



THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN SPAIN. OLD INTERPRETATIONS, NEW DEBATES.

Prof. Antonio Herrera González de Molina
Department of Contemporary History
University of Granada

26 October 2022 – 2.30 pm CET

I know that the main topic of these talks in this new cycle that I'm starting will be "Democracy and Constitutions" and, of course, I'm going to talk about these issues, but through a specific case which is the one I probably know best, namely Spain and the transition to democracy during the 1970s and 1980s. However, I don't want to bore you telling every fact in this transition to democracy, of course. That's why I think the Spanish case is going to be just an excuse to talk about democracy in the world as a concept, as a political system and the problem we have today with democracy. So my idea is to think or reflect collectively on the reasons why we should be concerned about democracy and about the rise of anti-democratic forces in much of Europe, in much of the world. I'm going to talk about the Spanish case not only because I'm a Spanish historian, but also because Spain was and still is nowadays at the centre of the great debates on the democratization processes. During the 1980s the role of the Spanish transition to democracy was highlighted as a very good example of the third great wave of democratization in the world, along with Portugal, of course, and Greece. Since then the Spanish case has been the subject of debate among political scientists, historians, sociologists and academics in general. So, the question is "What was so interesting about the Spanish case?" Let's take a look at this case.

Spain didn't usually appear in traditional histories of democracy worldwide. Spain hardly appeared in these general histories of democracy and the Cádiz Constitution, I mean the Constitution adopted in Spain in 1812, appeared as something exceptional in the history of a country marked by corruption, caciquismo, and political instability. That was the general idea. It didn't appear in the second wave of democratization in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. At that moment Spain was characterized again as a world of caciques that made the development of modern democracy impossible, although we know today that this was not the case. In general the history of democracy in Spain was read as the history of a great failure. That is why when, after the Civil War and after 40 years of dictatorship, Spain began a

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



process of transition to democracy which was gradually consolidated, many people were very surprised and began to speak about the great Spanish miracle. What was the question at that moment? The question was: “How was it possible to move from an authoritarian regime with this man, Franco, to a colourful movement of people, as you can see here in this picture? How was it possible to achieve this transformation in a short period of time? How was it possible to have democracy in a backward country? Democracy in a country with a dysfunctional capitalist model?” The Spanish case became even more interesting when, after Spain, other “unexpected” countries began their transition to democracy too. As the Spanish case was a model to follow, other countries - in Latin America, for example, after the dictatorships, or in countries in Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union - began to transition from dictatorial or authoritarian regimes to democracies. But what happened in Spain? What was the process of transition that could in theory serve as a model for other parts of the world? Again, let's take a look.

I'm going to talk briefly of the traditional history of transition to democracy in this case. As you probably know, the dictator Franco died on 20th November 1975. Here you can see the President of Franco's government, Carlos Arias Navarro, telling the news on television, a sad expression on his face. Franco's designated successor was the King, Juan Carlos, who was crowned just two days after the dictator's death. The government of Carlos Arias Navarro – that is, Franco's government –, seemed unwilling to make major changes and the King ended up appointing a new Prime Minister in July 1976. For many this was the beginning of the real institutional transition to democracy in Spain since this, at that moment, young President Adolfo Suárez, who came from the Franco regime, seemed ready to make some important changes. The idea that Adolfo Suárez was capable of convincing the different groups - the Francoist Conservatives, the reformists, the military, the Liberals, the Christian-Democrats, the Socialists, the Communists - of the need to initiate a reform or a series of reforms for the country is still held nowadays in the collective memory in Spain. All this in the context of a very important and great social, liberal and popular mobilization, which the President and, in theory, the King were apparently also able to bring about and to control.

On 15th December 1976 a referendum was held to confirm the support to this political reform law planned by the President Suárez. Maybe out of fear of a new Civil War or out of the belief that reconciliation between the two great blocks that had crashed in the Civil War was needed, the majority of voters gave their support to this reform. And this reform meant a negotiated break with the previous regime and the beginning of a series of agreements that would lead to – in theory – the recognition of a constitutional monarchy in exchange for the legalization of most political parties and trade unions

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



and the holding of free elections. In a way, by approving this plan, the Francoist Parliament was dissolving.

