



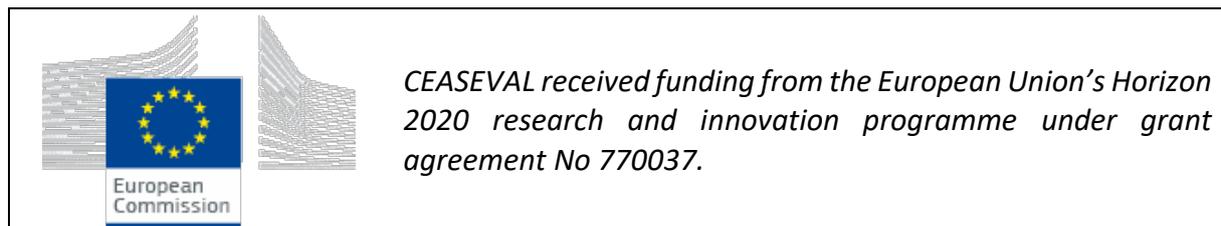
Politicisation of immigration in Spain: an exceptional case?

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Politicisation of immigration in Spain: an exceptional case?

Abstract

Spain is an exceptional case. When concern about immigration has grown, it has done so relative to the increase in arrivals at the southern border, meaning it relates more closely to border concerns than immigration as an issue of coexistence. The analysis of the main political debates on immigration leads us too to speak of a degree of uniqueness: a civil society that was especially mobilised in favour of immigration and refugees; multilevel confrontation between the central state, on the one hand, and cities, autonomous communities and civil society, on the other; and media coverage that is not always accompanied by in-depth discussion in parliament or by immigration becoming a topic in electoral debates. If we analyse the content of the debates, in both cases immigration and refugees are quite clearly considered to be the EU's responsibility. Public opinion, the media, and the main parliamentary differ on the extent to which Spain should do more. While the media are clearly in favour of greater involvement, the positions of the political parties diverge: the PP has tended to consider that Spain has already done enough while PSOE and Podemos favour greater co-responsibility. In this sense, we may conclude that in the PP's case the burden frame dominates – though sometimes mitigated by the humanitarian frame and coloured at times by the legal frame when refugees are spoken of – while in the cases of the PSOE and Podemos, the legal and humanitarian frames dominate. Despite a quite exceptional political context, policies are not as different as in more exclusionary environments: the relocation quotas remain unfulfilled despite the Supreme Court's condemnatory ruling and the refugee reception system leaves much to be desired.

Keywords: Spain, immigration, relocation quota, politicisation,

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1. Introduction

Between 2001 and 2017 Spain's resident foreign population grew by 412.25%. In just under 17 years it went from comprising 2.73% of the total population to 9.80% (INE, 2018). Over that period, the country found itself immersed in one of the worst economic crises in its recent history, with an unemployment rate in excess of 26% in 2013, and 29% of the population at risk of social exclusion in 2014 (INE, 2018). Nevertheless, and in contrast to what has happened in neighbouring countries, only 5.40% of the Spanish population consider immigration to be a problem that affects them at a personal level. The recent study by Birgit Glorius (2018: 26) finds the Spanish to be the European citizens who are most open to immigration and show most solidarity towards it. However, she warns that the rise in arrivals on the southern Spanish border over 2018 could lead to a change in the trend in the short term.

This report aims to analyse the extent to which the arrival of refugees in the European Union has been subject to politicisation in Spain since 2015. The issue is not so much the perceptions and debates around immigration, a subject that has been widely covered by the academic literature in recent years (see Consterdine, 2018), but the point to which *who should be responsible for these arrivals* (both at European Union and domestic levels) has been the subject of debate and contrasting positions. Following De Wilde's definition (2011), we take politicisation to be "an increase in salience and diversity of opinions on specific societal topics" (Wilde, 2011: 561). First, **salience** results from societal actors like political parties, interest groups, social movements and mass media paying more attention to a specific issue. Second, an issue can only become politicised when there are at least two different opinions on the subject (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, in Wilde, 2011: 567). Thus the more opinion of involved parties diverges and crystallises into opposing groups, the stronger **polarisation** of opinion contributes to increasing politicisation.

As De Wilde recalls, politicisation is time and space specific. In other words, contentiousness flares up in intense debates only to die away again. Thus, instances of politicisation take place in specific "episodes of contention" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007, in Wilde, 2011: 563). For the Spanish case, we have chosen two episodes of contention: the first is common to all WP5 national reports and refers to discussions on the EU relocation quota, which took place between May and October 2015; the second "episode of contention" is related to debates around the disembarkation of those rescue boats forbidden to reach Italian shores during the summer of 2018. While the first discussion has to do with responsibility sharing among Member States vis-à-vis asylum seekers (who should be responsible; how responsibility should be distributed; and, more particularly, to what extent Spain should take refugees from other Member States), the second one has to do with discussions on responsibility among Member States vis-à-vis those at risk of drowning at sea (who should be responsible and how their responsibility should be distributed).

Again following De Wilde's model (2011; 2012), for each "episode of contention" we analyse and triangulate the data from three different sources: public opinion polls, parliamentary debates and media coverage. Regarding public opinion polls, we have taken into account both the Eurobarometer and the monthly national surveys published by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS). For the analysis of parliamentary debates, all the parliamentary initiatives debated within the two periods of study were analysed. For the first "episode of contention" the words used were "*reubicación*" (relocation) and "*cuota*" (quota), producing a total of 34 initiatives. During the second, the words "*Aquarius*" and "*ProactivaOpenArms*" were used, the names of the two large vessels carrying out

rescue tasks in the Mediterranean that eventually disembarked in Spain. In this case, a total of 28 were counted.

In terms of the media analysed, two national newspapers were chosen: *El País* and *El Mundo*. As well as being the two most widely read newspapers in Spain, according to the CIS (2016) *El País* is the leading newspaper among people who vote for progressive parties, while *El Mundo* holds the equivalent position among those who vote for conservative parties. In this case each newspaper's online search facility was used to search for the same keywords as those used to analyse the parliamentary debates. For the first study period a total of 262 articles were counted (143 in *El País* and 119 in *El Mundo*), while for the second, the figure rose to 595 (374 in *El País* and 221 in *El Mundo*).

