

Television in Spain

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Spain is one of the largest European countries, but its many problems during this century have kept it out of the mainstream of European politics and economics. The democratic governments that followed the Franco dictatorship inherited an unusually varied broadcast structure. After a phase of centralizing government control, Spanish television, even without cable distribution, is beginning to open up and join the evolution in the rest of Europe.

History

Radio was initiated in Spain by Antonio de Castilla in 1917 with the establishment of the private Iberian Telecommunications Company for radio sets (Emery, 1969). Experimental broadcasts were begun in 1918. In 1923, the government decreed a code for radio regulation, establishing a state monopoly, but with the possibility for private licenses, placing it under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior. Radio Barcelona, the first private station, began transmissions in 1924. After some consolidation, Radio Iberia emerged as the primary station, and other stations were rapidly granted licenses. Low-power stations were also approved and networks soon emerged. In 1929, a state radio system was proposed, and in 1934, the law establishing the system was passed. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, there were sixty-eight radio stations, the most important of which were Union Radio and its successor, the Sociedad Española de Radiodifusión (SER) (Lopez-Escobar and Faus-Belau, 1985).

In 1937, the Franco rebels established the Radio Nacional de España (RNE), which became the official government station after their Civil War victory in 1939. It was awarded a monopoly over radio news, and all other stations were required to carry its news broadcasts exclusively. This state monopoly of news dissemination was later extended to television and led to its low credibility.

The Spanish Broadcasting Authority was created in February 1942 and placed under the control of the National Ministry of Education three years later. After 1945, the Franco regime granted licenses for several new radio stations and chains to its various supporters, which included the Church, the official national labor union, the Falange party, certain business interests, and the provincial branches of the Franco party (Franuquet, 1986; Gorostiaga, 1976; Ezcurra, 1984). It did so outside the allocations of the international frequency system, from which it had been excluded as an illegitimate regime.

The regime later permitted the establishment of low-power local stations. By 1962 there were about 1300 such radio transmitters in the country! The state loosened its tight restrictions on news coverage in 1964, allowing the nongovernmental radio stations to begin carrying some local news in addition to the official RNE menu. But only the SER stations did so; the others cautiously abstained (Faus-Belau, 1990). During the 1960s, however, most of the small local stations were shut down and others were required to upgrade their equipment.

By the time of Franco's death in 1975, there were 210 stations still operating (Lopez-Escobar and Faus-Belau, 1985).

Television service began with a single channel in 1956 provided by the government authority Televisión Española. A second channel was added in 1965, and color broadcasting began in 1969 (de Moragas et al., 1986). In contrast to radio, television operated from the beginning as a state monopoly. Unlike common European practice, TVE exists without license fee financing and, until 1984, relied instead on a budgetary allocation by the state and advertising revenue. Until 1977, the Ministry of Information made certain that television news content adhered to the official line.

By the end of the Franco regime, several radio networks had emerged, including the private SER system, which was owned primarily by two families and the newspaper El País and which controlled fifty-four AM stations. The country's other large networks included the following: the Franco-controlled REM/CAR, with forty-seven stations; the Church's COPE, network with forty-four; CES, run by the official trade union movement, with twenty-seven; and RNE, the official governmental system, with twenty-one. Two smaller private networks, CRI and RATO, were also operating in 1985 (Lopez-Escobar and Faus-Belau, 1985).

Regulation and Reform

A former member of Franco's regime characterized the governmental broadcast system that the Generalissimo left behind in 1975 as

being "industrially obsolete, economically extravagant and intellectually reactionary" (Howkins, 1983, p. 22). By the time of the dictator's death in 1975, it had become obvious that change was necessary. But the new government did not want to relinquish its influence over broadcasting. In 1977, the first of Prime Minister Adolfo Suarez's broadcasting reforms went into effect, with a royal decree proclaiming freedom of speech over radio. Yet the government also kept a 25 percent ownership in larger private broadcasting operations. Soon thereafter, several of the Church and labor organization stations were integrated into the state RCE system, which must be distinguished from the advertising-free governmental RNE network that remained. RCE, RNE, and RTE were put under a holding organization RTVE, the central institution of Spanish broadcasting. Thus, the state broadcasting apparatus created by the fascist dictatorship was preserved and strengthened even though it was now run by a democratic regime.