The next step was the holding of the first Parliamentary free elections in June 1977. But to be democratically trustable, all political parties had to be legalized, including Franco's number one enemy party, the Communist Party. So, despite the reluctance of an important sector of the army and the conservative group, the Communist Party of Spain was finally legalized in April 1977. In this picture you can see this mythic idea of the conversation between King Juan Carlos and the new President, meant to convince the rest of people to support the plan we mentioned earlier. This other picture represents, in theory, the reconciliation between the two different blocks that took part in the Civil War. In the picture you can see the leader of the Communist Party - he's laughing in the foreground - and just next to him the President of the right-wing party, who had been a Minister under Franco's government. Anyway, the next step, as I said, was the holding of the first free elections in June 1977. The Communist Party took part in the election. In these elections, Adolfo Suárez's centre-right coalition, the UCD (*Unión de Centro Democrático*), won, followed by the Socialist Party. But the future Spanish Constitution in 1978 was drafted by a small group of leaders of the major political parties that were represented in this new Parliament. They are the so-called seven fathers of the Constitution in Spain. In this picture you can see them - three from UCD, one from the Socialist Party, one from the Communist Party, another one from *Alianza Popular*, which is the right-wing conservative party still linked to Franco's regime, one from the nationalist parties in Spain, i.e.. the Catalan and Basque nationalists.

Well, for many even today this Constitution is the clearest proof or the key to understand this negotiated break from the past that led the country to the road of democracy. Through these representatives, the left and the right in theory renounced some of their fundamental principles and values in favour of national reconciliation, in favour of a future of peace for the country. That is the myth of the transition to democracy. This myth was the only way for them to understand why they all ended up signing the same text despite the great historical differences on issues such as the role of religion in the country, the territorial organization of the States, some individual and social rights like abortion or divorce and especially it was the idea that they could renounce some of their fundamental principles and values in the debate about the Monarchy or the Republic for the country. Most of these issues were resolved by applying large doses of ambiguity and imprecision in the drafting of the different articles in the Constitution, which left for the future many uncertainties, of course. At the time, to be honest, however, it was a great symbolic achievement in favour of consensus and a peaceful future for Spain, of course. On 6th December 1978 the

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



Constitution was finally approved and ratified by the people in a referendum, which gave a large majority to the “Yes” vote in Spain. But even before its adoption, there were at least three measures, or laws, that for many marked the path for the consensus. Let me just mention them briefly.

The first is the law of amnesty, which meant total pardon for political prisoners condemned by the Franco regime, including members of the Basque terrorist group ETA, but it also meant the pardon of all Francoists who had committed repressive acts during the Civil War and throughout the dictatorship. For many, this amnesty law was a political pact of amnesia, a pact of forgetting or, in Spanish, “Pacto del Olvido”. This was necessary to move towards a new democracy for the future. The second law was not just a law, but it consisted of different packages of pacts, the Moncloa pacts, which were social and economic agreements between employers and trade unions that established collective bargaining formulas to regulate the world of work and, in theory, give stability to the economy in Spain. They were the foundations of the welfare state in Spain. The third and last one was the restoration of the autonomous government in Catalonia in September 1977, when the former President of the *Generalitat* (the autonomous government) *de Catalunya*, Josep Tarradellas, returned to Spain. In this picture you can see Tarradellas on his return from the exile, but in exchange he had to recognize the unity of the Spanish State. This was a symbolic act within the new process of territorial restructuring for Spain. The Constitution said that Spain was a united and indivisible nation, in which the existence of different nationalities - not nations... this is a little bit tricky -, was possible. For many the possibility of the co-existence of different nationalities within the Spanish nation was another symbol of the reconciliation process that allowed other agreements to continue and that was the birth of the current territorial structure of Spain, which - as you probably know - has 17 autonomous communities, or regions, as you can see here, in this current map of Spain.

