

A Case of Polarized Pluralism in a Mediterranean country. The Media and Politics in Spain

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Abstract

Based on the polarized pluralism – or Mediterranean – model for the media, (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), we have analyzed the structure of the media system in Spain from the beginning of the post-Franco democracy at the end of the 1970s through to its current form today. Although some authors have considered the Spanish media system to be a mixture of the liberal and Mediterranean models (both described by Hallin and Mancini), we argue that the polarized pluralism model is applicable to the Spanish case. Below, we review the indicators used by Hallin and Mancini to classify the media models, with a view to demonstrating that Spain fulfils the 4 prerequisites set out by the authors typifying the Mediterranean media model: The low degree of press circulation (contrasting with a high level of TV viewing); an authoritarian past in which part of the media was involved in the struggle for freedom resulting in their political alienation; a low degree of autonomy among Spanish journalists under both political and commercial pressure, and a high degree of state interventionism in public media.

Introduction: the polarized pluralism model

Drawing upon Hallin and Mancini's (2004) comparative study proposal, we situate the Spanish media in the general context of media in western democracies with the dual purpose of highlighting the structure of the media system in Spain and to evaluate its relevance to the polarized pluralism model.

Hallin and Mancini classify media systems according to three ideal types: the polarized pluralism model – the one that most interests us – and the models of democratic corporatism (central and northern Europe) and liberalism (characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon world). The classification takes into account four main variables or dimensions: press circulation, the level of professionalization of journalists, the political nature of the media and the level of state intervention.

Hallin and Mancini include Spain in the Mediterranean model for four main reasons: Firstly, for the relatively low press circulation¹, which is a consequence of, on the one hand, a traditionally weak publishing industry, and on the other, a history of democracies that have been frequently interrupted by periods of restrictions or absence of freedom. In addition, Spain's press is mainly aimed at the political and cultural elite leaving the vast majority of the population at the mercy of the audiovisual media and the free press.

Secondly, the struggle for freedom in which the Spanish media has been involved brought about a political aligning of the media wherein they compete among themselves not only for commercial benefit but also as a result of their political inclinations (Hallin & Mancini, p. 106) This political aligning of the media distracts them from their primary mission of reporting and leads them to tasks of ideological indoctrination. This political *parallelism* is much more present in the corporatist model, and much less common in the liberal model.

Thirdly, Spanish journalists see their professional autonomy considerably reduced, and are at risk of being used (not only because of financial pressure from the media group where they work, but also by the political parties themselves). The professionalization of journalists in Spain has traditionally been and remains limited as is explored and explained below.

Finally, the Mediterranean media model is characterised by a high degree of state intervention that implies a fairly high level of governmental arbitrariness, both in the use of the public media and in the granting of licences. Crucially, in the lifespan of Spanish democracy, the media players have become powerful industrial conglomerates, while the mainstream political parties have weakened as a consequence of territorial fragmentation in Spanish politics and in the creation of an ideological vacuum. This means that the political parties have an ever-increasing dependency on the media to promote and defend their strategies.

Case study: Spain (1975-2004)

Below, we analyse the structure of the Spanish media system from the transition to democracy after the dictatorial regime of General Franco (1939-1975), to the crisis caused by the terrorist bombings in Madrid on the March 11, 2004. This extended historical review will highlight the distinctive

characteristics of the Spanish media system as they closely parallel Hallin and Mancini's (2004) polarized pluralism model.

The beginning of the media system

We will revise the stages that have led to the current situation, specifically the transition from the television monopoly to the mixed system with public-private competition, in which the public sector has a two-fold characteristic:

- It is a government sector, more than a public one, and is therefore more at the service of the government than the public.
- It is a fragmented sector with the model being repeated in each region, thus multiplying its defects to the point of a caricature².

At the risk of over-simplifying, it is worth noting that from the point of view of the public media, the political transition brought about, on the one hand, the end of a considerable amount of the old press chain of the Movement³, as it had become too much of an onerous deadweight in times of economic crisis and ideological shift, and, on the other, a government control of the television monopoly. If the organisational mess of the UCD⁴ made it feasible to hope for an open and plural media (at least for a while), the arrival of the Social Party to power (1982) laid any doubt to rest. Television was considered a political resource too important to be left to the devices of democratic participation, as President Adolfo Suárez⁵ knew only too well – he had been the director of TVE at the beginning of the seventies. This was most evident in key moments of the transition including the referendum on political reform and the first constitutional elections (in 1979, when the opposition from the left threatened the UCD's aspirations of repeating their electoral triumph).