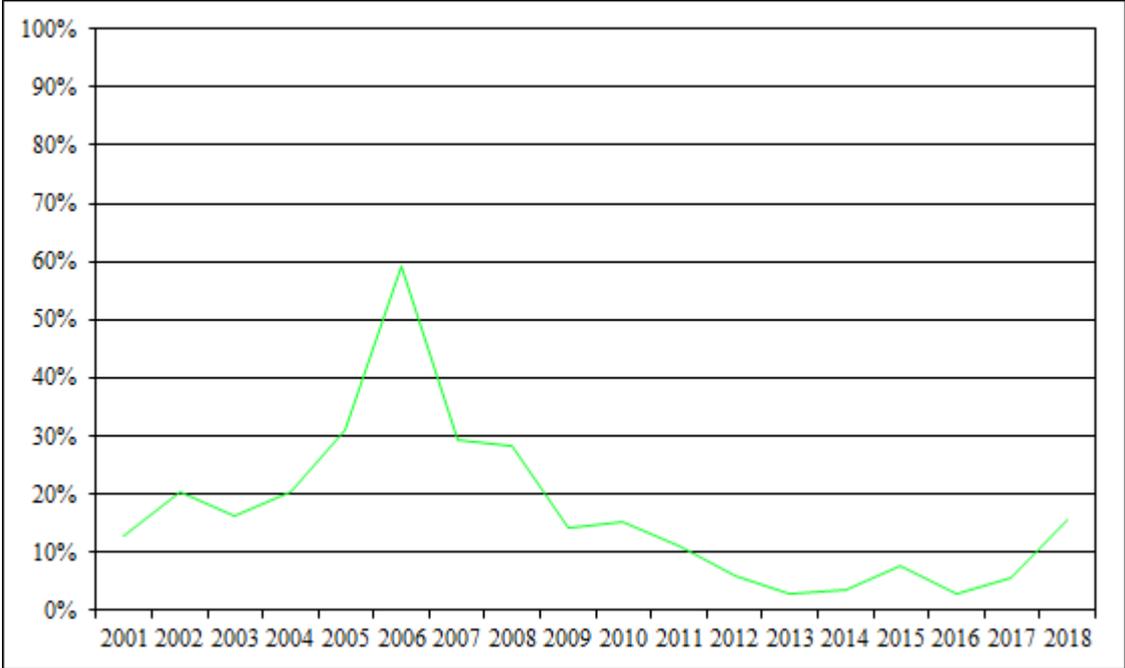
Before analysing each period separately, we will review the main issues and debates around immigration from 2000 to now.

2. Political discourses on immigration and refugees

Spanish public opinion has been relatively favourable to immigration. Most of the population do not consider immigration to be a problem, either at the general or the personal level. This could be explained by Spain being a country in which immigration is relatively recent. Nevertheless, as we said above, the number of immigrants grew considerably between 2000 and 2008, and this growth was followed by a particularly harsh economic crisis. If we compare it with countries with similar migration phases and socioeconomic characteristics, such as Greece or Italy, we may speak of a degree of Spanish "exceptionalism". There have been, however, two exceptions to this exceptionalism: the so-called "cayuco boat crisis" in 2006,¹ and the rise in arrivals via the southern border in summer 2018 (see Figure 1). In both cases the heightened concern about immigration was proportional to the increase in arrivals on Spanish coasts. We may therefore conclude that the issue being seen as problematic is less about immigration in terms of coexistence than immigration understood as the loss of border control.

¹ Whereas in 2005 4,718 people landed in the Canary Islands, in 2006 this number raised to more than 32,000 people, representing 81 percent of all maritime arrivals intercepted by Spain that year. This peak in the number of arrivals became to be known as "the cayuco crisis".

Figure 1: Percentage of Spanish citizens who consider immigration a problem for Spain 2001–18



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the CIS (2018).

It should come as no surprise then that immigration only reached the political agenda very recently. Isolated comments aside, immigration entered the electoral campaign for the first time during the 2010 regional elections in Catalonia. This was due to just two parties: the right-wing People's Party (PP nationally, PPC in Catalonia) and the Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC), an expressly anti-immigration party present in certain Catalan municipalities. In this campaign the PP proposed a compulsory integration contract for immigrants and repeatedly linked immigration with crime. For its part, PxC invoked the need to reduce immigration by repatriating the "migratory surplus" (their words, and using their order: "delinquents", "illegals" and "immigrants who are unemployed for a long period") and continued its specific crusade against Islam in Catalonia. The PP received 12.37% of the votes in these elections and the PxC 2.40%, leaving them just short of entering the Catalan parliament.

While immigration was an electoral issue only for two minority parties in the 2010 Catalan regional elections, it became one of the key topics in the electoral debates in many Catalan municipalities during the 2011 municipal elections (Garcés-Mascareñas et al., 2012). Immigration was implicitly or explicitly related with debates around coexistence, crime, social services and identity. What is more, the electoral trump card of immigration was no longer played only by the PxC and PPC. Statements such as "immigrants must behave like we do", made by a candidate for the nationalist centre-right party CiU in Vic, and "The council is not an NGO, we are not Càritas", by a candidate for the PSC socialist party in Reus, show how mainstream these discourses became. It is also true that almost as important as this kind of statement were the positions of those who denied their legitimacy or refuted them with data.

Curiously, despite the centrality of immigration in the 2010 and 2011 electoral debates, above all in Catalonia, in the following years immigration as a topic disappeared. It is worth noting that the political tensions between Catalonia and Spain became a central issue in political debates from 2010 onwards and particularly after 2012. Immigration, nevertheless, returned with particular impact in 2015 in relation to three specific issues: the legalisation of "hot returns" in Ceuta and Melilla; the deaths in the

Mediterranean and refugee reception; and healthcare access for immigrants with irregular status. Analysing the 2015 debates leads us to other particularities of the Spanish case: if there was politicisation, this was characterised by the confrontation between a government that took exclusionary positions and opposition parties – as well as a significant section of civil society – that was clearly mobilised in favour of the rights of immigrants and refugees; another particular feature was that the politicisation involved a great deal of multi-level confrontation, with cities and a growing number of autonomous regions, as well as international bodies and on occasions even the European Union itself, opposed to the exclusionary decisions taken in central government; the politicisation was also notable for taking place through political statements and the media, with few parliamentary debates, little presence in electoral debates and limited judicial intervention (for a more detailed analysis, see Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

In early 2017, the refugee issue began to acquire importance again. A year and a half after agreeing the relocation programme in Brussels, the Spanish government had fulfilled less than 5% of its quota. In this setting, Catalan civil society initiated the “*Casa nostra, casa vostra*” campaign. Made up of personalities and civil organisations of a diverse nature – NGOs, unions, universities, professional associations, journalists, and so on – the campaign culminated in February 2017 in a demonstration in Barcelona under the slogan “we want to host” that gathered between 150,000 (according to the local police) and 500,000 people (according to the organisers). Nevertheless, the government stuck to its political line and on September 20th 2017, when it was meant to have carried out the 19,000 relocations that corresponded to it, Spain had taken in only 1,089 (European Commission, 2017).