The next step in the conventional history of the Spanish democratic transition was in April 1979, when the first democratic elections were held in the local councils. In these elections the Socialists and Communists won the majority of the councils and municipalities in Spain, which meant a sign of political change unprecedented since the 1930s. For many it was the background to what was to happen a few years later, in 1982, when the Socialist Party led by Felipe Gonzalez won the absolute majority in the national election. This was a turning point in the history of democracy in Spain, given that for the first time a political and ideological shift in government took a place in a peaceful and democratic way. For many it marked the end of the transition to democracy and the beginning of a new, fully democratic period.

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



Obviously there were difficulties along the way, even in this idealistic and very positive narrative of the process. The best-known account or narrative of the transition always highlights the military coup that took place on 23rd February 1981, when Colonel Antonio Tejero, who you can see here in the Parliament, together with a group of Guardia Civil members, entered the Parliament and held the members of Congress hostage for almost a whole day. This coup has gone down in history for being the first to be broadcast on television, given that a session of Parliament was being held at the time. The King's intervention on television in the middle of the night, as head of the army, showing his opposition to the coup, won him great popular support from that moment on. In this sense, the failure of the coup, far from weakening democracy, ended up strengthening it, in view of the massive popular support that the new democratic government received after the failure of the coup.

So far I have briefly described the best known and most widespread narrative for the Spanish transition. In this sense, it seems logical that for a long time and still today the key to the success of the process has to do with the leading role played by political elites, the capacity of some leaders, among them the King Juan Carlos, Adolfo Suárez, Santiago Carrillo and Felipe González, and above all the success of a process guided by pact, an agreement, a consensus. In short, a model of negotiated break with the past.

But today we know more things about the Spanish case. We know, first of all, that many other events and facts happened that were not initially highlighted in the first narrative of the Spanish transition. We know today that the construction and maintenance of a democracy doesn't depend only on the role played by the political elites or by a series of key figures. Today, we know that there are many other factors related to the process of building a democracy. In fact, we know today that this is not the story of the Spanish transition. Even when we want to get objective criteria valid for other cases, history must of course be understood in context.

There are at least three important kinds of context. The whole process has to be understood in its international context, of course. Despite the dictatorship's attempts at isolationism, in the last years of Franco's regime Spain was very well connected with the countries around it. Thousands of Spaniards – as you can see here – had gone to work to Germany, Switzerland or England. With the outbreak of the international economic crisis in the 1970s, many of these workers returned to Spain and understood the enormous contrast between what they had seen abroad and the Spanish situation at that moment. On the other hand, we have to take into account the geopolitical context of the Cold War. Given its strategic position, Spain seemed somehow doomed to remain under the influence of the capitalist Western world. But to understand the

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



Spanish transition it is also necessary to go back a few decades after the death of the dictator in 1975. The democratic principles and values that took strong root among the Spanish population didn't emerge overnight suddenly after the dictator's death, of course. The democratic social capital accumulated during the second Republic and after years of anti-Franco struggle is related to the success of the democratic transition. Third, in order to understand the Spanish democratic transition one has to go down to the other levels – not only the national scale. We need to see the enormous role played by the civil society. We know very well that the process of change in Spain was not peaceful. The transition cost lives. There was conflict and at certain moment high doses of violence. In the 1960s the anti-Franco opposition was beginning to organize itself not only outside the country but also inside. The Communist party and the Communist Union, for example, played an important role in this opposition. In the 1970s the workers' movement grew and through the cracks in the labour and wage demands, political demands for democracy were also consolidating at that moment. Not only workers and labourers, but also other sectors participated in this opposition to Francoism. For example, an important sector of the Catholic Church – from the grassroots, of course. I'm referring to the so-called “worker priests”, who, to a certain extent, protected and allied themselves with the existing social demands. But we have to add the student movement, of course, cultural organizations, neighbourhood associations, agricultural or rural organizations. Their many actions gradually eroded and undermined the legitimacy of the dictatorship and generated a new political democratic culture that is at the basis of the democratization process.