In 1980 UCD and PSOE⁶ signed an RTVE Statute which has been in force since then and which sets out the ideal of a plural, autonomous public service, while at the same time, granting the government the possibility of controlling it.

The practical self-dissolution of the UCD and the resultant majority for the PSOE in 1982 – the clearest majority of the democracy – gave the socialist government a wide margin to terminate any ambiguity. The socialists took over from the UCD although, unlike in other spheres, not only were media issues not resolved, they were complicated even further. The first of these problems to be tackled was the privatization of the Social Communication Media of the State (the old channel of the Movement), privatization having been blocked by the left when in opposition. Once in power, the socialists saw in the media an opportunity to create an alternative network to the old media establishment. The plan did not prosper, partly because the workers themselves did not want to take the risk of each company being self-managed (as the government wanted), and partly because the job of reporting was becoming more and more arduous, particularly in the context of the economic depression in the early years of the socialist mandate.

The second problem they inherited was the privatization of television, which the previous government of the UCD had considered a prerequisite for democratic development but which the socialist government treated with greater caution: blocking any possibility of privatizing during their first two mandates (1982 through 1986 and 1986 through 1989). In fact it was not until the end of the eighties that the Socialist Party decided to end the television monopoly, as discussed below. By way of compensation, the government paved the way for autonomous channels, with a subsequent proliferation of radio-television entities that in practical terms, have only served to multiply the defects of a governmental model that they were supposed to improve.

The most serious problem was the progressive rift between the government's reporting policy as represented by public TV channel and private media. It is true that in the 1980s all kinds of problems surfaced including the government vetoing participation of certain politicians in popular televised debates (that were ultimately withdrawn by the government), to using television to attack opposition leaders in terms that an ideologically sympathetic daily newspaper, "El País", considered unacceptable, to the government responding to a demand for transparency in the financing of parties with a threat to also investigate the financing of the media (Fernández & Santana, 2000, p. 286). Nevertheless, the main problem was that the government believed that the media was threatening the democratic mandate obtained in the elections – as if the contrast between the views of the audience and the verdict of the voters was a dysfunctional anomaly in need of adjustment and correction. Rather than self-criticism the government resorted to self-defence and as such was doomed to lose face with public opinion (Jiménez, 1995).

Importantly, the social response became more outspoken in the latter half of the eighties. In December 1988, the unprecedented success of a general strike called by the trade unions made manifest the loss of authority suffered by the government amongst wide sectors of the population who were becoming increasingly critical of its management. It is no coincidence that the strike started a roller-coaster year in terms of public opinion: 1989 was not only an election year – a circumstance which normally leads governments to bring in changes in the area of the media – it was also the year that saw the creation of the “El Mundo” daily newspaper. This was to be the most expressive mouthpiece for the disenfranchised youth and the new urban middle classes in the face of the new political and media establishment.

The liberalization of the audiovisual market

1989 will be remembered above all as the year that saw the liberalization of television. After several years in which the government had been toying with different initiatives, it could no longer put off the regulating of such a sensitive topic. Importantly, Spanish society was experiencing economic euphoria and now that it had joined the EEC there was a plague of economic groups – not only national ones – who wanted to be part of the TV business. Furthermore, according to EGM⁷ data, the audiences for the different media had plateaued in the eighties: not only had the TV monopoly reached its limit but also the radio audience stopped growing as it topped 15 million listeners and even the daily press remained stable in the second half of the eighties. Overall then, the panorama of the media did not reflect the dynamic nature of the economic, not to mention civil, society.

After consulting with the media groups who were best positioned to obtain a licence, the government proposed a regulatory law which established, among other things, the following: licences would be granted for 10 years, advertising could not exceed 10% of air time and 40% of the programmes shown had to be produced in Spain. With a view to reducing the risk of a dominant position, a maximum share participation of 25% was fixed, which was reduced to 15% when the shareholder held 15% in other media. This was interpreted by the PRISA⁸ group as a direct assault on its interests. “El País” responded by claiming that the socialist government was obsessed with intervention, that the regulation represented political opportunism and, all in all, that the measure implied a lack of confidence in civil society (Seoane & Sueiro, 2004, p. 431 – 432).

