

# EU-28 WATCH



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# EU-28 Watch

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## On the project

Euroscepticism and the European Parliament elections in 2014, the EU's Neighbourhood in light of the Ukraine crisis and power relations in the EU: The EU-28 Watch project is mapping out discourses on these issues in European policies all over Europe. Research institutes from all 28 member states as well as Iceland, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey give overviews on the discourses in their respective countries.

This survey was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire that has been elaborated in March 2014. Most of the 33 reports were delivered in June 2014. This issue and all previous issues are available on the EU-28 Watch website: [www.EU-28Watch.org](http://www.EU-28Watch.org).

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## Spain

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### 1. Euroscepticism and European Parliament elections

#### ***National interests take the fore while EU frontrunners only garner some attention***

The economic situation, including the dramatic need for creating jobs, has been undoubtedly the most important issue in the electoral campaign in Spain. All parties broadly share the idea that the economic policy should tend to stimulate the economy instead of promoting austerity. However, there are differences depending on the party: while the ruling Popular Party (PP) considers the sacrifices already made as necessary, left wing parties disagree. Maybe the most significant example of this is the recently created party *Podemos* which obtained almost 8% of the popular vote and is very assertive in its anti-austerity creed. In Catalonia, the debate revolved around the support for pro-independence formulas.

Although national issues were the focus of the campaign, from a European point of view, the management of the Euro crisis has been the most important issue. To a lesser extent, the TTIP negotiations have also been mentioned, as well as the European strategy in Ukraine and the crisis with Russia. In contrast to previous elections, there was little discussion about cohesion funds or the Common Agriculture Policy.

Some analysts, due to the existence of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, have labelled these elections as "historical". This novelty has had impact in some European countries, including Spain. The final TV debate between the *Spitzenkandidaten* was only broadcasted by a single news channel with an audience share of less than 1%. Nevertheless, all of the candidates visited Spain and were interviewed by the Spanish press. Martin Schulz was quite present in several PSOE campaign acts. Jean Claude Juncker participated in lower profile political encounters with journalists. Guy Verhofstadt was in Barcelona endorsing CDC (the main party in the Catalan regional government). Finally, the leftist coalition Plural Left tried to take advantage of the popularity of Alexis Tsipras among more critical voters.

Links:

- Analysis by Miguel Otero-Iglesias and Kristina Lani. Published on 4 August 2014.  
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2014/08/04/coverage-of-the-commission-president-candidates-in-the-spanish-media-shows-the-spitzenkandidaten-process-had-a-wide-reach-across-europe/>

#### ***Still largely Pro-European***

Euroscepticism has played no role in Spain so far. Even though the two major parties, PP and PSOE, have lost voters in favour of minority parties, Eurosceptic parties have not occupied this space, as has been the case in other European countries.

The causes of the inexistence of a Europeanism/anti-Europeanism cleavage in Spain lay in the 40-year isolationist dictatorship of General Franco and the majoritarian features of the Spanish democracy. As the well-known philosopher José Ortega y Gasset pointed out, due to Spain's troubled history, Spaniards have traditionally consider that "Spain was the problem and Europe the solution".

Despite the inexistence of successful Eurosceptic parties in Spain, it is also true that the level of Europeanism varies depending on the party. Greece (with Syriza winning the elections) and Spain

(with Plural Left or *Podemos* achieving great results) are paradigmatic examples of European countries whose electorates are asking for a rethinking of their relationship with Brussels. In our country, smaller parties (particularly anti-austerity movements on the left, sometimes called Eurocritics) are against the way in which the European Union has been run in recent years and demand a rupture with the past.

Links:

- Salvador Llaudes & Ignacio Molina (2014): *Spain: an inward-looking and dispirited (but still pro-European) campaign* in “Between Apathy and Anger: Challenges to the Union from the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament”, EPIN Paper 39.  
<http://www.ceps.eu/book/between-apaty-and-anger-challenges-union-2014-elections-european-parliament>

### ***Leading two Parties take a hit while populists and separatists flourish***

PP and PSOE, the main parties in Spain, could not even reach a 50% combined share of the votes. This is a huge difference as compared to the more than 80% the two received in the previous elections to the European Parliament. These results have been considered as an indictment of the traditional two-party system in Spain, blaming both parties for the existing corruption, the high levels of unemployment, and the austerity policies implemented in the last few years.