In fact, this is one of the current two great debates on the Spanish transition. I talked about the first debate in the first part of this lecture - it's about who were the real architects of the transition, and we have already seen that, although the role of political figures such as the King or Adolfo Suárez or Santiago Carrillo and others remained in the collective memory, few today would doubt the central role of the civil society. Yet there is a second debate nowadays, a more current one, and it's about whether the Spanish transition was a model or if, on the contrary, it was a process with many mistakes, mistakes or defects that have been and continue to be a handicap for the quality of democracy in Spain today. That's the current debate. Let's briefly discuss the second debate about the cause of the current democratic deficits.

In recent decades the process has been widely criticised, especially by the young people who didn't live through the transition period and who blame it for having left too many unresolved issues or of having made too many concessions to power groups that came directly from Franco's regime. For some of them, this is the reason why

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



today we have a low-intensity democracy in Spain with important democratic deficits. These deficits are often highlighted focusing the attention on the following five points:

1. First, the unresolved problem of collective historical memory. There are still many people in Spain today who don't condemn the dictatorship. I'm not just talking about this new political party, Vox, I'm talking about common people in Spain. The new law about the historical memory has been adopted only recently, it was approved five days ago in Spain, after more than 45 years since the drafting of the Constitution.
2. Second, the question of the so-called peripheral nationalisms within Spain, i.e. the problems in Catalonia or in the Basque Country, which - according to these people - are left unresolved.
3. Third, they talk about the existence of a Catholic church with too much influence and power, especially in education.
4. Fourth, the world of the justice system seems excessively conservative, at times apparently too tight, too linked to the values of the previous regime.
5. Fifth, the existence of a monarchy in the 21st century is considered by many to be incompatible with modern democracy.

In short, it's understood that the so-called "régimen del 78" (the 1978 regime, coinciding with the year of the drafting of the Constitution) is the cause of the main ills of our democracy today. In this sense, the transition has gone from being a model process to be a process to be avoided.

In my opinion the reasons of our democratic deficit in Spain are not so much to be found in the way the transition was carried out. It didn't go badly if we take into account the context - 40 years of dictatorship, a civil war, etc. I think that the reasons come from more serious and general problems that affect all democracies in the world nowadays. I'm talking about the lack of confidence in this model, I'm talking about the political disaffection among citizens, which leaves scope for other, more dangerous options to succeed.

What is the source of this lack of trust in democracy? I think in part it is the process of mercantilization or commodification of politics, the process of commodification of rights, of mercantilization of rights, the triumph of an individualistic conception of politics. In short, the transformation of citizens into consumers, which weakens the States and politics and strengthens the market and individualistic capitalism. I believe that these are the issues that concern democracy in general and not only the Spanish democratic model. In the specific case of Spain, I think we should look for the reasons of our current democratic deficits in the years after the transition, not during the transition or in the process of the transition. Specifically in the 1990s, once Spain had

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



joined the European Economic Community, as the European Union was called at that time, and we, the Spaniards, somehow thought we had finally reached the goal of democracy. I remember this slogan I heard when I was a child – *Ya somos europeos*. Now we're. From then on, I think, we started to be somehow relaxed and we didn't continue to improve democracy.