The problem was that as a consequence of the technical-economic demands of the government, the regulation only allowed for the granting of 3 licences which the government had already envisaged going to a trio formed by Antena 3 TV (led by the Godó group who edited “La Vanguardia”⁹), Univisión (led by Grupo Z) and Canal Plus (led by PRISA). Faced with the inevitable withdrawal of PRISA, the government sought out new allies in Italy, where Silvio Berlusconi – owner of Tele 5 – was establishing a media empire with no opposition from the socialist leader Bettino Craxi (Ginsborg, 2006). This all made for a very prickly final decision as some of the best-placed contender would be left out. (Tijeras, 2005; Jiménez, 2005). Below, we will discuss the controversy caused by the licence going to Canal Plus, while, at the same time, the regulation demanded that any group requesting a licence had to offer a public service which did not tie in well with a pay channel. This led to the principal loser, Grupo Z, taking legal action over the political nature of the operation.

That moment represented a turning point in the dynamics of the media. On the one hand, audiences increased and the transformation occurred in a short space of time: Spain went from a TV monopoly to stiff competition between the 3 main channels (Channel 1 of TVE and the two newly-formed commercial channels: Antena 3 and Tele 5), to which we now add the autonomous channels from each region. The operation to privatize TV triggered a battle for control of the media that spread to radio and the press. Such was the case that the media in their entirety became locked in a spiral of political polarization which has made it impossible to find “public opinion” independent of the political parties.

Given that one of the licensed TV channels was a pay channel, the vast majority of the audience was left with the two commercial channels vying for advertising revenue, leading to a dynamic of degradation and low quality programming which dragged TVE-1 and the autonomous channels with it, leaving only La2 of TVE to justify the alleged public service nature of RTVE (Sinova & Tusell 1997, p. 207).

With the benefit of hindsight, the transition appears to have been a missed opportunity to create a public sphere in the true sense of the word. This opportunity was betrayed by the political decisions of successive governments, both socialist as we have just seen, and Partido Popular – as we will see below. Consequently, the panorama for the media in Spain matches Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) Mediterranean model perfectly.

The scenario of media polarization which has been created in Spain means that media performances fall far short of what would be expected of them – vis-à-vis, fair reporting of the news and a means of

encouraging an informed electorate that can engage actively in democratic decision-making. Instead, there is the only conceivable option where no truly public sphere exists: the favouring of one side over the other (Díaz Nosty, 2006, p. 40). This explains why the daily bombardment of political information to which the Spanish audience is subjected is plagued with insults and innuendo that only serves to turn politics into an agonising and pointless sport, with the sole purpose of creating a spiral of criticism against opponents (Humanes, 2006).

Given that during most of her democracy, the Socialist Party has governed Spain, it would be easy to illustrate the situation using the contrast between media serving the interests of the socialist government and private media serving the interests of an opposition party that is prepared to pay any price to oust the PSOE from government. However, we are going to follow an alternative strategy, in an attempt to ascertain to what extent the media groups that have surfaced due to their sympathy towards the socialist government, have in the same way been unable to escape the trap of polarization so typical of the Spanish case.

A study of the reference press

According to the typology used here as a reference, the Mediterranean model is characterised by low circulation and by a reference press that is aimed at the political and cultural elite. In addition, the unusual history of the Mediterranean countries has contributed to a political aligning of the media with the subsequent risk of ideological polarization.

Each of these characteristics raises a problem: the first is the risk of the confrontation of a public opinion divided between the educated middle class minority and the greater public – the victims of a (mostly TV) media bombardment, with precious little cultural input (Díaz Nosty, 2005). While the first problem is an important one, we concentrate on the second: the risk of ideological polarization as a consequence of the political alignment of the media. This necessitates highlighting the main players in the Spanish press – one of the main battlegrounds in the polarization war.

