



**TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO**

**THE BILATERAL SPANISH-MOROCCAN RELATIONS, THE DILEMMA  
OVER CEUTA AND MELILLA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This Final Degree Work aims to give a complete analysis of the situation between Spain and Morocco between the time period from 1975 to 2022, specifically on Ceuta and Melilla. This analysis uses secondary sources from academic research articles and papers specialized in Morocco, newspaper articles from established Spanish newspapers, institutional declarations from both and legal texts from Spain. The objective of this Work is to analyze the bilateral relations between the two Kingdoms and the dilemma over these territories, which could be framed and analyzed under two important theories that have shaped International Relations and are considered classic theories: Political Realism and Liberalism. This Work has studied the different Spanish administrations since the establishment of democracy in 1976 and the various relevant policies and actions executed towards Morocco and Ceuta and Melilla. The importance of these territories for the Moroccans can be traced back to the independence times of Morocco after the dissolution of the Protectorate in 1956, as it has been shown throughout this work. The territories are considered key for the future plans of the Moroccan authorities of becoming a regional power in Africa.

**Keywords:** Bilateral Relations, Ceuta, Melilla, Morocco, Spain.

## RESUMEN

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado pretende dar un análisis completo de la situación entre España y Marruecos entre el periodo de tiempo de 1975 a 2022, concretamente en Ceuta y Melilla. En el mismo, se utilizan fuentes secundarias de artículos de investigación académica y trabajos especializados en relaciones bilaterales España-Marruecos, artículos periodísticos de periódicos españoles establecidos, declaraciones institucionales de ambos países y textos legales de España. El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las relaciones bilaterales entre los dos Reinos y el dilema sobre las ciudades de Ceuta y Melilla, lo cual se enmarca y analiza bajo dos importantes teorías que han dado forma a las Relaciones Internacionales y son consideradas teorías clásicas: el Realismo Político y el Liberalismo. Este trabajo ha estudiado las distintas administraciones españolas desde la instauración de la democracia en 1976 y las diversas políticas y acciones relevantes ejecutadas hacia Marruecos, Ceuta y Melilla. La importancia de estos territorios para los marroquíes se remonta a los tiempos de la independencia de Marruecos tras la disolución del Protectorado en 1956, como se ha puesto de manifiesto a lo largo de este trabajo. Los territorios se consideran clave para los planes futuros de las autoridades marroquíes de convertirse en una potencia regional en África.

**Palabras-clave:** Relaciones bilaterales, España, Marruecos, Ceuta, Melilla.

## INDEX OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACRONYM</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Spanish</b>
<b>BOE</b>	<b>Official Spanish Bulletin</b>	<b>Boletín Oficial del Estado</b>
<b>ECC</b>	<b>European Economic Community</b>	<b>Comunidad Económica Europea</b>
<b>ETA</b>	<b>Basque Country and Liberty</b>	<b>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>European Union</b>	<b>Unión Europea</b>
<b>NATO</b>	<b>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</b>	<b>Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte</b>
<b>PP</b>	<b>Popular Party</b>	<b>Partido Popular</b>
<b>PSOE</b>	<b>Spanish Socialist Workers Party</b>	<b>Partido Socialista Obrero Español</b>
<b>UCD</b>	<b>Union of the Democratic Center</b>	<b>Unión de Centro Democrático</b>
<b>UN</b>	<b>United Nations</b>	<b>Naciones Unidas</b>

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## **1. Introduction:**

Historically, the relations between Spain and Morocco have been mainly problematic and delicate, since the independence of the Moroccan State in 1956; this characteristic can be appreciated since the previous centuries with the Spanish presence in North Africa, specifically in the tremulous period of the Spanish protectorate that began in 1912.

Bilateral relations between the nations have gone through different cycles in which they have shown greater or lesser cooperation which has been reflected in the treaties and agreements signed on very different subjects of bilateral collaboration, which has affected directly or indirectly Ceuta and Melilla.

In the second half of the 19th century, Spanish interference in the surrounding areas of Ceuta and Melilla became military incursions into Moroccan territory. The official delimitation of the land perimeters dates from the conventions of 1859 and 1862, in the case of Melilla; and 1860 in the case of Ceuta (López García, 1991). The end of the Protectorate in 1956, entailed the transformation of the Spanish patrimony in the Maghreb and also that of its borders with the new independent Moroccan state. Thus, Ceuta and Melilla remained under Spanish sovereignty, following the political guidelines drawn up by the Franco regime, at first, and by the democratic system of parliamentary monarchy, from 1978 onwards.

In 1995, Ceuta and Melilla were recognized as autonomous cities within the Spanish constitutional legal system (Spanish Constitution, 1978), according to the law, these cities, if they so wish, can become autonomous communities. The situation between Morocco and Spain with respect to Ceuta and Melilla has been in constant evolution, as for many years different political parties and their respective territorial ideas have been at play. This issue has been present in the foreign policy of the countries and has caused tensions in the relations of both countries, jeopardizing commercial

exchanges, migratory and security collaboration in anti-terrorist operations and other crucial aspects for the security of Spain and its citizens.

Ceuta and Melilla are considered the gateway to Europe, as they are part of Spain's territory, therefore, part of Europe. This statement is contrary to the belief of the Moroccans, who consider Ceuta and Melilla as part of their own territory and according to them, the Spanish government and security services are illegally occupying the territory.

These differences between Spaniards and Moroccans since 1975 have caused great uncertainty in their own Ministries of Foreign Affairs and respective security services, as it could provoke a major diplomatic clash between the countries and a possible confrontation between a consolidated member of the European Union and a growing power on the African continent.

Spain and Morocco depend on each other in several aspects that affect their national economies. Regarding agriculture, different goods and commodities pass through the border of Ceuta and Melilla. Therefore, these cities are considered crucial for both countries and any incidence or complication at the border can affect the livelihoods of the population on both sides of the border.

Morocco is increasing their power in terms of economic and military capabilities, so the Kingdom wishes to solve certain problems related to its territory, specifically its territorial integrity oriented towards Ceuta and Melilla. This determination can be seen as part of Morocco's strategy to become a regional power in the near future and the issue of its own territorial integrity can be seen as an obstacle to this objective. In the case of Spain, this determination can be seen as a threat to the Spanish territorial integrity, to its own foreign policy and the bilateral relations between both countries.

This Final Degree Project aims to give a complete analysis of the situation between Morocco and Spain between the time period from 1975 to 2022, specifically on Ceuta and Melilla. The contribution of this TFG is to

serve as a tool for anyone interested in this topic and to serve as inspiration for future research.

### **1.1 Hypothesis:**

The hypothesis of this Trabajo de Fin de Grado (TFG) will be the following: How have the bilateral relations between Morocco and Spain evolved, regarding Ceuta and Melilla given past history from the time period 1975 until 2022?

### **1.2 Methodology:**

This Trabajo de Fin de Grado (TFG) will use secondary sources from academic research articles and papers specialized in Morocco, newspaper articles from established Spanish newspapers, institutional declarations from both and legal texts from Spain. Using these resources, an inductive analysis will be carried out as it will help in fully understanding the complexity of the issue and the various elements that contribute to it.

### **1.3 Objectives:**

The objectives of this Trabajo de Fin de Grado are the following: the general objective is to analyze a situation which could have deep implications for both Morocco and Spain.

The specific objectives are:

- to describe the origin of the conflict.
- examine the different positions of the Spanish governments since 1975 over this issue.



## **2. Theoretical Framework:**

This Final Degree Project attempts to analyze the bilateral relations between Morocco and Spain and the problematic of Ceuta and Melilla, which could be framed and analyzed under two important theories that have shaped International Relations and are considered classic theories: Political Realism and Liberalism. These two theories could be linked with the concept a political party may have on the functioning and approach of International Relations, as both theories are linked to different political thinkings.

Political Realism is a theory that has different interpretations according to the different historical periods of the authors, but it could be seen as a general philosophy over the governing rules of International Relations (Donnelly, 2010); authors such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Morgenthau, Schuman, Waltz and Hobbes closely linked the State relations with the human condition as it has not changed for hundreds of years and humans are inherently selfish, only valuing their position of power over others as the world is in a state of anarchy. Therefore, governments are focused on acquiring power and securing their national standing as it will increase their survival in an anarchic international system (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018).

This Realism could be framed as representing the selfish characteristic of human beings, as it is based in survival, which affects their world view over certain aspects, such as, society and relationships between governments; relating this selfishness to International Relations, Realism illustrates the relationships between countries as egotistical or self-serving as they seek their own national interests and other elements, such as, cooperation are discarded, as it would be incompatible with the fundamentals of the theory (Barbé, 2020). This interconnection between human condition and Realism could be seen as an oversimplification of the world, but States seek to solidify their position of power and in some cases attempt to expand their influence to other regions and countries, as a means to increase their national security (Korab-Karpowicz, 2018).

A clear example of Realism would be Morocco, as their foreign policy seeks to solidify their national power, through the “*return*” of Ceuta and Melilla; the Moroccans have based their bilateral relations with the Spanish authorities on fulfilling their territorial integrity with the aforementioned territories and the Western Sahara (El Houdaigui, 2018). The Moroccans acknowledge the importance of cooperation with Spain, as it is an important commercial partner and key actor in tackling different issues in the Mediterranean area, but the foreign policy objectives of the Moroccans have not changed since its independence and will remain so until they are fulfilled. This Moroccan Realism can be correlated with Spain, as the Aznar administration is regarded as a Realist executive, mainly their actions in foreign policy and their objectives towards Spain.

The Spanish military response to the Perejil crisis was received with surprise by Morocco, as they had regarded every incoming Spanish administration since the start of democracy in Spain as liberal; therefore, if the Spanish authorities were considered liberal, any confrontation with the Moroccans would be avoided at any cost. This assumption was misinformed as the Aznar government had the objective of solidifying Spain as an important country in the world stage and increasing their power and influence in Europe and the Mediterranean region (Powell, 2003) i.e the Aznar executive had Realist objectives in their foreign policy as it would benefit the standing. Nonetheless, although the Aznar administration had Realist objectives it continued the Liberal orientation of previous governments and continued to cooperate with Morocco over different relevant issues.