So, can we get some lessons from the Spanish case to improve our democracies today or not? To protect them from other dark forces nowadays? Well, let me express some ideas about it in the way of conclusions or questions for the debate. Of course, I think, we can draw some important lessons from the Spanish case if we want to understand democratization process, not so much to find the definitive keys to success, but rather to understand the complexity of any process of building consolidated democratic principles in the world. Let me just mention these three points:

- First, democracy is not granted by anyone. Democracy is conquered, democracy is built, and there is no single way to build a democracy, of course.
- Second, beware – as citizens – because the rights that a country has achieved are not cumulative. Rights can be lost, of course. There can be democratic regressions, even under apparently well-consolidated, well-established democracies, and today experts say that there is no need for a military coup to attack democracy. Democracy can be attacked from the inside. This is what seems to have happened in the United States with Trump, or in Brazil with the election of Bolsonaro. This is why the civil society and the common people must be vigilant not to lose their rights and not to let them depend on the purchasing power of each individual.
- Third, democracy is not the natural result of capitalism. A capitalist economic growth is no guarantee of democratic success. Other factors can impact the success of a democracy and these other factors are related to the flourishing and maintenance of a democracy. For example, experts on democratization say that more than economic growth, it seems that levels of inequality have more to do with the stability of a democracy. The existence of an active dynamic civil society that holds its representatives accountable also appears to be a decisive factor in sustaining democracies. The existence of an educated civil society, with high levels of civic virtues also seems important in this respect. Mass media, of course, and social networks can play an important role. Experts point out that a favourable international context is also decisive in the flourishing and maintenance of democracies, of course. And commitment to the basic rules of the democratic game as well as the belief in the values of mutual respect of one's opponents also seem to be important elements in consolidating a democracy. Finally, elements in general that build trust among the civil society,

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



creating confidence that democracy is a good system of self-government that deserves to be protected.

If these issues are not taken care of, the door is left open to options other than democracy, for example, fascism, and historians know this regression very well. These are lessons to be learned from any democratic transition, including the Spanish one.

That's my general idea, so I'm very happy if you have questions or points to debate. Thank you very much for your attention.

Giuseppe Zorzi: Thank you very much, professor Herrera, for your clear and interesting speech, which not only illustrates the various phases of the democratization process in Spain, but also warns us of the risks and, at the same time, the positive potential of the present and future democratic development in Europe and, more generally, in the West. I was very impressed by your lecture that focuses not only on the transition itself, but underlines the importance of the period following the transition, and the importance of the international context, and poses the question of democracy. At the moment we have, for example, the issue of some democracies in the European Union that are in fact autocracies. Think, for example, of Hungary. You also mentioned the question of politics. Politics is something that always moves between two poles, the real pact and the low compromises. This is politics, and this the importance of politics. Anyway, I'd like to ask Daniela to take questions from the audience.

Daniela Ferrari: I would like to congratulate and thank Professor Herrera for this very interesting lecture. I liked the idea of democracy as being not a state, but an act, an unfinished act, a continually unfinished act and always inclusive. And I would like to also thank him for giving us the ingredients of democracy, so that we keep them in mind and we can preserve our democratic States nowadays. So this is very important for us as adults and also for the young people. So I don't know if any of the students from any of the schools have any questions about this topic of democracy. I think you are the main protagonists of our democracy in the future. So what do you feel about the state of democracy in your countries, in Europe and maybe in the world in general?

Benjamin, Sarajevo: I have a question about the transition in Spain and the whole matter. Considering that the King that inherited Franco's place, Juan Carlos... Well, if I can remember correctly, his father was actually first in the line, but Franco wanted the son to succeed him as the chief of the State, so I would like to know your opinion about that. Juan Carlos ruled from Franco's death in 1975 until, I think, 2014-2015¹,

¹ 2014 (www.wikipedia.org)



something like that. Do you think that, although the transition to democracy happened during his reign and Spain joined the European Union during his reign, do you think that maybe Juan Carlos can be blamed for the way he got his position and the very trust that he had from this caudillo, from a Fascist leader? And I also wonder, if it is true that Franco's regime was never actually overthrown in Spain, maybe because of the way that he had created the system that outlived him, in a way, considering that the Spanish monarchy was re-established by Franco, my question is - what's your opinion about that? Is there any guilt that can be placed on Juan Carlos because his position was handed him to him by Francisco Franco, a Fascist leader?