The terrorist attack Barcelona experienced on August 17th 2017 put immigration back on the table. Curiously, the response in Barcelona was significantly different to that of other European cities after an attack. Nobody declared war on anyone in Barcelona, just as they had not in Madrid. Terrorism was immediately condemned and almost in parallel so was xenophobia and racism. What was also said was “*no tinc por*” (I’m not afraid). This was the motto of the August 26th demonstration, where a group of social entities (dressed in blue for the occasion) also asked for there to be no repressive response to the attack and for reflection to be given to Western states’ roles in wars, which were seen as the ultimate causes of the attacks. “*El enemigo es la guerra*” (War is the enemy) was chanted in Madrid after the Atocha attacks in 2004. “*Vuestras guerras, nuestras muertes*” (Your wars, our deaths) was chanted again at the end of August 2017 (Garcés-Mascareñas, 2017).

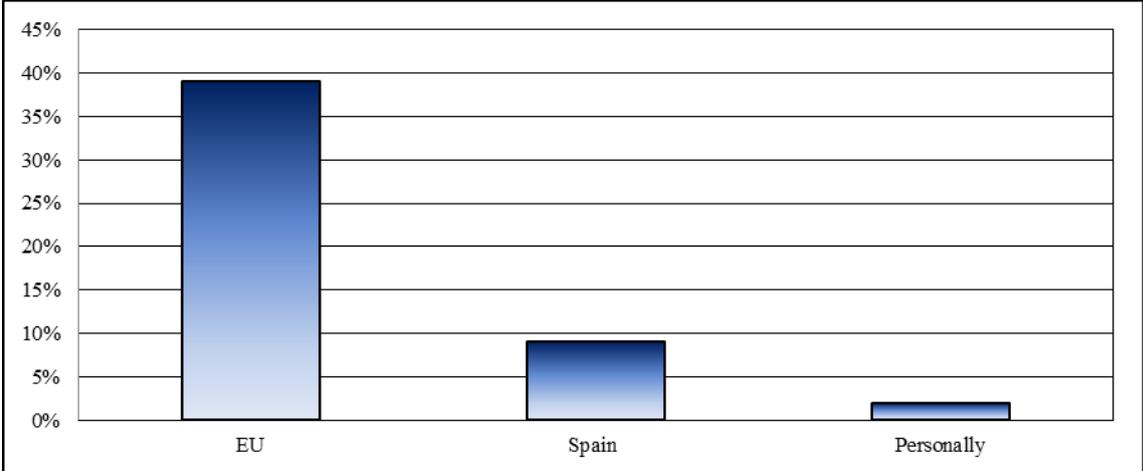
Finally, the latest significant events for the migration debate in Spain took place in the summer of 2018 and constitute this study’s second “episode of contention”: the arrival of people rescued in the waters of the central Mediterranean. When Italy and Malta refused to open their ports to migrants rescued by humanitarian NGOs, the new Spanish government offered the ports of Valencia, Mallorca, Barcelona and Almería for disembarkation. Between June and August, a total of five boats crossed Mediterranean waters. At the same time, Spain became the main route for migrants entering Europe, with a total of 48,000 arrivals between January and October 2018 (UNCHR, 2018). Though this number is far lower than the 850,000 people received by Greece in 2015 or the 120,000 that arrived in Italy in 2017, the situation was once again in the media spotlight. In this context, the conservative opposition parties (PP and Citizens) used the higher number of arrivals to rail against the government’s reception policies, speaking of a “migration avalanche” and connecting migration with crime. Though the concern with immigration has grown, it has not even come close to the levels of 2006 (see Figure 1).

3. First episode: the relocation quota

From June to September 2015 the Spanish government explicitly opposed the relocation quotas proposed by the European Commission. According to the government, a system of distribution within the European Union would generate a pull effect. In the words of the interior minister, Jorge Fernández Díaz, it was like “having a house that was full of leaks ... but instead of plugging those leaks we distribute the water that falls over different rooms” (*El País*, 20th July 2015). The Spanish government also opposed the relocation criteria proposed by the Commission, arguing that unemployment should be a more decisive factor when setting quotas; that the quotas undervalued the reception efforts (referring to immigration in general) made by Spain in recent years; and that the efforts Spain was making in terms of external control of European borders were already “immense”, and “impacted the whole EU” (*El Mundo*, 18th May 2015). With these arguments, at the end of July the government managed to reduce the quota assigned to Spain from 5,800 to 2,749 asylum seekers.

At the start of September, however, the government's position changed. While days earlier, the vice-president was still arguing for the need to “place caps on reception capacity”, on September 2nd the prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, announced his willingness to “talk about the issue again” and said that this time they would be “flexible”. A few days later the prime minister said Spain would take a “constructive and positive position” and that there was a “moral duty” to attend to “all people with a right to asylum” (*El País*, 7th September 2015). Then the Council of Ministers agreed an Interministerial Commission that – just like the one created in 2006 to tackle the cayuco boat crisis – was charged with coordinating the policies of the different ministries involved. On September 9th the government agreed to fully accept the new quota of 14,931 proposed by the European Commission and increased the budget for refugee reception from €53 million to €253 million. To what extent was the government's stance on the relocation quotas subject to politicisation? What arguments were used and by whom? Which factors explain the government's change of position?