The other theory, from which the bilateral relations between the two Kingdoms could be analyzed, would be Liberalism; this theory of International Relations is clearly opposed with Realism, as it bases the relationships between States on ideals that could be framed as “*utopian*” according to realist theorists (Moravcsik, 1997). However, Liberalism is not utopic but recognizes the complexities inside a democratic society and the different

interests present inside of a State, authors such as Tocqueville defended these particularities of Liberalism (Barbé, 2020). A Liberal State, such as Spain, should not be considered homogeneous as there are different political parties that have different concepts of the strategies the Spanish State should have towards Morocco in regards to Ceuta and Melilla. An example

Cooperation remains an important tool for Liberalism to prevent conflicts between States, as can be seen with the Treaty of Friendship between Spain and Morocco in 1991. The Treaty aimed to create a new chapter of trust and friendship between the two States to avoid and overcome any tensions through dialogue and understanding; this new relationship helped lessen of different issues that were affecting the relations, but only cooperation and other liberal tools were considered insufficient to avoid conflict between the States due to their own particularities. It could be argued that due to the Liberal nature of Spain their behavior, regarding Morocco, is more predictable whereas Morocco is more unpredictable and more aggressive due to their Realist disposition (Moravcsik, 1997).

This clash between the two aforementioned theories is translated to a continuous strain in the bilateral relations between the two Kingdoms, as Ceuta and Melilla have become an objective of Morocco and will use tools at their disposal to achieve their foreign policy goals. Spain will continue to use liberal ideas such as cooperation and dialogue to prevent a direct clash with Morocco but the concept of Ceuta and Melilla as part of Spain, will remain unmovable and the Spanish State will protect these territories even if it entails a conflict with the Moroccan authorities. The Liberal foreign policy of Spain will not entail a weakness towards Morocco, but dialogue will remain the first answer to any crisis or problems that may arise between the two States.

### **3.1 Contextualization:**

Traditionally, the relations between Spain and Morocco have been difficult and complex. According to Cajal (2003), the links between the two

nations started on the previous centuries with Spanish presence in the north of Africa, specifically between 1912 and 1956 in which France and Spain had a protectorate<sup>1</sup> in the north of Africa over areas of the present Morocco, where Spain had north and south of the country (Aránguez, 2019). This protectorate did not end until 1956, in which Morocco gained its independence and regained areas previously occupied by France and Spain; Spain returned all their lands in the north of Africa to Morocco in 1956, excluding Ceuta and Melilla which remained Spanish territories as the United Nations deemed them as Spanish provinces. Certain areas of the southern part of the Spanish protectorate were returned later in 1958 with the signing of the Treaty of Cintra between the Francoist regime and Morocco (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores y Cooperación, 1958), promoting a slow but continuous withdrawal from the African continent by the Spanish forces.

As Autonomous Cities, Ceuta and Melilla share many similarities in terms of government competences like the other Spanish autonomous communities, such as, Andalucía or Madrid; however, these cities are governed through a combination of local and regional government due to their legal status which hinders their ability of acting as an fully autonomous entity inside the Spanish legal and territorial system (BOE, 1995).

The situation of Ceuta and Melilla can not be considered a topic of actuality with this previous framework, but rather a complex issue that requires understanding previous elements, such as, legal texts and historical events in order to have an objective understanding. Morocco had argued that

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<sup>1</sup> El protectorado español de Marruecos, fue un tratado jurídico aplicado a unos territorios del Sultanato de Marruecos en los que España, según los acuerdos franco-españoles firmados el 27 de noviembre de 1912, lo ejerció hasta los años 1956 y 1958. Éste consistía en que a España le correspondía la zona norte, que incluía las regiones del Rif y Yebala, que tenía frontera en el norte con las ciudades de Ceuta y Melilla y con la Zona Internacional de Tánger; tanto al sur como al este, el protectorado español lindaba con el francés. La zona sur, también conocida como Cabo Juby, en la actual provincia marroquí de Tarfaya, denominada Villa Bens en el período de dominación española, lindando con la colonia española del Sahara español al sur, y al norte con el protectorado francés con el río Draa como frontera (Álvarez de Manzano, 2012).

Ceuta and Melilla were territories that were colonized by Spain and therefore should undergo a decolonizing process and should be returned to the “rightful owners”, that being Morocco.

The first two elements to analyze would be the United Nations resolution 1514, which can be considered the cornerstone of the decolonization process; and document A/5446 of the United Nations General Assembly, detailing a list of territories to be decolonized sooner than later. Document A/5446 (United Nations, 1963) can be considered to be key as in the list of territories to be decolonized, Ceuta and Melilla are not included, consequently they are viewed as being part of the Spanish national territory as they were part of Spain before the independence of the Kingdom of Morocco in 1958.

This previous affirmation by the United Nations was contrary to the interests of Morocco which sought the contemplation of the UN regarding Ceuta and Melilla as colonized territories by Spain. This lack of consideration prompted in 1975, the official complaint of Morocco towards the United Nations Decolonization Committee and other United Nations forums for the reconsideration of their posture towards the “occupied” Ceuta and Melilla (González Enríquez, 2021).

The surrender of the Ifni territory, under Spanish control and considered legally a Spanish province (BOE, 1958), in 1969 was one of the many steps of the Francoist regime to pacify and continue befriending the Moroccan Kingdom; additionally, the surrender of the Ifni was a way to keep the Francoist regime amicable with the *international community* and continue ensuring its survival. The Moroccans had become the main defenders of the anticolonial movement and advocates for the people in the colonized territories of Spain, as the United Nations focused on the issue of the Spanish colonial presence in the Ifni territory and the Western Sahara; the Francoist regime had not addressed the recommendations of the United Nations General Assembly regarding the decolonization of these territories on

previous resolutions (United Nations, 1966), thus the UN in *Resolution 2072 (XX)* denounced this attitude of Spain towards its colonies<sup>2</sup> and created an opportunity for the Moroccans to influence, both directly and indirectly inside these territories.

The Ifni territory was fought fiercely in 1958 against the Moroccans but the lack of commitment from the Spanish government and the war of attrition the Spanish troops had to suffer over the period of time they were stationed in Ifni, made it possible for the Moroccans to obtain the territory (Pastrana, 2019). The Ifni sector was the necessary stride towards reaching the territorial integrity of Morocco and pushing back the Spanish “colonists” from African territory, including Ceuta and Melilla.

On the other hand, the *Green March* of the Moroccans over the Western Sahara in 1975 can be considered an element that has contributed to the increasing tension over the situation of Ceuta and Melilla, as the Western Sahara was marched upon by thousands of Moroccans in order to declare Western Sahara as part of Morocco (Marraco, 2022); this was done upon a territory that was formerly and formally part of Spain, as it was considered a province of Spain<sup>3</sup> (BOE, 1958) and was in the process of being decolonized and becoming independent.

This event increased the fear of Spain to a future move upon Ceuta and Melilla, as the Green March effectively occupied territory and Morocco was now more emboldened to having new territorial gains. The weakness of the Francoist regime due to the prolonged illness of Franco, the killing of Franco’s successor, Carrero Blanco by the terrorist group ETA on the 20th of December of 1973 (Segovia, 2021) was an excellent opportunity for Morocco to begin the process of taking over Spanish territories in the north of Africa. The Francoist regime was too preoccupied with securing the survival of the

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<sup>2</sup> Urgently requests the Government of Spain, as the administering Power, to take immediately all necessary measures for the liberation of the Territories of Ifni and Spanish Sahara from colonial domination..... (United Nations. 1966)

<sup>3</sup> Artículo primero. -- Los Territorios del África Occidental Española se hallan integrados por dos provincias, denominadas Ifni y Sahara Español.(BOE, 1958)

regime after Franco's death, therefore all resources and attention were dedicated to domestic issues rather than a possible invasion of Morocco towards the Western Sahara and the effective subsequent occupation of the territory by the Moroccans.

This emboldenment from Morocco could be directly linked to the Green March but the origin can be found in the Tripartite Agreement of Madrid on the 14th of November 1975<sup>4</sup>, which allowed the transference of responsibilities to Morocco and Mauritania of the Spanish Sahara or commonly known as the Western Sahara. This agreement could be deemed as an attempt by the dying regime of Franco of avoiding their duties regarding the Western Sahara and keeping their southern neighbors, Mauritania and Morocco, friendly towards the Kingdom of Spain (Miguel, 2006); the United Nations did not recognize this arrangement as valid as it violates International Law, therefore Spain continues to be the country in charge of the future of the Western Sahara. This agreement regarding the Western Sahara allowed the Moroccans to further their claims to more territories from Spain, such as Ceuta and Melilla as Spain previously granted territorial concessions to Morocco.

The Tripartite Agreement could be analyzed as an attempt by Franco to secure the legacy of his regime towards Morocco and avoid any unnecessary fighting with the Moroccans regarding Western Sahara. The close dates of this Agreement and the death of Franco on the 20th of November of 1975 indicate the frail health of Franco in the negotiations and the unsteadiness inside the Francoist regime (Alcalá, 2022). The main issue of the Agreement done by Franco is the opening of a possibility for the Moroccans to obtain Spanish territory either through negotiation or the threat of an armed conflict, as Spain could be too weak to refuse at a given point.

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<sup>4</sup> El entonces rey de Marruecos, Hasán II, se enfrentaba a una crisis socioeconómica que le llevó a sufrir dos intentos de golpes de Estado al inicio de los años setenta. Su solución fue potenciar el nacionalismo y recuperar la idea del "Gran Marruecos", por la que reclamaba el Sáhara Occidental. (Bermejo, 1999).

However, Ceuta and Melilla remained under Spanish sovereignty and the political directives set by the previous Francoist regime and the democratic system established in 1978. The evolution and relevance of the Ceuta and Melilla from 1976 to 2022 during the different Spanish governments are introduced and presented in the next pages.