The reference press is understood to be the daily newspapers that, given their position and prestige, have become leaders in the creation of public opinion – at least in the field of information with a political and socio-economic content. According to one expert, “in Spain when we talk about reference press, we’re thinking of *El País*, *El Mundo*, *Abc* and *La Vanguardia*” (Reig, 1998, p. 154). Of the four, the last two correspond to the family business model generated by liberal capitalism, which adapted more or less readily to Franco’s regime, and survived all the problems of the 20th century. The first two, however, were created in the climate of the freedom of expression, which was typical in the transition¹⁰.

At the beginning of the transition, media panorama was highly concentrated in public media under government control and scarcely counterbalanced by two private radio stations (“*Cadena Ser*” and “*COPE*”, the latter being under the guidance of the Episcopal Conference¹¹) and two newspapers dating from before the Franco regime (“*Abc*” and “*La Vanguardia*”). During the Franco regime a strict censorship had been in place until the mid-1970s after which time it was eased, although the governmental influence could still be felt in the newly found press freedom. (Chuliá, 2001, pp. 203 – 209). With the transition, censorship disappeared, the media panorama diversified, the State withdrew the official press of the Movement, and competition between radio stations and between newspapers became extraordinarily frenetic.

Newspapers which had existed before Franco’s time, including “*Abc*” and “*La Vanguardia*”, represent a model of family business which survived the problems of the 20th century, as a result of their greater or lesser capacity to adapt to or take on board the demands of the regime. In the case of “*La Vanguardia*”, it is a newspaper that moved between liberal and conservative and which, in the 1930s, reached a readership of 250,000 (Reig, 1998, p. 91). Since then, it has been the most read newspaper in Catalonia and from the end of the 1990s it has been trying to increase its readership outside the region. In the case of “*Abc*”, it has been directly related to the Luca de Tena¹² family since its creation in 1909 until the middle of the 1990s when it came under the control of another great family empire of the Spanish publishing field: the *Correo* group. This group is dominated by a small number of Basque bourgeoisie families who, once established in the Basque Country, spread to other regions, becoming a national newspaper in the 1990s when it joined *Prensa Española* (editors of “*Abc*”) and *Tele 5*.

The history of the other two reference newspapers – “*El País*” and “*El Mundo*” – reads differently. In the case of the first, a group of professionals critical of the Franco regime promoted a newspaper that was initially designed to give media coverage to the leaders of the movement to open up the Regime. In the end they supported the Socialist Party. In the second, the problems of “*Diario 16*” (another of the most emblematic newspapers of the transition), led its director, Pedro J. Ramírez, to create “*El Mundo*”, at the end of the 1980s, taking advantage of the increasing discontent among wide sections of the urban

middle classes and the youth with the socialist government. El Mundo has not achieved anything like the success of “El País” and the creation of Spain’s main multimedia group (PRISA).

Picture 1: The reference press “La Vanguardia” and “Abc”



Source: www.lavanguardia.es and www.abc.es

The fact that PRISA obtained a national TV channel (Canal Plus) in the first liberalization of TV media, when “El Mundo” did not, is a crucial moment in the configuration of today’s Spanish culture industry. It also highlights the lot of the two long-standing players in the Catalan and Madrid press: “La Vanguardia” and “Abc”. The latter joined Tele 5 and together they entered the Correo group, creating Vocento whereas “La Vanguardia”, which had initially obtained a position of power through its shares in Antena 3 TV, lost control to the Zeta group. This has led to a considerable loss of influence.

The media panorama is completed with the arrival of the Planeta¹³ group among the shareholders of Antena 3 TV. This occurred after the fiasco of the media operation in the first government of José María Aznar and the attempt to involve the Telefónica Company in the creation of a multimedia group that was sympathetic to the Partido Popular. The operation, which included a digital platform project (Vía Digital) competing with PRISA (Canal Satélite Digital), ended with the takeover of Vía Digital by Canal Satélite and with Telefónica being replaced by Planeta in the hard core of Antena 3 shareholders.

