

## **Vigilados\*: Surveillance of Foreign Press Correspondents during the Spanish Transition to Democracy**

*\*Vigilar tr. Observar atentamente el comportamiento de alguien o el funcionamiento o desarrollo de algo especialmente con intención de intervenir si no son los adecuados. (Manuel Seco-Diccionario del Español Actual)*

### **Introduction**

The recent history of European press reporting, archive research and interviews with veteran foreign correspondents in Madrid show that, after the end of the Civil War in 1939, Spain all but disappeared from the international journalism radar for three decades. While it is certain that stories such as the designation of Prince Juan Carlos as Franco's successor in 1969 or ETA's assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco in 1973 drew the momentary attention of the world's media, it was clear that once again it would need a major story to project Spain back into the political and media limelight. Franco's death in November 1975 provided that opportunity and subsequent events whether it be the return of the monarchy, the legalization of the Spanish Communist Party or the holding of democratic elections proved irresistible to European and American international news desks all of which committed reporters to Madrid.

Reporting events in late-Seventies Spain was a daunting professional challenge. In order to do so, the international press opted to approach the Spanish Transition<sup>1</sup> in a wider European context of political instability which included the fall of the military dictatorship in Greece, the 'Carnation revolution' in Portugal, or leftwing terrorism in Italy and Germany, events themselves considered to affect the balance of Cold War forces. Journalists were aware that a democratic way out from Francoism would allow Spain to enter a period of rapprochement with the EEC and NATO after four decades of international isolation. However, in November 1975 the situation in the country was

extremely critical given that the military regime created at the end of the Civil War did not offer the necessary conditions for its conversion into a democratic system and was dominated by the lack of measures taken for the provision of such a change. Prince Juan Carlos, appointed King by Franco with the aim of continuing his regime, did not enjoy widespread support. Extreme right wing factions of the Army, security forces and the Administration opposed any democratic change and maintained the mindset of the Civil War. There was no consolidated moderate opposition party and only the Communist Party was organized at a national level having infiltrated the regime's union network and abandoned its revolutionary aims in favour of a democratic reconciliation. The Catholic Church had distanced itself from official positions in favour of a climate of moderation and a desire for reconciliation which led it to confront its most intransigent sectors.

In this framework of political tension and social upheaval, European and American foreign correspondents, special envoys and op-ed staff writers were charged with narrating the democratic regeneration of Spain while under the watchful and omnipresent eye of the Ministry of Information and Tourism. The present article<sup>2</sup> examines the freedom of movement and expression conceded to the foreign press corps in the immediate post-Francoist period, their access to official and non-official sources and the difficulties they encountered in their coverage of the complex and permanently-unfolding story which was the Transition. It also considers the level of surveillance to which international reporters were subject by governmental officials unfamiliar with such permissive practices regarding the free flow of information but obliged to be tolerant of them as a further example of the country's commitment towards a democratic society. In doing so, the article measures the two-way flow between the importance lent to internal Spanish politics by the foreign press and the corresponding

concern by Transition authorities to cater to the international media in order to project a positive post-Francoist image beyond its frontiers. In their attempt to construct this Transition narrative, the paper concludes by reflecting on the contribution of the international reporters to the consolidation of the Spanish transition to democracy.

### **The press and political transitions as a research topic**

The role played by the international media regarding the coverage of national political events is undoubtedly one of the main references for the external perception of a country and invariably offers a different frame to that of the local press. In certain circumstances, permanent and intense coverage by the foreign press can offer an independent and particular vision of a historical event which can bring nuances to previous versions of events offered by the historiography of the period under study. In times of political crisis, the greater room for manoeuvre accorded to foreign correspondents can compensate for and redress the balance of a malfunctioning domestic press whilst offering opinions, commentaries and access to sources beyond the capacity of local journalists subjected to greater measures of control.

Studies regarding the relationship between the foreign press and the Spanish transitional process can be framed within a growing body of international research regarding the conquest of political liberty and the role of the media in the consolidation of democratic systems. Seminal texts regarding the external stimulation of democracy and the international context of regime transition (Schmitter 1986; Pridham 1991; McGrew 1997), as well as comparative studies of transitions among new democracies in Latin America, South Africa, Russia and Eastern Europe (Filgueira and Nohlen 1994; Anderson 1999; Jones 2001; Gross 2004; Voltmer 2006) have all been considered as wider referents for this present study.

In this context, the foreign press coverage of the Spanish transition to democracy offers a fascinating case study of such international news dynamics. However, while the Transition has been the subject of landmark historical studies over the last three decades, (Carr and Fusi 1993; Maravall, 1982; Preston 1986; Clark and Haltzel, 1987; Tuñon de Lara, 1991; Tusell 1996, 1999; Tezanos et al 1993; Soto, 1998; Townson, 2007; Gallego, 2008) along with important studies of the role played by local journalists in this rebuilding process (Guillamet 1996; Barrera, 1995, 1997; Fuentes and Fernández Sebastián 1997; Canel and Pique 1998; Sáiz and Seoane 2006; Zugasti 2008; Quirosa-Cheyrrouze 2009), the relevance of the international media coverage of these events has, until recently, been comparatively sidelined.