### **3.2 Suarez's presidency**

The government of Adolfo Suarez, belonging to Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD) the main centrist party of Spain at the time, could be considered to have been of great importance over the situation of Ceuta and Melilla, as he had to overcome multiple issues towards reaching a de-escalation of the situation between Morocco and Spain. The relations between a country with former colonial ties and the metropolis are typically considered to be very complex and difficult to manage, especially if they were engaged in a military conflict less than a 100 years ago.

Adolfo Suárez was appointed President of the Government by King Juan Carlos I in 1976 in order to create a democratic regime in Spain and take the next step away from Franco's dictatorship, which had ruled the country for more than 40 years. The design of a new Constitution was considered to be key for the solidification of the new democratic Spanish system; with great effort and political negotiations between different actors a new Constitution was enacted in 1978 and allowed Spain to start a new democratic era. An obstacle that the Suarez administration had to overcome was the weakness that Spain had projected towards Morocco, as the previous leader Franco had passed away after being in charge for an extensive period of time and the country was undergoing a difficult and complex process towards becoming a fully functioning democracy.



The 1978 Constitution in its content does include Ceuta and Melilla in Art.68.2 and 69.4<sup>5</sup>, in terms of allowing them to have elections to choose their representative in the Senate and the Congress (Cortes Generales, 2011); these articles at their root regard Ceuta and Melilla as part of the national territory and should therefore be represented in the legislative power as the rest of the Spanish territories.

Nonetheless, Ceuta and Melilla were not included, at this time, in the design of the territorial composition into autonomys or other forms of local administration (Juárez, 2016); this was a contradiction at the time as not including them into an autonomy or creating for them a form of local government, hinders the status of these territories inside the Spanish Kingdom. However, there were dispositions in the Constitution to allow Ceuta and Melilla to have a form of local government should their population wish to do so (Cortes Generales, 2011).

Nevertheless, this inclusion of Ceuta and Melilla in the Constitution allowed the government of Suarez to have a stronger claim and position over the Moroccans; this addition was done with aims at a more peaceful resolution of the conflict as those territories were now officially part of Spain. The Suarez administration acknowledged that an armed conflict between the two Kingdoms could threaten the stability of the newly established Spanish democracy; the territorial integrity of Spain would be defended using all the tools at the disposal of Spanish but other less conflictive proposals were also considered inside the Suarez's administration.

During Suarez's government a number of debates happened and were centered around Ceuta and Melilla, specifically the convenience or not of these territories being included in Spain. These discussions were happening due to the previous successful "Green March" of the Moroccans and their subsequent emboldenment and more aggressive rhetoric towards "des

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<sup>5</sup> Art.68.2 *La circunscripción electoral es la provincia. Las poblaciones de Ceuta y Melilla estarán representadas cada una de ellas por un Diputado.* Art 69 4. *Las poblaciones de Ceuta y Melilla elegirán cada una de ellas dos Senadores.*

occupying” these territories from the Spanish. The main problem for Suarez for the territorial integrity of Ceuta and Melilla was the aftermath of the Tripartite Agreements of Madrid done by the Francoist regime, as it had opened the possibility of a future negotiation between Morocco and Spain over these territories.

Morocco had the impression the newly democratic Spain of Suarez would be too weak in military strength or lack political will in protecting territories that were not in the European continental shelf but rather in Africa. This assumption would be proven otherwise as Suarez was even more determined on defending Ceuta and Melilla from the increasing expansionist rhetoric from Morocco (Hernández, 2014).

This discourse was seen on the delimitation of the territorial waters and the fishing zones by Morocco in 1975, which completely ignored the Spanish sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla and included them as being part of Morocco (Council of Ministers of Morocco, 1975); this was later reversed due to a formal complaint by the Suarez’s government but it demonstrated Morocco’s will to pressure the Spanish government over the situation of these territories.

The King of Morocco Hassan II wished to “restore” Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco but knew that it would be nearly impossible to do so unless Gibraltar was returned to the Spanish Kingdom (Fernández, 2004); this “*quid pro quo*” was assumed by the Moroccans as the Spaniards having the two sides of the Strait was unacceptable, as they would effectively control one of the most important trading routes in the world. The Spanish authorities saw the two issues as completely separate from each other, Ceuta and Melilla would always remain part of the Spanish State regardless of the propositions expressed by the Moroccans.

The threat of an invasion to Ceuta and Melilla was very present during Suarez’s government in various conversations during 1978 with high ranking Moroccan officials and with King Hassan II as well (Hernández, 2014). The

main conclusion from those conversations was an unequivocal rejection of President Suarez of any claims that Morocco has over these territories and any attempt on taking them would be met with force. President Suarez also visited Ceuta and Melilla in 1980 (Sakona, 2018), in order to display the support of his government to these territories and to showcase to Morocco that Spain would go to great lengths towards the defense of Ceuta and Melilla.

The government of Adolfo Suárez can be considered key on protecting Ceuta and Melilla from Moroccan expansionism and the inclusion of these territories on the Constitution, allowed them to have more security in the juridical aspect of the situation and strengthened the defense of these territories as part of Spain.

### **3.3 Gonzalez's presidency**

Felipe González, leader of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), came to power on the 2nd of December 1982 and was one of the longest serving presidents in all of the democratic history of Spain, serving 14 years in total. His government had to deal with the persistence of Morocco over Ceuta and Melilla and also different crises that would affect these territories on different levels. Felipe Gonzalez knew that the Kingdom of Morocco was a key neighbor and Ceuta and Melilla were a topic that could strain the relationship between the two nations at any time.

The government of González wanted to fill the void left by the Constitution, in regards to its territorial status, in order to strengthen the juridical situation of Ceuta and Melilla inside of Spain. In 1986 the Council of Ministers of Spain approved 2 laws projects in regards to the status of Ceuta and Melilla, which would grant a special regime for both of these territories (Sánchez Navarro, 2003).

The membership of the Kingdom of Spain to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986 was seen as a great achievement by the

government of González as Spain was now fully integrated in Europe and the advantages it would entail being a member of this economic organization would help the country develop. The signing of the act of adhesion of the Kingdom of Spain to the EEC also implied the recognition of Ceuta and Melilla as part of Spain as it is seen in Art. 25.1<sup>6</sup>, 155<sup>7</sup>, 186<sup>8</sup> and 187<sup>9</sup> (BOE, 1985).

This recognition did not signify the consideration of Ceuta and Melilla as part of the customs union or part of the Schengen Area<sup>10</sup>, in order to facilitate the commercial exchange and passage of people with Morocco, but rather a confirmation of the Spanish sovereignty over these territories. This was considered a provocation by the Kingdom of Morocco as it provided more legitimacy towards the Spanish rhetoric rather than the fulfillment of the territorial integrity of Morocco.

The 1985 protests in Ceuta and Melilla due to the new Spanish Immigration Law increased the tensions between the Kingdom of Morocco and the Kingdom of Spain. These protests were widespread between the Muslim population who lived in Ceuta and Melilla as many of them were lacking Spanish national documents even though many of them were born in these two territories<sup>11</sup>; the new law considered any person an immigrant if

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<sup>6</sup> Tanto los Tratados como los actos de las instituciones de las Comunidades Europeas se aplicarán en las Islas Canarias y en Ceuta y Melilla salvo las excepciones contempladas en los apartados 2 y 3 y en las demás disposiciones de la presente Acta.

<sup>7</sup> Salvo lo dispuesto en el apartado 2 y sin perjuicio de lo dispuesto en el Protocolo n° 2, la política común de pesca no será aplicable a las Islas Canarias ni a Ceuta y Melilla.

<sup>8</sup> Estos ingresos no comprenderán los posibles montantes percibidos sobre la importación en las Islas Canarias y en Ceuta y Melilla.

<sup>9</sup> Este importe se calculará y controlará como si las Islas Canarias y Ceuta y Melilla estuvieran incluidas en el ámbito territorial de aplicación de la Sexta Directiva 77/388/CEE del Consejo, de 17 de mayo de 1977...

<sup>10</sup> El espacio Schengen surgió, en junio de 1985, tras la firma de un acuerdo entre los representantes de la República Federal Alemana, Francia, Bélgica, Luxemburgo y los Países Bajos en la ciudad de Schengen (Luxemburgo). Este acuerdo tenía como objetivo la eliminación gradual de los controles en las fronteras interiores de este espacio. Era un modo de fomentar la circulación de personas, mercancía y capitales. En el espacio Schengen hay 27 países: 23 países miembros de la Unión Europea y 4 países que no son miembros de la Unión Europea (Comisión Europea, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> As many of the people entered Ceuta and Melilla not through the proper channels and were living irregularly in the Kingdom of Spain.

they lacked a Spanish national document which was the case for many people in both Ceuta and Melilla (BOE, 1985).

Even though many of the people living in those two territories could be considered Spanish citizens either by birth or by the time living as a resident in Ceuta and Melilla, which could grant them citizenship, they were in danger of being deported to Morocco due to the new Immigration Law. This issue was solved by the Spanish Ministry of Interior by granting the Spanish nationality to these communities of Ceuta and Melilla between 1986 and 1989 (González Campos, 2004). This created more security for the inhabitants of these two territories and for the expansion of the Spanish influence over the area more so.

The Immigration Law could have been considered by the Kingdom of Morocco as a direct threat towards the Muslim population of the “occupied” territories and the lack of will of Spain to protect this vulnerable section of the population. The response of the Spanish Ministry of Interior allowed them to defuse the situation and keep Morocco from using this situation as a tool for their territorial gains towards Ceuta and Melilla.

The membership of Spain to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1982 and the approval of the membership via popular referendum in 1986 granted a new status for the Kingdom and a new layer of defense for potential attacks or threats from abroad. This membership to NATO was viewed by Morocco as a threat as any action against Ceuta and Melilla could be viewed as an act of aggression as Spain is a member of the alliance and could invoke either Art. 4<sup>12</sup> or Art. 5<sup>13</sup> of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (OTAN, 1949). This threat for Morocco did not exist as in art. 6 of the North

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<sup>12</sup> Art. 4 The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

<sup>13</sup> Art. 5 The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all .....will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Atlantic Treaty the area of action of the alliance in case of an attack does not explicitly include Ceuta and Melilla<sup>14</sup>; this could be considered a loophole according to the interpretation of the North Atlantic Treaty.