Two years later, however, the Suarez government opened up FM radio to new private entrants by initiating a two-phase process for the issuance of 300 new licenses for low-power and local broadcasting. More than 2000 applications for the stations were received from a variety of groups, including private firms, political parties, local governments, publishers, and labor unions. Most of the first group of licenses went to established broadcasters and publishing firms.

Two networks emerged from among the new stations:

Antenna-3, a system of stations run by private newspapers, and Radio 80. Competition from these new networks reinvigorated the private SER and the Church-run COPE networks. Private radio networks included SER (140 stations), COPE (98), RR (37), Antenna 3/Radio BU (50), and Cadena 13 (13) (de Moragas et al., 1986).

The Suarez government also authorized regional governments to allocate broadcast licenses. This new policy led to the proliferation of public municipal FM stations, which often operated without any license or authorization, and to the growth of the pirate "radios libres." In 1988, there were an estimated 640 unauthorized radio stations in operation. The local and regional governments' ability to run their own public radio stations encouraged the creation of official broadcasting organizations on a variety of government levels, since each desired a direct access to the population.

The Socialist government that followed accelerated the trend toward official radio. The plan gave 31 percent of the 1856 new FM stations to the state broadcasting system, 8 percent to regional governments, and 42 percent to local authorities. Only 18 percent went to private broadcasters, whose stations were also often restricted to much lower signal strength than official stations. Of the private licenses, many went to individuals and firms supporting the Socialists, and they quickly announced plans to organize into a national network dubbed the "Rose Network." The governmental RCE and RNE also received twenty-two additional licenses and were merged into one radio organization,

RNE. Despite the enormous allocation to official stations, they have only 20 percent of the audience, whereas 80 percent listen to private stations (Faus-Belau, 1990).

RTVE consists of three separate divisions: TVE (Televisión España) and the two radio networks RNE (Radio Nacional de España), and RCE (Radio Cadena Española). RTVE conducts broadcast transmission and provides the links between its various transmitters rather than employing the telephone monopoly Telefónica. It is controlled by a board of governors appointed by the two chambers of Parliament (i.e., by the major political parties). RTVE's director general is appointed directly by the government and not by the board. The director general, in turn, appoints the directors of the television and radio companies and their regional representatives. Because RTVE's high administrative officers depend on political appointments, changes in the composition of the governmental bodies lead to turnover at the top of RTVE.

The first director general, Fernando Castedo, a member of the centrist Democratic Union, resigned after only six months in office. His resignation was the result of pressure from narrow-minded conservative politicians who charged him with giving the opposition too much influence over broadcasting by encouraging independent broadcasting. His successor, Robles Piquer, was related to the leader of the conservatives, and his appointment was thus a response to criticism that the RTVE had become too liberal. These moves damaged the RTVE's embryonic

neutral image. The changes also triggered heated confrontations within the television staff, and hundreds of members signed petitions for and against various policies of the authority.

In 1982, the Socialist party received an absolute electoral majority. Like the UCD before it, the Socialists found it difficult to permit truly independent broadcasting, and the government of Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez exerted strong control over both television and radio. It increased the number of government radio stations by incorporating a number of private stations into the public RCE network and in the process gave the state, for the first time, control over a majority of Spanish radio stations. The government also blocked the introduction of private television broadcasting, which was on the brink of realization. Partly as a result of the politicization of the broadcast institutions, the listenership of RNE stations dropped by about 70 percent from 1982 to 1986 (Faus-Belau, 1990).