Prof. Herrera: This is a very controversial, debated point nowadays. It was debated also in the past, of course. And you are right - It was Franco who designated Juan Carlos as a King and he did so in the middle of the dictatorship, in 1969, when he created a law saying - Spain is kingdom, so we need a king. Who is going to be the king? You are right, he had the possibility to say "Don Juan", the grandfather of the current King of Spain. But he finally chose Juan Carlos, because Juan Carlos was at that moment very young, he was a child, and Franco had the opportunity to educate this child in the principles of his movement. And the relation between Franco and Don Juan wasn't very good. Don Juan probably wanted to be King before Franco's death, so Franco decided to designate Juan Carlos. But I think that's not a problem for the monarchy in Spain. That monarchy had to create a way to preserve itself while the transition to democracy was carried out. How? The King said "I have this position because of the Constitution". The Constitution was the key point. The Constitution read: "Spain is a monarchy". Plus, everyone had the opportunity to vote. In December 1976 the people, the Spaniards voted "Yes" and this is how he got the legitimacy to be King. And a few years later he became very popular because of his role during the military coup. At that moment he had a lot of doubts. He only appeared on television after hours, because he was trying to see if this coup had the possibility to succeed. But he finally decided that the coup was not a good idea. I think that at that moment he got the other legitimacy, the popular legitimacy. So I don't think he considered himself guilty. For a long time people thought that a monarchy was a very important element in our transition. The problem was in the 1990s and in the last two or three decades, when we discovered that he was corrupted and suddenly a lot of people were surprised. This is why the current King is trying to put some distance between himself and his father. He's trying to give the idea that he's another thing, he's not his father, he's not a corrupted man. So, as one sees in other places, the monarchy is capable to adopt measures to continue and that's why it's not strange that today we have a monarchy in Spain, but it's true that now there are a lot of people that don't want a King. I'm not quite sure that this is the right moment to talk about a Republican

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



system in Spain. Even today there are a lot of people who believe that the monarchy is a symbol of stability, so we'll see what happens in the future.

Question from Dublin: What is the greatest threat to democracy in Spain at the moment?

Question from Granada: Do you think that the current crisis might have put democracy in Europe in danger and why?

Prof. Herrera: In the theory of democracy as an unfinished system, democracy is always in danger. To be realistic and to be honest, I don't think that in the next few years democracy is going to vanish in Spain, because democracies in general are not vanishing as they did 40 years ago or 50 years ago. We don't need a military coup. Our democracies are being attacked little by little and our democracy could have less and less quality and that's the real problem now and that's the danger. There are problems in Spain, like the problem with the judges... As you probably know, the Supreme Court in Spain was supposed to be renovated four years ago, but political parties have been unable to agree on the appointment of new judges, which led to a 4-year stalemate. That's a big problem for a democracy, we need to separate the three important powers, as Montesquieu said. So, democracy is not in danger in the short term, but we should all be aware of the issues that democracy is facing in Spain and in Europe.

Question from Meran: Is it possible that a new civil war breaks out in Spain because Catalonia wants to be independent?

Prof. Herrera: I don't think so. As you probably know, the question of the independence of Catalonia was highly critical a few years ago, five or seven years ago, but not now. I think that the new policy by the current President Sanchez is trying to loosen the tension in Catalonia. According to surveys, there are less and less people who believe in the independence of Catalonia. That's the point. If there are a lot of people – up to two millions of people in Catalonia – who believe in the independence, this is a problem. At the moment, this is not the case.

Question from Meran: Were there any mistakes that were made regarding the autonomy of the Basque region?

Question from St. Ulrich: How does the Spanish democracy protect linguistic and cultural minorities and why do modern democracies rarely want to recognize democratically legitimized independence aspirations of individual regions?

Question from Sarajevo: What would you say is the biggest flaw of the Spanish democracy today and how does it relate to the Catalanian question?