The signing of the Friendship, Good neighboring and Cooperation Treaty between Morocco and Spain in 1991 can be considered a turning point for the relationship between these two countries for the foreseeable future (BOE, 1991). This document would shape the interactions between the two States and would create a different approach on solving the different issues that could affect the two nations.

The Treaty touched upon many issues that had conditioned the relationship between Morocco and Spain, such as, the threat of use of force, the territorial integrity of both countries and to peacefully solve problems that may arise in the future. This Treaty also included future high level summits between the Moroccan government and the Spanish government that would happen annually in the future; which prompted a new chapter of friendship and clear communication between the "*now friendly neighbors*" (Aránguez, 2018).

The first summits between the Moroccans and the Spanish after the signing of the Treaty were focused mainly on developing the economic relations between the two countries and the immigration flows that went through Ceuta and Melilla. These two topics would be the common theme over the next summits during Gonzalez's government. The Gonzalez's administration acknowledged that peace and security were connected with economic stability and financial investment, as it is aligned with the liberal ideas of the Gonzalez's party (Artetxe, 2015); security will no longer be tied with the military dimension but other characteristics that help increase the security of the Maghreb region and subsequently Ceuta and Melilla.

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<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of Article 5, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack: on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France 2, on the territory of Turkey or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer.

The government of Gonzalez wanted to increase the juridical protection of both Ceuta and Melilla as the special regime granted before to these territories was insufficient as it constrained many of the functions of the local governments. The approval of the new Autonomous Status to Ceuta and Melilla in 1995 was considered to be a bold move, considering that these territories are formally recognized as part of Spain (BOE, 1995). The Moroccan government saw this Autonomous Status as an escalation by the Spanish government, as now Ceuta and Melilla were a proper Spanish territory under the legal point of view; this tension would not subside until many years after the approval of the new Autonomous Status.

The main issue with the approval of this new Statute was that Ceuta and Melilla were now Autonomous Cities and not Autonomous Communities, as many parts of society from these territories wished to become so. The new Statute only grants powers to the local government as these territories are considered only to a degree of small localities of Spain (Juárez, 2016). The status of Autonomous Cities to Ceuta and Melilla could be considered to be incomplete as it did not grant certain powers to the local government that other Autonomous Communities had already. These facts could be deemed as an attempt of the Gonzalez administration of both granting a new level of integration to Ceuta and Melilla in the juridical and territorial feature and at the same time not angering the Moroccans by granting the full Autonomous Community status to these territories.

Despite the intentions of the governments of both the Kingdom of Morocco and of Spain to move forwards in their relationship based on the Treaty of Friendship, this did not stop the intentions of Morocco to debate with Spain over the “colonial territories” of Ceuta and Melilla. This was seen in different institutional declarations of both the government of Morocco and King Hassan II in different forums, including the United Nations General

Assembly declaration in 1995<sup>15</sup> by the Moroccan Prime Minister (United Nations, 1995).

The Barcelona Declaration of 1995 alleviated some of the tensions between the two Kingdoms as it was a project with the aim of creating a peaceful coexistence between the European Union and the different countries of the Mediterranean. This agreement was based on cooperation on different themes, such as: security, immigration, development, financial and economical support (European Union, 1995). The Kingdom of Morocco preferred the benefits of a deepened association with the European Union and as such Spain, rather than further increasing the tensions over Ceuta and Melilla. The Barcelona Declaration shows the wishes of the governments of both nations of moving away from the classical realist diplomatic relations and towards relations based on liberal values, such as, cooperation.

The Gonzalez's administration could be considered as being instrumental for the increase in the juridical protection of Ceuta and Melilla, with the new Autonomous Cities status for these territories. The increased cooperation with Morocco through the Treaty of Friendship and the Barcelona Declaration helped decrease the tension between the two Kingdoms over Ceuta and Melilla, among other issues, as there were more benefits for both sides by having normal diplomatic relations between them. The long period of the Gonzalez's administration helped create a State position for Ceuta and Melilla and the design of a comprehensive foreign policy towards Morocco.

### **3.4 Aznar's presidency**

The new government of Spain chaired by Jose Maria Aznar, from the conservative party Partido Popular (PP), came to power on the 5th of April of 1996 after the long rule of Gonzalez. Aznar's cabinet had to deal with the possible changes of Morocco towards Spain, as the ruling Spanish

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<sup>15</sup> "Unfortunately however, the two Moroccan cities of Sebta and Melilia and the neighbouring islands are still under Spanish occupation. These enclaves, which are part and parcel of Moroccan territory, and which overlook the Mediterranean sea, are thus the last remaining colonies in Africa" (United Nations, 1995)



government was going to be different for the first time since more than 10 years; this change of presidency could change the status quo that was established during the long government of Gonzalez in respect to the situation of Ceuta and Melilla (Aránguez, 2018).

After Aznar was elected president, his first official foreign visit was to Morocco, as the new Spanish government continued to regard the Moroccans as key partners in the design of their foreign policy. The importance of the ties between the two countries was shown even more so, as the heir to the Moroccan throne Sidi Mohammed visited Madrid in an official State visit. This exchange of official visits between the two Kingdoms showed the mutual understanding between them, even though Aznar visited Ceuta and Melilla during his presidential campaign

The executive body led by Aznar wished to maintain the good relations with Morocco, which were cultivated by the previous administration. The Aznar administration was continuist in their approach towards Morocco and recognized the issue Ceuta and Melilla could represent in the relationship; this however, did not prevent the discussion of topics that concerned both countries, such as: illegal immigration, drug trafficking and other themes (Molina, 2003).

The building of the frontier fences in Ceuta and Melilla by the Aznar administration was done as a way to simmer down the pressure of the European Union authorities in Brussels. These demands were due to the lack of a physical barrier between European Union territory, as Spain was part of the EU, and Morocco; a lack of a physical obstacle to the European borders could incite and aggravate the illegal migration problematic in the future (Campo, 2020). This could indicate a realignment of values inside the European institutions from a more liberal approach towards a realist policy in certain aspects of the illegal migration issue.

This new approach towards border policy by the EU and Spain could affect the future and sustainability of the economies of Ceuta and Melilla, as

they considerably depend on the free flow of merchandise and people between Spanish and Moroccan territory; the new border policy also allows Morocco to have a say over the matter, therefore Morocco could use to their benefit opening or closing the border causing a possible hindrance to Ceuta and Melilla (Recio, 2022).

The death of Hassan II in 1999 meant a sudden change in the leadership of the Kingdom of Morocco (De la Serna, 1999), as the sudden ascension to the throne by Mohammed VI would mean a new and uncertain chapter in the relations between Spain and Morocco, specially for Ceuta and Melilla. The will of the Spanish government was to continue with the current trend of bilateral relations with Mohammed VI; this wish was shown publicly as the first official visit received by Mohammed VI was President Aznar, highlighting the importance of the relations between the two Kingdoms (Molina, 2003).

The increasing personal involvement of Aznar in matters of foreign policy was something unheard of, as it was assumed a non-direct interference and latitude between the different members of government; it could be framed as an irresponsibility from Aznar, as it shows a lack of trust in its Foreign Minister privately and publicly (Artetxe, 2015). The correct functioning of bilateral relations and the design of policies by the Spanish Foreign Ministry should be influenced by foreign policy experts, not by the personal views of the head of the Executive power. This new engagement of Aznar could threaten the stability of Ceuta and Melilla, as the situation of these territories require an expertise on diplomacy and good communication skills, in order to prevent an unforeseen escalation between Morocco and Spain regarding these territories.

The relations seemed to be ever improving, despite this new involvement, but the signing of the Treaty of Friendship 2002 (BOE, 2002) between Spain and Algeria became an element of heavy debate inside the Kingdom of Morocco. The ties between the two countries were strengthened

in key aspects, such as, energy regarding the supply of gas towards Spain and the immigration issue; the new position of Algeria in regards to Spanish foreign policy was at the same level as Morocco as they were now key partners in the north of Africa for the foreseeable future. This partnership between Algeria and Spain could directly affect Ceuta and Melilla, as Morocco had been displaced as a top priority and partner in the Maghreb region and could cause a shift in the general approach of the Moroccans towards these territories.

This new association between Spain and Algeria was seen with skepticism inside Morocco, as Algeria is the main competitor and rival of Morocco in the Maghreb area. This association was also considered a problem as the Algerians defended the autodetermination of the Saharuis in the Western Sahara, which was contrary to the wishes of the Kingdom of Morocco to incorporate this region to their national territory. The government of Aznar remained neutral to the issue of the Western Sahara and referred to the resolutions of the United Nations regarding this issue; the solutions, according to the Aznar administration should be based on agreements between the different parties involved (Pino, 2004). The Spanish government was regarded as an ally of Algeria inside the higher spheres of power of Morocco, as the declarations that were exposed before the United Nations were aligned with the postulates from the Algerian government.

The sudden departure of the Moroccan ambassador from Madrid in 2001 without any formal explanation, threatened to escalate the tense stability of the relations between the two Kingdoms due to this event. This withdrawal of the ambassador could be related to the growing differences between the Spanish government and the Moroccans in regards to illegal immigration, as the Spanish authorities were asking for more involvement from the Moroccans in this matter, as well as in the ongoing drug trafficking in the areas surrounding Ceuta and Melilla, the increasing criticism of Spanish journalism regarding the Moroccan political system, the lack of support of the

Spanish government to the aspirations of Morocco towards the Western Sahara and the new association with the Algerians by the Aznar administration (Jordán, 2021).

After the departure of the Moroccan ambassador, the situation became unclear as the relations between the two Kingdoms were at the will of the decisions made by Mohammed VI; the Aznar administration hoped to return to the previous status between the two countries due to the diplomatic ties between them and the strong bonds of cooperation built over the years in important areas of mutual interests. This hope would be unfounded as the Kingdom of Morocco sent members of the royal gendarmerie, later members of the royal marines, to the small uninhabited island of Perejil near Ceuta in order to occupy it and restore it to the Moroccans away from the Spanish administration (López Bueno, 2006). The use of force by the Moroccans in the invasion of Perejil could be seen as a shift from a semi-liberal view of the relation of the Moroccans with the Spanish authorities, before the new association with the Algerians, towards a pure realist approach to achieve the foreign policy objectives through any means necessary.