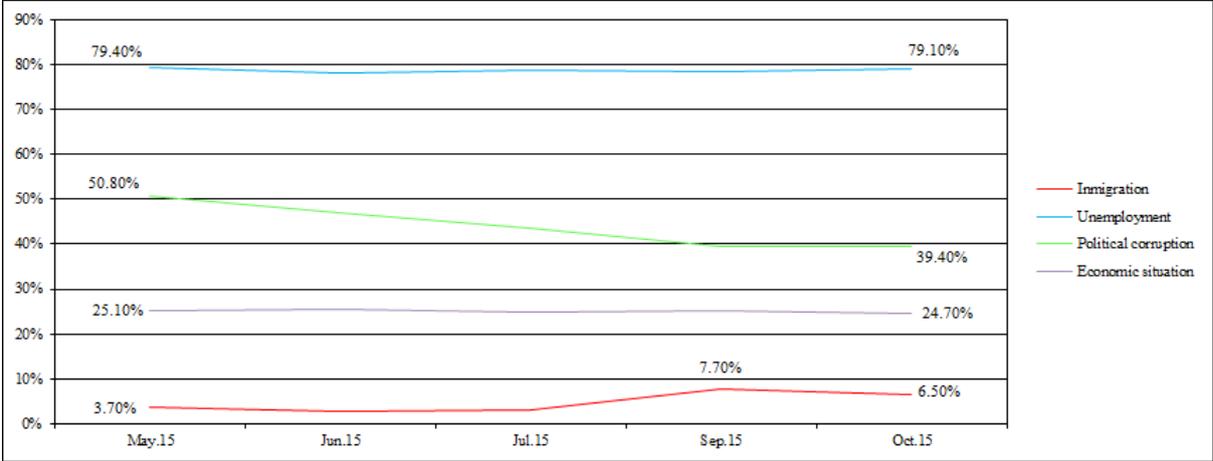
Figure 2: Spanish citizens’ perception of immigration as a problem for the EU, for Spain and for themselves



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the 84th Eurobarometer (2018).

If we take **public opinion** into account, in Spain the concern about immigration has been lower than in other European countries (Glorius, 2018). At that time, immigration was not perceived as a problem at a national level but it was seen as an issue that could affect the European Union, where the figure grew by a factor of four to reach 39% (Figure 3). It should be recalled that at that time Spain was not among the main migration routes towards the EU, meaning that it should come as no surprise that the Spanish people attributed responsibility for managing migration to the EU bodies rather than their domestic institutions.

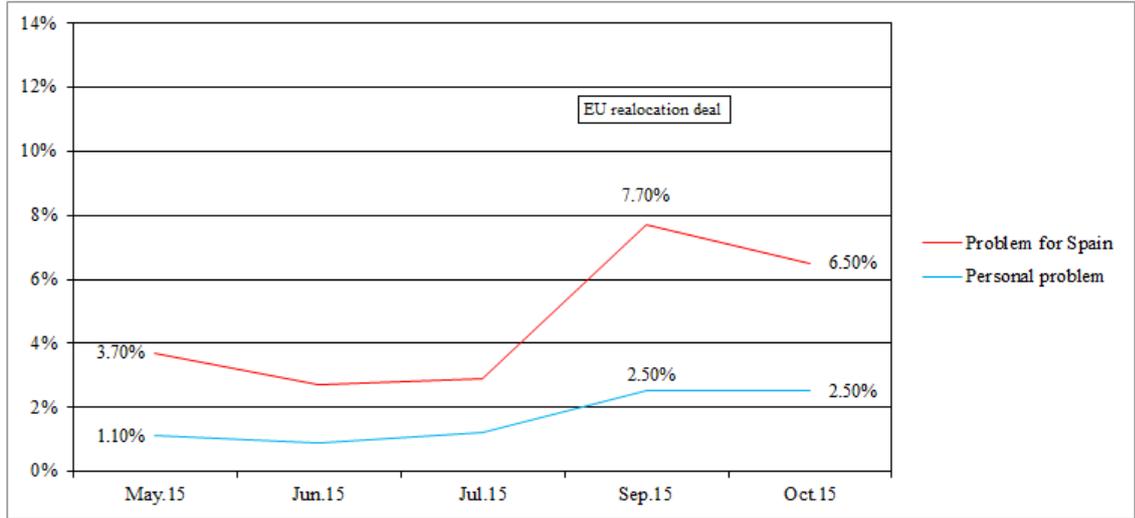
Figure 3: Spanish citizens’ perception of Spain’s most important problems



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2018).

The national surveys conducted by the CIS confirm that immigration did not feature in the top three issues perceived as problematic by Spanish citizens at that time. Only 6.50% of those surveyed considered immigration to be a problem, far below unemployment (79.10%) and corruption (39.40%) (Figure 3). While the concern about immigration grew over this period (reaching a high point between July and September of that year), very few considered immigration to be a problem that affected them personally (Figure 4).

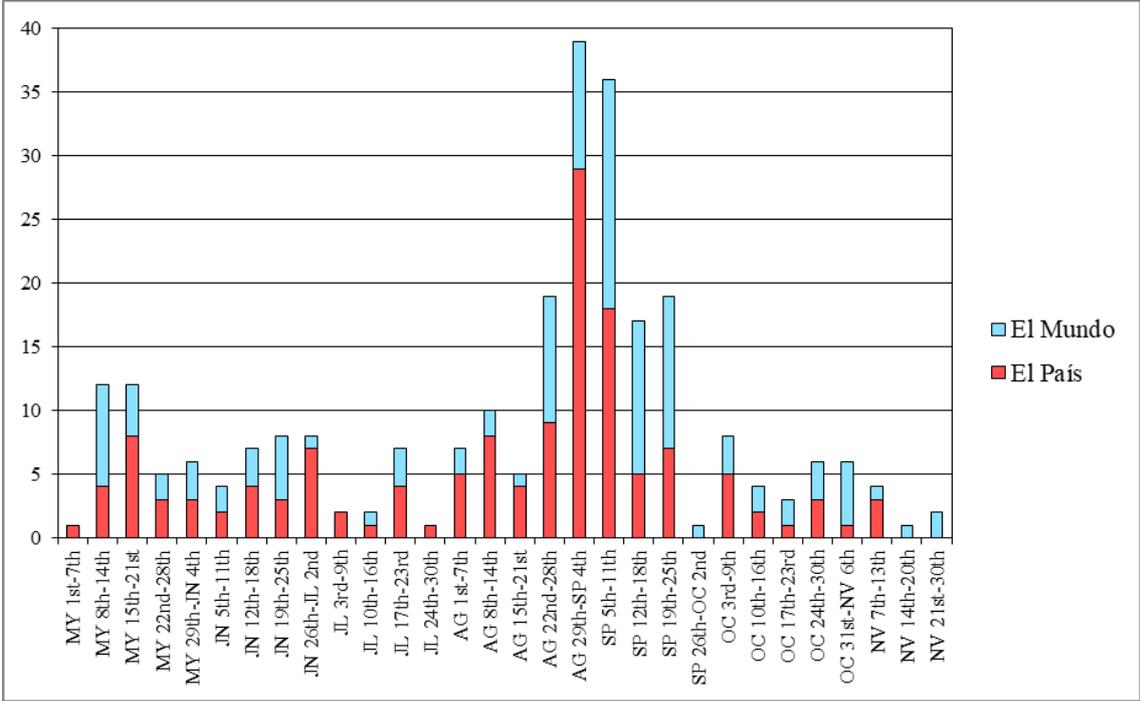
Figure 4: Percentage of Spanish citizens that consider immigration a problem



