



PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP: FROM STATE NATIONALISM TO EUROPEAN PARADIGM

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Abstract:

Democratic Spain has made an exemplar transition from a late closed economy to a modern one with strong growing signs. Spain is standing as an example to other countries, namely Portugal who see in its progress, powered by European integration, a final product that other States can not generate. The answer to false fears and problems can only be given through a rational line that withdraws the basic emotions created by nationalisms. A rational approach will also make us understand the role the European integration has played in the political, economic and social Portuguese and Spanish development.

Keywords: Spain; Portugal; nationalism; European Union.

Resumen:

La España democrática ha realizado una transición ejemplar desde una economía cerrada a otra moderna con claros signos de crecimiento. España es un ejemplo para otros países como Portugal, que ve en su progreso, impulsado por la integración europea, un producto final que otros Estados no pueden generar. La respuesta a falsos miedos y problemas sólo puede darse mediante una racionalidad que elimine las emociones básicas creadas por los nacionalismos. Un enfoque racional nos ayudará también a comprender el papel que la integración europea ha desempeñado en el desarrollo político, económico y social de España y Portugal. .

Palabras clave: España; Portugal; nacionalismo; Unión Europea.

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Introduction

It has been frequent in the Portuguese media the propagation of an updated version of historical fears about an expansionist wish from Spain. Now and then, usually motivated by the acquisition of a Portuguese company or economical group or by the interview given by an intellectual, the so called «civil society» speaks about what is considered to be a manifestation of an Iberian feeling. Beyond that abnegated patriotism there is a real wish of economical protectionism and nationalism with no place in an economical integrated Europe and in a global world. Nevertheless, there a reflection upon this issue is required, in order to demystify it.

A sketch of the recent democratic history of both countries and the Spanish political system is enough to understand that the Portuguese nationalistic arguments are a mixed bag. We propose to verify how in three decades both countries no longer ignore one another and now walk side by side; and that the present decentralized democratic Spanish political system together with the state of affairs formed in the last thirty years does not allow expansionist adventures anymore .

A final note to this introduction may reinforce our thesis: in the last years the periodical debates about a potential integration have always been roused by Portuguese elites and intellectuals who see in the expansion period of the Spanish economy and in the crisis and stagnation of the national economy arguments enough to create an Iberian federation. Oddly enough, only Portuguese are aware of this (as already referred), which creates an ironical situation of the Spanish expansionism being a mere intellectual problem of the Portuguese elites.

1. Europe and Democracy

The last 60 years changed into a common place the idea according to which the European building was an essential element in the pacification of the continent. The economical integration guided by the former French and German enemies generated a dragging effect that, today, materializes itself in a European space which deepens its interactions in different areas, under the sign of a liberal democratic political system.

Until the mid seventies, the Iberian Peninsula was withdrawn from this due to the Portuguese and Spanish dictatorships. This «Iberian uniqueness» was the product of a bipolar conjuncture that followed World War II. Both countries due to their being neutral during the conflict and to their geographical position, ended up in the sphere of influence of the United States that decided not to promote the institution of democratic regimes. Thus for decades, the Iberian Peninsula has remained isolated from Western Europe. Nevertheless, neither the identical nature of the political Portuguese and Spanish regimes, nor the common trace of their isolation was enough to straiten the bonds between the two States.

In spite of the essential role of the democratic institution, there was not an immediate correlation between the new political systems and the explosion in the bilateral economical political and social relationship of both countries. Portugal and Spain began to face one another from the point of view of their commercial relationships, with their integration in Europe (Mendes, 2002).

**RELAÇÕES COMERCIAIS DE PORTUGAL COM A ESPANHA** (valores em %)

Períodos	Peso no Total		X+M	Taxa de Cobertura X/M
	Export. Portuguesas	Import. Portuguesas		
1960	1,0	0,9	0,9	68,8
1970	1,6	4,4	3,3	22,3
1979	2,9	5,8	4,8	26,3
1985 - 90	9,4	12,0	11,0	54,4
1991 - 97	14,7	19,7	17,7	48,3
1998	15,9	24,4	21,1	41,9
1999	18,1	25,3	22,5	43,9
2000	19,3	25,9	23,4	45,4

Fonte: INE.

Nota: Peso nas exportações, importações ou total (X + M) do comércio externo português.

Source: Janus 2003

As in other examples in the history of EEC and afterwards in the European Union, the increment in the economical and financial relationship had a dragging effect in the political relations between both States, as proved by celebrating yearly Iberian summits.