The loss of support for both PP and PSOE has not been the only news in the elections. In Catalonia, “The Left for the Right to Decide” (composed mainly of the Republican Left of Catalonia, a pro-independence party), has achieved a great success superseding the until now moderate nationalists of CiU. At the same time, other small parties have taken advantage of the loss of support for PP and PSOE, gaining much more support than five years ago. In particular, the Plural Left (composed by the United Left of the European Unitarian Left, and by ICV, member of the Green coalition), saw large representative gains with 6 MEPs. Furthermore the centrist Union, Progress and Democracy (or UPyD) made gains with 4 MEPs.

But the greatest surprise of the elections was *Podemos*, an anti-austerity party which to some extent is the heir of the Indignants 15M Movement and has gained almost 8% of the electorate only 3 months after its creation. A great part of the success of this party lays in its communication campaign, notably on television. Its leader, Pablo Iglesias, managed to appear several times a week on TV infotainment shows with large audiences, thus gaining mass notoriety quickly.

The European Parliament elections have been traditionally characterized by a high abstention rate. Things have not been any different this time around at neither at the European nor the Spanish level. These low results reflect perception that these elections are considered “second-order elections”, not as important as the general, regional or even local elections. In Spain in particular, turnout has only reached 42,54% (43% in 2009).

Links:

- Spanish results to the European elections:  
<http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/country-results-es-2014.html>

## **2.The EU’s Neighbourhood**

### ***Public opinion of Russia and Putin very poor among most Spaniards***

Although the conflict with Russia revealed the weakness of the EU’s foreign policy and Europe’s strong energy dependence on the Russian Federation, Spain is reluctant to adopt more sweeping measures against Russia because of specific economic interests which could harm its own economy. Moscow is a top oil supplier for Spain (14% of total imports in 2013), and in addition is considered a key partner in tourism and real estate, two crucial sectors for the Spanish economic recovery. Only on the occasion of the annexation of Crimea, did Spain stand firmly with Brussels against Russia’s

violation of international law. This position, like the Spanish one on Kosovo's independence, is primarily shaped by Madrid's own internal issues.

In Spain there are divided opinions about bilateral relations with Russia. While there is a surprisingly good opinion (although not ubiquitous) of Russia among the Spanish elite and politicians, The Spanish people have a very negative image of Russia and its leader. People's views on Russia have strongly deteriorated since last year, according to the latest 24-country poll of the BBC World Service. The increasing disapproval of Russia is a worldwide trend, but is particularly marked in Kenya (up 16 points), Spain (up 15 points), Brazil (up 13 points) and Canada (up 12 points). According to the 35<sup>th</sup> wave of the Elcano Barometer (May 2014), Putin's image has descended from 3.1 to 2.4 in the latest months, being the worst valued of all the international leaders proposed in the study. In the same study, Russia finds itself last among all countries with a punctuation of 3.8 out of 10, most probably due to the events of the Ukrainian crisis.

Links:

- Nicolás de Pedro: "How should Europe respond to Russia? The Spanish view", ECFR. [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_how\\_should\\_europe\\_respond\\_to\\_russia\\_the\\_spanish\\_view354](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_should_europe_respond_to_russia_the_spanish_view354)
- Russian image has deteriorated - BBC World Service poll. *BBC News World*, 3 June 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/27685494>
- Elcano 35 Barometer: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/encuesta?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CO NTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/barometro/oleadabrie35#.U5hJ0hbtBAQ](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/encuesta?WCM_GLOBAL_CO NTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/barometro/oleadabrie35#.U5hJ0hbtBAQ)

### ***Reluctant to call out Putin, but not shy about need for integrated European energy market***

The Eastern Partnership, one of the two components of the European Neighbourhood Policy, is the one in which Spain has had traditionally less interest. In contrast, the Mediterranean region is a historical priority for Spain. Therefore, though events in Ukraine show the lack of a European strategic vision and the existence of difficulties in relations towards the Russian Federation, Spain has not played a predominant role in dealing with the crisis.

The events that have taken place affect energy relations between Europe and the Eastern countries, meaning that the Ukrainian crisis has important economic consequences to the EU as a whole. The large debt owed to Gazprom has resulted in a rise in all prices. Strongly related to that is the need to promote interconnections that allow for a physically integrated European gas market to offset the market power of Gazprom.

