-Fuentes & Bruquetas-Callejo 2011). Concerning child care, a mixed family strategy has extended by means of a greater use of formal and informal *chrèches*, as well as extra-curriculum activities for school children (Marí-Klose *et al.* 2010). These processes have generalised during 2000-2010, something which corroborates preferences in Southern Europe for contingent solutions.

Table 1 A summary of main outcomes in welfare development (2000-2010)

Policy domain	EU input	Domestic input	Category of outcomes	Degree of change
Education	Encouragement for permanent training and vocational education.	Full management of educational system by regions (<i>Comunidades Autónomas</i>) (compulsory coverage 6-16 years) Opening to private management. Law on Education (2006)	<i>Accommodation</i> (EU inputs incorporated without modifications in essential features)	Medium
Health	Encouragement for financial sustainability.	Full management of the health system by regions (<i>Comunidades Autónomas</i>) (universal coverage) Opening to private management Law on Cohesion and Quality of the National Health System (2003)	<i>Accommodation</i> (EU inputs incorporated without modifications in essential features)	Medium
Income transfers	Encouragement for cost-containment of pension system 2000 Lisbon, 2002 Copenhagen and 2003 Nice (NAPIIncls) (Open M. C.)	Regional programmes of income supports (<i>IMIs</i>) National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (2001, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2008) Assistance policies for the closure of safety net	<i>Accommodation</i> (EU inputs incorporated without modifications in essential features)	Medium
Social services and care	Encouragement of long-term care policies and family-work conciliation	Universalization of long-term care (subjective right) Measures for gender parity in public sector. Pre-schooling programmes by regions Legislation on conciliation and equality (e.g. parental leaves)	<i>Transformation</i> (New policies, practices and organization)	High
Labour market	European Employment Strategy (EES) (Open M. C.) Adoption of activation principles	National Action Plans for Employment (2000, 2001, 2002, 2003. National Reform Programmes 2005, 2006, 2008 Employment Laws 45/2002 and 56/2003 Law on Effective Male and Female Equality (2007) (positive discrimination for female employment). Politics of employability, flexibilization, individualization	<i>Transformation</i> (New policies, practices and organization)	High

EU inputs for the various governmental reforms affecting the Spanish labour market resulted in a high degree of change. Social services and care was the other policy domain in which both EU and domestic impacts induced a high degree of change during 2000-10. EU institutions had pointed out the need for member states to secure long-term care policies and family-work conciliation, two areas closely linked to the prioritisation of labour activation. The Law for the Effective Equality between Women and Men (*Ley 3/2007 para la Igualdad Efectiva entre Mujeres y Hombres*) incorporated measures of positive discrimination in order to avoid discrimination between men and women in the labour market. It also extended parental and family leaves. Regional governments were also active in providing pre-schooling programmes for children, as the proportion of children of 0-3 years in childcare centres (both public and private) increased from five per cent in 2000 to 37.5 per cent in 2008 (OECD Family database 2011).

The most important policy outcome in Spain regarding care and social services was the legislative approval of the universalization of long-term care. The Law on Dependency and Long-Term Care (*Ley 39/2006 de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención a las Personas en Situación de Dependencia*) established a universal and legally enforceable entitlement for care not only for the frail elderly, but for all those citizens who lack personal autonomy. The Law created a 'dependency system' (*Sistema Nacional de Dependencia*) which is to provide services to dependent citizens (day care, household help or residential homes) and benefits to main care providers. However, the future development of the 'dependency system' for long-term care appears uncertain due to the extra financing required from both central and regional governments (Marbán 2009).