The good relationship between Portuguese and Spanish political leaderships became the dominant item. For more than twenty years of communitarian sociability the governments were almost always ideologically non coincident. Nevertheless it was obvious the exemplariness of sociability between the governments of Anibal Cavaco Silva and Filipe Gonzalez in the eighties and nineties and of Antonio Guterres and Jose Maria Aznar in the late nineties and early years of the following decade. We should remember that in both States the government is responsible for the foreign affairs and the leaderships of this organ (Prime Minister in Portugal, President of the Government in Spain) are the most relevant political figures in this area. The Iberian policy of good neighboring became one of the exceptional consensual subjects in the leading of public affairs in both sides of the border.

The further extinction of customs between these two countries, which in 1993 culminated in the establishment of free circulation of people, played a fundamental role while giving the citizens a determinant task in a greater integration between Portugal and Spain. The afflux of tourists and the development of economical relationship near the frontier are two examples of the way citizenship has also contributed to the new model of relationship between both countries, proving that it does not restrain itself to a new political approach.

2. Iberian national pluralities

Due to political and social differences between both States, the democratic models established in Portugal and Spain are significantly different in their origin and contents. As for origin, Spanish democracy was established by means of a pact transition and the Portuguese democracy through a military coup followed by a revolutionary process. Nevertheless, more than the genesis of the systems themselves or the dimension of the countries, the important difference lies on the national and cultural Spanish plurality and in the Portuguese unity.



Although we do not overemphasize that Portugal as a state-nation has nine centuries of history (the present concept of nation has about two centuries) there are signs of a political, linguistic and cultural unity coincidental with this territory for much longer than generally happens with other European States. The formation process of the Portuguese realm was not built through the unification of political unities with cultural and linguistic different characteristics as it happened with Spain, but through territorial conquest.

Today's Spain inherited several realms, having acquired its geographical configuration in late 15th century. This diversity, with periods of a greater or lesser subdueness has a role in Spanish history, and now Spain stands as an example of plurality inside the frontiers of a State. After Franco's dictatorship, in which the cultural and linguistic diversity was seriously repressed, the process of democratic transition accomplished the establishment of a State of autonomies with the prime function of including the diversity in its bosom.

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 shapes this process by which a strongly centralized dictatorship was transformed into one of the most decentralized democracies of Europe. As an example, the Spanish fundamental law refers to a «Spanish nation» in its 2nd article and it grants autonomic rights to the «nationalities and regions which integrate it». That is, it recognizes the existence of «nationalities» inside it. In the 3rd article, number 2, the Constitution establishes that the other Spanish languages, besides Castilian (established in number 1 of the same article as an official language of the State) «will also be official in the respective communities» (our translation).

Much has been discussed, from a theoretical point of view, about national or multinational Spain. The debates which have another nature in Portugal belong to Spanish everyday routine. Is Spain a nation? Is it a State with several nations inside? It seems obvious that this debate would come up sooner or later, as it has been avoided in the period of transition for the sake of other obvious issues such as freedom and democracy. The deepening of autonomies with a greater demand in skills from the different regions and the Basque conflict helped by a legislature of great conflict, such as the Zapatero's, that is now coming to an end, detonated old debates.

3. Two apparently contradictory myths, which should be refuted

It is important to establish a relationship between two issues that have been swollen and approached from a wrong perspective but which contain pertinent elements for a valid analysis. We mean two alleged contradictory risks: the desegregation of the Spanish State on one hand and, on the other hand, or the establishment of a federation of Iberian States.

3.1. Myth 1: the disaggregation of the Spanish people

The general elections on March 14, 2004, held three days after the Islamic bombings in Madrid when the information about their authorship was managed in a confused doubtful way by the government of the Partido Popular (PP) of José Maria Aznar, were won by the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Responsible for this victory was the massive presence of voters, (unexpected according to all opinion studies made before the bombings) probably mobilized by the perception of a fraud caused by the



persistence from the government of conducting the investigation towards the terrorist organization ETA (Bérout 2006). From then on, a legislature has begun in which the PP, with a badly digested elections defeat, has chosen a strategy of radical opposition. At the same time Zapatero's government began a program of unprecedented social reforms and the revision of the territorial statutes in several autonomies. Along these two polemic issues the socialist government agenda was, from early 2006, marked by the beginning of a process of negotiations with ETA and with the illegal party Batasuna, political arm of the Basque organization.