Over recent years, steps have been taken to redress the balance as analysts of the Spanish Transition coincide in including the construction of a favourable international context among the factors which explain its success. Gradually, the weight lent to the professional and political role of the foreign press during this period has become the object of study (Graham 1987; Hooper 1987; Van Bemmelen 1988; Aguilar 2007). Whilst figures such as King Juan Carlos I, Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez or Spanish Communist Party leader Santiago Carrillo were undoubtedly the main protagonists of the process, their political strategies were prone to influence by external forces such as foreign governments, pan-national political movements and, to a modest extent, by published opinion in the world's leading newspapers as shown by the publication of texts from former foreign correspondents (Haubrich, 2009; Chislett, 2011), important recent contributions regarding the posture taken by the European press towards the Transition (Martin Garcia and Ortiz, 2010) as well as the position adopted by the United States' press and its influence on foreign policy and the diplomatic corps (Powell 2011).

## **Profile of the foreign correspondent community in Madrid during the Transition**

From the death of Franco in November 1975 onwards, the Ministry of Information and Tourism (MIT) found itself confronted with several information management issues posed by the foreign correspondent corps based in Madrid: i) the logistics of handling the number of international reporters posted to the Spanish capital; ii) the younger and uninhibited profile of many reporters for whom Madrid marked their debut in international journalism; iii) the armed conflict mindset which many correspondents brought with them to Spain as a result of their professional background and iv) the highly delicate nature of many of the issues on the foreign journalists' news agenda.

As *The Times* correspondent William Chislett points out in his memoirs, “the foreign press corps at the time of Franco’s death was not a large one, as befitted a European backwater” (Chislett 2011: 4). Until 1975, Madrid had been a second level international posting. The news agencies maintained minimum bureau coverage and very few European and US quality dailies had full-time staff correspondents. Occasional coverage of Spanish events was in the hands of the scarce staff correspondents who were around in the early Seventies such as Walter Haubrich of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Kees van Bemmelen at the Dutch daily *De Telegraaf* or the BBC’s Gordon Martin. Other veterans at the time included long-standing *stringers* such as Harry Debelius at *The Times* or Jose Antonio Novais at *Le Monde* or the so-called *super stringers* who simultaneously covered the country for more than one media outlet.<sup>3</sup> However, the imminent death of Franco and the uncertainties surrounding the political transition to democracy brought the correspondents back to Spain in numbers reminiscent of the Civil War. Staff postings were created, stringers were upgraded to staff correspondents, correspondents were transferred over to Madrid from their regular

posting, op-ed writers were flown in from editorial headquarters to support their journalists in the Spanish capital and those freelancers roaming the country knew their moment had finally arrived.

By the end of 1975, the British press had assembled a significant contingent of journalists to cover the Transition. *The Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Financial Times* could all rely on the services of qualified stringers – Harry Debelius, Bill Cemlyn-Jones and Roger Matthews respectively – while *The Daily Telegraph* had shown greater provision by sending reporter Harold Sieve as a full time correspondent a year earlier. Further contributions came from colleagues in Paris and op-ed writers who had previously covered some news stories from Spain and flew over from London for their own take on the story.<sup>4</sup> French press coverage was entrusted to correspondents who were given the occasional support of “special envoys” at key moments. This was the case of Jacques Guillemé-Brûlon at *Le Figaro* who received a helping hand from ‘specials’ such as Anne-Marie Romero or Georges Dupoy.<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde* was the only French paper to count on the services of a full time staff correspondent, Jose Antonio Novais, who shared the workload of covering the Transition with the help of Marcel Niedergang. The US quality press increased the intensity of its coverage during the key moments of the process. Both *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* combined their “own correspondents” with distinguished “specials”. The *Times* combined the full time work of Henry Giniger and James Markham with temporary assistance from Flora Lewis who came from the Paris bureau to help construct the Transition narrative from September 1975 to January 1976. The *Post* also enjoyed full-time coverage thanks to the constant coverage of Miguel Acoca and Jim Hoagland through to the summer of 1977 and from then on thanks to imported texts from *Los Angeles Times* correspondent Stanley Meisler. Germany also channelled considerable resources into the Transition

story. Three German news agencies (DPA, Nordpress Verlag and Südwest Presse) had both correspondents and stringers in Madrid and by April 1977, a quarter of the 132 officially accredited foreign correspondents in Madrid were German including the dean of the foreign press corps in Spain, Haubrich of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. The Italian press drew almost exclusively on “specials” and wire services for their press coverage. *La Stampa* chose not to set up a permanent bureau in Madrid so half of its news articles came from the wire services, the slack being taken up by “parachute” correspondents.<sup>6</sup> *La Repubblica* covered the story in similar fashion with exactly half of its articles published over the three year period coming from the wire services. The exception here was Paolo Bugialli at the *Corriere della Sera*, who was solely responsible for 70% of all news articles coming from Spain.