Picture 2: The reference press “El País” and “El Mundo”



Source: www.elpais.es and www.elmundo.es

Summarily, when we compare the four main reference press players in the field of Spanish journalism, we see an uneven result both in terms of audience figures and in terms of capacity to use

audiovisual media that greatly multiply the reach of their messages. As for the former, the early success of “El País” is important. It was unquestionably the leader from the end of the transition period (1981 – 1982) having triple the audience size of its three main competitors for most of the 80s. This is, however, in the context of relatively low readership figures: the most read newspaper “El País”, had approximately 1.5 million readers, which, when added to the figures for the other 3 reference newspapers barely reached 3 million. In other words, the audience for the reference press was barely one third of the readers of daily newspapers while the total number of newspaper readers was only a third of the total potential audience. This clear leadership position of “El País” is challenged with the arrival of “El Mundo” at the end of the 80s and its stiff competition with “El País” at the beginning of the 90s, coinciding with the scandals and tension at the end of the socialists’ time in office.

Not only were there uneven results in terms of readership: A comparison of the four main reference press players in the field of Spanish journalism suggests that they were unequal in terms of their capacity to get their message to audiences by means of other media. We are referring to the fact that two of the top four (“El País” and “Abc”) are linked to television channels that often act as the sounding boards for opinions that feature in newspapers.

However it is crucial to note that the PRISA group and the Vocento group are the result of two alternative business strategies. The first comes as a result of a strict division of labour in the heart of the group, after the consolidation of its main reference (“El País”) and its later diversification (radio, pay TV, and finally, free TV). The Vocento group includes a dozen regional and provincial publications while it negotiates the terms of its entry into “Abc” and Tele 5 all of which limited the necessary capacity for co-ordination in the heart of the group.

The success of the “El País” newspaper and the PRISA Group

In 1971, José Ortega Spottorno, son of the philosopher Ortega-Gasset, registered the newspaper “El País”, which would later be sold to Promotora de Informaciones Sociedad Anónima (PRISA). The investment capital came from a varied source of shareholders and reached an initial sum of 15 million pesetas¹⁴. Among the shareholders the dominant ideology was “to reform the regime and represent a moderate opposition”. A dozen of these shareholders later became ministers under Adolfo Suárez (Seoane & Sueiro, 2004, p. 30). The editorial project was originally linked to Manuel Fraga¹⁵ but not even Fraga who, in 1966, had promoted the law which lifted Spain’s previous censorship as a first step towards press freedom, was able to get the project through the administrative quagmire of the late Franco regime. As a result, the newspaper did not come into being until the spring of 1976, after the death of Franco. Its first director was Juan Luis Cebrián, who had been the head of news services of TVE when Pío Cabanillas was Minister of Information until he was fired, thus ending Arias Navarro’s experiment of opening up towards the end of Franco’s regime. With Fraga’s involvement in Arias Navarro’s first post-Franco government his political career waned and Cebrián distanced himself from the project.

“El País” was never sympathetic towards Suárez. From the beginning, Cebrián voiced his concern that any UCD victory in the first democratic elections would not accurately reflect the real sociological centre of the country. He reasoned that whether it was Fraga or Suárez, “it’s all the same: more or less revamped Franco supporters”. Consequently, Cebrián had no qualms about calling out for “an alternative from the left, a united and powerful socialist force, whose project goes beyond a formal democracy to the forming of a new model of society” (Seoane and Sueiro, 2004, pp. 143 – 144). Importantly, in the year of its launch and coinciding with the first democratic elections in 1977, “El País” had already surpassed 100,000 readers, although it was still behind the longstanding players of the Madrid and Catalan press (“Abc”) and (“La Vanguardia”) respectively. In the third year, coinciding with the second general and first municipal elections, (1979), “El País” overtook “Abc”, with almost 150,000 copies, making it the leading daily newspaper in terms of nationwide readership. According to the results of a survey carried out by the newspaper itself, the average “El País” reader at that time was young, quite feminized for the norm at that time, and highly educated. In other words, as Seoane and Sueiro (p. 266) say, they were informed youth from the middle classes and to the left of the political-ideological spectrum who were strongly against what Franco and his regime stood for.

But PSOE’s rise was not problem-free. For some time, “El País” did nothing to hide its belief that, in certain areas, it would have identified more with an Italian-style radical party – which never really came into being in Spain. Thus, even though “El País” did Felipe Gonzalez a favour that he could never repay when it came to imposing his leadership and de-Marxization of the Socialist Party, it had no problem in expressing its concerns about the PSOE’s lukewarm reforms. Seoane and Sueiro explain why, in 1980, Cebrián called for a “hinge” party to cover the gap between UCD and PSOE, thus freeing the educated middle classes from the awkward dilemma of having to choose between a fake centre party and a left “dedicated to protecting the specific corporate interests of the working class” (p. 182).

