

The Ceuta Crisis: A Migration Crisis with Political and Geopolitical Consequences

The massive influx of migrants into Ceuta, Spain's enclave on the Moroccan border, quickly evolved from a migration incident into a major political, diplomatic, and security crisis. Although most migrants soon returned to Morocco, the episode sparked intense debate over border management, migration policy, and the growing role of social media in shaping migration flows.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez -Maduro and Petro's regimes, Iran (Hezbollah and Hamas), the Castro's Cuba ally- became the primary target of criticism. Several European governments accused his regularization program of undocumented migrants of creating a migration "pull factor," even though it applies only to individuals already residing in Spain and does not grant them the right to move or work freely across the European Union.

The controversy exposed deep divisions among EU member states over migration policy. It also reignited diplomatic tensions between Spain, Morocco, and other international partners. While Madrid continues to advocate a more humanitarian approach, several European governments are calling for stronger border controls and tougher migration measures. Sánchez has also faced broader international criticism that extends beyond migration and reflects wider geopolitical disputes.

According to former European Commissioner Thierry Breton, Ceuta marks a turning point. Rather than a conventional migration crisis, he describes it as the first large-scale "algorithmic hybrid attack" against an EU external border. In his view, coordinated disinformation campaigns on Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram rapidly mobilized thousands of migrants within hours, demonstrating how digital platforms can become strategic tools alongside physical borders.

In Morocco, reactions have ranged from national pride to political embarrassment and public outrage over the heavy human toll. The authorities deny direct responsibility, blaming human trafficking networks and online disinformation while insisting that Morocco should not serve as "Europe's border guard." Nevertheless, questions remain over whether

migration pressure was used as a diplomatic bargaining tool.

Ultimately, the Ceuta crisis highlights the growing convergence of migration, geopolitics, and digital information warfare. It exposes divisions within the European Union, the fragility of Spain-Morocco relations, and the increasing influence of online disinformation on migration dynamics. More than a border incident, Ceuta serves as a warning of the complex challenges the European Union will increasingly face in managing migration in the digital age.

The EU and the Legacy of Colonialism

One of the European Union's enduring challenges is reconciling its commitment to democracy, self-determination, and international law with the persistence of colonial-era territorial arrangements among some of its member states. While European colonial empires have formally disappeared, several European countries continue to exercise sovereignty over territories beyond continental Europe, some of which remain subject to sovereignty disputes or international decolonization debates.

France maintains the largest network of overseas territories. In South America, French Guiana is an overseas department and an integral part of both France and the European Union. In the Caribbean, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint Martin, and Saint Barthélemy retain constitutional ties to France, while in the Indian Ocean Réunion and Mayotte remain under French administration. Mayotte remains particularly controversial, as the Comoros claims sovereignty over the island and the United Nations has repeatedly affirmed the principle of Comorian territorial integrity.

France also administers the Scattered Islands (Îles Éparses) in the Mozambique Channel, which are claimed by Madagascar, Mauritius, and the Comoros. In the Pacific, New Caledonia and French Polynesia remain listed by the United Nations as Non-Self-Governing Territories, reflecting ongoing debates over their political future and decolonization process.

Spain likewise retains several territories on the North African coast, including Ceuta, Melilla, and smaller enclaves such as the Chafarinas Islands, Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, and Peñón de Alhucemas. Spain considers these territories integral parts of its sovereign territory,

while Morocco regards them as remnants of European colonial expansion and continues to assert claims over them. Although these territories are not classified by the United Nations as Non-Self-Governing Territories, they remain politically sensitive and periodically create diplomatic tensions between Madrid and Rabat.

Other European states also retain territories with historical links to colonial expansion. The Kingdom of the Netherlands continues to include Aruba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Saba, and Sint Eustatius in the Caribbean, while the Kingdom of Denmark maintains sovereignty over Greenland, which enjoys extensive self-government and has an active independence movement. Although these territories are not generally considered colonies under contemporary international law, they remain part of broader debates concerning autonomy, political representation, and self-determination.

The United Kingdom, although no longer a member of the European Union, provides some of the most prominent examples of unresolved colonial-era territorial disputes. The Falkland Islands (Islas Malvinas) in the South Atlantic remain contested between the United Kingdom and Argentina. Argentina considers the islands an unfinished case of decolonization, while the United Kingdom emphasizes the right of the islanders to determine their own political future.

Similarly, Gibraltar remains disputed between the United Kingdom and Spain, despite repeated expressions by its population in favor of maintaining British sovereignty. Another significant case is the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory), claimed by Mauritius. In 2019, the International Court of Justice concluded that the United Kingdom's continued administration of the territory was inconsistent with the completion of Mauritius' decolonization process, a position later supported by the United Nations General Assembly.

Beyond overseas territories, Europe also faces internal debates over sovereignty and self-determination.

Movements

in Catalonia (Spain), Scotland (United Kingdom), Corsica (France), Flanders (Belgium), and other regions demonstrate that questions of political identity and autonomy remain significant within European states themselves.

These cases differ fundamentally from colonial disputes: they are not considered cases of decolonization under international law, but rather debates over constitutional arrangements, regional autonomy, and the right of communities to determine their political future. Nevertheless, they raise related questions about the balance between territorial integrity, democratic legitimacy, and self-determination.

These examples demonstrate that the legacy of European expansion has not entirely disappeared and that questions of sovereignty remain unresolved in different forms. Some territories have repeatedly expressed support for maintaining their relationship with the European state that administers them, while others continue to seek greater autonomy, independence, or recognition of disputed claims.

For the European Union, this creates an important normative challenge. Can the EU consistently promote self-determination, human rights, and international law abroad while avoiding a critical examination of unresolved territorial questions within its own political space? Addressing this tension would strengthen the Union's credibility as a global actor committed to democratic governance, equality, and a rules-based international order.

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