The occupation of Perejil was one of the greatest challenges Spain had to face as this crisis could evolve into a war between both Kingdoms. Perejil was not regarded as key for Spain, but this invasion was used to test the resolve of the Spanish government; a lack of response to this incident could result in a future invasion of Ceuta and Melilla in the near future (Jordán, 2021). The Spanish ambassador in Rabat was immediately recalled, as a sign of protest to this unilateral actions by the Moroccan authorities. The Moroccan members of the marines were later detained by Spanish security forces and subsequently handed back to Moroccan authorities, as a sign of good faith by the Spanish government in order to deescalate the situation. This approach of the Aznar administration could be analyzed as semi-liberal, as the use of force was not used immediately to respond to this crisis and the

force was used proportionately to defend Spanish national territory, which is contemplated in article 51 of the United Nations charter<sup>16</sup>.

This incident represented the lowest point in the relations between the two countries and the decrease of the level of friendship and communication between them, as stipulated in the Treaty of Friendship of 1991. The intervention of the United States government in the crisis alleviated some of tension, as it regarded both countries as key allies in the region; the United States forced the two nations to sign a treaty of peace and to return to the previous *status quo* of the island of Perejil (López Bueno, 2006).

The peace treaty helped reduce the tensions between the two countries but the normalization of the diplomatic relations came with the return of the ambassadors in both countries in 2003 (López Bueno, 2006). The Aznar administration attempted to revitalize the relations between the two Kingdoms with economic collaborations and agreements, as it would be mutually beneficial for both countries. The status quo between Morocco and Spain was somewhat restored but the actions of the Moroccans regarding Perejil could be categorized as the end of the previous state of affairs. The Moroccans occupying Perejil manifested the possibility of an invasion to Ceuta and Melilla and a complete disregard to diplomacy and the spirit of collaboration signed in the Treaty of Friendship of 1991. This possibility of an invasion to the aforementioned territories increased the wariness of the Spanish government towards the Moroccans.

The swift response of the Spanish government to this crisis could be interpreted as a change of paradigm regarding Morocco and the future of the relations between the two Kingdoms. The previous administrations aimed to placate Morocco and deal with the consequences of their foreign policy rather than advocating for the position Spain has acquired for the last years in the world thanks to their association to NATO, European Union and the Security

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<sup>16</sup> Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations..... (United Nations, 1945).

Council of the United Nations during Aznar's administration (Miguel, 2002); this position is stronger than Morocco and would effectively shift the weight of the diplomatic relations towards the Spanish sector and in favor of the Spanish sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla.

The 9/11 attacks in the United States in 2001 by Al-Qaeda, an extremist Islamic group, changed the landscape of State and global security for the foreseeable future, including Spain; Ceuta and Melilla would no longer represent a border between Europe and Africa but rather a possible security risk for both Spain and Europe. The incoming migration fluxes to Ceuta and Melilla could devolve into an infiltration from Islamic radicals to Spanish national territory and possible attacks to cause terror among the population.

This risk was increased as the Aznar administration was supporting the United States in the Iraq invasion, therefore making Spain an objective for Islamic extremists. The border controls were increased but the 11M terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and the attacks in Casablanca in 2003 showed the Spanish and Moroccan governments the importance of security collaborations between them to tackle this problem that was affecting both countries (Bozal, 2016). There are no official agreements in this regard between Spain and Morocco but the spirit of collaboration and the common objectives remain in the association against terrorism, as it is viewed as being an existential threat for both countries.

The traditional "Operación Paso del Estrecho", one of the most important operations of passage of Moroccan people from European countries towards Morocco done in the summer, was affected by this new security context as it is coordinated by both governments the parameters and measures for this operation (Molina, 2003). This operation is very important for Ceuta and Melilla, as they are important ports of transit, and a lack of good communication and coordination could cause a collapse inside these territories if the operation is not well designed by the authorities of the two countries. The turmoil of the last years between Morocco and the Aznar

administration did not affect this operation, which could be seen as a sign of a possible reconciliation between the Kingdoms as there are mutual needs and interests between them.

The government of Aznar could be considered as being one of the most important administrations since the establishment of democracy in Spain in 1978. The invasion of Perejil caused a great crisis with Morocco that would take many years to subside, but the new landscape of security after the 9/11 attacks helped soften the situation between the two Kingdoms. The Aznar administration helped show the conviction of Spain to Morocco regarding Ceuta and Melilla and shifted the balance of power towards Spain once again. The Moroccans welcomed the change of government in Spain, as a new administration would entail a new period of relations between the two Kingdoms rather than continuing with the ongoing tensions of Aznar's administration.

### **3.5 Zapatero's presidency**

The new government led by Jose Luis Zapatero in Spain, from PSOE, was received in 2004, favorably by the Moroccan authorities as it marked the possible beginning of a new era of relations between the two Kingdoms. The Zapatero administration firmly believed that the importance of the bilateral relations between the two countries would be considered more important than past struggles between the Kingdoms. This was shown with different visits of members of the Spanish government, such as, Zapatero and even the Spanish royals to Morocco; the return of a certain fluid communication between the two nations in regards to agreements, migration and cultural projects would entail the normalization of the diplomatic relations as it had been set out by the Zapatero administration.

However, this aspiration of the Zapatero administration of a normalization of diplomatic relations did not entail a renounce of efforts from the Moroccan government to "restore" Ceuta and Melilla to Morocco's territory

as it was shown during the High Level Meeting of 2005 (González Del Miño, 2007). The new government in Spain was viewed in Morocco as a new opportunity to continue their past diplomatic efforts in challenging the Spanish presence in Ceuta and Melilla; this change also provided a new opportunity to propose the “return” of these territories back to Morocco as the new Zapatero administration was viewed as more accessible to these possible negotiations for Ceuta and Melilla than previous administrations in the Spanish government.

The firm belief of the Zapatero administration of including multilateralism through the League of Civilizations and the use of the Spanish institutions was aimed to reduce the confrontation and promote fluid diplomatic relationships (Hernando de Larramendi & López, 2004). The rhetoric from the Moroccan side to recover Ceuta and Melilla decreased as there was a greater communication between the two governments; however, the Spanish royalty, a very public Spanish institution, visited these territories and this was considered a lack of respect for the status quo, as there was a general “understanding” in regard to a “*no visits policy*” to Ceuta and Melilla by important members of government and institutions of Spain.

The new government of Zapatero became more involved with the issue of the Western Sahara, as it shifted from neutrality to a more active role as a mediator. This new position could be interpreted as an attempt on shifting the focus of the Moroccan political elites from Ceuta and Melilla towards the Western Sahara. The issues in the Spanish-Moroccan border in these territories had stabilized compared to the previous administration but it was still considered a key issue to be studied and analyzed profoundly.

This new relationship could be related with to the economic growth of Spain and the rest of the European Union were experiencing from the start of the Zapatero administration, as having a fluent relationship with Spain would mean more commercial exchanges and increased investment inside of Morocco from the Spanish side. It can be directly correlated with the situation



of Spain and the attempts of Morocco to increase the tension regarding Ceuta and Melilla, if Spain is in a stable situation, both politically and economically, these territories are not raised by the Moroccan government as there would be minimal possibilities for a negotiation between the two governments and any kind of pressure exerted would be nullified entirely by the Spanish government (Gutiérrez, 2010).

The grave financial crisis of 2009 affected many countries of the world but Spain, due to a lack of action of the Zapatero administration, greatly suffered the effects of this crisis, such as, high rates of unemployment, around 18,9% of the population was unemployed (Expansión, 2009) and a drastic decrease of the public expenditure by the Spanish State which would affect greatly the internal stability of the country (Ob. cit, 2009). This instability inside Spain was viewed in Morocco as an opportunity to propose negotiations between the 2 Kingdoms in regards to Ceuta and Melilla, as the Zapatero administration would be too preoccupied with solving the domestic economic issues; this possible negotiations would help deviate the attention of the Moroccan public from the effects of the economic crisis inside Morocco. Moreover, this financial crisis exacerbated the drug-trafficking issue in Ceuta and Melilla, as the lack of a steady income motivated individuals to seek economic benefits through trafficking with drugs (El Confidencial, 2009).

The 5+5 group was an initiative proposed by the French government to create a forum of cooperation between the countries of the Maghreb region (Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia) and the south of Europe (Spain, Portugal, France, Malta and Italy). The threats of terrorism, drug trafficking, illicit traffic of goods and illegal migration in the Mediterranean area became issues of great concern for all members participating in this forum (Aubarell, 2012). This use of multilateralism was greatly defended by the Zapatero administration, as it was a great opportunity to deepen the ties between Europe and the north of Africa. The presence of this group and its revival, after different issues between the member states, and the increased

connection between the member countries have allowed for a noticeable increment of the security in the Mediterranean region; it has been assumed by the Zapatero administration that a closer collaboration with the Maghreb countries could potentially boost the security of Spain and its territories in the area, such as, Ceuta and Melilla.

Although the relationship between Morocco and Spain appeared to be typical and with great amount of cordiality, the Zapatero administration acknowledged the risks Ceuta and Melilla could represent for Spain and a possible military confrontation between the nations could arise in the near future. This was defined in "*Los intereses geopolíticos de España: panorama de riesgos y amenazas*" (Ministerio de Defensa, 2011) by the Spanish Ministry of Defense during the Zapatero administration. This document clearly states that: "Ceuta and Melilla are considered by Morocco as strategic territories to be controlled rather than vital for their country; the "return" of these territories could be used by the Moroccan monarchy to further solidify their status inside their nation and increase their legitimacy between the Moroccan public" (Ministerio de Defensa, 2011) .

The question of illegal migration in the border of Ceuta and Melilla became key for both Kingdoms and a future sign of the state of the relations between Morocco and Spain. Depending on the decisions the ruling Spanish government could make at a certain period of time could directly affect the collaboration on security, commercial exchanges and the leniency from the Moroccan authorities towards incoming fluxes of illegal migrants to the frontiers of Spain (Hernando de Larramendi & López, 2021). These facts show the power Morocco can exert over Spain, as the Moroccan authorities could instrumentalize the illegal migrants to achieve their foreign policy goals towards Spain. The Zapatero administration sought after a new understanding with the Moroccans to reduce the possibility of the use of migrants, through a deeper collaboration in migration and economic cooperation.

