

How the storming of Ceuta shifts Europe to the right



The sight of at least 50,000 migrants storming into Spanish territory is certain to harden opinions about migration in Europe when the political right is on the rise with calls for tougher border controls.

The astonishing images are being likened to an "invasion" of Spain as people flee Morocco in the hope of settling in Europe, even though the migrants have only reached the tiny enclave of Ceuta on the northern coast of Africa.

Police overwhelmed as thousands of migrants have rushed across the border from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta.

While none have reached the European mainland, there is an urgent argument about the strength of the border - and national leaders are blaming Spain for being too weak.

First, some facts. The new arrivals did not have an automatic right to transfer to the rest of Spain, so many of them faced a long wait in Ceuta with an uncertain future. They could not simply move into the Schengen zone of easy travel between European nations without passport checks.

The mayor-president of Ceuta, Juan Jesus Vivas, said 60,000 rushed over the border. The national government said it was about 50,000.

By the end of Friday - early on Saturday, AEST - the Spanish government claimed that almost all the arrivals had gone back.



People walk on a beach after attempting to cross from Fnideq to Ceuta. AP PHOTO/STR



Migrants wait for a shop to open so they can buy food after crossing from Morocco. AP PHOTO/ANTONIO SEMPERE

"Practically the entirety of those who entered Ceuta have already returned to Morocco," said Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares.

"It is not possible to travel from Ceuta and Melilla to the Peninsula without identifying oneself at a police checkpoint. The integrity of the Schengen Area is absolutely guaranteed. Enough of this deliberate confusion."

Problem solved? No. This was a total breakdown at the border, with no capacity to count the arrivals, let alone check their passports. What stood out was the utter chaos.

And that is what will keep feeding the deep anxiety in Europe about border security and the serious argument about the scale migration.

Donald Trump is already using the viral images for his own purposes. "It's terrible," the US president said.

"Remember that picture. That's going to be us in three years if the wrong side gets in."

US Vice President JD Vance, who warned last year of a breakdown in European values, saw the storming of Ceuta as proof he was right.

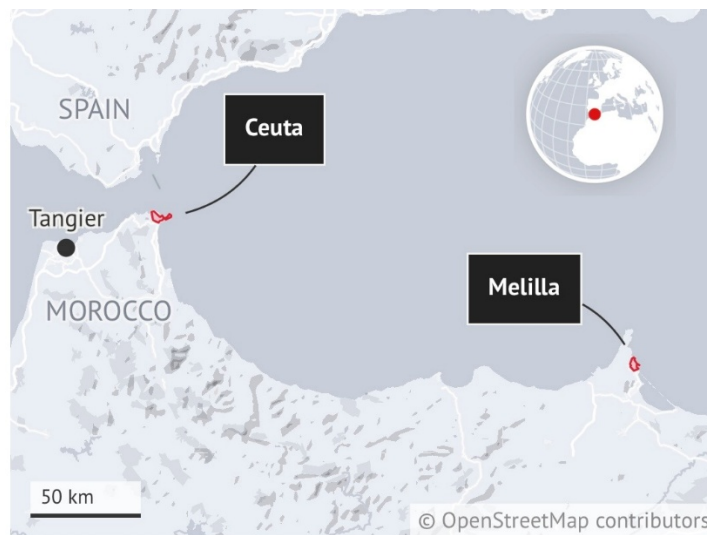
"These images out of Spain are an unfortunate reminder of the consequences of mass migration and the radical left-wing globalist policies that have enabled the Invasion of the West," he said.

These were self-serving exaggerations from American leaders who want their side to win the US midterm elections in November. Even so, that does not mean Europe can shrug off the concerns about what just happened.

The alarm about Ceuta is not limited to the right. "Spain must act now!" wrote Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen. He leads a party called the Moderates and is a centrist in a coalition government led by a social democrat.