The structural axle of the opposition from the right to the socialist government lies in the radical rejection of any contact with the Basque separatists and in the extreme criticism to the revision of statutes, namely the new statute of Catalonia. While the negotiations with the Basque separatists were waved as proof of yielding to a terrorist organization (deliberately omitting in their argumentation the two previous processes held by Felipe González and José Maria Aznar) they attributed the role of detonator to the revision of statutes.

As a matter of fact, the Spanish constitution foresees the possibility of several degrees of autonomy to several communities. It does not establish exclusive competences to the autonomies stating that the matters listed in the article 148, the communities «may» assume those they think that should be taken with the approval of the Cortes. As for the State it has the responsibility of those not assumed by the regions and those listed as «exclusive» in article 149. As the fundamental law foresees in its article 146 that for the elaboration of a regional statute the autonomic legislative organs must concur as well as the Cortes, the maximum legislative organ from the State, to which competes the final approval as law, it's typical that each negotiation and revision agreement of competences conducting to its approval are developed with some tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces.

It is obvious that any alteration which grants more competences to one of the so-called historical communities, enjoying cultural and linguistic specificities, such as Catalonia, Basque Country or Galicia allows a more critical reading from Spanish conservative sectors that, after years of a relative undecidedness assumed again an openly nationalist discourse. On the other hand, the peripheral nationalisms tend to profit from these processes to claim as much competences as possible, and there are even radical separatist sectors that take advantage to make a sectional discourse, which is also used by Spanish nationalists to wave the ghost of the disintegration of the State. This snowball effect opens a gap between the political debate and the ambitions and problems of society. Also here do the extremes tend to feed one another.

Opinion studies

As above referred, about the revision of Catalonia statute, there was an obvious attempt of political exploitation by the centralizing Spanish nationalism and by the peripheral nationalism of Catalonia with well defined objectives to obtain future electoral benefits and debilitate their opponents. Nevertheless, society seemed not to correspond to this dynamics and, one year after the process (not yet concluded as a result of the interposed appeals from the PP in the Constitutional Court) there was no increment in the separatist aspirations of citizenship in Catalonia (except some occasional demonstrations from radical left sectors, such as the burning of the king and queen of Spain photos). Let us see some recent data shown by opinion studies.



In October 2007 the newspaper *El Periódico de Catalunya* published its Autumn barometer, according to which in an hypothetical referendum 43.9 % of the Catalans would vote against the independence of their region; 33.9 % would be in favor and 9.8 would vote blank. The remaining 12.5 % did not answer. As for the models of relationship of Catalonia with Spain, 37.1 % claimed they identified themselves with the autonomic system; 21 % with the federal system; 18.4 % chose independence and 10.3 % stated they were for a centralized Spain. The remaining 13.3 % didn't answer at all

The « Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió » of Catalan Generalitat also publishes a political barometer with a question about the model of relationship between the region and the Spanish State. In the two last moments of the study the answers were as follows:

Catalonia should be:	October 2007	December 2007
A region of Spain	4.7 %	5.1 %
A Spanish autonomic community	35 %	37.8 %
A federate sate in a federal Spain	34.2 %	33.8 %
An independent State	18.5 %	17.3 %
Do not know/ Do not answer	7.5 %	6 %

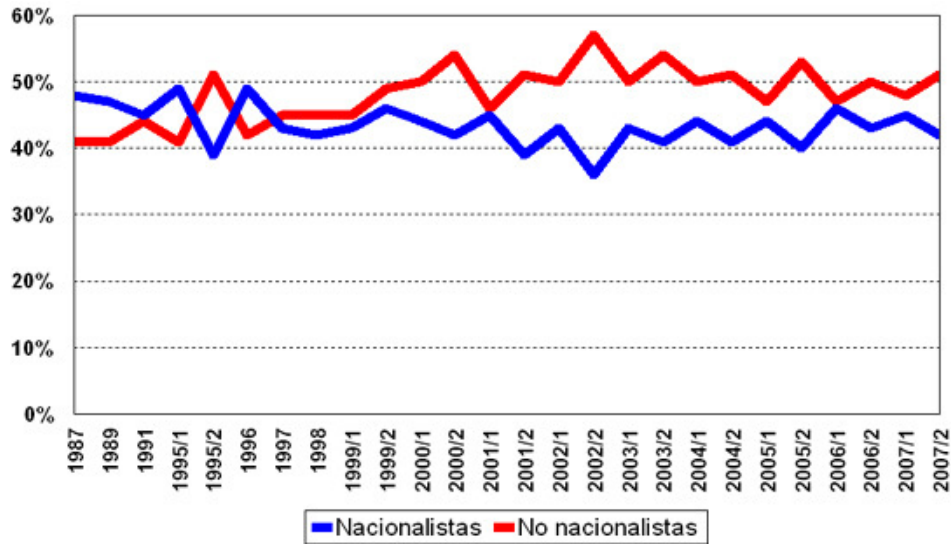
Source: Baròmetre d'Opinió Política. Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, Generalitat de Catalunya.