Concerning income transfer, EU policy recommendations insisted in the adoption of further measures of cost-containment by the member state, in order to secure financial viability. In the case of Spain the public contributory system ('pay-as-you-go') did not face the kind of sustainability problem found in other Mediterranean countries, as happened with the 'generous' pension provision in Greece and Italy (Ramos & del Pino 2009). But Spain was facing rising costs for the provision of income support, mainly for jobless people. Taking into consideration all contributory benefits and those others provided by the social assistance financed by general taxation, safety net programmes allowed 4.5 million beneficiaries to receive income support (around ten per cent of the total population) (Arriba, 2010).¹¹

Health and education areas accommodated policies to the general EU recommendations for encouraging permanent training and vocational education, and for securing the financial stability of both systems, which are decentralized and managed by the regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*). State-wide legislation on territorial cohesion was passed in 2003 so that financial inefficiencies in the National Health System could be avoided. Once again, EU's warnings on cost-containment were very present in political debates at the regional level to reduce the level of sub-national public borrowing, something which worsened with the unleashing of the 2007 crisis (Moreno-Fuentes 2009).

4. Unpacking change: the role of ideas, interests and institutions (2000-2010)

Changes in outcomes during 2000-2010 have been mainly induced by the generally-accepted 'benchmarking' idea that Spain's policies ought to be in line with those

promoted by EU's institutions. Following the analytical framework put forward in the introductory chapter of this monographic issue, relevant transformations in Spain's political economy can be explained using the triad of 'ideas', 'interests' and 'institutions' (Heclo 1993; Hall 1997; Palier & Surel 2005; Bache 2008, Blyth, 2009; Jenson & Merand 2010). The purpose of this section is to identify not only the interaction between the supranational (global and EU) and domestic levels, but also the 'co-determination' among the 3-I's in order to make sense of paradigm shifts and policy changes. Analytical explanations and interpretations have adopted the following criteria: (a) Relevance to welfare state development; (b) Expected impacts for future developments; and (c) Parsimony and general explanatory power. Modifications in ideas are, thus, related to institutional processes and intervening interests in the process of continuity and change concerning Spain's political economy of welfare.

Paradigm shifts: neoliberalism and labour activation

In the 1980s, Neo-liberal ideas first gained predicament in the Anglo-Saxon world (Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States). Subsequently, such ideas spread out gradually in other European countries and EU institutions. The whole process resulted in changes in programme design and policy-making based, among others, on the following tenets: (a) De-regulated labour markets; (b) Individualization of life-course expectations; (c) Financial control of the productive economy; and (d) Unrestrictive movement of speculative capitals (financial investments and derivatives).

Most advanced welfare democracies came to share the same strategic aims and an overriding concern for the maximization of human capital in national markets so as to gain positions of comparative advantage in the global market (Jessop 1994). Anglo-American capitalism (Albert 1993) became not only synonymous of the Liberal variant of contemporary capitalism but, most significantly, the very proponent for the 'canonical' political economy guidelines in First World countries. A paradigm shift occurred by which welfare arrangements correlated changes in economic policies --most notably, from Keynesianism to Monetarism. Arguably, welfare development became a mere surrogate of economic ideas, interests and institutions (Moreno & Palier 2005).

The incorporation in Spain's political debate of key concepts and proposals of EU institutions --mainly activation-- turned a system of beliefs into assumptions, such as: (a) the alleged disincentive function of 'passive' social protection policies, and (b) the proposals that the unemployed should become 'active' in order to avoid social exclusion. A certain epistemological consensus had been reached among academics and policy-makers. As in other EU's member states, the fight against unemployment was to be replaced by a fight against low employment rates (Salais 2006; Serrano-Pascual 2007). The trend in Spain to take on board the principles of activation (individualization, employment-centred schemes, or contractual insertion) was reinforced in the employment reform of 2002 (Law 45/2002). With the transformation of the political concept of security, unemployment protection was conceived more in line with employee's own self-insurance and responsibility. The European Employment Strategy (EES) fitted well and reinforced long-term traditions of labour activation in the cases of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic member states (Jacobsson 2004). However, this strategy also had an impact on countries traditionally alien to these policy concepts and with different historical traditions, such as Spain. (Moreno & Serrano-Pascual 2011).