At the end of the 1980s, two events took place that were crucial for a strategic linking of “El País” and the socialist government: First, the interventionism in news stories of the latter began to loosen, paving the way for the first licence being granted to private TV channels, and ensuring the PRISA group had the only pay channel (Canal Plus). Second, José María Aznar replaced Manuel Fraga at the head of the PP, which had reinvented itself. That led to the creation of a true political opposition – something that had been unheard of until then. Given that PRISA had gained control of Cadena Ser in the mid-1980s¹⁶, Canal Plus’ licence brought about an audiovisual diversification in the new holding company and the setting out of a new corporate strategy in which “El País” independence was in play.

The granting of a licence to Canal Plus was highly controversial since the law effectively required licence holders to offer a public service, which did not tie in well with a pay channel. The issue reached the Constitutional Court¹⁷, which took years to reach a verdict, creating even more confusion and making the groups’ protests even more vociferous. Groups like Zeta that felt hard done by the licence, when their application was rejected. These groups took action in the situation and brought court proceedings because of what they considered the political nature of the operation, to serve the new establishment. Things became even more complicated at the start of the 1990s with the so-called “antenicide” when the PRISA group took part in a confusing operation to gain control of Antena 3 Radio that finished off the radio station (Ser’s main competitor at that time). It ended towards the end of the socialist era when the PRISA group tried to control cable TV (Canal Plus used satellite) using, as an instrument, the national company Telefónica.

All of this took place under a socialist government that had been weakened by scandal. Until then it had resisted the regulation of cable channels, but it ended up giving in to the pressure exerted by Jesús de Polanco, better known from then on as “Jesús of the Great Power”. The operation went ahead in spite of a report from the Court for the Defence of Competition that recognised that it contained “both restrictive practices and a merging of players which were harmful for the market” (Muñoz Machado, 1999, p. 101).

It is clear that in such a context the PRISA group and the governments of José María Aznar did not see eye to eye (1996 – 2000 and 2000 – 2004) and that the latter¹⁸ had difficulty relating to the former. It is worth focussing on the end of the Aznar era as it represents the high point in the history of the PRISA group. It is true that from the point of view of results, the PRISA group can have few complaints about the eight years during which Aznar was in power. “El País” and Cadena Ser had consolidated their respective leadership positions, while Canal Satélite Digital had won the digital battle. However, all of this came at a cost: a ferocious struggle between PRISA and the Government that led “El País” to question its own *Style Guide* and the objectivity expected from the reference press.

Finally, we consider the General Election in 2004 when “El País” resigned itself to waiting to welcome the successor of José María Aznar with whom they hoped to enjoy at least a more cordial relationship than with Aznar. “El País” did its best to blame the outgoing president for the errors committed during the eight years of Partido Popular government, thus granting the new candidate, Mariano Rajoy¹⁹, his successor, the benefit of the doubt. It appeared that the relationship with Rajoy would be free from tensions and excesses until the Islamic bombing at the end of the electoral campaign, giving PRISA the opportunity to get even with Aznar. In the confusion during the moments just after the explosion, the PRISA media, along with the society in general, backed what appeared to be a spontaneous move to support the government. Such is to be expected during critical moments and given the unprecedented situation²⁰, in which the president held a direct telephone conversation with the director of the “El País”, to transmit the government’s version of events claiming ETA had been behind the bombing.

As far as the government was concerned, the frame of the situation could be no clearer or coherent: given that the struggle against ETA terrorism was one of Partido Popular’s strongest cards, if it could be proved that ETA was behind the bombing undecided voters would be sure to close ranks, defend the unity of the democrats and condemn the terrorists. This helps to explain why Partido Popular insisted on ETA being the authors. The problem: the thesis was submitted on Friday, March 12 during a massive demonstration organized by the government and the demonstration became fertile ground for contradictory versions of the events to take hold.

