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**EXECUTIVE REPORT
SPANISH-ITALIAN DIALOGUE ON IMMIGRATION:
PAST EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE INITIATIVES
WITHIN A EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK**

Executive Report of seminar on “Spanish-Italian Dialogue on Immigration:
Past Experiences and Future Initiatives within a European Framework”, co-organised by the *Real
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FRAMEWORK

Immigration matters have become one of the most important topics of the Community debate. An integrated approach to immigration whereby issues relating to development cooperation, migration management, integration and security policy might be considered together.

However, given that the reality of immigration across member states is extremely varied, it is by no means obvious what the objectives and/or priorities of these integrated policies on immigration should be, nor is it clear to what extent there is room to pursue the development of EU common policies in this field.

The premise underlying the one-day seminar was that Italy and Spain are two major stakeholders in any joint venture in the field of immigration and bilateral cooperation with third countries, be they common policies or simple multilateral cooperation ventures.

Italy and Spain share a substantially similar immigration problem. Both are mass immigration countries which together receive more than half of the EU's new immigration. Both are major recipients of African and Latin American immigration, and they have recently become increasingly attractive for Eastern European migrants. They are geographically similarly located and exposed to both trafficking and illegal border crossings in a comparable fashion. In addition, by being exposed to mass immigration the two countries are bound to share problems related to the successful integration of immigrants in their respective societies.

Surprisingly, however, little progress has been made in terms of mutual understanding about how Italy and Spain go about solving their immigration problems. At best, both countries are aware of each other's dilemmas, but there are very few initiatives whereby these two immigration giants effectively exchange views on their particular experiences. Furthermore, little has been done to build a joint strategy towards immigration, both in the short and the longer term, in which their exposed positions with respect to south-north immigration might be catered for in a sustainable way, and in keeping with their geo-strategic interests.

With this in mind, the seminar sought to bridge the two countries' immigration experiences, with a view to opening up a more constructive Italian-Spanish dialogue on immigration issues while fostering a dialogue among policy-makers as well as exchange views on good practices in those situations where both countries share similar immigration policies.

Three interrelated thematic sessions structured the one-day seminar mobilising experts from various disciplines and professional backgrounds.

1- Italy and Spain: Immigration: Current Policy and Practises

The objective of the first session consisted in laying emphasis on how Italy and Spain have respectively dealt with the presence of immigrants as well as with the integration while referring to different stages in migratory processes.

The demographic, economic and social aspects linked to immigration in Spain and Italy were compared. Speakers noted that asymmetric levels of economic development and labour market discrepancies between sending and receiving countries remain critical factors in explaining the resilience of (legal and illegal) migration inflows and the growing heterogeneity of immigrant communities in both Italy and Spain. This heterogeneity lies not only in the various sociodemographic profiles characterising immigrant stocks but also in their conditions of stay, whether these are legal or not.

The issue of illegal immigration and its hardly quantifiable magnitude was addressed during the discussions stressing that its resilience was questioning the capacity of governments to effectively manage individually international migration. They also stressed that Italy has so far earmarked much more funds to combat illegal migration than to foster the integration of immigrants in its territory. Integration policies constitute however a prerequisite to sustaining social stability and to making immigrants fully-fledged participants in host society. In this respect, speakers mentioned the potential positive effects on national immigration policies of the recent proposal from the European Commission of a directive providing sanctions against employers of illegally staying third-country nationals. This draft directive should complement and reinforce action against the wider problem of undeclared work which is important in both Spain and Italy. Although immigration legislation remains the sole responsibility of each EU member state, not the EU, the expected adoption of this directive should nonetheless promote an action framework allowing national migration stakeholders to better harmonise their own legal provisions and to foster cross-border cooperation among EU member states.

2- Bilateral Cooperation between Spain and Italy together with Third Countries: Similar challenges, different responses?

There is no question that further policies need to be promoted in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy with a view to tackling the root causes of migration. These lie not only in resilient asymmetrical patterns of development between the North and the South of the Mediterranean but also in the need to address the socioeconomic context existing in countries of origin and transit. Laying emphasis on these differentials is critical in better understanding the challenges facing the “selective” labour migration policies that both Italy and Spain are trying to implement.