As well as Western news wire services such as Reuters<sup>7</sup>, AFP, Ansa, DPA, Associated Press and UPI, the prospect of change attracted global news agency interest and reporters flocked to the Spanish capital from Cuban agency Prensa Latina, Xinhua (China), PAP (Poland), Plus Ultra (Mexico), Kyodo (Japan), MITI (Hungary), the Saudi Arabian official news agency and TASS from the Soviet Union. As we can see, Chislett’s “European backwater” suddenly became the fashionable political story and the MIT found itself faced with the difficult task of monitoring a foreign news reporter community which, while never again reaching the dizzy heights of the 419 officially accredited foreign journalists for Franco’s funeral and the coronation of King Juan Carlos, nonetheless remained stable at approximately 130 international journalists stationed full time in Madrid over the three year period.<sup>8</sup>

The commitment of such human resources to the Transition story by the international media was complemented by their impressive volume of production which further increased the difficulty of monitoring their output. Individual illustrative

examples over the three year period include the 1261 articles on the Transition published by *The Times* alone, the 852 articles published by *Le Monde* or the 764 articles published by the *Corriere della Sera*. In collective terms, the British quality broadsheets produced over 3600 articles (including no less than 112 editorials), the Italian quality broadsheets offer a tally of over 1800 articles, the French broadsheets *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro* close to 1200 articles while the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, the US's most prestigious newspapers, jointly published 1036 articles from November 1975 through to December 1978 (Guillamet & Salgado 2014: 113). The prolific production of these journalists and the predisposition of their foreign news desks to publish stories on the Transition were aspects somewhat underestimated by MIT officials who, after initial attempts to monitor and translate all articles by the elite foreign press on Spain, particularly in the first months after the death of Franco, gradually relented in their attempt to 'shadow' the news output of international reporters.

The professional profile of many of the correspondents and special envoys stationed in Madrid in 1975 was that of a young, and in some cases inexperienced, debutant foreign correspondent with limited language capacity and scant previous knowledge of the country. Such was the case of Mimmo Càndito (*La Stampa*), Frank Taylor (*Daily Telegraph*), Anne-Marie Romero (*Le Figaro*) or Roger Matthews (*Financial Times*) for whom Madrid was his first post as correspondent. Even those journalists with prior professional experience such as John Hooper at *The Guardian*, who had previously covered both the Nigerian civil war and the Cyprus story for the BBC, was still only 25 years of age when he came to Madrid for the first time in the spring of 1976. For journalists such as Chislett at *The Times* who was just 24 years old, or Tom Burns at Reuters who was just a year older, the Spanish Transition was their



baptism in international news coverage.<sup>9</sup> The inexperience and unconditioned praxis of many of these correspondents led to their non-observance of established codes and practices and a predisposition to take on delicate issues which, as we shall later, concerned those charged with monitoring their movements, particularly when dealing with unofficial sources or when reporting from outside the capital.

The mindset of many of the foreign correspondents and special envoys who came to Spain in 1975 was preconfigured for covering armed conflict. Latin America figured on many a correspondent's curriculum as reporters came to Spain after having covered "high voltage" news stories such as the military coups in Chile and Brazil in 1973 and the emerging dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay. Others such as Jim Hoagland at the *Washington Post* came straight to Madrid from the war in the Lebanon while Bugialli at the *Corriere della Sera* also came from covering the conflicts in the Middle East. Many were understandably influenced by the "Carnation Revolution" just a year before in Portugal. Correspondents such as Jimmy Burns or Diana Smith of the *Financial Times* and op-ed writers such as Edward Mortimer at *The Times* came to comment on events in Spain after similar professional experiences in Portugal. Some American correspondents came to Madrid straight from Vietnam after the end of the war in 1975. Such was the case of James Markham at the *New York Times* who came from Saigon with similar expectations of armed conflict or assistant Flora Lewis who took over at the Paris bureau after also having covered Vietnam. The AP bureau in Madrid was itself headed by former "brat-pack" Vietnam veteran journalist, Malcolm Browne. The professional curriculum of these assigned reporters – Saigon, Beirut, Latin America – responds in some way to the perceived threat by both the media and the Ford Administration alike that a failed Transition could lead to a second Spanish Civil War and, faced with such a threat, the media employed its specialist staff to narrate such a

potentially explosive story. According to Spanish news agency Europa Press president Jose Mario Armero: “it was an especially interesting period during which an important number of journalists from different countries came to Spain and stayed for long periods here because many believed that another civil war was about to blow off”.<sup>10</sup>

### **A complex news agenda**

The size and profile of the foreign journalist corps aside, their predisposition to openly confront the most delicate issues on the contemporary agenda such as the tandem between King Juan Carlos and Adolfo Suárez, US military bases, industrial disputes in the north of Spain or growing demands for greater autonomy in Catalonia unsettled MIT officials and lent a certain urgency to their monitoring. Nowhere was this more evident than regarding two subjects which intrigued the foreign correspondent community above all others: the Basque country and the role in post-Francoist Spain of the Communist Party.

