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**DEFENCE AND  
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**NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

**SUB-COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSATLANTIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY  
CO-OPERATION**

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**VISIT TO SPAIN**

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**SECRETARIAT REPORT**

**13-15 OCTOBER 2004**

International Secretariat

25 October 2004

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\* This Secretariat Report is presented for information only and does not necessarily represent the official view of the Assembly.

Assembly documents are available in English, French and Spanish, <http://www.nato-pa.int>



1. Twelve members of the Defence and Security Committee Sub-Committee on Future Security and Defence Capabilities travelled to Spain to learn about Spain's military modernization program. Led by Sub-Committee chairman Julio Miranda-Calha (Portugal), the delegation met with top-level military officials and members of Parliament. The delegation also toured the Rota Naval Base, home to both US and Spanish forces.

2. General Enrique Perez, Deputy Director General for International Affairs, gave the delegation a basic overview of Spain's strategic position and outlook. He underlined that it was important to understand that Spain was highly isolated after World War II until the end of the Franco regime with the exception of the bi-lateral relationship with the United States. Even when Spain joined NATO in 1982, it still stayed out of the integrated military structure until 1999. This isolation and the legacy of a long period of military dictatorship have left much of the Spanish public dispassionate about the military and its role in international affairs. He noted the need to raise public awareness of defence and security issues.

3. General Perez cited five main areas of discussion that guide the direction of Spain's defence policy: (1) participation of defence forces in support of broader foreign policy goals, (2) connecting with the population through the university system to encourage defence and security issues awareness, (3) dialogue and co-operation with North Africa, (4) areas of activity for the Spanish armed forces, (5) professionalization and modernization of the armed forces.

4. Questions from the delegation focused on Spain's progress in making its forces more mobile. In response General Perez noted that Spain is close to the NATO target for usable forces, that is 40% of all forces should be deployable and 8% should be able to operate outside the country on a sustained basis. He also noted that Spain has only one set of forces and they will be used for both EU and NATO missions. As this is the case for most countries, it is important that the two institutions work together in a mutually reinforcing manner.

5. The Spanish armed forces, like many other militaries across Europe, is attempting to transform itself from a territorial defence force to one capable of projecting power in co-operation with allies. The focus is therefore on interoperability with other forces and shifting investment to assets that will allow its forces to be more deployable. Spain is interested in using its forces to project stability and is focused on using its forces under a UN umbrella. It is participating in 17 defence modernization project groups in both the EU and NATO and is working closely with other countries in the Mediterranean dialogue, as well as other initiatives in the region. Spain has recently increased its military co-operation with Morocco and will send a joint Spanish-Moroccan peacekeeping to Haiti in the near future.

6. Captain Blanco discussed the professionalization of the armed forces. Like most European countries, Spain had a conscript-based military through much of the cold war period. In 1990, however, Spain began to reduce the number of conscripts and moved toward a "mixed model" with more professional soldiers. But by 1994 public opposition to the increasing unfairness of the mixed model (which only required a minority of the draft-age men) forced the government to consider moving to an all-professional military. In 1998 Spain decided to end conscription and the last conscripts finished their service in 2001.

7. Adjusting to an all-professional force has not been easy. It has been difficult to maintain the desired size of the military. Recruitment is falling short of the goal of 80,000 professional soldiers by approximately 9,000. Part of this may be because of the poor image of the military in Spain given the history of the country, and the increasing competition from the civilian labour market. In addition, the decreasing birth rate is likely to reduce the available pool of recruits in the future, Spain, like most of Europe, has a birth rate below that which is needed to sustain the current size of the population.

8. Retention is also a serious issue. There is a high dropout rate among new recruits, but more importantly, Spain is confronting difficulties in keeping mid-career personnel. This is a common problem across the alliance, but Captain Blanco underlined the seriousness of the problem in Spain, noting that "the bottom line is retention".

9. In a discussion of Spain's military modernization, the delegation learned about plans to transform its forces. Spain has increased its military budget, although it remains low by NATO standards at approximately 1.3% of GDP. Nonetheless, it is spending more to procure additional resources in command, control and communications, with an emphasis on interoperability with other allies. Spain is also upgrading its helicopter fleet and purchasing several new naval vessels capable of carrying aircraft, tanks and personnel carriers to distant locations.

10. The delegation also met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff who discussed Spain's strategic program. The discussion focused on the reorganization of the military to make it a more effective and deployable force, as well as Spain's presence in multinational missions. Despite the well-publicized withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq, Spain has considerable numbers of troops in other missions. Spain increased its participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, doubling its contribution to over 1,000 troops. That makes it one of the larger contributors to that mission although about half of those troops are slated to return now that the election in Afghanistan has passed without serious security problems. Spain is also contributing to humanitarian relief operations in Haiti and peacekeeping operations in the Balkan region. Currently Spain has approximately 2,600 troops abroad, about 1000 in Afghanistan, 1,200 in Kosovo and Bosnia and 400 in Haiti. This does not appear to be stretching Spain's capability to deploy forces. Spain has the ability to sustain about 5,000 troops abroad provided the funds are available. The joint chiefs are aiming to be able to sustain two brigades, two air wings, and two naval squadrons on a continuous basis.

11. The delegation also met with their counterparts in the Spanish Parliament. At the moment, Spain is changing the role of the Parliament in defence issues, giving it more of a voice in key decisions. It was explained that the Spanish Parliament does not have the same role or control as its counterparts in, for example, Germany, but that it now has a chance to debate the issues and get explanations from the government about procurement decisions and deployments before they occur. The increasing role of the Parliament is a direct result of the controversy over Spain's participation in operations in Iraq. Many issues are under discussion including setting time limits on participation in international operations and the number of troops for particular deployments. A new law clarifying those responsibilities and a role for the Parliament will probably be enacted next year.

12. Some members of the delegation asked if there is a consensus across party lines in the Parliament about the direction of Spanish defence policy. The Spanish members replied that there is a broad consensus about the direction, but different views and concerns about how to fulfil the modernization program. Some are concerned about the level of investment and question if Spain is spending too much on current programs and not leaving enough room for starting new programs in information technology and C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance).

13. The delegation also travelled to the Rota Naval Base, a Spanish and US base built in the 1950s that has been of strategic value ever since. Currently there are 7,000 Spanish and 2,600 US personnel using the base. Other countries are also represented in both EU forces and NATO forces and are there as guests of the Spanish government. The base occupies an important geostrategic location halfway between the US and the Middle East and is close to the Straights of Gibraltar. The US pays for most of the investment in the base and a major upgrade of the piers will start soon. This will be of benefit to both Spanish, US, and other naval vessels operating in the area.

14. Rota is the main base for the Spanish Navy, and from there the navy conducts a variety of exercises and deployments and ships based there participate in a variety of NATO and EU maritime forces. On the day that the delegation visited, two Spanish ships were getting ready to leave for Haiti with 200 Spanish Marines aboard. The delegation also had a chance to visit the simulation training center where pilots can get state-of-the-art simulated flight experience. Not only do the simulators save money in terms of reduced flying hours, they allow pilots to practice dangerous missions and emergency situations in a safe environment.

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