



## Spain's Bluster Masks an Immigration Crisis

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The United States and Europe are facing many of the same challenges on the issue of immigration. But within Europe, few countries have a more troubled—indeed contradictory—approach to illegal immigration than does Spain.

By any measure, Spain is a magnet for immigration: During the past ten years, the number of immigrants in Spain has skyrocketed nine-fold to 4.5 million; immigrants now make up a whopping ten percent of the total population of Spain, a country that for much of the last century was an exporter rather than an importer of immigrants.

Up until early 2005, half of all immigrants in Spain were undocumented, a problem that Zapatero decided to “fix” by granting the

largest blanket amnesty in Spanish history to nearly one million of them. But while the politically correct prime minister regularly boasts that his “humane” approach to immigration has added a multitude of new contributors to Spain’s financially unsustainable social security system, he has been less willing to acknowledge that his leniency has triggered an avalanche of uncontrolled immigration.

In fact, official statistics confirm that today (just two years after Zapatero’s amnesty) there are now more than one million new illegal immigrants in Spain. Many Spaniards are asking themselves how this could happen, but the answer is obvious. By rewarding illegal immigrants with Spanish (and thus European) documentation, Zapatero has

unleashed what is known as the “call effect” to people as far away as Kashmir who now believe that Spain is an easy gateway into Europe.

And indeed it is. Because according to Spanish law, if an individual enters Spain legally on a three-month tourist visa, overstays that visa for 24 months, and then presents the immigration authorities with a labor contract, that person automatically becomes legal.

Why is Spain so lenient? One reason is because Spaniards are getting rich on cheap immigrant labor. In fact, hundreds of thousands of low-paid immigrants are the fodder that fuels two of Spain’s most important industries: agriculture and construction. And it is above all a construction boom that has transformed Spain into one Europe’s fastest growing economies.

Another reason is because at 0.7 children per woman, [Spain has one of the lowest birthrates in the world](#), and studies show that to keep the Spanish pension system from bankrupting, immigrants will have to make up 20 percent of Spain’s population by 2030. Spain’s demographic crisis is so troubling that Zapatero has just promised to pay a 2,500 euro (\$3,400) “[baby bonus](#)” for every newborn child as an incentive to boost the birthrate.

Combine these factors with Zapatero’s never-ending populist rhetoric about the need for “solidarity” with developing countries and it comes as no surprise that would-be immigrants in Africa and elsewhere

perceive (correctly) that Spain is deliberately lax on illegal immigration. So masses of people who dream of a better life in Europe keep coming and coming...by the hundreds day in and day out. Some 25,000 “economic migrants” have arrived in the Canary Islands so far this year alone.

But many of them do not arrive alive. The waters separating Spain from Africa are notoriously turbulent and the corpses of would-be migrants are washing up on the shores of Spain’s prized tourist beaches almost daily. Up to 3,000 migrants are estimated to have drowned this year alone, a gruesome spectacle which, more than anything else, has created a public relations nightmare for the Spanish government.

In the face of a public outcry over the government’s inaction, Zapatero now senses the political need to appear tough on illegal immigration. But because Spain’s immigration problem has spiraled completely out of control, [Zapatero now says the problem is a European problem and as such he has tried to put the onus on other EU member states to find a solution](#). He wants the EU to dedicate a substantial part of its 2007-2013 frontier control budget to the southern border, for example.

But the EU’s response has been tepid. Indeed, most EU countries believe that Zapatero started the crisis with his indulgent immigration policies and, as such, he should find the solution as well. In the words of French President Nicolas Sarkozy: “We see the damage

caused by the phenomenon of massive regularization. Every country which has conducted an operation of massive regularization finds itself

the next month [in a position that] does not allow it to master the situation anymore.”.

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