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FOR: OPEX

SUBJECT: McCain's *LEAGUE OF DEMOCRACIES* PROJECT: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPANISH FOREIGN POLICY

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BACKGROUND

A priority of US presidential candidate Senator John McCain's foreign policy programme is a series of measures directed at restoring the moral authority of American leadership. Prominent among these measures – which must be interpreted as a series of corrections to the unilateralism of the Bush Administration over eight years – is the project to create a new organization, the League of Democracies (LD).

Presented by McCain as a “servant of freedom”, the League of Democracies is considered to be one of the most original proposals of the Republican candidate's programme as regards foreign policy. In the event of a Republican victory in the presidential elections this November, McCain has voiced his intention of calling – in the first year of his term of office – a summit of the democratic countries from across the world to take the first steps that will lead towards the creation of new international organization under this name. The Republican leader's proposal, therefore, goes beyond a mere political pact to acquire institutional importance.

What today is no more than a theoretical project could have real effects on the international order and on the position of Spain and Europe as a whole. Given that we cannot rule out the victory of the Republican candidate, Spain must be ready to tackle a proposal which **could have distorting effects on its foreign policy on several fronts.**

ANALYSIS

- **Theoretical premises**

This proposal has its roots in neocon thought of the previous Bush period and his doctrine of *regime change*, which, in turn, is a peculiar adaptation of the Kant-inspired democratic peace theory¹. It must not be forgotten that McCain has a major neoconservative presence among his foreign policy advisers (Kristol, Kagan, Woolsey, among others), for which reason the neoconservative approach of the League – essentially pro-Western and in favour of forming a front – may be taken into consideration by the Republican leader.

Supposedly, the LD would provide a more agile and less tortuous decision-taking mechanism than that of the United Nations, given that among the democracies there are common interests determined by their own internal political nature. In all the forums in which he has spoken – and particularly in his famous speech to the 42nd Munich Conference on Security Policy of 2006 – McCain has shown solid support for a NATO in permanent expansion and for the marginalization of Putin's Russia from the G-8 and from international institutions.

- **Operation**

As far as membership is concerned, it is too early to say what formal and actual requirements would be needed to take part. So far, McCain has said that **the League would be composed exclusively of the democratic states from around the world which wished to join, though obviously the League would be aimed at the USA's democratic allies.** The **criteria for membership would**

¹ The idea of creating such an organization is not new, rather it was already outlined in the early 1990s by the most idealistic branch of neoconservatism, the so-called “democratic globalists”, such as Muravchik and Gregory Fosseda, and has recently been championed by the Israeli Sharansky, one of the main intellectual references of George W. Bush.

therefore be ideological and not merely technical as it is more than likely that it will not be enough to be an electoral democracy if there is not also certain political affinity with the American Administration.

While we wait for this idea to take proper shape it can be said that it is a **significant advance in relation to the famous ad hoc coalitions of the willing** determined by the kind of military mission to be performed. Their philosophy is based on the USA taking a decision and its allies deciding whether to follow it or not, with minimum influence over the content of that decision. The League would be substantially different to these coalitions both in terms of its mission – the League would not be a military organization – and in terms of its degree of institutionalization, which would have a significant effect on the decision-taking process.

As for the **functions** the League would perform, McCain has listed a series of tasks which it could carry out:

- **humanitarian issues** (Darfur, AIDS); environmental or trade issues (access to markets)
- **promoting democracy** both directly or proactively (via concerted pressure on dictatorial regimes such as those of Myanmar or Zimbabwe, imposing sanctions on Iran or aid and support to incipient democracies such as Serbia and Ukraine) and indirectly or by setting an example (joining the League would be presented as a democratizing incentive to countries in democratic transition).
- **taking action wherever existing regional or universal systems are absent** or prove ineffective.

- **Provisional assessment**

There are several general criticisms of this proposal which can be made from various fronts:

- The basic and obvious one is that now more than ever in recent history, **democracies need the non-democracies to solve global problems**. The solution is not to exclude Russia, China or Iran, rather involve them in global governance.
- Democratic peace theory has clear limits for cooperation among democratic states: **the creation of a League does not resolve the division of democracies over key issues** such as trade, finance, climate change, energy or relations with third parties, as the disputes between the USA and the EU, or among EU members themselves, make clear.
- The LD has a somewhat tautological basis in its premise that democracies do not go to war with one another. In fact, if they are ready to do so, all it requires is to withdraw unilaterally the description as “liberal” or “democratic” from the other to begin a conflict. In this respect, **an LD could even have an immediate counterproductive effect: the emergence of a League of “real” democracies** led by countries such as Venezuela, Iran or Russia.

IMPLICATIONS

1. For the United Nations

The Republican candidate has declared that **the League would complement** current multilateral systems, which would imply that it would be subject to the authority of the highest executive body of the UN. However, this would be difficult to keep to as it seems clear that it would have an **immediate weakening effect on its powers as regards maintaining international peace and security** on account of the creation of a parallel structure that is actually a political copy of NATO, which can be extended indefinitely to those countries politically akin to the USA which so desire (Israel, Australia, Japan, etc).

2. For the EU

Given the importance which McCain gives to fresh impetus to transatlantic relations, Europe would come to comprise the hard core of a potential League of Democracies. **The main effect** of the US Administration tabling the LD would be to **introduce an element of division among the European partners.**

As for the **actual chances of it going ahead, they are very slim**, given that it is highly unlikely it will garner support from members such as France and Germany, who would see an independent policy towards emerging powers, particularly Russia, under threat. Despite the existence of pro-NATO governments in Germany (Merkel) and France (Sarkozy), in Europe it seems it could only receive a very warm welcome in the United Kingdom and the Eastern countries.