Both 2002 and 2003 labour reforms coincided with a new drive from EU's institutions to encourage member states to comply with the promotion of active labour market policies, the extension of an entrepreneurial spirit, the flexibilization of labour relations, and the adaptation to new changing scenarios in the global economic order. With the internalization of these normative views, the new interpretative framework aimed at establishing a linear causality between unemployment and tax revenue, unemployment rate and economic growth and unemployment benefits and activity rate. Not surprisingly, the introductory statement of the Spanish Employment Law (56/2003) reads: "... globalization and the process of European integration [with] the co-ordination of EU's policies make it imperative to Spain..." Thus, the European Union appeared as the leader championing these changes *vis-à-vis* the member states. The latter were happy just to accept a secondary role and intensified their blame avoidance devices (Guillén & Álvarez 2004).

Institutional path dependency and policy innovation

During the 1990s and 2000s, Spain's welfare avoided retrenchment so that its catch-up aspirations with Europe were maintained. During 2000-2010, the single most important institutional outcome of the efforts to expand Spain's welfare state in line with that of other large EU countries was the approval of the 2006 Law for the Promotion of Autonomous Living and Help for Dependent Individuals (*Ley de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención de las Personas Dependientes*). The Law established a new subjective and universal right entitling dependent persons to coverage for long-term care.

Path dependency and policy innovation can be seen as the two sides of the same coin responsible for welfare outcomes (Ebbinghaus 2005). In some instances, the intensity of change in Spain during the last decades has prevailed upon institutional inertia. The modernisation of the Bismarckian social insurance system, and the extension of those services and benefits funded by the general tax revenue, have allowed the extension of more citizenship social rights (health, education, non-contributory pensions, and new social services), *vis-à-vis* contributory entitlements. However, the Bismarckian component of the Spanish welfare state continued to play a decisive institutional role during 2000-10, as it carries the bulk of welfare expenditure (Rodríguez-Cabrero 2011).

The constitutional decentralization of powers and competencies has allowed substantial autonomy to the regions for the management of important domains such as education, health and social services. With the reforms implemented in 2000-2010, contributory pension and unemployment benefit systems remained state responsibilities, but other social policies and services continued to be run by regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*). In matters of social assistance and services, the central layer of government can be regarded as the one playing a 'subsidiary' role with respect to the regions (Arriba & Moreno 2005).

Other than the proximity rationale claimed by the regions as a criteria of efficiency and democracy in the provision of social policies, the 'home-rule-all-round' decentralization process in Spain has spurred policy innovation by the meso-governments. Most initiatives in regional welfare have been carried out by means of emulation and credit-claiming practices among them. As a result, innovations in the policy design, production

and management of social services have encouraged policy learning and improvements by means of imitation of regional ‘best practices’. The rationale is that no region wanted to be left behind or being considered to play a game in the second division of Spain’s political life. Such a pattern of regional mobilization has resulted in a *de facto* policy equalization and also in an incentive for ‘catching up’ to those Spanish regions which have been traditionally lagging behind the ‘modernized’ ones. However, some of them went seen to be spendthrift spenders which had increased the level of public debt to unsustainable levels.

After the outbreak of the 2007 financial crisis the trajectory of Spain’s welfare policy expansion and innovation came to an end. Further implementation of the long-term and dependency legislation will test in the years to come not only the limits of welfare development in Spain but, most importantly, the shared rule capacity of the *Estado de las Autonomías* (central, regional, local) to meet the new challenges for multi-level governance in Spain.

Actors: the battle of ideas and interests

Consensual politics had been crucial during Spain’s main political developments since the death of Franco in 1975. Such climate for social dialogue (*diálogo social*) was highly successful in the process of democratisation but has come under strain during 2000-2010. Debates on the flexibilization of industrial relations illustrate such a change.