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2018).

The **media** analysis, specifically of *El País* and *El Mundo* between May and October 2015, provides evidence of a certain degree of salience and a low level of polarisation. As shown by Figure 5, the news relating to the arrival of refugees and the discussions about sharing between the various Member States increased, particularly from the end of August to the end of September 2015. It is at precisely this time that the shift in the Spanish government's position took place and when most Member States finally agreed to the second batch of quotas proposed by the European Commission. In terms of polarisation, it should be pointed out that most of the news items describe the internal division between the various Member States, in particular between the Visegrad countries and the rest, while little is said about the significant disagreement between the government and opposition parties. *El Mundo* reports few voices that disagree with the government's official position. More dissenting voices appear in *El País*, though they remain residual. In the light of what is reported by the two media outlets, neither the refugees nor the discussion around the relocation quotas appear to have generated a great deal of polarisation.

Figure 5: Salience of the topic in the main Spanish media (May–November 2015)



Source: Prepared by the authors (2018).

If we take the media to be an actor, it should be pointed out that both newspapers took a position that clearly favoured immigration and explicitly criticised the government’s (initially negative and later more doubtful) positions. For example, while the Spanish government argued that Spain had already made enough efforts in terms of reception and border control, *El Mundo* underscored the limited number of asylum applications and even less frequent granting of international protection and concluded: “a very small quantity when considered in relation to criteria such as the size of the economy, the country’s population and the fact that it has a land border with Africa” (*El Mundo*, 12th May 2015). Similarly, at the end of June the same newspaper denounced the lack of veracity of the Spanish government’s arguments: “a problem cannot be resolved if the diagnosis is wrong. Less so when those who have to resolve it use mantras that are out of touch with reality to justify migration policies that do not even come close to standing up against the facts. (...) Migration pressure?” (*El Mundo*, 31st July 2015). Similar statements also appeared in *El País*. What is significant about the case of *El Mundo* is that its typical readership is far from being placed to the left of the ideological axis.

Analysing the **parliamentary debates**, the lack of salience stands out along with the lack of polarisation of the positions of the different political parties. The refugee issue did not reach the Spanish parliament until early September 2015, when the Socialist Party (PSOE) – the main opposition party – presented a draft proposal urging the government to accept the quota proposed by the European Commission and approve a humanitarian reception plan (Congreso, 29th September 2015). The discussion took place weeks later, when the government had already fully accepted the quota proposed by the European Commission. The matter was therefore settled. After a brief parliamentary debate, the proposition was approved with the support of all parliamentary groups, including the governing PP. The final text omitted the initial proposal to put an end to "hot returns", as this was one of the points on which there was least agreement. But the text did include, as its last point, the exclusion of asylum from any political

confrontation between parties. No surprise then that the issue was left out of the electoral campaign for the general elections that year.

Widening the analysis of the political arena beyond parliament, significant tensions are nevertheless notable from September onwards. On the one hand, many cities mobilised in favour of hosting. On the 28th of August, Barcelona's mayor, Ada Colau, (representing a local party close to Podemos) proposed creating a network of refugee cities. A week later 55 councils from across Spain had joined the initiative. PP councils did not sign up but many made themselves available to the Spanish government to host refugees. In an open letter to the prime minister, the mayor of Barcelona condemned Europe's passiveness and asked for more funding to support cities to host refugees. On the other hand, that September the social organisations and unions also sprang into action. Alongside the opposition parties, the two largest unions signed a manifesto condemning the European states and institutions and requesting more rescue and better reception. The main social organisations working with refugees also mobilised to press for legal, safe entry routes alongside international organisations such as Save the Children and Amnesty International.

Taking into account the analysis of the media and the main political debates, distinct **frames** stand out. On the governmental side, until September the migration burden frame dominated, meaning the conceptualisation of the arrival and reception of asylum seekers as a burden on a country with high unemployment rates that had already made significant efforts to integrate immigrants and had responsibilities for controlling European borders. Another frame, opposed to this one, was constructed by the opposition parties, social entities, cities and autonomous communities, and demanded the reception of refugees not only as a moral duty but also as a legal obligation. From September onwards, with the government's shifting position, the moral and legal frame began to prevail, although it was always influenced by the humanitarian one, i.e. the need to save lives. "Europe cannot afford this" (Rajoy's words in April 2015) is what at bottom explains the unanimity about the legal frame. From September onwards, above all due to the demands made by cities, another two frames appeared on the scene: the state as the sole guarantor of the right to asylum versus the need to develop multilevel governance that would include autonomous communities and municipalities.

