Spain’s Government Sees Folly of Falling Fertility

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The socialist government of Spain has surprised everyone by adopting a pro-natal policy. Each newborn will receive a check for Euro 2,500 (about $3,938 U.S.). If the newborn is born into a family with three or more children, the amount is increased to Euro 3,500.

“Spain Needs More Children”

In announcing the policy, President Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero said to the Parliament that “In order to continue progressing, Spain needs more families with more children. And families need more aid to have more babies and more resources for their upbringing.”

Even a blind man could see that this is so. In only 30 years, the average size of the Spanish family has dropped from 3.8 members to 2.9. Today, two and a half million Spanish people live alone. There are now only about 1.7 million large Spanish families—that is, families with three or more children — and the number is steadily falling.

Low Birthrates in Europe

Along with Italy and Greece, Spain has one of the lowest fertility rates in the EU. Spain’s population is aging rapidly, and is on the cusp of absolute population decline. In 1996 Spain added only 11,177 people to its population. Since that year, the numbers have gone up, but only because immigrants from Latin America and North Africa are having children. Even with these births, however, in 2005 births only exceeded deaths by 78,597. Experts calls this the “desnatalidad,” which translated means the “un-birth rate.” So President Zapatero is right in trying to ramp up the birthrate, but will he succeed? It’s hard to be optimistic, for several reasons.
Cost of Raising Children High

Given that it costs over Euro 100,000 to raise a child to adulthood, the 2,500 payment may not be enough to encourage more childbearing. Juan Moreno, the head of the Consumers Association of Spain, has called the amount “insignificant.”

Moreover, according to 2004 Eurostat data, Spain spends less on family and childhood programs than any other country in the EU. Such programs account for only 0.7 percent of Spain’s GNR while Europe as a whole averages 2.1 percent. And Spain taxes back some of this money since, along with Greece, it includes public family aid as taxable income. What the government gives with the right hand, it takes away, in part, with the left.

Abortion in Spain

Abortion is also eating away at the Spanish population. Abortion is supposedly legal in Spain only for cases of rape, “fetal defect,” and danger to the mother’s physical or psychological health.

In the case of rape and fetal defect the law allows abortions between 12 and 22 weeks of pregnancy. For the “health” exception, however, there are no time limits.

At present, one in every six pregnancies ends in abortion. Every day, 252 abortions are performed in Spain, for an average of 11 each hour.

Spanish police recently closed several abortion clinics in Barcelona after they found medical abuses beyond description. The closures were the result of investigations carried out by an association called “E-Cristians” (www.e-cristians.net), and an undercover TV investigation by the Danish press. Many abortionists were jailed, and Spanish society as a whole was horrified.

More Abortion in the Future?

One would think that Spain, in light of the current scandal, and facing a population crisis, would want to put additional limits on abortion. In fact, there are groups in the Spanish Parliament clamoring for a revision of the current law, but they want to make it more permissive, not less.
This is both immoral and nonsensical, given that Spain needs more children, so much so that it is even willing to pay for them.

What Spain Needs

I do not believe that the current policy will succeed in reversing Spain’s population decline. The evidence shows that one-time baby bonuses, however large, are unlikely to cause more than a blip in the birthrate.

Spain needs to shelter parents with children from taxes altogether. Were Spain to embark upon a generous program of tax credits for children, the birthrate would rebound. Only this can stave off demographic decline.

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