Foreign press coverage of Basque country related issues, whether industrial disputes or terrorism, was closely tracked by MIT officials. Harry Debelius at *The Times* feared the government would crack down on foreign correspondents in Spain and expel some of them after being accused by conservative daily *ABC* of participating in a ‘propaganda campaign against the unity of Spain’ for having published a front page article in which he said the Basque underground movement closely followed the BBC’s Spanish service reporting of the state of emergency in two of the Basque provinces. A Basque source was quoted in *The Times* as saying the BBC coverage was reminiscent of the coverage it gave during World War II to the resistance to Nazism (Chislett 2011: 13). Foreign newspapers were usually unobtainable in the Basque Country if they carried reports on the situation, particularly those concerning ETA. Reuters journalist

William Robinson was given an expulsion order for his work regarding troubles in the Basque country and just a month prior to Franco's funeral, Joel Leslie Gandelman, special correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* and *Newsweek*, was forced to leave Spain for "having published stories about the supposed torture of Basque separatists by the Spanish police", an incident which was interpreted by many as a warning shot to the foreign press corps regarding their coverage of the Basque conflict.<sup>11</sup> Simply attending a pro-Basque rally could be a dangerous activity for those committed to covering the story. *Times* correspondent William Chislett still recalls what happened to the foreign press corps when they turned up to cover the first legal celebration of the *Aberti Iguna* (Basque National Day) since the Civil War in Vitoria:

the police fought running battles with groups of Basques and foreign journalists were also (deliberately one suspected) in the firing line: a Belgian cameraman was hit in the chest by a rubber bullet and Gordon Martin, the BBC's Spain correspondent, was in a flat with his microphone in one hand and a glass of whisky in the other when police fired at the window. He was left holding the microphone and a shattered glass. (Chislett, 2011: 14)

Tom Burns at Reuters still remembers when the bureau in Madrid received a call from security forces in spring 1976 warning them that if they were to publish news stories about demonstrations in Bilbao, "they would be out of the country tomorrow".<sup>12</sup> Guy Lagorge of *France-Soir* was under constant vigilance by the Dirección General de Seguridad for having being "expressly commissioned by his newspaper to inform about the current situation in the Basque country". Christopher Segura of the *Times Picayune* of New Orleans was arrested in March 1976 for photographing graffiti on the streets of San Sebastian<sup>13</sup>. MIT documents held at the General Archives in Madrid reveal how the work of UPI bureau chief Peter Uebersax, *Financial Times* correspondent Roger

Matthews and Haubrich at the *FAZ* received special attention when the Basque country featured in their news stories and how, with both foreign correspondents and Basque separatists under surveillance, meetings between the two were arranged at mutual risk.<sup>14</sup>

The future of the Spanish Communist Party (SCP) equally fascinated correspondents and their respective international news editors. The reemergence of Communism in Spain was unsurprisingly of great interest to the Italian press. Bugialli at the *Corriere Della Sera* focussed his coverage on how the Spanish Communist Party had adopted Eurocommunism and how its leader Santiago Carrillo, ally of Enrico Berlinguer, national secretary of the Italian Communist Party, challenged official Kremlin doctrine. When interviewed recently, Mimmo C ndito of *La Stampa* explained that for the Italian press, the fate of the Spanish communists was the number one story during Transition-period Spain. Carrillo's critical stance towards Soviet communism was needless to say a source of great interest for the US press. James Markham's articles in the *New York Times* and the more cautious approach shown by the *Washington Post* reflect a positive attitude towards the pending legalization of the PCE. Tom Burns points out the key role of the American foreign correspondents on the Spanish communist issue and how the power they wielded back in the US was underestimated by the post-Francoist government. Interviewed in Madrid in May 2011, the former Reuters correspondent considered that "the work carried out by the *Washington Post*, *New York Times* and the *Christian Science Monitor* amongst other newspapers was crucial for persuading congressmen and those on the Senate Committee for Foreign Relations to take a serious interest in areas such as the military bases agreement or the future legacy of the dictator."

The Ministry of Information and Tourism was particularly nervous about foreign coverage of the Spanish Communist story. Just five days prior to Franco's death, an

internal circular was published expressing grave concern about “foreign press correspondents’ contacts with subversive organizations and militants of orthodox communism”<sup>15</sup> and the MIT showed itself to be wary of foreign journalists’ contacts with representatives of Trade Unions such as Comisiones Obreras and semi-clandestine pro-democratic organizations such as Justicia y Paz.<sup>16</sup> As could be expected, Chinese and Soviet agency correspondents were in the line of fire of the authorities. News wire service Xinhua was considered to be “Mao’s message service throughout the world forced to compete with the capitalist agencies, to break their monopoly and extend its influence in our country”<sup>17</sup> while those reporters working for the Soviet news agency TASS came under constant heavy criticism. An excellent example of how the authorities shadowed the journalistic output of the Soviet foreign correspondents can be found in this cable published in November 1975 a week prior to the death of Franco:

“TASS constantly publishes extremely negative news stories (...) its correspondent in Madrid protects himself by datelining his articles in Paris (...) the question should be asked whether the TASS bureau in Madrid is a cover for extrajournalistic purposes, extraprofessional news contacts and the base for political propaganda and strategies for a policy of deliberate agitation (...) TASS’s news stories can have serious consequences for domestic Spanish policy and could be of great help to the clandestine activities of communist groups controlled at a distance by the leadership of the Communist Party in the USSR (...) the TASS news agency is an ideological and agitating Trojan horse...”<sup>18</sup>

Needless to say, secret meetings between foreign correspondents and communist sources were not as “clandestine” as many foreign reporters may have thought. Archive material in Madrid shows the vigilance to which many correspondents in their meetings with trade unionists from Comisiones Obreras or “communist groups” were subjected. French correspondents from RTF were tracked as they made contacts in Madrid with

militants of orthodox communism who fixed them up with interviews. *Times* correspondent Chislett had his press documents confiscated after being stopped in the street by the police after attending the Communist Party's first authorised press conference. PCE leader Carrillo himself was acutely aware of the pulling power of the news story he embodied and used the international journalists present in Spain as a threat as for example when, in 1976, he made a public demand from Rome for a Spanish passport:

(Carrillo) began by holding an open meeting of the PCE Central Committee in Rome at the end of July. Amply publicized by the media, it had considerable impact, revealing to the Spanish public for the first time that a significant number of intellectuals and labour leaders were Communists (...) Carrillo who was living clandestinely in Madrid, informed Suárez through intermediaries that, if he did not receive a passport, he would hold a press conference in Madrid in the presence of Oriana Fallaci, Marcel Niedergang and other influential foreign correspondents. (Preston, 1986: 120)

According to Preston, in this way the foreign correspondents became an instrumental part of the struggle between Suárez and the opposition – in this case from the PCE – for control over the Transition. Armero, former president of Europa Press, confirms this theory when stating that “the relationship between foreign journalists and the most important figures of the opposition was intense. They knew them all. [...] During the Transition, the foreign correspondents controlled a lot of information and many politicians resorted to them”.<sup>19</sup>

### **Freedom of expression and constraints on coverage**

In order to fully consider the *modus operandi* of the foreign correspondents in late-Seventies Spain, we can turn now to consider the margins within which they

maneuvred and those factors which may have implied a constraint on their professional routines. First of all, it should be mentioned that not all correspondents at the time considered their professional routines to have been overly conditioned by the political environment in which they worked. Anne-Marie Romero, former correspondent of *Le Figaro*, claims she enjoyed an acceptable level of professional autonomy to tackle any subject she felt was worthy of coverage. Romero does not recall having had any problems when interviewing prominent figures during the Transition years and maintains that it was easier to contact Spanish politicians than it was French deputies.<sup>20</sup> William Chislett at *The Times* showed himself to be equally uncritical regarding the working conditions of a foreign correspondent at the time:

the foreign press corps at the end of the Franco regime was not restricted as Spanish journalists were by repressive laws, but it had to contend with them as they formed the official working environment. We all assumed our phones were tapped and so a lot of information had to be gathered by arranging meetings [...] Free journalism could be exercised thanks to meetings and prudent measures that were taken. (Chislett 2011: 10)

However, a second, and more numerous, group of journalists pay testimony to practices more fitting with dictatorial news control dynamics even in the post-Franco period. Documents at the National Archives in Alcalá de Henares show how MIT authorities tried to deal with the influx of foreign reporters to the Spanish capital in the winter of 1975 and the spring of 1976. On arrival, journalists were given a provisional work permit by the Ministry of Information and Tourism. Non-possession of this permit could lead to expulsion. The hotels where journalists stayed (particularly the Palace in Madrid) were under constant supervisión as were the border controls at Irun-Bilbao. Some reporters were deported immediately.<sup>21</sup> Others were ousted due to political

pressure as in the illustrative incident involving Harold Sieve at the *Daily Telegraph*. Sieve was substituted in the spring of 1976 after a formal protest from the Duke of Wellington, Arthur Valerian Wellesley, complaining about “the quality of his journalistic output” and Sieve’s supposed “socialist tendencies”. An MIT archive document entitled “Unpleasant English Journalist” (!) states that “Sieve seems to be very influenced by an extreme socialism in spite of working for a conservative newspaper and continues to associate his Majesty the King with acts carried out by the government [...] This is all a manoeuvre to bring the Spanish Monarchy into disrepute.”<sup>22</sup> Sieve replied to the Duke arguing that the King had been “imposed” by Franco and that it was the King himself who had named the Prime Minister making His Majesty responsible for the decisions of the Cabinet. The controversy could not have finished any other way. Sieve signed his last article on the 31st March 1976 and returned to London to carry out minor professional duties.