In 1983, the Socialists enacted their own reform of the broadcasting charter and brought RTVE under the direction of a new government department, the Ministry of the Presidency. Only one-half of RTVE's administrative board would be elected by the two chambers of Parliament; the rest of its members would represent cultural, educational, and economic interests. Through the exercise of powers accorded to the government under a constitutional court decision, RTVE's monopoly was extended into all forms of broadcasting and transmission, including cable and satellites (Lopez-Escobar and Faus-Belau, 1985).

The government also passed a law permitting the establishment of a third television channel under state control. In addition, it provided for broadcast concessions to be granted to autonomous regions such as that of the Basques, who wanted to operate their own programs. The Basques and Catalonians' advocacy of provisions for regionally controlled broadcasting came to fruition with the creation of a third RTVE channel designed to feature regionally provided programming. Although this station was placed under the control of the central government, elements of decentralization were built into its organizational structure. When the new channel was introduced, the ruling Socialist party was not in power in either of these regions, and thus its locally-provided programming supplied a measure of political contrast to the fare provided by RTVE's national stations. For that reason, the Socialists were not very enthusiastic about regional TV.

Because the Spanish constitution guarantees the freedom of expression through the media, those seeking the liberalization of broadcasting brought a number of cases before the constitutional court. The first case was argued in 1980, when an applicant for a private television channel sued the government to force it to act upon requests it had previously ignored. The court ruled that although private television broadcasting was not prohibited by the Spanish constitution, the right to allow it was a political matter and thus the prerogative of the government.

In 1982, the second case resulted in a temporary

liberalization of television similar to the landmark decision of the Italian constitutional court a decade earlier. The suit was a challenge to state television monopoly brought by Antenna-3, a venture of several large publishers. Referring to the constitutional principle of free speech, the court found no basis in the Spanish constitution for the existence of such a governmental monopoly. Until Parliament succeeded in passing a law specifically outlawing it, private broadcasting was thus permissible (Howkins, 1983). Eight companies announced their interest in television licenses, including one company that was already operating SER, the country's largest private radio network. Among the others were a left-wing newspaper, various Catholic organizations, and Basque, Catalanian, and Valencian interests. The political center and right were in favor of this liberalization, but the Socialist party opposed it.

In 1984, the publishing group El País, a newspaper close to the government, acquired control of the private radio network SER, thus bringing the largest private broadcast network in Europe into the government's orbit. Allegedly, the government exerted pressure on the stock owners of SER to sell to El País. The government owned 25 percent of SER since the end of the Franco regime, under a law enacted at the time.

An important attempt to reorganize overall Spanish telecommunications and media was made with the decision of the proposed Communications Ordinance Decree (LOC) in 1985, which aimed to integrate the various telecommunications authorities.

This attempt at broad reform was stalled, however, by a government crisis, leading instead to the introduction of several narrower reform bills.

Under the provisions of the television reform, RTVE was to begin sharing its authority with three regional television operations, one for each of the three major Spanish regions, but all three operated under state or community government control. These regional organizations would be supervised by administrative committees appointed by either regional legislators or the Spanish Parliament, with the membership of each reflecting the strength of the various political parties (de Moragas et al., forthcoming).

In 1986, the Socialist government published a bill for the legalization of private television and the establishment of three private networks. It was criticized as requiring several years for actual implementation and as providing inadequate assurances of renewal in case of a change of government. It specified that 40 percent of the programs on the new private channels would be of Spanish origin and that advertising would be permitted for up to ten minutes per hour. Foreign investment would be allowed up to 25 percent of total ownership, provided it came from other EC countries and Latin America (i.e., not from the United States). The law was enacted in 1988, and the government began granting licenses in 1989. Transmission facilities were transferred to a new state agency, Retevisión (Magdaleno, 1989).