It can be confirmed that the majority of inquired Catalans choose one of the three models compatible with remaining a Spanish State. In the question about a hypothetical independence there were 10 % more negative answers than positive.

Even in the Basque Country, the historical community in which the issues of independence and nationalism, goaded by a violent conflict which has persisted since the final period of General Franco's government, have occupied more political and media space and where the autonomic institutions enjoy more competencies, the existence of a general separatist aspiration ca not be considered.

For more than twenty years the University of the Basque Country has been promoting «Euskobarometro», a periodical study of public opinion that bends over a series of political problems. In this study of opinion three questions seem especially relevant for the problem we are approaching: one about the nationalism of the Basque people, another centered in the best form of organizing the State and, at last a question that leans over the separatist ambitions.

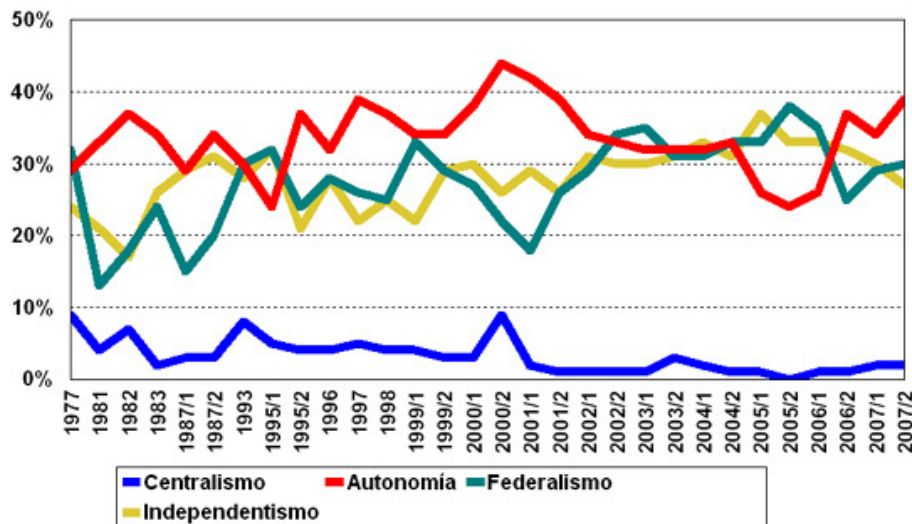
To the question about the Basque nationalist feeling, the answers were as follows:



Source: Euskobarometro, U.P.V.

As we can see in the graphic, although there is small difference between those who consider themselves nationalist and the non-nationalists, the larger number of the latter has been temporarily consistent.

To the several options placed about the territorial organization of the Spanish State, the obtained answers were as follows:

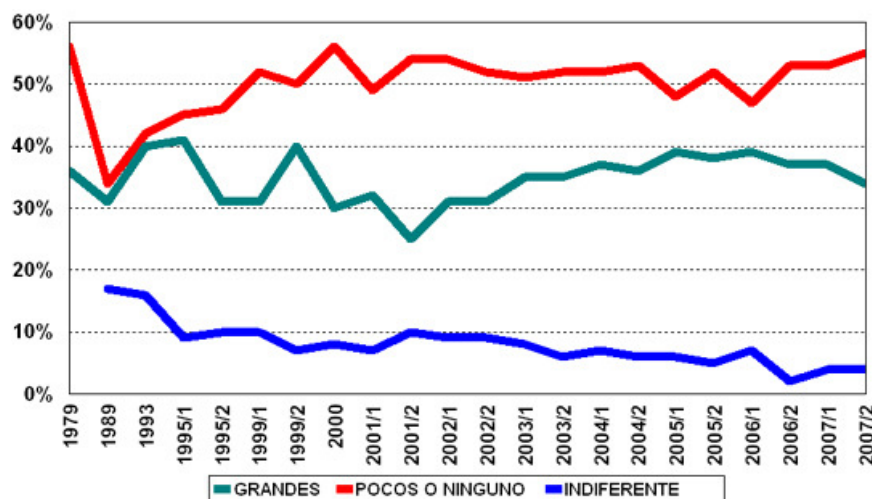


Source: Euskobarometro, U.P.V.