Bilateral cooperation with third countries of origin and transit will necessarily have to be based on a form of *quid pro quo* responding to the interests of third countries’ governments. The latter have recurrently voiced the fact that so far the bilateral cooperation on migration management has been more responsive to the interests of the EU and its member states than to their developmental needs. Both Italy and Spain are now devising a new framework of cooperation with migrants’ countries of origin based on a new pattern of co-development. One of the main objectives of this new compromise lies in inducing third countries’ governments to become more cooperative

on such strategic issues as the reinforced control of the EU external borders and the fight against illegal migration. Speakers working for governmental institutions in Spain and Italy mentioned that substantial progress has been made in the field of bilateral cooperation on border controls. Bilateral cooperation with law-enforcement agencies has been conducive to further cooperation in the control of the EU external borders; a crucial issue for both south European countries. This substantial progress does not however conceal the resilience of various obstacles regarding the cooperation on the readmission of illegally staying third-country nationals. Despite the existence of bilateral readmission agreements, most speakers noted that the full implementation of such agreements remains extremely difficult, laying emphasis on the need to find new incentives to induce third countries' governments in the Mediterranean to become more cooperative.

A close look at the consequences of such readmission agreements allows the reluctance of third countries to cooperate on this thorny issue to be better understood. Firstly, the capacity of third countries to deal effectively with the reintegration of their removed nationals remains extremely limited, from an institutional, structural, financial and economic point of view. Secondly, some speakers mentioned that the conclusion of readmission agreements by the Maghreb countries, aimed at removing the nationals of the signatory countries and other third-country nationals, might have a disruptive impact on their diplomatic relations with their regional neighbours. Thirdly, few concrete mechanisms aimed at sustaining returnees' reintegration in their countries of origin exist. This lack of supportive policies is detrimental to returnees' social and economic conditions generating not only a financial but also a humanitarian cost for both origin and destination countries. The presentation of field data based on interviews carried out with forced returnees were helpful in understanding the impact of enforced return on the person's opportunities to reintegrate back home, but also in showing that a genuine return policy cannot be limitedly seen against security concerns and that further attention should be paid to the pre- and post-return conditions shaping returnees' patterns of reintegration.

3- Inserting the Spanish and Italian Initiatives within EU Immigration Policy

Against this background, the last session of the bilateral seminar dealt with the extent to which both Euro-Mediterranean countries could contribute to consolidating the EU comprehensive approach to migration and asylum enshrined in the 1999 Tampere programme and reasserted in the ensuing The Hague programme adopted in late 2004. This comprehensive approach marked a watershed in EU foreign policy while placing migration-related issues at the centre of the dialogue between the EU and its Eastern and Southern neighbours.

Following the December 2005 Brussels European Council, the EU started to prioritise its policy actions while placing emphasis on the need for:

1. enhanced cooperation in the field of sea and land border controls;
2. reinforced cooperation with third countries in the management of migration flows, particularly in the fight against illegal migration and human-trafficking and in the field of readmission;

3. concrete actions in the area of migration and development with a view to supporting the development of countries of origin and transit and to tackling the root causes of unwanted migration.

Speakers noted that this three-pronged approach (referred to as the “Global Approach to Migration”) significantly draws on a project that Italy had already presented when it took over the EU presidency in 2003. This three-pronged approach is also an integral part of Spain’s *Plan Africa*. These observations are important to show that both Italy and Spain may have an impact on the making of a European migration policy.

Admittedly, as some speakers stressed, the European agenda remains heavily shaped by the policies of such influential EU member states as France and Germany. However, over the last three years, Spain and Italy have become key players in the framing and consolidation of an EU migration and asylum policy as well as in the reinforced cooperation with Mediterranean third countries. Both European countries have also taken an active part in the development of EU-funded programmes aimed at dealing with integration issues and with technical cooperation on migration and border management issues.

Importantly, one of the main issues at stake lies in ensuring the full and concrete development of a rights-based approach to migration and asylum, at an EU level, paying due attention to the rights and dignity of vulnerable people whether these are legal or illegal migrants.