The most successful of the new regional television channels

was Telemadrid, which gained over 40 percent of the audience in Madrid in a short time. Others were TV3 and Canal 33 (Barcelona stations in Catalan language), TV Galicia, Televisión Valencia, Canal Sur (Andalucia), and Euskal Telebista (Basque). These regional stations formed the Association of Autonomous Television Stations early in 1990. In many instances, they are dependent on their regional governments.

Cable television came to Spain in 1970, with the government's extension of cable rights to RTVE. Two years later, RTVE entered into an agreement with the telecommunications administration CTNE (also known as Telefónica) for the construction of pilot networks in Madrid and Barcelona. Trunk lines were laid for these networks, but for a variety of reasons, no households were ever connected to them.

Subsequently, cable service existed only on a very small scale. Although Telefónica had a general interest in its development, the administration was not given legislative support and had to abandon a Madrid development. There were only a few municipal pilots projects in place and two tiny private systems. In 1986, however, the Catalan regional government initiated a project for Barcelona, as part of modernizing for the 1992 Olympic Games. Telefónica also began to plan for a Madrid system as a core of national cable distribution.

In 1989, the government awarded three licenses for national commercial networks to Antena 3, Canal Plus, and Tele-5. Charges of political favoritism were made when two other broadcast

groups, Canal C and Grupo Zeta, the latter backed by Rupert Murdoch, were denied licenses. Each channel must offer at least 40 percent domestic programming. Antena 3, a consortium of 24 newspaper publishers, several radio stations, and foreign investors (20 percent) was the first to begin broadcasting in 1989, after the October 1989 elections, with a fairly domestic and family-oriented programming. Canal Plus is a pay channel owned by the French company of the same name (25 percent), the dailies El País (25 percent), Prisa (20 percent), an ex-minister of the Socialist government, and others, and was slow in establishing its infrastructure of films, decoders, and subscribers. Tele-5 is owned by the Italian Silvio Berlusconi, the publisher Anaya, and the semiofficial Spanish Institute for the Blind. In just six months, with imported programming, Tele-5 won a 27 percent audience rating and projected \$90 million in revenues for 1990. Tele-5 reached 34 percent of Spanish viewers concentrated in major urban areas, and planned national coverage by 1994. Indirectly, the government has some influence over Canal Plus and Tele-5.

Conclusion

Broadcasting in the Iberian Peninsula was for a long time distinct from the rest of Europe, since the fascist government's attitude toward private participation was ambiguous. On the one hand, the strong state required state broadcasting as a means of propaganda. But on the other hand, it rewarded private

supporters, and its corporatist ideology permitted broadcasting by the Church, official labor organizations, and municipalities. The system inherited by the new democratic regime was thus mixed, at least for radio, and susceptible to opening, especially given the left's greater tolerance to a mixed system than that in northern Europe. At first, radio was liberalized, though with a strong emphasis on official radio. The radio model was continued into television, in which more publishers participate and international media firms actively participate. The strong regional diversity of the country also led to autonomous public and private broadcast institutions.

Spain is only at the beginning of becoming an information society, but the trend is unmistakable and will lead in time to a greater diversity of content, as well as role in production, especially for Latin America, in the way that it already does in the very active telephone sector.

Broadcasting in Gibraltar

Gibraltar is located at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula and has been a British possession since 1704. Its relations with neighboring Spain have been strained, since Spain claims it as its own. In 1958, government radio broadcasting began in Gibraltar. Four years later, a private local broadcast operation with connections to the Thomson organization started its own service. In 1963, the two were merged to create the independent Gibraltar Broadcasting Corporation (GibBC), which was managed by

Thomson television until 1978 (Black, 1980).

GibBC is formally run by a board of eight members who answer to the governor-in-council. The board is responsible for broadcasting standards and practices and maintains editorial independence from the government. The government supports GibBC through subsidies because advertising revenues, given the area's small population, are not adequate. Additional financing comes from license fees. GibBC Radio broadcasts a fair amount of Spanish-language programming, but television is available only in English. A second radio service was started in the early 1980s on the VHF band.

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