With the outbreak of the global financial crisis in 2007, the discussion on labour market and regulations intensified. A battle of ideas took place between epistemic communities of a different orientation (Jessop 2004; Schmidt 2008). Illustrative of the growing role played by ideas and think-tanks in Spain was the confrontation between social scientists analyzing the effects of the economic crisis on the Spanish labour market. During 2009-10, an economists’ group (the G-100) claimed that the introduction of ‘flexibilization’ measures was a necessary reform in Spain’s labour relations. Claims made by this informal network of economists were widely amplified by large sections of the media favourable to both flexibility and deregulation of the labour market in Spain. An alternative forum of 700 experts in labour relations (mainly, economists, lawyers and sociologists) offered a distinct view. As the authority of such analyses is usually based upon the alleged legitimacy of ‘rational and apolitical science’, the debates between these networks were centred on the very definition of and monopoly claims to ‘scientificity’. But technical prescriptions of an economic nature were challenged and have increasingly become politicized in the light of the financial turbulences provoked by the crisis

Indeed, concepts, methodologies and indicators disseminated by European institutions have been of the outmost importance in such epistemic debates, as well as on the role played by the coalitions of actors and institutions involved in subsequent policy-making. As in other EU countries, the selection of the ‘problems’ requiring political action was the result of confrontations articulated ideologically by social actors with capacity to preserve their views or interests (Jørgensen 2002; del Pino & Ramos, 2009). In the case of ‘pro-EU’ views, there has been an extensive strategic use of Europe by the Spanish social actors in order not only to legitimate their positions and claims but also to a hegemonic or influential position in the policy/political debates. During 2000-10, references to Europe continued to be an important authoritative recourse to attain

symbolic gains and, hence, to articulate organized interests (Moreno & Serrano-Pascual 2011).

All things considered, the pro-EU common stance of the most representative political parties and organized interests in Spain (parties, trade unions, businesses' organizations) has begun to show internal differences, particularly as regards policy option to overcome the effects of the 2007 financial crisis. Despite the fierce electoral competition, the consensus on major constitutional issues between the two main parliamentary parties (centre-right PP, Popular Party, and centre-left PSOE, Socialist Party) was renewed on occasion on establishing spending limits to public borrowing. Such a decision needed a modification in the 1977 Constitution, which was finally implemented in 2011 without the consent of the rest of parliamentary parties. Trade Unions and Business Associations engaged also in tough negotiations on industrial and labour reforms. In general terms, advocacy coalitions and interest groups adopted a 'wait-and-see' strategy on how the economic crisis in the Eurozone could be sorted out. Significantly enough, signs of discontent with the socioeconomic situation were already been voiced loudly in the streets and major squares of Spain. The *indignados* movement, which initiated in Madrid on 15 May 2011 and spread afterwards to other European and American cities, was a manifestation of such discontent which channelled spontaneously outside mainstream ideas, interests and institutions.

Concluding remarks

Prior to the 2007 financial crisis, Spain's economy had 'flown' high and had successfully accomplished its long-standing goal of achieving a status as a core European and world economy. Whether a PIG country such as Spain is to keep on 'flying' in the medium-term future remains doubtful. Much of this uncertainty is shared not only by EU Mediterranean countries but also by other large EU economies. In fact, the very model of the post-WWII European welfare state, as we have known it until now, is highly questioned by the ongoing realignments in the world economy and the shortcomings of EU's governance.

During the period analyzed (2000-2010), Spain's political economy of welfare translated in reforms, mostly with a high degree of change, in line with the country's aspirations to develop a mature welfare state similar to other large EU countries. To this end, policies were implemented in all four pillars of the welfare edifice (education, health, income transfers and social services). The most important transformation concerned the establishment of a national system for long-term care (according to the 2006 Law for the Promotion of Autonomous Living and Help for Dependent Individuals). The full implementation of this reform, due in 2015, will test the capacity of both central and regional governments to keep the momentum of welfare expansion and recalibration.

Certainly, the effects of the ongoing economic crisis in Spain's welfare development have put further pressure on governmental decisions for the cost-containment of social spending.¹² It remains to be seen how the needs for family and social care can be adjusted with the maintenance of a high female activity rate. As a familistic country, Spain is already facing the huge stumbling block of either favouring deeply-seated

cultural arrangements within households or promoting women's aspirations to be formally active.

Spain will continue to pay attention to developments in the European Union as main points of references for its political economy of welfare. In attempting to achieve EU welfare standards and economic indicators, the case of Spain can provide useful experiences to new and peripheral member states. The catching up effort put into practice in the last decades of the twentieth century was sustained until the outbreak of the financial crisis in 2007. Despite the lack of further institutionalization of EU's economic government, the case of Spain still validates the general EU claims that 'benchmarking' and 'best practices' can induce socioeconomic convergence towards the middle.

