

## ***BLAIR MUST "PROVE THAT HE CAN WORK WITH EUROPEAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS"***

### ***New think-tank report calls on Blair and Zapatero to form a new alliance***

Tony Blair should forge an alliance to revive social democracy with the Spanish Prime Minister, Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, to answer the criticism that he can only work with Governments of the Right, according to a new report published by the Foreign Policy Centre think-tank.

David Mathieson, a former special advisor to Robin Cook MP, argues that, following the disquiet over the Prime Minister's relationship with Berlusconi, such a move would help Blair reposition himself both within the Labour party and before the British public, who worry that he has become dangerously isolated. Since Blair is likely to win the next election and Zapatero will be Prime Minister until 2008, there is a window of opportunity for them to collaborate on domestic policy and to push common foreign policy goals such as the democratisation of the Middle East.

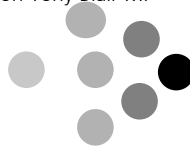
However, if co-operation is to be successful, Zapatero should participate in the reconstruction of Iraq – as it is doing in Afghanistan and the Balkans – and take more responsibility for European defence. Blair, in turn, needs to avoid hubris when urging Spain and the rest of Continental Europe to introduce economic reforms. The Prime Minister has benefited from the Thatcherite economic shock therapy of the eighties, and did not himself have to make the "tough political choices" that he is urging on others.

Mathieson argues that both leaders should revive the European-Mediterranean dialogue, initiated in the Barcelona conference in 1995 and drawing all countries in from the Mediterranean rim, as a more subtle counterweight to Bush's Middle East "great democracy" project. Zapatero is one of the few European leaders with enough credibility to deliver unpopular messages across the region, he claims.

The pamphlet traces the parallels between the two political leaders. Both are lawyers and sons of lawyers, rose unexpectedly to lead their parties around their fortieth birthdays and travel with light ideological baggage. At the height of debate about Blair's "Third Way" a close circle of politicians and advisers propelled Zapatero to the leadership by calling themselves "the new way".

Though there remain important policy differences between the two countries – Spain is historically far less pro-American than the UK and Blair and Zapatero will disagree in Europe about tax harmonisation, Common Agricultural Policy reform and the EU budget within Europe – there are important areas of domestic policy where they occupy common ground. Both New Labour and the Spanish Socialist Party (the PSOE) recognise that the drive for equality can only be sustained by a balanced budget. Borrowing from Brown's "golden rule", Zapatero plans for deficits over the course of the cycle only to finance investment. They have both prioritised education and have sought to reconcile a competitive economy with a robust welfare state.

**For briefings, interviews or a copy of the pamphlet,  
call Rob Blackhurst on 0787 9423341**



**David Mathieson says:**

The two Governments must put their different views over Iraq aside and avoid caricatures of each other. The PSOE is not a continental version of “Old Labour” and Blair is not a neo-liberal stalking horse. If they can get over these perceptions, then the Blair-Zapatero relationship could give beleaguered social democrats hope elsewhere”

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. *Blair's Doppelganger: Zapatero and the New Spanish Left*, like all Foreign Policy Centre pamphlets, represent solely the views of the author.
2. Dr David Mathieson was a Special Advisor to Robin Cook between 1997-2002. A solicitor by profession, he now lives permanently in Madrid lecturing in economics and writing in *El Pais*, *El Correo*, *La Razon* and the *Guardian*. David has collaborated closely with PSOE since 1996, contributing to party reviews on policy, party organisation and strategy.