The Spanish authorities in Ceuta and Melilla criticized the lack of actions from the Zapatero administration to prevent Morocco from allowing the influx of illegal migrants to these territories, as it increased the strain on the security forces and the necessary resources for handling the migrants before and after they trespassed the frontier (Padín, 2012). The High Level Meeting of 2005 happened after the grave crisis of 500 illegal migrants attempting to cross the border of Ceuta and Melilla resulted in 5 deaths (Abad & Rodríguez, 2005); this meeting was done with the sole purpose of increasing the security measures around the border and gain a strong compromise from the Moroccan side to better oversee the situation of illegal immigration.

Although this new agreement between Morocco and Spain attempted to normalize the situation of illegal migration in Ceuta and Melilla through the usual diplomatic channels, this topic would arise in future interactions due to lack of actions mainly from the Moroccan authorities (Hernando de Larramendi & López, 2021). The Zapatero administration would return to past positions of appeasement and lack of comprehensive actions that would allow normal diplomatic relations with Morocco, regardless of the status of Ceuta and Melilla and other controversial topics, for the foreseeable future.

The end of the Zapatero administration was received in Morocco as harmful for their interests, as the Spanish government had been weakened by its internal turmoils due to the financial crisis of 2008. The new incoming administration would remedy the dire situation inside of Spain and regain the power and position Spain had before the financial crisis.

### **3.6 Rajoy's presidency:**

The election of Mariano Rajoy in 2011 from the conservative party Partido Popular (PP) was viewed with apprehension from the Moroccan authorities, as Rajoy had been very vocal against the previous administration's policy towards Morocco, Ceuta and Melilla and the change of

policy towards the Western Sahara situation. Although, the Rajoy administration differed in the approach and principles towards Morocco the wish of the incoming Spanish government was to continue building the diplomatic relations with Morocco based on cooperation and agreements; topics, such as, Ceuta and Melilla were considered controversial and potential aspects that would likely threaten the relations between the two Kingdoms if they are not dealt with appropriately, defending the basic principle of Spanish sovereignty over these territories.

This new principle could be applied to Morocco as it would be more beneficial to establish a situation of stability and lack of controversies with Spain, as it would affect future opportunities with the European Union. The Rajoy administration maintained the focus from previous administrations in regards to immigration and security, as illegal immigration continued to be a major concern for the two Kingdoms and could devolve into a grave security issue (Torrejón, 2018); this topic continued to be relevant due to the political instability in the north of Africa and the Middle East due to the Arab Spring. Ceuta and Melilla were the first step towards a better future for many immigrants, who seek stability and better living in European territory i.e. Spain.

The normalization of relations initiated by Zapatero and continued by the Rajoy administration allowed for a deeper collaboration of counterterrorism, anti-drug operations, anti-organized crime operations and normal transit of people and merchandise in Ceuta and Melilla (Torrejón, 2018). This new situation could be considered as a new chapter of relations between Morocco and Spain, as the Moroccans prioritized the collaboration with the Spanish authorities rather than the support and defense of Ceuta and Melilla as part of the Moroccan territory.

This new closeness between the Moroccans and the Spanish authorities could be interpreted as a sign of Morocco towards a closer relationship with the European Union and the multiple benefits it could receive

in the future due to this fact. This closeness between the two Kingdoms was symbolized with multiple economical agreements between the respective governments and a strong association between the Spanish and Moroccan security forces; this collaboration was aimed at Ceuta and Melilla and the Mediterranean Sea with the objective of combating drug-trafficking and anti-terrorism operations (Martín, 2016).

It is important to highlight that Morocco did not take advantage of the poor economic situation inside of Spain at the moment Rajoy became the leader of the government, unlike the previous period with Zapatero in which Ceuta and Melilla became more recurrent during the institutional interactions between the nations and declarations from Morocco in regards to these territories. The confrontation between the Aznar administration and Morocco was still present in the memories of the Moroccan political elites (Fernández & Soler, 2014). This fact threatened the relations between the two Kingdoms, as the new administration was from the same conservative party which Aznar was part of; despite this multiple elements the relations between Morocco and Spain became stable and free of any controversy, as it was the wish of both Kingdoms to inaugurate a new period between them.

However, this new chapter between Morocco and Spain had some internal detractors as the most nationalistic sectors inside Morocco were against this closeness as it was interpreted as a surrender towards regaining Ceuta and Melilla. This assumption was mistaken as the Moroccan did not renounce these territories but rather adapted their discourse to the current circumstances, as the diplomatic relations between Spain and Morocco were at their best. These tensions inside the Moroccan society and government, show the fragmentation inside the Moroccan Kingdom as Mohammed VI is under pressure from multiple groups to obtain certain benefits or objectives, such as, Ceuta and Melilla.

The drug trafficking problem is one that affects both Kingdoms as the drug flow is increasing due to the ever-growing demand in the European

continent, with multiple low-cost means to buy the different illegal products from the other side of the Gibraltar Strait (Rodríguez & López, 2021). The importance of drug-related business inside of Morocco is increasing as drug-trafficking is very profitable and different types of drugs can be produced very cheaply; this creates great profit margins for criminal enterprises and encourages drug-trafficking among a population with low living standards.

The high rate of unemployment in both Ceuta and Melilla has been around 40 % approximately, during the Rajoy administration (Expansión, 2022). These facts allow us to comprehend the relevance of drug trafficking in these territories, as the lack of a steady income creates a dire situation for many families and the drug cartels take advantage of this circumstance. The governments of both Morocco and Spain realizing the problem will be ever growing unless actions were carefully designed and executed, the two Kingdoms created the G4 ,which is a working group that includes Spain, Morocco, Portugal and France that tackles issues such as drug trafficking, among other relevant issues (The Objective, 2019). These 4 countries are directly affected by drug trafficking in the Mediterranean; the G4 was designed to create a greater cooperation between the member countries and tackle directly the drug trafficking gangs using surveillance and drug raids to achieve their goals.

The Spanish foreign policy towards Morocco became a State position, which changed the trend from past administrations in the Spanish government. This creates a mutual trust between the two Kingdoms, as the governments may change but the core objectives and values of the bilateral relations will be maintained by the Spanish ruling party at that point in time. A State position in foreign policy allows the flourishing of good relations between the countries, as there will be no major changes in certain policies; State policies are aimed to be long-term, as it shows a commitment between the parties to continue growing the diplomatic relations between them.

This equilibrium in the bilateral relations was difficult to maintain as the change of King in Spain, meant a modification to a very important figure in the diplomatic aspect of the Spanish State; the former King Juan Carlos I had a good relationship with Hassan II and furthermore with the current king Mohammed VI. The new King of Spain, Phillip VI, assumed the head of State position on the 19th of June of 2014 (Congreso de los Diputados, 2014) and the expectation of his new reign was a close relationship with the King of Morocco and a new opportunity to revitalize the “*royal*” diplomacy, given past history between their fathers. The relations between the two Kings are cordial but do not attain the same closeness as with Juan Carlos I and Hassan II; this could prove challenging if any future crisis arises, including Ceuta and Melilla, between the two Kingdoms as there is no complicity between the two new Kings, thus there are no possible back channels to prevent a confrontation between their nations.

In the Rajoy administration the new relations between Morocco and Spain reached an unseen level, as the Spanish security forces were allowed “hot returns” of illegal migrants crossing the border of Ceuta and Melilla; these “hot returns” are in essence returning the migrant back to the Moroccan side without checking their health status or follow the proper procedures of returning the migrant to the other side of the border. The Moroccan security forces would deal with the illegal migrants discreetly, as it would benefit both Kingdoms to keep the illegal migration issue out of the spotlight, as certain practices from both sides of the border could be categorized as unorthodox, unethical or blatantly illegal (Fernández García, 2020).

The Moroccan government regarded the new attitude of the Rajoy administration as a significant positive change, as it showed the Moroccan population the will of Spain towards handling an issue that affects both sides of the border; Morocco had become a country of both transit and receiving of illegal migrants, as they either stayed permanently in Morocco after being rejected by the Spanish authorities or attempted to cross the border either in

Ceuta or Melilla. This new attitude from the European side of the border stated a change of mentality towards a realist approach to the problematic of illegal migration, both in the Spanish political institutions and the European Union as the hot returns in the border were allowed by the European Court of Human Rights (Fernández García, 2020).

This acceptance of this new policy by Morocco was not shown publicly, as Morocco attempted to position itself as a relevant country in the North of Africa and the rest of the African continent. The new aspirations of the Kingdom of Morocco towards achieving a leadership position in Africa, caused a shift with the public position of Morocco towards the Spanish “hot returns” as it was perceived as a mistreatment of the Spanish authorities towards migrants; however, this public position did not change the collaboration and acceptance of Morocco with these practices. The closeness and exceptional communication between the authorities on this problematic became affected due to an incident between Mohammed VI and the Spanish security forces in 2014; this episode led to a lack of intervention from the Moroccan security forces for two consecutive days, against illegal migrants attempting to cross the border in Ceuta and Melilla (Fernández, 2015).

The aforementioned incident displays the standing of the foreign relations situation between Morocco and Spain, as being permanently subjected to events that could lead either to a betterment or worsening of the existing state of the diplomatic relations. The appropriate response of the Moroccan authorities to the incident with Mohammed VI and the Spanish security forces should have an official protest to the Spanish authorities; the reply of the Moroccans to allow the free transit of the migrants to Ceuta and Melilla does not correspond to the excellent relations between the Rajoy administration and the Moroccans. The framework established in the Treaty of Friendship between Morocco and Spain was designed specifically to avoid situations which could threaten the good relations between the countries and



avoid abnormal practices that could be considered detrimental for diplomatic relations.