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



Prof. Herrera: They're all questions related to nationalism in Spain. I know this is an important question that people usually ask. I'm going to try to answer all the questions together, including the issue of the language minorities, if you don't mind. Well, there were no mistakes, in my opinion, at the moment of the transition to democracy. The solution was a good solution. Taking into account the situation, try to go through the past in your mind. Now we are in the 1970s or the beginning of the 1980s, after a civil war followed by 40 years of dictatorship. The people are afraid. The militaries are very conservative, they support the authoritarian regime and don't want to recognize the autonomous regions because they think that Spain is just one, the Spanish people are equal and we don't have different cultures, languages and behaviours, in general. So, imagine that moment. If they wanted to avoid a new civil war at that moment, they had to write tricky or strange statements in the Constitution. So, Spain is one nation with different nationalities inside, which means a very strange situation. The people who drafted the Constitution thought that only the Basque Country, Catalonia or maybe Galicia were going to be autonomous regions inside Spain, because they had had an autonomous government during the 1930s in Spain. But suddenly something happened - millions of people in Spain claimed "Why not my region?". For example, in Andalusia, in the South of Spain, millions of people went to the streets saying "We want the same political competencies". So, the Constitution was changed and it established that every region could become an autonomous region, with their own competencies, their own politics and their own governments, but they had to remain inside the nation. I think it was a good solution at that moment. The problem is that after 40 years the situation is different. So, if there are people claiming for a review of these laws or these articles in the Constitution, why not? We should sit with these people and talk and if you don't do that you have a problem, like we had 10 years ago when the Conservative government refused to recognize, for example, the Catalan language in Catalonia. So, I think it was a good solution and I think it's a good solution to allow these different nationalities to exist and recognize the minorities in linguistic terms. So, it is a challenge, even today it is a big challenge for democracy in Spain, which depends on the moment, on the economic context, etc. This problem is going to be like a wave in history and it is unresolved. At the same time, I think it's not easy to solve if there are a lot of people claiming for independence. We'll see in the future. These are very complex issues and I would need at least another talk, an hour or more, to explain the background of this situation in Spain or in Galicia.

Question from Sonthofen: Do you agree that reconciliation with the past is one of the crucial factors in the process of transition from authoritarian to democratic systems? That's the real reason for teaching history in an attempt to contribute to the process of renewing democracy again and again, isn't it?

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



Prof. Herrera: Yes, I agree. Reconciliation was a very important point at that moment, but that's not always the point, not in every case. It was useful for the Spanish transition at that moment, but it's not always like this, there is not a magic recipe for improving our democracies that is valid every time, every day. If you think that reconciliation is a magic recipe to successfully transform an authoritarian regime into a democratic regime, you're going to see failure in the future. It was useful in Spain, but it is not always like that. It depends on the context. For example, I have a colleague who specialises on Latin America and he wrote a very impressive book about transitions to democracies in Latin America and he studied at least 20 different countries in the last 70 years and one of the conclusions was: "Not exactly reconciliation, but consensus, moderation is a key point to maintain stability in democracy". It's a common-sense idea, but he demonstrated it studying different countries. So, of course, consensus, in general, helps to promote democracy, it helps to keep democracy safe, in general.

Question from Granada: Were there any women who had a significant influence during the Spanish democratic transition?

Prof. Herrera: I really like this question: yes, yes, of course. But, as you probably can imagine, sometimes history forgets women when they reconstruct. In the last 20 or 30 years historians here in Spain are recovering this memory, giving an important role to women in the process of democratization. We need to transfer these ideas, we need to spread these ideas and write books for secondary schools, for example, and for people in general to show the important role played by women in different kinds of associations. For example, the role played by women in the student movement was very important, they took part in the movement in the universities, but they were also very important in the neighbourhood associations. So yes, yes the answer is yes, and I'm sorry because I didn't mention it.

Question from Granada: Do you think that the appropriation of some symbols as the flag, for example, can cause some kind of division between the society or the State itself?