Recent interviews with veteran correspondents reveal that telephone threats were not uncommon. Tom Burns at Reuters remembers moments of considerable pressure and threatening phone calls from the secret police. Another undesirable was Kees van Bemmelen of Dutch daily *De Telegraaf*, who had his press credentials confiscated because according to José Antonio Novais of *Le Monde*, his name was on a black list of the “enemies of Spain”. Walter Haubrich of the *FAZ* remembers how his office was frequently searched, his accreditation confiscated, his phone tapped, and the constant threats of facing a firing squad. According to the veteran reporter, “foreign correspondents received pressures but no censorship (...) the MIT threatened me with expulsion at least ten times”.<sup>23</sup> The International Press Club (IPC) was temporarily closed on occasions.<sup>24</sup> Letters of protest by the IPC president were sent to the MIT complaining of “the difficulties encountered by professionals in the exercise of their



duty and attempts by authorities to use foreign correspondents as policemen".<sup>25</sup> Symposiums with foreign correspondents at Journalism Faculties on university campuses were duly infiltrated and semi-clandestine press conferences were often raided by plain clothes policemen.

Regime authorities were particularly concerned about one professional routine employed by correspondents which they found particularly difficult to monitor: contact with local journalists. Foreign correspondent material could be cited with impunity by the national press as a way of getting round restrictions and international reporters were approached by national journalists to pass on to them ideas for stories they knew they could not publish. This was particularly true of news agency correspondents who, given their more anonymous professional condition, could publish news stories beyond the reach of regular press correspondents. There was no shortage of local pro-democratic journalists ready to cooperate. That the ever-present Ministry for Information and Tourism was aware of the collaboration between young Spanish journalists and their foreign colleagues can be seen in this circular:

our sources are convinced that the largest part of news stories and commentaries hostile to the Spanish Regime emanate from a small group of young Spanish journalists who are at the service of foreign news agencies in Madrid and which represent in general terms the most radical elements of Spanish journalism. These young journalists frequent the corridors of parliament and fashionable clubs and restaurants and in their rush to make a name for themselves are the best vehicle for the dissemination of false rumours put into circulation by their political comrades in Madrid.<sup>26</sup>

Many local journalists used their international colleagues and the International Press Club as a cover for participating in acts demanding greater press freedom, all of which

were closely followed by the Director-General of Security. Some foreign correspondents went a step further and lent a more practical hand. For example, the coalition known as the Democratic Junta (*Junta Democrática*) was proclaimed in the office of Walter Haubrich, correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and it was Haubrich who acted as cicerone to a clandestine Felipe González, General Secretary of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) and future prime minister of Spain whom he personally presented to the foreign correspondent community in Madrid at that time.

During 1976 and through to June 1977 the vast majority of all Reuters and UPI news wires were retyped, translated into Spanish and evaluated to detect their position on certain issues of the day.<sup>27</sup> Television and radio correspondents did not escape the shadowing tactics employed by the omnipresent Ministry of Information and Tourism. Michael Vermehren of German television station ZDF was constantly watched while he travelled around Spain “maintaining contacts with extreme elements”. Paul Thahon, correspondent for French public television Canal 2, was detained for filming pictures of a student demonstration and, a week after Franco's death, various members of a French radio crew were attacked after President Giscard d'Estaing arrived at Madrid airport.<sup>28</sup> The BBC's Chief European correspondent Charles Wheeler was arrested and detained by police in the Puerta del Sol in Madrid.<sup>29</sup> Swedish television correspondents were condemned for presenting ETA as “champions of liberty opposed to Francoist terror” and were dismissed for producing programmes with “the crudest anti-Spanish tone possible which insists on well-worn topics such as censorship, detentions, torture (...) thus converting their programmes into blatant political manifestos.” Belgian television journalists were criticised for a “sectarianism and a partiality incompatible with their role as journalists and of personal theses belonging to the extreme left.”<sup>30</sup>

A daily internal bulletin entitled the “Newsview of Foreign Agencies” (*Visión Informativa de las agencias extranjeras*) along with a daily summary of both radio and television programmes called “Spain seen from abroad” (*España vista desde el extranjero*), evaluated the contents of the texts and scripts in an attempt to detect attitudes or editorial positions hostile towards the Spanish government. Authorities in Madrid received complementary information about the foreign correspondents working out of the Spanish capital from the consular staff at the Information Offices at their respective Embassies. Numerous internal memos headed “The political meaning of the foreign press” attempted to calibrate the ideological affiliation of the international reporters in Madrid. Journalists were categorised according to their “ideology”, level of “objectivity” and their “position with respect to Spain”. The newspaper for which they worked was classified into one of three groups: “independent”, “conservative” and “liberal”. By way of example, the *Corriere della Sera* was considered a newspaper “which belongs to a masonic lineage which has survived fascism [...] It accomodates itself therefore to all circumstances ... Attitude towards Spain: measured, discreet, objective: can be considered as good.” *La Stampa* was classified by the MIT as “a centre-left paper belonging to FIAT [...] editor Giulio de Benedetti feels very close to the Spanish ... Attitude towards Spain: discreet evolving towards good.”<sup>31</sup>

When it comes to censorship, the post-Francoist authorities were always able to play a definitive trump card: an embargo on the import of foreign newspapers at the airport. Chislett of *The Times* referred to this as “commercial censorship”:

“Foreign correspondents were free to write what they wanted, but [...] the regime was able to control the distribution of foreign publications in Spain as copies of each one were sent from Madrid’s airport [...] to the Information Ministry. The articles on Spain were then translated and given to senior officials

[...] and the decision taken whether to allow the sale of the publications at newsstands. Distributors were then given permission, or not, to deliver the publications to newsstands. All the copies of an unauthorised newspaper were thrown away. Another tactic was to allow distribution, but to hold it up for several days. A newspaper published on a Monday was unlikely to sell on a Thursday. (...) *The Times*, *Le Monde*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [...] correspondents agreed among themselves to publish at the end of each month the number of days when their publications were banned. This greatly displeased the government which liked the outside world to believe there was unrestricted distribution of the foreign press in Spain.” (Chislett, 10)

## **Conclusions**

The death of Franco and the socio-political experiment that was the Transition to democracy brought Spain back on to the European and American media stage for the first time since the end of the Civil War. In a context of generalized instability in Western Europe, foreign correspondents found themselves charged with the task of negotiating a complex news agenda made up of delicate issues – a restored monarchy, Eurocommunism, terrorism – many of which were instrumental in the reconfiguration of Spain as a Western European democracy. The international media’s commitment to the Transition story seen both in quantitative terms – by the size, profile and prolific output of the foreign reporters based in Madrid – and in qualitative terms – by its distancing from the neo-Francoist regime and unequivocal support of political renewal and democratic mechanisms such as its backing of opposition parties and the creation of a multiparty system – made it the understandable object of scrutiny by a regime forced to offer a wider margin of manoeuvre to foreign journalists than that conceded to a local press which remained under much stricter vigilance. While the contribution of foreign reporters to the Transition should be couched in modest terms, what was none the less apparent was that in late 1975 and early 1976, Spaniards often resorted to the US and

European quality press to find out what was happening in their own country, a surreal situation summed up by Chislett of *The Times*:

There were many jokes at the time about Spaniards reading the foreign press to find out what was happening in their own country [...] An editorial in *ABC* commented laconically that it was ridiculous for people abroad to know what was happening in Spain before Spaniards did. Some people claim that the foreign correspondents helped Spain achieve democracy by holding a mirror up to what was going on. (Chislett: 12)

However modest the role of international journalists in the democratic regeneration of Spain may have been, the perception of their influence and their role as intermediaries by the Ministry of Information and Tourism or the Director-General of Security led their movements, contacts and production to be considered worthy of monitoring, constant analysis and vigilance by those authorities responsible for supervising the foreign reporters and overseeing the external image of the country at one of the most delicate moments in contemporary Spanish history.

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<sup>1</sup> Divergent opinions exist regarding the chronological time frame of the Transition. Some date the Transition back to Franco's nomination of Prince Juan Carlos as his successor in 1969 and continue up to the Spanish Socialist Party's electoral victory in October 1982. This article, however limits itself to the three year, 1080-day period from Franco's death on the 20th November 1975 through to the promulgation of the Constitution on the 6th December 1978.

<sup>2</sup> The paper forms part of a wider research project entitled "International News on Spain: The Transition 1975-1978. News Treatment and the Foreign Perception of Spanish Politics in the International Press" funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. Collected and cross-referenced data from 1080 days of news production by eleven leading world newspapers and news agency wires was complemented by field research visits to London, New York, Paris, Rome and the Historical Archives in Madrid. In-depth interviews were also carried out with those surviving foreign correspondents and special envoys which covered the Transition.

<sup>3</sup> Such was the case of Panamanian journalist Miguel Acoca who covered the Transition for *The Washington Post*, *The International Herald Tribune* and *Newsweek*, Richard Mowrer who combined the *Christian Science Monitor* with the *Chicago Daily News* or Bill Cemlyn-Jones who served both the *Guardian* and the *Observer*.

<sup>4</sup> Relevant examples here include Edward Mortimer of *The Times* or Richard Gott of *The Guardian*. Gott was an editorial writer and historian specialized in European politics in the Thirties who also covered the fall of Chilean president Salvador Allende in 1973. Gott came to Madrid for the first time in the spring of 1975 and worked as an op-ed writer covering Spain, Latin America and the Mediterranean basin. He also wrote General Franco's obituary.

<sup>5</sup> When interviewed, *Le Figaro's* special correspondent Anne Marie Romero explained she was free to travel to cover those issues she considered relevant. The daughter of a



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Spanish exile, her knowledge of the Spanish language and culture was fundamental for carrying out her duties from 1976 to 1978 as special correspondent for Spain and Portugal.

<sup>6</sup> A relevant example here is Mimmo Cándito who came briefly to Madrid for Franco's funeral but did not return until the autumn of 1976 when he returned to cover the referendum on political reform or in June 1977 when he covered the General Elections.

<sup>7</sup> The Reuters news agency bureau was led by bureau chief Ernesto Mendoza and staff writers Tom Burns Marañón and David Cemlyn-Jones, son of *Guardian* correspondent Bill Cemlyn-Jones. According to Burns, their small office in central Madrid "became an obligatory call-in point for all the British correspondents at the time. "Reuters was very chic. Everybody used our copy. We had an unbelievable amount of work to do and worked with pride and a great sense of responsibility. All the journalists would come in, read our copy and then leave." Interview with Tom Burns Marañón in Madrid, May 2011.