Although the foreign relations between the two Kingdoms were considered fruitful and positive, certain issues were not debated between the governments. The Western Sahara was a topic Rajoy's administration avoided in any forum with their Moroccan counterparts; this could be interpreted as not fulfilling the responsibility the Kingdom of Spain has with the Western Sahara and its people. This avoidance was carefully designed by the Spanish authorities to encourage the collaboration of the Moroccan authorities in anti-drug trafficking, illegal migration and counter-terrorism operations; conflicting topics could sour the relations between the Kingdoms and create a crisis in the future. This restraint of the Rajoy administration towards topics, such as, the Western Sahara, could indicate a direct correlation between these topics and Ceuta and Melilla; the less Spain becomes involved in these topics, the less Morocco will pressure the Spanish authorities in regards to these territories.

The Rajoy administration could be analyzed as a continuation of the policies promoted by Zapatero, reinforcing the cooperation and collaboration between the two countries and creating a network of interests to prevent tensions in the diplomatic relations. The complicity between the Kingdoms was shown in handling the illegal migration problematic in Ceuta and Melilla, among other issues that require a close collaboration between them. The economic recovery of Spain, as result of the economic policies done by the Rajoy administration, helped shift back towards Spain the balance of power in the bilateral relation, thus preventing Morocco advancing their position and postulates in regards to Ceuta and Melilla without any opposition from the Spanish authorities.

### **3.7 Sanchez's presidency:**

The new administration of Pedro Sanchez, from the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), came to power on the 1st of June of 2018 after a no confidence vote against Rajoy which succeeded (La Moncloa, 2018); the new government of Sanchez was viewed in Morocco with uncertainty as the previous administration was held in high regard between the Moroccan political class. This skepticism over the new administration was confirmed furthermore, as after the 2020 elections Sanchez reached an agreement with the far left party Podemos to govern together and include members of both parties in the new cabinet led by Sanchez (La Vanguardia, 2020). Podemos was one of the many political parties that were against the plans of Morocco towards the Western Sahara as it is stated in their political program “...apoyaremos con acciones concretas el derecho a la libre determinación del pueblo saharauí...” (Podemos, 2023), therefore members of the Spanish government were publicly against Morocco in this regard and were aligned with the Saharais; this new coalition government led by Sanchez could cause tensions with Morocco over the Western Sahara and provoke an answer from the Moroccans, which could involve Ceuta and Melilla.

The Sanchez administration had to deal with an unseen issue with Morocco, as the Moroccan authorities decided unilaterally to close the border with Melilla for one day on the 31st of July 2018, causing concern among the population of Melilla as an extended closure of the border could cripple the economy of Melilla, dependent of the commercial exchanges between Spain and Morocco (Cembrero, 2018). This event could not be explained as there were no major reasons for Morocco to close the border, but it could be analyzed as a way to test the response of the new Spanish government; however, the Sanchez administration did not issue any response to this event, which could either be considered a weakness or a complete trust on the bilateral relations with the Moroccans.

The new government in Spain was expected to follow the route of the previous administrations, Zapatero and Rajoy, by maintaining certain “state” positions regarding different aspects of the bilateral relations with Morocco. The continuation of these policies would allow Spain to continue maintaining fluent and positive collaborations with the Moroccans, regardless of the position of their partners in government, Podemos, might have over certain aspects of the relationship. Since Sanchez is from the same political party as Zapatero, it was assumed that multilateralism and collaboration would be central in the design of the foreign policy of Sanchez towards Morocco (Europa Press, 2022), as these ideas would be best in preventing actions of Morocco against Ceuta and Melilla.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a sudden closure of the borders all around the world, including Ceuta and Melilla as the free transit of people and merchandise could increase the spread of the virus in these territories, as well as, other Spanish and Moroccan regions. However, Ceuta and Melilla acknowledged the exceptional situation due to the virus but the complete lockdown of the border meant a total constriction of the economy of both of these territories, as they depend on the free flow of people and merchandise. This lockdown caused an increase of unemployment and tension among the population due to the uncertainty in the border and the lack of a schedule for the reopening of the border from both the Moroccan and Spanish authorities (Peña, 2022). The border was not reopened until two years later but the damage done to both Ceuta and Melilla and Morocco, in regards to their economy, was very severe due to: the Covid-19 pandemic and the lack of free flow of any kind in the border.

The Sanchez administration would face again a new crisis with Morocco as the leader of the Western Sahara Polisario Front, Brahim Ghali, the main opposition towards the Moroccan occupation of this territory was secretly transported from Algeria to Spain to be treated due to the Covid-19 virus in a special flight and with a false diplomatic passport in 2021 (Coarasa,

2023). This transport of Ghali to a Spanish hospital could not have occurred with the express permission of the Spanish authorities and the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Arantxa Gonzalez Laya; the Moroccan authorities were extremely discontent with this “*collaboration*” between the Spanish authorities and the Polisario Front, as they were engaging in armed conflict with the Moroccan security forces. The Moroccans considered this an act of aggression from the Spanish authorities towards Morocco and a deliberate attempt on damaging the diplomatic relations between the two Kingdoms (HuffPost, 2021).

The “Ghali Case” could be considered to be an ineffective attempt from the Sanchez administration and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs on assisting the Saharais covertly, to avoid the backlash of the Moroccan authorities to this assistance (Val, 2021). The result was the contrary, as the diplomatic relations with Morocco were at their lowest point since the invasion of Perejil in 2002 and the repercussions could directly affect Ceuta and Melilla, as they are territories that suffer heavily if Morocco decides to increase the pressure over them either in economic or migration issues.

The central role of Gonzalez Laya in the “Ghali Case” due to the false diplomatic passport and the attempt of withholding the information to the Spanish judiciary authorities, effectively made her a null diplomatic representative towards the Moroccans, as diplomatic relations should be based in mutual trust and transparency and the Ministry did not respect this spirit of the relations (Val, 2021); the Moroccan ambassador was recalled, as a formal protest for the actions of the Sanchez administration and as an attempt to pressure Sanchez to substitute Gonzalez Laya in the Ministry if Spain wished to repair the relationship. Gonzalez Laya was substituted the 12th of July of 2021 by José Manuel Albares, a career diplomat with ample experience, to attempt on rebuilding the bilateral relations before the crisis; this change was seen as a way of pacifying and pleasing the Moroccan authorities, showing the importance and influence Morocco has inside of

Spain and the weakness the Sanchez administration projects towards the Moroccans (Mouden, 2021).

However, this normalization of the relations did not come clear handed as the border of Ceuta and Melilla saw an unseen “*invasion*” of illegal migrants, in May of 2021, around 8,000 migrants attempted to cross the border, which furthermore increased the tensions between Spain and Morocco. This “*invasion*” on Spanish territory was analyzed as a response from the Moroccans to the actions of the Sanchez administration of the “Ghali Case”; the Moroccans did not participate directly in this “*invasion*” but the free transit of this migrants through Moroccan territory and reaching the border of Ceuta and Melilla could not be achieved without the support of the Moroccan authorities (Valle, 2021).

The use of illegal migrants, a large number of them minors, by the Moroccan authorities was condemned by different Spanish political parties and various European Union authorities, as this “*invasion*” was viewed as an attack on Spanish territories i.e EU territory (RTVE, 2021). On the other hand, the Sanchez administration did not correlate publicly these incidents in the border with the “Ghali Case”, according to the Minister of Treasury and Spokesperson of the Government: María Jesús Montero said “...*las crisis migratorias responden a causas múltiples y complejas para establecer una relación causa efecto, por tanto, hay diferentes elementos y factores, que pueden estar incidiendo en la llegada de las personas migrantes a nuestras fronteras*” (La Moncloa, 2021), even though it was very clear the connection between Ghali and the events of Ceuta and Melilla (La Moncloa, 2021); this lack of a response from the Spanish authorities could be linked with the will of repairing the relations with Morocco and not increase the existing tension furthermore. This crisis has confirmed the fact that the fate of the Western Sahara and Ceuta and Melilla are interlinked, as any action that the Spanish authorities take over their former colony, directly affects Ceuta and Melilla.

The “*invasion*” of Ceuta and Melilla also presented another actor to the Ceuta and Melilla problematic, as the European Union is now more involved with issues at the border that would fall under the scope of bilateral relations between Spain and Morocco. The EU provides greater juridical and political assistance to Spain in engaging with Morocco, as having the support of multiple continents and the attention of the respective governments of the member countries would decrease the tension and the potential conflicts between the Spanish and Moroccan authorities (Valle, 2021). The Moroccan plans of assimilating Ceuta and Melilla are contrary to the will of the EU in preserving and defending the European Union territory, including the aforementioned territories. The continuation of hostilities between Spain and Morocco, over Ceuta and Melilla, could threaten the investments of the EU in Morocco; this lack of European financial backing could threaten the internal stability of Morocco, as the country is receiving great sums of EU grants over the next years (RTVE, 2022).

The new Spanish foreign Minister, Albares, attempted to redirect the bilateral relations between the two countries towards a total reconciliation but this attempt was unsuccessful as the Moroccan authorities refused any ventures of normalization of the relations. The Moroccans wished for a gesture that would show the will of the Sanchez administration on mending the relations, this gesture would come with a written letter Pedro Sanchez directed to Mohammed VI in March 2022, in regards to the Western Sahara (Muñoz, 2023). The subject matter of this missive was secret and personally addressed to the King of Morocco but it was leaked to the media; this leak was attributed to the Moroccans as they were the only other party that knew of the contents of the letter. This leak violated the Treaty of Friendship of 1991, in which the relations should be based on good faith and good communication (BOE, 1991); it was also a violation of the norms of diplomacy, as classified written exchanges between governments should not be released to the public without an agreement between the parties.

The content of the leaked letter of Sanchez concerned the future of the Western Sahara, as in the letter the Sanchez administration agrees with the postulates of the Moroccans of the Moroccan Autonomy plan of 2007. This plan involved assimilating the Western Sahara into their core territory and becoming a Moroccan province; the aforementioned plan effectively takes away the right of self-determination of the Saharai people and the freedom of choice of either becoming independent or becoming part of Morocco (Muñoz, 2023). This agreement of the Sanchez administration to the Moroccan plans came as a shock to every diplomat and government in the world, as the Sanchez administration had effectively changed their historic position towards the Western Sahara, as previous administrations defended an arrangement between the Saharais and the Moroccans. This concession of the Spanish authorities towards Morocco was seen as a victory by the Moroccan political class and an important step towards fulfilling the territorial integrity; this could open the possibility of “*recovering*” Ceuta and Melilla, as Spain had allowed the return of Western Sahara back to Morocco.