Spain was also criticised by leaders from Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy and Sweden. The most urgent issue was confidence in the Schengen Agreement, which allows free movement without passport checks between 29 member countries.

Entry to Ceuta does not guarantee entry to the Schengen zone: the arrivals from Morocco would have to go through another border check to get to mainland Spain. The European Union lists Morocco as a "safe country of origin" - which counts against claims for asylum.



What is very clear, however, is that many national leaders simply do not trust Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez on border control. He is a progressive leader who welcomes asylum seekers, and he is sharply at odds with his neighbours.

In his most radical move, Sanchez decided in January to offer a form of amnesty for illegal migrants living in Spain. His government estimated about 500,000 people would apply. By the June deadline, the actual number was 1,174,978. Not all will be approved.



Pedro Sanchez GETTY IMAGES

Sanchez called his policy an act of justice.

Others call it an incentive for illegal migration. Austrian Chancellor Christian Stocker said this on Friday, in an argument that that Australians will recognise from years of debate about "pull factors" that attract asylum seekers.

Other factors were also at work. On June 29, the Spanish Supreme Court ruled that authorities could not summarily return migrants who came by sea to Ceuta and the similar enclave of Melilla. This meant arrivals had to be given due process; it did not give them guaranteed entry to Spain. In Morocco, however, the word spread on social media that those who swam to Ceuta had a new chance to get to Spain.

Sanchez arrived in Ceuta on Friday and vowed to toughen the borders with more armed forces. "What happened yesterday was an attack, a violation of the territorial integrity of Spain," he declared. He blamed people smugglers and said 57 of the migrants had died.

By 6pm on Friday - 3am on Saturday AEST - the Spanish government estimated 48,300 of the 50,000 had returned to Morocco.

Sanchez may eventually declare victory because so many of the arrivals were turned back, but he is exposed ahead of the elections due by August next year. Past polling by national newspaper El Pais suggests 70 per cent of voters believe migration is too high. The images from Ceuta can empower his critics when they demand tougher borders.

The argument is not just about a tiny enclave in Africa. In France, where National Rally leader Marine Le Pen hopes to win the presidential election next year, she called for tougher border controls with Spain. Her deputy, Jordan Bardella, called for a meeting of the European Parliament to toughen the laws.

"This is an unprecedented deluge," Bardella said. "Ceuta is Europe's future if we do not put an end to this naive migration policy."

In Britain, Reform UK leader Nigel Farage said the migrants had "invaded" Ceuta. "Before long many will be crossing the English Channel to enter Britain illegally," he predicted. This is a false fear if the Spanish government is right that most of the migrants have returned. But it taps into a real concern: the facts show that asylum seekers continue to cross the channel by boat. (There were 1193 in the last seven days.)

The startling images from Ceuta, showing a serious failure at a European border, are sure to shape the migration debate. There are already calls for nations to quit or modify the European Convention on Human Rights to toughen the rules against asylum seekers.

There are also plans for more detention centres outside the European Union to hold rejected migrants. And there are growing calls for "remigration" schemes to deport people who arrived in the past.

This has been a bruising crisis for European leaders, and Sanchez showed it by rebuking neighbours who complained about the Spanish borders.

"Solidarity and empathy are optional. Respect for European treaties and data is not," he said on Friday afternoon (about 1.30am on Saturday, AEST). "This is not the time to divide".

The Spanish leader pointed out that 234,760 people had come to Spain as irregular arrivals over the past five years but more had gone elsewhere. He said 478,600 had gone to Italy, while 340,600 had gone to the western Balkans, another 259,800 to Greece and 48,000 elsewhere.

In defending Spain, however, he was highlighting the arrival of 1.4 million irregular arrivals into Europe when most voters clearly want a lower migrant intake. Most of those who stormed into Ceuta achieved nothing for themselves. As a group, however, they certainly had an impact. They just shoved Europe to the right.

Author:



David Crowe – *is Europe correspondent for the Sydney Morning Herald and the Age.*

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