In what this question is concerned the answers have demonstrated that the aspiration to independence did not even surpass 40 % being presently quite far from its peak, registered in 2005. On the other hand the autonomic option has kept the first place since 2006, having attained 40 % at the end of 2007. With regard to the two possibilities with less media visibility, the centralism obtains residual results and federalism has registered numbers near

the two main options. It's worth mentioning that the federal and the autonomic alternatives comprise ways of non-centralized territorial organization of a State, being thus able to confront (together with the small % of centralists) an alternative Basque independence that, as is show by its own name, follows alternative way to the Spanish State.

Finally, according to this study, the evolution of the independence aspirations of the Basque people has been as follows:



Source: Euskobarometro, U.P.V.

We couldn't exclude the question we consider more relevant in this barometer, which definitely seems to exorcize the ghosts underlying the discourse of disaggregation of the Spanish State. Coincidental to the period in which this argument was more strongly discussed, the final phase of the present Spanish legislature, there has been a substantial rise of those who do not agree with the Basque independence. Their relative weight has surpassed 50 %, in a consistent way, since November 2006.

As a matter of fact, the common sense, the understanding of the political events in the legislature that is about to finish (2008) and the data we choose to present here (a small share of many other indicators of the State cohesion which we could have referred to) seem enough to dismantle the idea of a disaggregating Spain. It is evident that the Spanish State is too well grounded to be as it is even with the terrorist threatening over itself and the support demonstrations to partial independences, the media visibility of which proves the health of a democratic regime.

3.2. The Spanish nation between two myths.

Now we need to clarify the connection between the two myths. The fact that we are not confronting a potential disaggregation process does not necessarily mean that Spain, as a political unit, is what has been agreed to call a nation-state with the increase of stability inherent to the concept. Nevertheless, Spanish nationalism (that is never assumed as nationalist, preferring a more general terminology aspiring to a supposed consensus and that has been in power for eight years, during Aznar governments) refuses to assume this reality.



What in fact seems to define better the reality of the Spanish nation is its classification as a multi-national State, with a nation or nationality clearly minor in the number of its inhabitants and hegemonic in the great majority of the regions that form it in the great majority, but not in its totality.

According to Spanish Constitution its 2nd article shows precisely this almost “bipolarity” identity situation.

«La Constitución se fundamenta en la indisoluble unidad de la Nación española, patria común e indivisible de todos los españoles, y reconoce y garantiza el derecho a la autonomía de las nacionalidades y regiones que la integran y la solidaridad entre todas ellas»

When analyzing these words, we can draw some immediate conclusions: the existence of a Spanish nation is proclaimed, identified as a homeland to all the Spaniards and indivisible. Nevertheless, at the same time, the «nationalities» are granted the right of autonomy. A brief reflection will allow us to come to the conclusion that there is an attempt to subordinate the concept of «nationality» to the meaning of the concept of «nation», which is doubtful in itself, once the words are mostly used as synonyms. That is according to the constitutional text, certain nationalities would be contained inside the Spanish nation.

We think the first term is used in a more political sense (perhaps a material content of the State) and the second enjoys a more cultural connotation. In his work *Nacionalismo Español*, published in 2007, Xacobe Bastida Freixedo claims that the editing of the above referred 2nd article was one of the many profits from the negotiations which took place in the transition process. According to the author its early outline didn't contain any references to the «Spanish nation» but otherwise to the «unity of Spain». Nevertheless on demand of Alianza Popular, (apparently with the support of the military forces) heiress of «franquismo» and predecessor of PP, the final terminology chose the word «nation», that was accepted by the other political parties, due to de consensus spirit presiding to this historical moment.

The hypothetical Spanish disaggregation will thus have a theoretical background in case we take Spain as a nation-state politically and culturally uniform. Under this perspective we can consider the more underlined recent demonstrations of the peripheral nationalisms as a factor that may potentiate a possible separation of the so called political unity. However if we look into Spain as a multi-national reality, emphasizing the State and not the nation, we will understand that it is absolutely possible to conciliate the centrifugal aspirations of certain communities with the expected performance of the political system (as it has happened up to this moment). The studies of opinion that we have shown here demonstrate that the people are aware of the difference between their feelings of national belonging and their will of belonging to Spain as a State.