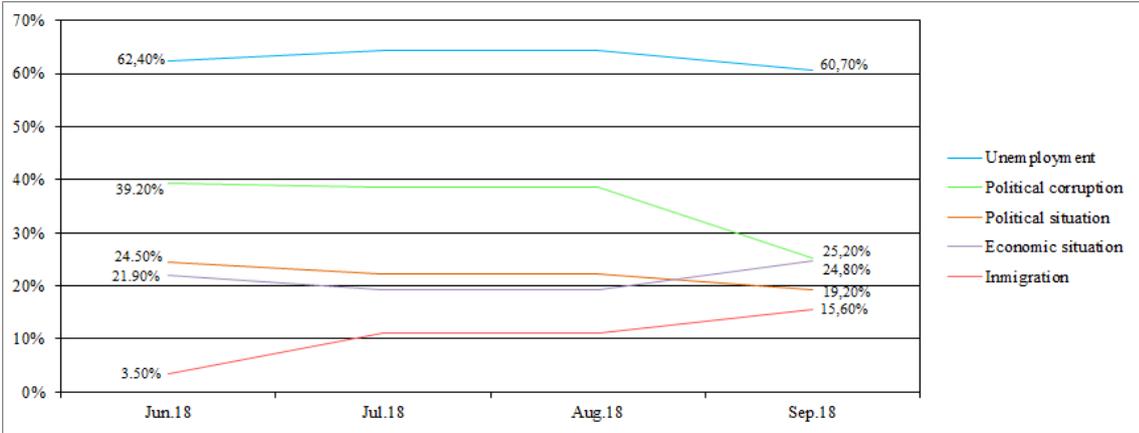
4. Second episode: rescue boats in the Mediterranean

Since September 2017, the number of arrivals on Spain's southern coast has risen. In June 2018 the Spanish parliament supported the formation of a new government to be led by the PSOE. A few days after reaching power, and after the refusal of Italy and Malta to open their ports to the maritime rescue boat the *Aquarius* on June 10th, the government offered the port of Valencia for disembarkation. Italy and Malta's policies opposing the reception of migrants meant the problem recurred on up to four more occasions between the months of June and August. Hence, between the first rescue on June 10th and the European Council of September 20th (a period of time that includes this second "episode of contention"), a total of five disembarkations were made: two by the *Aquarius* (by the French NGO MSF) and three by the *Open Arms* (a maritime rescue boat belonging to a Barcelona-based NGO).

During this period concern about immigration grew in **public opinion**. Focussing on the national surveys (at the time of this study's submission the Eurobarometer for the time period analysed has not been published), we can see that despite not featuring among the Spanish people's top three problems

(headed by unemployment with 60.70%, political corruption with 25.20% and the economic situation with 24.80%), its exponential rise over the past four months has taken it above 15%.

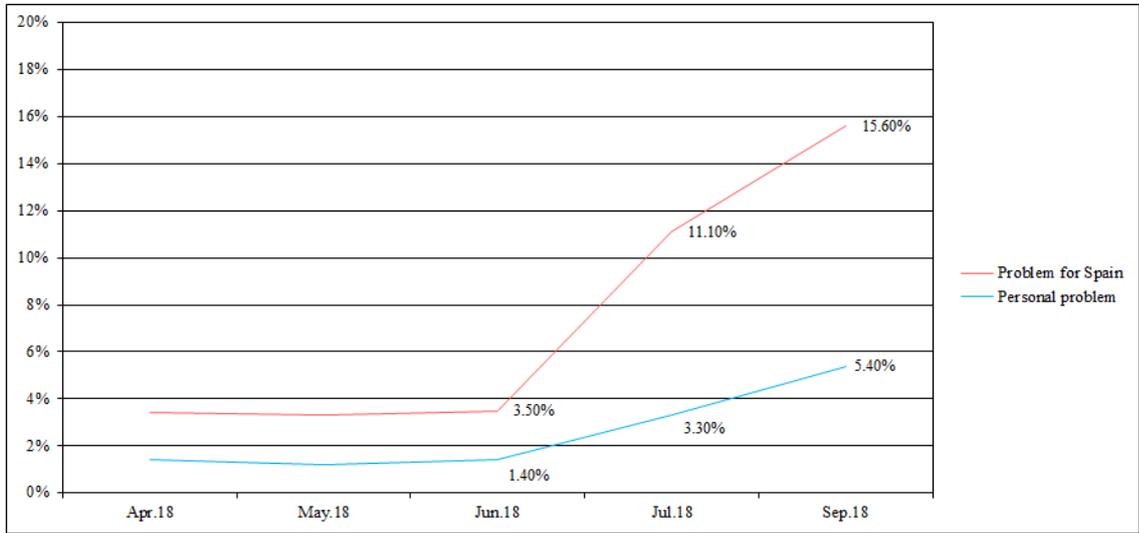
Figure 6: Spanish citizens’ perception of Spain’s most important problems



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2018).

In order to show the significant increase in this issue’s importance, Figure 7 includes data on the perception of immigration during the two months prior to this "episode of contention". While this "problem" had remained highly stable since October 2017 and always below 3.50% (CIS, 2017), between June and September its perceived importance almost quintupled.

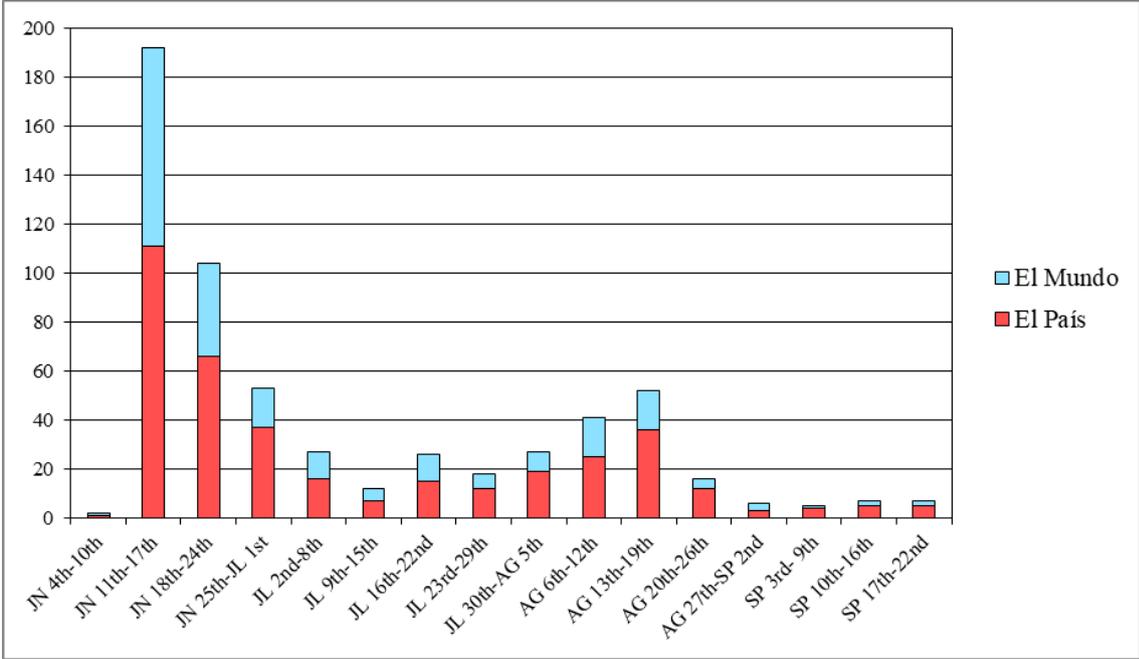
Figure 7: Percentage of Spanish citizens that consider immigration a problem



Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (2018).

This change of trend, which occurred both among those who consider it a problem for Spain and those who consider that it personally prejudices them, did not begin the moment the number of arrivals across the southern border began to grow, but when the arrivals became the media and political focus, which was also the case for the arrival of the first *Aquarius*. As shown by Figure 8, the **media** gave a great deal more visibility to this second “episode of contention” than they did to the first. Although the attention has declined (since the arrival of the first *Aquarius* no other disembarkation has generated as much coverage), these episodes produced as many as 192 weekly news items.

Figure 8: Salience of the topic in the main Spanish media (June–September 2018)



Source: Prepared by the authors (2018).

Though the coverage in *El País* is much more extensive than in *El Mundo*, both newspapers consider this to be one of the key policies for the Pedro Sánchez executive and that “they have raised great media interest” (*El Mundo*, 20th September 2018). In contrast to what we see in relation to parliament, the editorial lines of these two newspapers show little polarisation, and have handled the issue in a very similar way.

In terms of who is responsible for management, at first most articles considered that the countries that were closest should take responsibility, meaning they were critical of governments that refused to open their doors. However, they warned that this system was not sustainable and for that reason requested that “Europe urgently produce an asylum and migration management policy that is not merely reactive” and “share the load between all the countries” (*El País*, 11th June 2018). Without this, according to *El Mundo* (21st June 2018) “the EU faces a summer of shipwrecks, reproaches, division and disdain for human rights”. By contrast, the responsibility of the autonomous communities and cities (with Catalonia, the Community of Valencia and Barcelona, who offered to host migrants, being highlighted) was always seen as voluntary.

The issue’s coverage has a markedly international nature. The presence is substantial of the Italian interior minister, Matteo Salvini, whose vision of closing borders has been harshly criticised and has come to be called “Europe’s shame” (*El País*, 22nd June 2018). The media have contrasted Salvini’s stance with that of Pedro Sánchez and the Spanish executive, whose policy of rescuing the *Aquarius* and the other boats were positively assessed. Nevertheless, and in contrast to their attitude to immigration through the central Mediterranean, both newspapers are highly critical and label “problematic” the migration route across the southern Spanish border. *El País* (18th June 2018) considers that “the problem of irregular immigration by sea is getting worse”, while some articles in *El*

Mundo (17th June 2019) speak of “an authentic avalanche that has exceeded all predictions and overwhelmed the care and security instruments”.

In terms of who should be protected, although the media initially referred to those rescued from shipwrecks as "refugees", by the time it became known that the Spanish government would simply give them a 45-day entry permit and would apply immigration law to them, both newspapers were already referring to them as migrants. Notwithstanding that, in both cases, they continued to be seen as victims and responsibility was not attributed to them. By way of example, *El Mundo* (17th June 2018) wrote that “people are not fleeing their countries, taking journeys that last years, facing torture, hunger, thirst, violence, sexual assault, and a strong possibility of dying for no reason. This system does not work”. In a very similar way, *El País* (20th July 2018) lamented that “rape, torture, detention, blackmail and live castrations are some of the barbarities suffered by hundreds of migrants on these beautiful disembarkation platforms in which they also lock up children.”

When it comes to parliament, a total of 28 parliamentary initiatives were identified between June and September, 70% of which were in the week of the first landing of the *Aquarius*. Despite parliament being made up of ten political parties, 85% of the initiatives were proposed by the People's Party (PP), the main opposition party. The remaining 15% were questions asked by Podemos, a party to the left of the PSOE, which has a stability pact with the government. While the three parties seem to agree on who is responsible for migration management, the degree of polarisation is higher in terms of the type of protection that should be given to the rescued and who should benefit from this protection.

Starting with the responsible party, both the PSOE and PP believe the debate should take place at EU level. While the PP criticised the landing of the *Aquarius* because it had not been carried out “all together, in the European Union, [...] pulling together from our own countries” (oral question 180/000660, 2018), the PSOE argued that it was working to “achieve the goals of the migration policy at EU level” (written question 184/035150, 2018) and fulfil “Spain’s desire to place the migration situation Europe is enduring at the heart of the discussion between the Member States” (written question 184/034957, 2018). Podemos likewise considered that the action of the refugee cities was the fruit of the “failure of the European Union’s asylum and migration policy and those of its Member States” (written question 184/035109, 2018). Podemos also showed concern for the fact that NGOs such as ProActiva Open Arms are the ones having to take responsibility for rescues in the Mediterranean instead of the public administrations (oral question 181/001215).

In contrast to the media, at no point do the different actors refer to the rescued people as “refugees”, they are seen as migrants. On the other hand, who should host these people is the subject of debate. The most belligerent position is the PP's, who on repeated occasions say that the reception of the *Aquarius* has produced a “pull effect” for illegal immigration (written question 184/035161, 2018), and that the party in government is carrying out “propaganda of the politics of papers for all” (written question 184/036983, 2018). The PP is also in favour of greater border control, asking questions on how to protect the work done to contain immigration on the border between Spain and Morocco (written question 184/035161, 2018), showing concern about whether the policy of rescuing the *Aquarius* would become the general rule (written question 184/034880, 2018), and questioning whether Spanish ports, specifically that of Valencia, were the safest for the disembarkation of migrants from the central Mediterranean (written question 184/035150, 2018).