The postulates of this letter are also contradictory to international law, as it is inconsistent with UN resolutions regarding the Western Sahara, which promote a dialogue and referendum to decide the future of this territory (Carrión, 2022). This missive was regarded, both nationally and internationally, as a concession of the Spanish authorities towards Morocco; the indulgence of the Sanchez administration towards Morocco over the Western Sahara could be analyzed as an attempt to return to previous diplomatic status between the two countries and avoid further conflicts over Ceuta and Melilla.

The letter of Sanchez helped rebuild the ties between the two Kingdoms, as a very important issue for the Moroccans now had the support for the first time of the Spanish government. The normal free flow of people and merchandise resumed in Ceuta and Melilla and collaboration between the Spanish and Moroccan authorities in security issues in the border and the

Mediterranean were normal and fully functioning. However, the leaked letter did cause a very direct negative effect to the foreign relations of Spain as Algeria, a key ally in the Maghreb region since the Aznar administration, broke off the Treaty of Friendship, suspended any foreign commercial exchange between Algeria and Spain and recalled the Algerian ambassador (Campo, 2022). This reaction from Algeria was expected as the Algerians and the Polisario Front are close allies and they are entirely against the plan of Morocco and the shift of Spain towards the Western Sahara, as it aligns with the proposals of Morocco who is a rival/enemy of both the Algerians and Saharais.

The Sanchez administration had to face a new reality in the Maghreb region, after the alignment of the Spanish foreign policy towards the Western Sahara to the plans of the Moroccans for the territory, as one of the key countries in the area have effectively cut all diplomatic ties and will not collaborate with the Spanish authorities in different security issues, such as, illegal migration. This lack of cooperation could affect Ceuta and Melilla, as this issue requires the collaboration of both Spain, Morocco and Algeria to avoid further migration crisis at the Spanish border.

This shift of the Sanchez administration from an “active neutrality” position to defend a position of one of the parties, Morocco, has taken away the diplomatic credibility of Spain towards other countries and has increased the power of Morocco in the bilateral relations (Casani & Tomé-Alonso, 2023). Any future shift by incoming Spanish governments of this new position towards the Western Sahara will be a predicament, as this agreement with the Moroccans does not align with International Law and will need to be revoked; this possible shift would increase the pressure by the Moroccans towards Ceuta and Melilla, as they are territories vulnerable to “unconventional” measures taken by the Moroccans authorities. A possible future support of the Spanish government towards the original plan of referendum in the Western Sahara, would be viewed in Morocco as a support



to Algeria, therefore tensions would be increased between Morocco and Spain, affecting Ceuta and Melilla.

The new chapter of the relations between Morocco and Spain after the letter, was considered very positive as it assured the complete support and collaboration of the Moroccans on different issues that affected the border and the two countries (La Moncloa, 2022). However, this new complicity between the two governments did not entail a lack of controversies over Ceuta and Melilla as the Moroccan government continued to claim in different public forums, such as, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in October 2022, the lack of physical frontiers between Spain and Morocco in the African continent<sup>17</sup>. This declaration by the Moroccan government was swiftly clarified, thus the Moroccan authorities recognized the existence of borders between Morocco and Spain; this declaration of the Moroccans show their will on “*recovering*” Ceuta and Melilla, irregardless of the good relations between the two Kingdoms at any point in time.

The Sanchez administration also had to deal with internal dissent over the status of Ceuta and Melilla as Spanish territory, as former members of government from the Zapatero administration were aligning themselves with the statements of Morocco over these territories<sup>18</sup>. This lack of uniformity inside Spain between the political class hindered the position of Ceuta and Melilla as part of Spain, thus weakening the position of Spain over these territories and enabling Morocco to pressure for negotiations between the two Kingdoms over them. This dissent was unforeseen, as the defense of Ceuta and Melilla as part of Spain was considered a State position, regardless of the political party in power in the government of Spain; the former minister was reprimanded by both her party and the Spanish government, but the image

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<sup>17</sup> "El Reino de Marruecos no cuenta con fronteras terrestres con España y Melilla sigue siendo un presidio ocupado y por este motivo, no se puede hablar de fronteras, sino de simples puntos de paso" (Europa Press. (2022).

<sup>18</sup> Maria Trujillo, former Minister of Housing –"Ceuta y Melilla y los peñones e islotes suponen una afrenta a la integridad territorial de Marruecos" (Coll, V. 2022).

projected towards Morocco was a lack of unity over the aforementioned territories.

The meeting of NATO in Madrid in June 2022 came at a key moment in history, as international relations in the world were drastically changing and the future of modern Europe was at stake due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (The White House, 2022). The Sanchez administration celebrated this meeting, as it would be an ideal forum for a discussion between allies of the status of Ceuta and Melilla inside the Atlantic Alliance. The Spanish authorities defended the need of changing article 5 of the Treaty of the Alliance, as it did not specify explicitly Ceuta and Melilla which could be subjected to outside pressures of third countries, such as, Morocco among others; a strong declaration of the Alliance regarding these territories would force the Moroccans to not continue their plans for these areas.

The new Strategic Concept of NATO was approved by the member States and the Sanchez administration was pleased as the new Concept was considered a support over Spanish sovereignty over Ceuta and Melilla and a new layer of security was added to these territories. The new Strategic concept did not change article 5 of the Treaty of the Alliance but it expanded the concept of self-defense for the national territory of the member countries of the Alliance; according to NATO “...*nadie debe dudar de nuestra fuerza y determinación a la hora de defender cada centímetro del territorio aliado, preservar la soberanía y la integridad territorial de todos los Aliados y prevalecer frente a cualquier agresor*” (Ministerio de Defensa, 2022); therefore, it was interpreted and accepted that Ceuta and Melilla were included in Spanish national territory and should be protected to defend their national territorial integrity (RTVE, 2022). This change in the interpretation of art. 5 could be analyzed as a considerable problem for Morocco, as now Spain has the support of both the EU and NATO for the aforementioned

territories; any actions that involve Ceuta and Melilla could be interpreted as an aggression towards Spanish national territory.

The Sanchez government, in regards to foreign policy, could be compared with the Aznar administration as both Presidents dedicated personal time towards fulfilling diplomatic objectives and were personally involved in diplomatic decisions. This involvement of Sanchez in the foreign policy could be seen in the letter directed to Mohammed VI regarding the Western Sahara; the letter was personally signed by Sanchez and appealed directly to the Moroccan King, acting individually instead of referring to his status as the representative of the Spanish government. The lack of a comprehensive diplomatic action to solve the crisis due to the Ghali Case, possibly prompted a deeper involvement of Sanchez to solve the crisis between the two countries.

The Sanchez administration could be analyzed as being the most conflictive administration with Morocco since the instauration of the democracy in Spain in 1978. The relations between the Moroccans and the Spanish authorities were at their lowest due to different actions of the Sanchez presidency that jeopardized the established diplomatic ties between the two Kingdoms; the historic shift of the Sanchez government towards the Western Sahara could prove to be a grave mistake, as it has compromised the international status of Spain and opened the possibility for Morocco to a future negotiation over Ceuta and Melilla. The new chapter of bilateral relations with the Moroccans appear to be uncertain and not clear, as the Sanchez administration appears not to have a clear diplomatic project towards Morocco; nonetheless Ceuta and Melilla are still being defended by the Spanish authorities against any attempt that would jeopardize its status as part of Spain.

#### **4. Conclusions:**

This Final Degree Project has analyzed the bilateral relations between Morocco and Spain and the dilemma over Ceuta and Melilla, under the scope of two important theories that have shaped International Relations: Political Realism and Liberalism. This work has studied the different Spanish administrations since the establishment of democracy in 1976 and the various relevant policies and actions executed towards Morocco and the aforementioned territories. The cooperation between the two Kingdoms is key for the safety and survival of both Ceuta and Melilla, as these territories require a complete understanding between the Moroccan and Spanish authorities.

The importance of Ceuta and Melilla for the Moroccans can be traced back to the independence times of Morocco after the dissolution of the Protectorate in 1956 as it has been shown throughout this work; the aforementioned territories are considered key for the future plans of the Moroccan authorities of becoming a regional power in Africa. The “return” of these territories to Morocco would help increase the popularity of the Moroccan government and King among the Moroccan population. On the other hand, Ceuta and Melilla are a very important trading area for the Spanish State and a key sector to combat both drug and human trafficking; the hispanity of these territories and the membership of these territories in the Spanish Kingdom will remain a State position for incoming Spanish administrations, regardless of their political orientation as it has occurred since the establishment of democracy in Spain.

The interdependence between the two States over Ceuta and Melilla has forced a coexistence between the Spanish and the Moroccans through different treaties and increased political dialogue. Even though these territories were still a topic of hefty debate for the political parties of both countries; however, the lack of collaboration and understanding between Morocco and Spain could be disastrous for the security and prosperity of the

Maghreb area and the Mediterranean. The past Spanish administrations have demonstrated the will of protecting Ceuta and Melilla and continue their integration in the Spanish State both juridically and in practice; the Spanish authorities also have demonstrated their disposal of deepening their ties with Morocco, through collaboration and dialogue, in order to lessen the effects the aforementioned territories could have in the mind of the Moroccans. However, this Liberal foreign policy towards Morocco will not weaken the will of the Spanish authorities to defend and protect these territories from any threats, both internally and externally.

The connection between Ceuta and Melilla and the Western Sahara is unavoidable and the future of one of these territories could decide the status of the others. The incoming Spanish administrations will need to have a balance between collaboration and firmness with the Moroccan authorities over the aforementioned territories. The condition of the bilateral relations between Spain and Morocco will remain connected to these territories and will continue to affect areas of interest such as security, commerce, free transit of people and merchandise through the border.

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