Across the ensuing weekend, PRISA was able to offer an alternative framework supported by the fact that forthcoming information did not fit the Government version of events. Indeed, it was thought that the Government was twisting public opinion for electoral ends. At the end of the day, the Partido Popular Government had already accumulated a long, well-documented, list of questionable management moves that could be interpreted as precedents of manipulation²¹. As the idea of asking terrorists to claim responsibility for the massacre was a pointless exercise, there was a sense that blame was being transferred to the government’s poor management. This led to increased suspicion, including the idea that suicide bombers had been on the trains when the bombs went off and that the government was considering declaring a state of red alert in order to postpone the elections. This is how the situation

developed: with PRISA's frame of the crisis prevailing over that of the government, resulting in the socialist victory. (Olmeda, 2005; Travesedo de Castilla, 2005).

Conclusions

The typology set out by Hallin and Mancini has served as an outline to summarize Spain's media system as it developed from the transition years through to democracy. The main features are: 1) The political alignment of the media 2) The loss of journalists' professional autonomy 3) Government interventionism. The problem is that the combined effect of these three circumstances may have a demoralizing effect on any attempt to create a relatively autonomous sphere of public opinion.

It is clear that the media have given a valuable service to Spanish democracy when it comes to controlling both the political parties and the social and economic players. They have also served to keep public opinion well informed and aware of any possible abuses carried out by the above. But it is also true that in a media system characterised by political alignment, the Spain's media are going through a phase in which they no longer conform with the role of "mouthpiece" for the respective parties but seek to impose their own political agenda. They do this to such an extent that instead of merely creating a sphere of public opinion independent of parties and capable of arbitrating and regulating political conflict, the media often cause that very polarization and play an important role in the conflict itself.

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Notes

¹ According to the "Annual Communication Report", in 1999, Spain had an average daily press leadership rate of 104.7, which is clearly lower than the EU average:214.8

² Spain is divided into 17 Autonomous Communities (plus the cities of Ceuta and Melilla on African soil). Most of these regions has its own TV channel which is different from the other 16.

³ A media conglomerate serving the interests of General Franco's dictatorship.

⁴ Unión del Centro Democrático (UCD), the first political party to hold government in democracy (1977-1982) after the death of Franco and the success of the transition to democracy.

⁵ Leader of the UCD, he led Spain during the transition years (1976-1981).

⁶ Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). Governed Spain between 1982 and 1996. In the latest General Election in 2004 it was returned to power. The conservative Popular Party was in government during the intervening years.

⁷ General Study of the Media (EGM), the body in charge of measuring audience figures for the Spanish media.

⁸ One of the strongest business groups in Spain. Its main media are the daily newspaper "El País", Cadena Ser (radio), the recently launched Canal 4 TV and the sports daily "As". The group tends to be pro-socialist as we will see in the following pages.

⁹ Catalan newspaper founded in 1881.

¹⁰ In reality, "El Mundo" appeared later, in the eighties, but as far as we are concerned here, it could be considered the continuation of another emblematic newspaper from the transition period, "Diario 16".

¹¹ Maximum governing body in the Roman Catholic Church in Spain.

¹² And, therefore to the monarchical cause.

¹³ Before taking control of Antena 3 TV and Onda Cero, the Planeta group, Spain's second Publisher, just behind the Timón-Santillana group (PRISA), but well ahead of the third publishing group (Anaya)

¹⁴ 90.000 euros.

¹⁵ A Minister under Franco, a political leader from the right during the transition and President of the Autonomous Community of Galicia between 1989 and 2005. Currently, at 85, he is senator for the Galician Parliament and has retired from frontline politics.

¹⁶ Total control World was to be lost in 1992, when the socialist government decided to sell the 25% state stake in the radio company to PRISA. (Sinova, 1995, p. 83).

¹⁷ Maximum judicial body in the interpretation of the Spanish Constitution..

¹⁸ Particularly the former, when the digital TV battle unfolds and the Sogecable case begins.

¹⁹ At the end of August 2003, Mariano Rajoy was elected General Secretary of the Partido Popular and presidential candidate in 2004, when José María Aznar announced he World not be running for reelection once his second term in office (2000-2004) ended.

²⁰ President Aznar won the general elections in 2000 with an absolute majority without having granted “El País” an interview.

²¹ The news coverage of the general strike in June 2002, which gave rise to a verdict by the Audiencia Nacional against the news service of TVE, the sinking of the oil tanker *Prestige* off the coast of Galicia, involvement in the Iraq war, etc.

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