Although Spain is in need of natural gas, it does not import it from Russia, but rather from Algeria and other providers. Spain is trying to consolidate itself as an energy hub, but it is firstly necessary to promote the interconnections between our country and France. The European Commission recently renewed its focus on creating the conditions to build a so-called Energy Union within the continent. This may help Spain's aspirations to become that aforementioned hub.

Links:

- See Alejandro Barón: Spanish foreign policy monitor: January-March 2014. *FRIDE*, Policy Brief, N° 180 - May 2014 <http://www.fride.org/publication/1193/spanish-foreign-policy-monitor:-january-march-2014>

### ***Spain, a friend to Turkey without the means to impose its vision***

Overall, and unlike other countries such as Germany or France, Turkey's candidacy for the EU has always been strongly supported by Spanish policy-makers. Spain and Turkey share certain historic



Merkel/anti-Germany sentiment was utilized in the last electoral campaign by Pablo Iglesias, the leader of the recently created *Podemos* party. He explicitly said that he “would fight to stop Spain being a German colony” and that “Spain was a country controlled by the Troika”.

On the contrary, the ruling Popular Party has a pro-German attitude and very good relations with the conservative CDU. PP pictures Spain as a “Germany of the South”, engaged with the European Union at all levels, particularly focused on reaching the necessary economic stability.

Links:

- Elcano Barometer, December 2013. Available here: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano\\_es/encuesta?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CO NTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/barometro/oleadabrie34](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/web/rielcano_es/encuesta?WCM_GLOBAL_CO NTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/barometro/oleadabrie34)

### ***Austerity: largely opposed***

Spain is witnessing high unemployment rates and the strongest austerity measures since 2009-2010. While it is true that some indicators of the macroeconomic situation seem to have stabilized, it will take time to return to a tolerable situation for thousands of families who were affected by the crisis.

Voters are unsurprisingly angry and disappointed with politicians and institutions, both at the Spanish and European levels, something which was selected by the recent European elections. The economic situation and the unemployment rate rank consistently as the main worries of the Spanish population in all studies and were naturally the most important topics of the recent campaign.

It is a shared view amongst parties from the Spanish political spectrum (but particularly intense in the opposition) that the country’s economic policy should shift from austerity policies to stimulus measures, and any measure undertaken in that sense by the European Central Bank is broadly celebrated. Notwithstanding this, the Government considers the incipient growth of the country as proof of the success of its austerity measures. For that reason, the Government likes to call itself a “champion” of reforms at the European level, in contrast with other Member States such as Italy or France, not to mention Greece, who have not been able to take the necessary measures so far. The behaviour of the markets seems to confirm this.

Links:

- Such as the risk Premium, now stable at 120 points. <http://countryeconomy.com/risk-premium/spain>

### ***Spain views possible Brexit passionlessly but watches independence vote in Scotland closely***

The possibility of a British exit from the EU is a controversial issue not only in Europe as a whole, but also in Spain, a country that shares many things in common with the UK. Despite the dispute with Gibraltar, and Spain being a much more pro-European country than the UK, both countries share an interest in deepening the Internal Market. At the same, Britain and Spain favour reaching an ambitious agreement with the United States on the TTIP, and many of the British nationals live in Spain and viceversa.

In spite of the economic crisis, most Spaniards continue to support EU membership and believe that only deeper integration can provide a solution to the eurozone’s current difficulties and future viability. Spaniards also seem to view that Britain has little to offer in this regard. Even if it is broadly agreed upon that a UK exit would be a major loss for Spain, the United Kingdom and the EU as a whole, Spanish elites are no longer unduly concerned by the possibility of it.

From a Spanish point of view, David Cameron has shown a surprising interest in dealing with complex questions via direct democracy concerning Scotland. If in the 2011 consultation there was a clear majority against changing the UK’s electoral system, in the 2014 the victory over the supporters of pro-independence positions was very narrow and only attained through promises of devolution of more powers to Scotland. This last referendum has had implications for Spain, as the regional

government of Catalonia has actively asked for the possibility of holding a referendum on independence. Since the consultation in Scotland, pro-independence supporters in Catalonia have gained momentum and received lots of press from the international media.

Links:

- Charles Powell, Director of the Elcano Royal Institute, comments on Judy Dempsey's "Judy Asks: has the EU already lost Britain?".  
<http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=57326>