Podemos has a radically different stance on these accusations. In contrast to the PP, Podemos applauds the act of rescuing the *Aquarius*, considering that “Spain is fulfilling its commitment to international reception and international humanitarian law” (question 184/034960, 2018). It is also the party that has been most favourable to reception, asking that international protection and refugee accommodation be granted to all those rescued regardless of their legal situation (question 184/034957, 2018).

Finally, we can place the PSOE government’s position halfway between those of the PP and Podemos. When accused of having generated a pull effect by offering the port of Valencia to the *Aquarius*, the government refuted the existence of any such effect, arguing that “the migration flows in the western Mediterranean have been growing since 2013” (question 184/035161, 2018), and assured that relations with Morocco on containing illegal immigration were excellent. The PSOE’s position on what type of protection should be given to those rescued is clear from the following response in parliament:

“An exceptional 45-day entry permit has been issued [to those rescued], and they have been given a leaflet on formalising their request for international protection, where appropriate. [...] the formalisation of the asylum application will proceed in accordance with the provisions of Spanish asylum law, and the rights gathered in article 18 of the Act on the Right of Asylum and Subsidiary Protection, such as those to documentation, legal assistance and interpretation, for the application to be made to the UNHCR, to the suspension of any removal, expulsion or extradition, to know the contents of the file at all times, to healthcare and to receive specific social benefits established in law. With regard to persons who (aside from vulnerable persons) do not request asylum or whose application is rejected, action will be taken according to their personal situation and the applicable regulations” (written question 184/034960).

Thus, while the PSOE says it is in favour of guaranteeing rescue, once disembarkation occurs it chooses to apply the ordinary systems in place for foreigners, meaning either processing their removal or the recognition of asylum for those who meet the necessary requirements.

5. Conclusions

Spain is an exceptional case. We began this report by calling it exceptional because of its citizens’ disinclination to consider immigration a problem. When concern about immigration has grown, it has done so relative to the increase in arrivals at the southern border, meaning it relates more closely to border concerns than immigration as an issue of coexistence. The analysis of the main political debates on immigration has also led us to speak of a degree of uniqueness: a civil society that was especially mobilised in favour of immigration and refugees; multilevel confrontation between the central state, on the one hand, and cities, autonomous communities and civil society, on the other; and media coverage that is not always accompanied by in-depth discussion in parliament or by immigration becoming a topic in electoral debates. After analysing the two episodes of contention what should we add?

If we examine the facts, it is important to note that in both cases the government changed its position in just a few months. In the first case, while between May and August 2015 the PP government refused to accept the relocation quotas proposed by the European Commission, arguing that it was “already

doing a lot", at the start of September it fully accepted them. A prior meeting with Angela Merkel, the photo of a drowned child, Aylan, being published, and the opposition – particularly that of cities and autonomous communities – partly explain this change. In the second case, concerning the PSOE government's decision to open Spanish ports to rescue boats, we also see substantial changes. While the migrants were at first treated as refugees, within a few weeks they came to be seen as economic migrants and immigration law was applied to them. In this case, we might wonder whether this was a policy change or whether it was a symbolic introductory act by the new Pedro Sánchez government before a return to the "normality" of the migration and border policies.

In terms of politicisation, in both cases there was salience and to a lesser degree polarisation. The salience was greater in the second episode than the first – no surprise given the boats disembarked in Spanish territory while the relocations from Greece and Italy happened further away. In terms of polarisation, regardless of their ideological line, the media are clearly pro-immigration and refugees. In terms of parliamentary debate, the polarisation in the second episode was much greater than in the first. The debate on relocation reached parliament at a time when the government had already changed its position and concluded with a draft proposal being approved by all the parliamentary forces; in the second episode the debate came at the start and the PP (this time the main opposition party) took up a much more belligerent position against the government's policy of opening ports to rescue boats.

If we analyse the content of the debates, in both cases immigration and refugees are quite clearly considered to be the EU's responsibility. Public opinion, the media, and the main parliamentary forces all agree on that. They differ on the extent to which Spain should do more or whether it already does enough in the European context. While the media are clearly in favour of greater involvement, the positions of the political parties diverge: the PP has tended to consider that Spain has already done enough, both in terms of receiving immigrants since the 2000s and in terms of border control. The PSOE and Podemos, by contrast, favour greater co-responsibility. In this sense, we may conclude that in the PP's case the burden frame dominates – though sometimes mitigated by the humanitarian frame and coloured at times by the legal frame when refugees are spoken of – while in the cases of the PSOE and Podemos, the legal and humanitarian frames dominate.

What is less clear is to whom this responsibility applies and what it means. In the first and the second episodes, economic migrants and refugees are indiscriminately mixed up and confounded. In relation to relocation quotas, the PP argued that Spain was already doing enough, but its arguments were connected to immigrant integration and border policies. Concerning the arrival of the rescue boats, although initially the media described those rescued as "refugees", the government's decision to apply immigration law to them immediately led to them being characterised as migrants. This categorisation change meant the meaning of co-responsibility changed too: as soon as those who arrived in the rescue boats came to be seen as migrants, co-responsibility meant rescue and then, for those not meeting asylum application requirements, expulsion.

The new PSOE government (since June 2018) began its legislature with the *Aquarius* gesture. At the time it received support from the media, recognition from the European institutions and criticism from the PP. If this gesture made it seem that substantive change in the government's policies was possible, as the summer progressed, other measures gave the lie to that. The Spanish government announced that it would continue with the hot returns on the southern border despite the condemnation of the

European Court of Human Rights. The policies of externalising border control to Morocco have continued, despite the complaints of human rights organisations. Change or the return to normality seems not to have been a reaction to either internal pressures or greater politicisation (due to the PP's belligerent opposition). In fact, both PP and PSOE governments have deployed the same border policies. The difference is the manner. The new PSOE government sought to distinguish itself from the previous PP government with its humanitarianism and co-responsibility at European level; the presence of such a figure as Italy's Salvini made the need to present Spain as his antithesis even greater. But all the while, the relocation quotas remain unfulfilled despite the Supreme Court's condemnatory ruling. The refugee reception system leaves much to be desired, despite the particularly favourable context it met upon arrival.

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