If certain political agents from Madrid stop using the national issue as a political weapon, they will take an important step to weaken the most radical peripheral nationalisms. As it was already stated, nationalisms feed to one another, once they have an idea of difference in their foundations, which, as a matter of fact, is rooted in «the other»'s exclusion.



3.3. Myth 2: Spanish aspirations and Iberian federation

Beginning with the dismantling of what we decided to call Myth 1, the dismantling of Myth 2 does not seem so easy. As a matter of fact there is no place for Iberian aspirations in a democratic decentralized pluralistic Spain. This is not claimed only because we are aware that in an advanced democratic space as the present day Europe there is no place for ambitions of agglutinating States. We state this for all the above said: a State with the complex national characteristics of the Spanish State has no margin for attempts of rebuilding new territorial realities (a hypothetic Iberian federation, for example) that overflow its present borders.

Only the presupposition that Spain is a monolithic nation-state (even non-centralized) will allow us to accomplish the traditional geopolitical exercise, that has the purest realism as its theoretical frame, while a theory of International Relations, of imagining an Iberian union stimulated by the political Spanish will. Most curious yet in this exercise is the fact that it is almost always performed by the Portuguese and virtually never by the Spaniards. Not even Spanish political far right lobbies (with an insignificant number of voters), the homeland of the most radical Spanish nationalism, incentives any theoretical expansionist intention about Portugal. Their program lies otherwise in a strong ambition to return to Spanish centralism, considering the autonomies a focus of instability against the unity of the State.

After more than three centuries of continued national independency some Portuguese still have unjustified fears, while others make intellectual propositions of Iberian unions without any political or cultural consistency. There is only a common item between both positions: the non assimilation of the concept evolution of the political performer, the state and the misunderstanding of the new realities inherent to the process of European building where there is no longer space for assimilations by dynastic union, for conquering wars or federal Iberian republics.

Overcoming the problem: conclusion/answers

1. Democratic Spain has made an exemplar transition from a late closed economy to a modern one with strong growing signs. The Spanish economy, rated as one of the best in the world, is completely integrated in the European space, having performed the proper structural adjustments that allowed the country, even in periods of crisis that affected its European partners, to maintain positive growing rates. To prove it we have its recent overtaking of Italy a member of G8, in GDP per capita, witnessed by Eurostat and the International Monetary Fund.
2. Spain is standing as an example to other countries, namely Portugal who see in its progress, powered by European integration, a final product that other States can not generate. Some comments from Portuguese that watch both sides of the border and are aware of the gap between both economies, show that it would be better to be on «the other side». This position is frequently reflected in studies of opinion stirred by some media with the objective of creating an emotional impact
3. The answer to false fears and problems can only be given through a rational line that withdraws the basic emotions created by nationalisms. When we refer to nationalisms we wish to include all possible manifestations in the Iberian Peninsula: peripheral nationalisms of regions of the Spanish state, the centralizing pro-Spain nationalism



and Portuguese nationalism with its periodic fears about a potential invasion by the neighbor country.

4. A rational approach will make us understand the role the European integration has played in the political, economic and social Portuguese and Spanish development. Thanks to EU it was possible to integrate both economies without the hurdle that would certainly be created by some Portuguese sectors if an attempt was made for an exclusively Iberian economic and monetary union. Whenever there is the perspective of a Spanish group purchasing a Portuguese corporation, these sectors make noise, which demonstrates that emotions speak louder and do not allow the conclusion that it is impossible to obtain the best of both worlds.
5. The Portuguese living standard benefited a lot from the single market, which should have allowed the acceptance of two very realities: there is a group of rules for the single market that does not sympathize with (or should not sympathize) imbecile nationalisms; and the Spanish economy, the only State with which we share a (long) land border is substantially stronger than the Portuguese one.

The abandonment of nationalistic leanings is a form of simplifying the two interrelated issues we have exposed. The political unities are not monolithic and a direct correlation between the objectivity of the concept of State must support and the subjectivity inherent to the concept of nation should be neither mislead nor forced upon. The understanding and assimilation of a new Iberian reality in its three aspects (domestic aspect in Portugal, domestic aspect in Spain and bilateral) will be a fundamental step so that citizenship and the political and economical agents can take from it the best profit, far from the great localisms that generated and still generate so many conflicts.

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