But in the event of a serious debate taking place at the heart of the EU, the LD could **dilute the EU's incipient independent Foreign and Security Policy into a project led by the USA.** The **demarcation line in relation to NATO would also be blurred.** **Relations with Russia** play a fundamental role in this issue. McCain is determined that the USA will exert strong pressure on Russia in relation to democracy and human rights. Thus, the Republican candidate has even warned of a possible exclusion of Russia from the G-8 if progress is not made on these issues and the Eurasian giant continues its drift towards authoritarianism. It could also have a divisive effect on the policy of enlargement and the **former Soviet republics.** With regard to **China**, we could enter a scenario of trade sanctions or protectionist measures.

In the **Middle East** an LD will spark confrontation while ever it fails to respect a fundamental principle: the integration of the Islamists – Hezbollah, Hamas – in the political game of the so-called “arc of crisis” from Pakistan to Morocco. The LD would mean the continuation of **unconditional support for Israel** and that would place the EU in an uncomfortable position in relation to the Arab-Muslim world.

The LD would also have also have a negative impact on a European policy of actively strengthening the **regional security bodies in Africa (AU)**, introducing a factor of mistrust which would provide the authoritarian regimes of sub-Saharan Africa with an anti-neocolonialist pretext.

3. For Spain

The first implication for Spain of putting the LD before International Forums would be **internal: to accentuate still further the breakdown of the consensus** on foreign policy between the PSOE and the PP, widening the ideological gap around the project between a more pro-NATO PP and a PSOE closer to the United Nations. It must not be forgotten that Bush's neocon vision of the *coalition of the* (democratic) *willing* in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was backed by former Prime Minister Aznar and still has significant support within the Popular Party.

A second implication concerns the **negative impact on the Alliance of Civilizations (AC)**. On account of its connections with NATO in the area of defence and general security, and because of its focus on democracies, the LD appears to strongly counter the AC, which is an open forum for intercultural dialogue and non-violence, with no preconditions.

Thirdly, the confrontational use of the LD, fixing the conditions for dialogue with the countries classified as non-democratic beforehand, **would jeopardize the current Spanish strategy towards Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia** of non-exclusion, open dialogue and the "outstretched hand".

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SPAIN

Our conclusion is that **it is an idea which is not very feasible, divisive and one which will have counterproductive consequences both for the international order and for Europe and Spain. Spain and Europe must not fall into the trap of *democratic peace***. Although the actual implementation of an LD is unlikely beyond a token club, **it could prove to be divisive factor if Spain and the EU do not present alternatives** to solve the democratic shortfall of the international institutions and the lack of global governance.

Given that we cannot rule out a Democratic Administration invoking the democratic status of the decision-taking clubs (with regard to Iran, for example) it would be advisable **to take preventive initiatives directed at blocking or cancelling out** the effect of this proposal in its current form. The Spanish government conducts a difficult policy of balance between a conditional commitment to NATO and unconditional support for the United Nations. If the LD were on the table, Prime Minister Zapatero's government would be simultaneously obliged not to snub its ally while not allowing the usurpation of the United Nations by the LD.

The LD project cannot be supported by Spain. But that does not mean it can take no action. On the contrary, it forces the government to reconsider various aspects of its foreign policy which currently appear somewhat vague. It is necessary to take the initiative and reorientate some of its multilateral policies and its strategy in the global forums with the aim of **counteracting possible suspicion or criticism on the part of the USA or other European partners**. To this end the following is advisable:

- **At an EU level**, the Union must approach its relations with non-democratic regimes with an **increase in global governance**. Europe must not take the transatlantic bond as a purpose, rather develop a CFSP and ESDP of its own with regard to Russia, China and the emerging countries, raising the **democratic standards of its foreign action on the basis of common positions** and developing mechanisms of its own such as the **European**

Neighbourhood Policy. At most, Spain must try to **redirect the LD proposal** along with the other principal members (France, Germany, the United Kingdom) towards fresh impetus for the UN and diluting the LD rhetorically into a reformed United Nations system.

- As a general approach, Spain and the EU should **place more emphasis on strengthening the human rights aspect** (no repression, no torture or basic freedoms of speech or association) **than on issuing certificates of democracy to countries.** In this respect, it is essential to advocate an **improved operation of the mistreated Human Rights Council**, active since June 2006 and the result of a reform which has yet to solve the problem of the organization's lack of democratic legitimacy (due to the presence of countries such as Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, Nigeria or Pakistan). A **simultaneous effort must be made to incorporate the USA into the Council** – currently, and by its own decision, merely an observer, with no vote – and to **come up with fresh formulas which raise the standards of the demands made on all** the members.
- The government must **review the arguments and practice of Spain's policy of promotion of democracy and human rights**, making it more transparent, more consistent and more proactive. In this respect, Spain must **relaunch the Alliance of Civilizations, trying to involve the USA** in Spain's main international initiative, refocusing it towards policies of democratization, perhaps one of its main deficiencies at present. **Turkey**, both a NATO member and a bastion of the AC, is an essential figure in this strategy.
- It would also be advisable to **redefine Spain's pro-UN stance in a somewhat more thorough way**, with what that implies for Spain's role in international missions and its position in relation to international law – for example, in Kosovo or other future missions which are not expressly backed by the United Nations Security Council, but in which the EU as a whole has an interest in taking part.

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