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Notes

- [1] According to Eurobarometer figures in Autumn 2009 (no. 72), 3 out of 4 Spaniards felt optimistic about the future of the European Union, which compared to an average of 2 out of 3 Europeans in the whole EU-27. Among the 6 countries with largest populations in EU-27, Spain was the most 'optimistic' with 75 per cent, followed by Poland (74 per cent), Italy (69 per cent), Germany (68 per cent), France (58 per cent) and United Kingdom (50 per cent). For the perception of the European Union by political and economic elites in Spain, see Jerez-Mir, Real Dato & Vázquez García (2010).
- [2] This sentence was expressed by the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno in a long-standing dispute with his colleague, José Ortega y Gasset, on the issue of the 'Europeanization of Spain' (or the Hispanization of Europe). European 'practicality' was to be confronted with Spanish 'spirituality'. Later on such expression has often been used to criticise the lack of scientific interest in Spain.
- [3] Using data of France and Italy, it has been contended that there is no such consistent distinction between Continental and Mediterranean market economies (Geffen & Kenyon 2006). For much of their political economy arrangements, France and Italy could well qualify for continental European countries of a 'genuine' Bismarckian-type. This could apply, at least partially, to other Southern European countries. However, the degree of internal variation within the Mediterranean cluster --including Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain-- does not reach the degree of internal variance as in the group of the Continental European countries. Other studies grouping all four Southern European countries clearly confirms that Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain cluster robustly in a distinctive group (Vasconcelos-Ferreira & Figueiredo 2005).
- [4] According to a traditional Scottish proverb (first written in 1586), if 'pigs fly in the air with their tails forward, flying backwards would seem a small extra feat'.
- [5] A more comprehensive picture on the general level of indebtedness needs to take into account also private borrowing. It comes as no surprise that countries like Spain, with a total external debt of around 140 per cent are expected to face hard times during the 2010s, along the lines of other core European countries. At the end of 2010, figures of total indebtedness (per cent GDP) were of a similar

- range, if not higher, in France, 130 per cent, Germany, 135 per cent, Italy (155 per cent), or UK, 170 per cent.
- [6] This shows significantly in the higher equalization in pension payments (Sarasa 2007).
 - [7] If there is analytical agreement to include Greece, Italy and Portugal and Spain in a Southern typology (Giner 1986; Gunther, Diamandouros & Puhle, 1995; Malefakis 1992; Morlino 1998), the boundary limits of the Mediterranean mode of social protection remains a debatable issue (Ferrera 1997). Questions in this respect relate, for instance, to whether France should be included as a Mediterranean welfare country, or if new (Cyprus, Malta, Slovenia) or prospective EU member states (Croatia, Turkey) share analogous welfare characteristics with countries located in the West of the Mediterranean Sea.
 - [8] The percentage of women with higher tertiary education went from 12.6 per cent in 1985 to 22.7 per cent and 31 per cent in 1995 and 2005, respectively.
 - [9] In 2000, just 8 percent of the Spanish working couples with children had women as part-timers, a percentage which contrasted with those of 53 per cent in the Netherlands, 40 per cent in the United Kingdom, or 33 per cent in Germany (Moreno, 2007).
 - [10] Cohorts of women, now aged between forty and sixty-four, who could only undertake demanding professional activities in the labour market if they were prepared to combine them with traditional unpaid caring work in households, typify Spanish ‘superwomen’ across all Spanish social groups, classes and geographical areas (Moreno 2004).
 - [11] According to data produced by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), some 80 per cent of all jobless residents in Spain had some kind of income support in 2010, although such figure did not take into account first job seekers and those who are not registered as unemployed.
 - [12] An instance of this financial concern was the cancellation of the ‘baby-check’ benefit (*cheque bebé*), which was implemented as an electoral promise by the PSOE Government in July 2007. Mothers were granted 2,500 Euros for birth or adoption. The programme was phased out at the end of 2010.

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