Prof. Herrera: I always say the same with my students when I talk about nationalism in history in general. Think about why an American person in the States, who votes either for the Democrats or the Republicans, can put a big flag of the States outside his house. And my students always ask – Why can't we do the same? I would like to have this flag at my door saying "Viva España", but I don't want to give the impression that I support Franco's regime just because I'm proud of my country. And I always say

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



the same thing, "I'm sorry, but nationalism is related to history and it's only logical that our flag, even today, continues to be part of our history." During at least 40 years a dictator used the flag to symbolise just one part of Spain and it's only logical that even today in our memory some of these symbols are part of this horrible past history. So, we probably need time and the proof of that is when Spain won the World Football Championship, I think 10 years ago. At that moment a lot of people wore the T-shirt of Spain, including people who voted for left-wing parties. So, who knows what happens in the future, but the symbols of nationalism are always related to the history of a country. So, yes, of course, this appropriation of some symbols causes an impact in the minds of people even today.

Question from Meran: Are right-wing parties in Spain still more openly linked to Franco? Is there a legacy to Franco's party more than, for example, Italian people or German right-wing parties are towards Mussolini or Hitler?

Prof. Herrera: Well, as you probably know it's not easy to make comparisons and I think sometimes it's not a very good exercise, but the answer is - yes, it's not a majority, but we do have a party like this. This is Vox. This is a new Fascism in Spain and I think it's very dangerous for democracy. In theory they agree with the rules of democracy, but it's not true, they only agree on the surface, at the institutional and political level, but they are not willing, for example, to accept the rights of the minorities, they don't want to accept different rights that we have now in Spain, they are not willing to accept the opposition. For them the Spaniards are all the same. They have a profile of the Spanish people and that is Spain. If you do not comply with this profile, you are not Spanish. It reminds me of the discourse of Franco.

Darman, Sarajevo: My question is related not only to Spain but to the whole of Europe and its policy of preserving democracy. In this current geopolitical situation, with the Russian aggression against Ukraine, we are aware that there are increasing attacks on democracy. In my country, for example, as a country that is in the process of completing democratization, there are attacks on its sovereignty and territorial integrity every day. Bosnian-Serb leaders from the Republika Srpska are directly linked to the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, and call for the dissolution of the State every day, openly saying that they are waiting for a suitable geopolitical situation to declare independence. This is a very broad topic, but I'm only interested in whether there's a will in Europe and, more specifically in Spain, Italy, Germany, to protect the young democracies wherever they are in Europe, because the spread of Russian malicious activities in Europe is a problem not only for my country, but also for the whole of Europe. In fact, if such moves are encouraged, if the perpetrators see that Europe will watch silently, this will certainly whet the appetites of many across Europe and the

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com



world to do the same as Russia is doing in Ukraine. Now I wonder if there is a will in Europe to openly oppose this and stop all such attempts, thank you.

Prof. Herrera: Thank you very much, I don't have an answer of course, just reflections. Well, I think that an international answer is important when democracies are being attacked in other places, and not just in your country. We know a lot about that in Spain. After the civil war, when Franco came to power here in Spain, we didn't receive any help from other democracies in Europe. And that's why we - not only because of this, of course – but that's also why we suffered 40 years of dictatorship, because the other democracies didn't move a finger to change this policy in Spain. Precisely because of that, we don't want this to happen other countries and I think this is important. I think it is important to support democracy in other countries. The only problem is, I'm not quite sure how. Which is the way to help? I'm not quite sure if military help is a good solution. I'm not an expert in geopolitics. However, what I'm sure about is that all democracies in the world have the obligation to somehow protect democracies in other places, especially young democracies. The problem nowadays in Europe is very complicated, as you mentioned. It is difficult because if you help in one way, you will probably have problems in another way, for example with energy resources. I have no answers to that. The situation is overwhelming for me and I'm very worried, like you, probably all of you. I'm sorry for not being more precise. The only thing I know is that we have the obligation to protect young democracies in Europe.

Schools beyond regions and borders (2021-2023)

Austria – Bosnia-Herzegovina – France – Germany – Ireland – Italy – Spain

web: www.sbrb.eu | email: sbrb.2023@gmail.com