<sup>8</sup> According to official documents at the Spanish General Archives, 419 correspondents and special envoys belonging to all media – including radio and television – were accredited for Franco's funeral in 1975. This figure, obviously not a representative statistic given the unique quality of the event, can be discarded in favour of a more realistic figure of between 120 and 140 journalists accredited in Madrid which media companies employed throughout 1976 and the first half of 1977 according to the trimestral register known as the "Negociado de Acreditación de Corresponsales Extranjeros" compiled by the Dirección General de Régimen Jurídico de la Prensa – Sección de Prensa Extranjera". As from summer 1977 onwards, such specific head counts are discontinued.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase "Our Correspondent", says Chislett, refers just as much to himself as to Debelius. When interviewed, none seem to have been particularly weighed down by the responsibility of covering such a big story at such a tender age. Chislett explains that without any prior knowledge of the Spanish language, he began to file stories in the weeks leading up to Franco's death and was shortly afterwards taken on by the foreign news editor at *The Times*. Bureau chief Debelius got married shortly afterwards and the debutant Chislett carried the greater load of the Transition news production.

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<sup>10</sup> Armero's comments can be found on the official website of the International Press Club in Madrid. <http://www.clubinterprensa.org/paginas/el-cip-y-la-transici%C3%B3n-espa%C3%B1ola>

<sup>11</sup> According to a note issued by the News Service of the Dirección General de Seguridad, Gandelman was given five days to leave Spain for his news stories about "the government and the guerilla forces." 12-10-1975. *Difusion Informativa de la Dirección General de Seguridad. Visión informativa de agencias extranjeras*. AGA, Madrid.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Tom Burns Marañón, Madrid, May 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Internal memo. "Difusión informativa de la Dirección General de Coordinación." 08-03-1976.

<sup>14</sup> One such meeting is Chislett's encounter at Biarritz Golf Club with ETA terrorist José Miguel Beñarán Ordeñana ("Argala"), the man who had detonated the remote-controlled bomb that killed Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, Franco's Prime Minister and handgroomed successor. Interview with Chislett, Madrid, May 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Internal memo of the Gabinete de Enlace del Ministerio de Información y Turismo entitled "foreign press contacts with subversive organizations". 15-11-1975.

<sup>16</sup> The MIT memo from 15th November reads: "We have received confidential information that some foreign correspondents are maintaining contacts in Madrid with orthodox communist militants who are facilitating interviews for them with representatives of CC.OO and Justicia y Paz."

<sup>17</sup> Gabinete del Servicio Exterior – Sección de Medios de Comunicación. "Notas informativas sobre la agencia China Xinhua". Ref: 42/09052.

<sup>18</sup> Internal MIT memo dated 11th November 1975 from the "Subdirector General Jefe del gabinete del servicio exterior al Subsecretario del Departamento". Subject Corresponsales TASS/EFE.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.clubinterprensa.org/paginas/el-cip-y-la-transici%C3%B3n-espa%C3%B1ola>

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Anne-Marie Romero. Barcelona, May 2012.

<sup>21</sup> In November 1975, Luigi Somorruga of the Rome-based daily *Il Messaggero* was detained in his hotel room by three plain clothes policemen and accused of writing articles "whose inaccuracies are used as propaganda by subversive clandestine groups to attack the common peace". Somorruga refused to board the plane and was driven to the

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border at Irun. AGA 42/0943, 3. Foreign press correspondents' accreditation documentation. November 1975

<sup>22</sup> Memo related to foreign press personnel. MIT. AGA 42/0943, 8. 28th February 1976.

<sup>23</sup> *El Pais*, 04-09-2010.

<sup>24</sup> The Press Club was closed for five days just a week after Franco's death because it had scheduled a conference to be given by Felipe González, Secretary General of the non-legalized PSOE. The official MIT note dated 26th November 1975. argues that the Club "did not have the necessary authorization".

<sup>25</sup> MIT Ref. 42/09043/4. "Press Correspondent Organizations in Spain 1975".

<sup>26</sup> MIT Ref. 42/9051/5. "Informative notes regarding news agencies". Ministry of Information and Tourism.

<sup>27</sup> MIT Ref. 42/09052/9. "Newswires Reuters". Ref AGA: 42/09051, 8 "Newswires Associated Press".

<sup>28</sup> Internal note from General Coordination – Newsview of Foreign Agencies. Note AFP 27-11-1975.

<sup>29</sup> MIT Ref. 42/09030/8. "Informative notes on the BBC". General Coordination 09-11-1975.

<sup>30</sup> MIT Ref. 42/9032/3. "Documentation regarding broadcasts and television programmes referring to Spain and carried out by foreign film crews".

<sup>31</sup> MIT Ref. 42/09049/1. "Notes and articles by the Italian press regarding the political situation in Spain".