

The Last King Of Spain?

A young King Juan Carlos helped steer Spain from a dictatorship to a modern democracy after he came to the throne some 32 years ago, and his achievements include defending the fledgling democracy in 1981 from an attempted coup.

Once popular and regarded as a man of the people, recent times have been more troubling for the king as political groups on both the left and right have called for an end to the Spanish monarchy.

1981 it could be argued was the height of the King's popularity when some army officers stormed the Spanish Parliament. Spain had been ruled by the dictator Franco until his death in 1975, and the King appeared on television to order the army back to barracks, in the process saving the young democracy from returning to dictatorship.

While the royal family spend their summer holidays on the island of Majorca at the Marivent Royal Palace and the rest of the year near Madrid his popularity carried through to all regions of Spain.

Recent comments from the King though have made many Spaniards uneasy about how close he is coming to interfering with politics, and this has not helped his popularity - although the people of Majorca might disagree as the royal family's holidays give the island an upmarket image elsewhere in Europe, and the hotels and Majorca villa holidays travel market have thrived in recent years.

He made a surprise visit to Spanish troops in Afghanistan just before Christmas, but controversially visited two Spanish enclaves in Morocco which have been in dispute over sovereignty since the 15th century.

But last year saw protestors burning photographs of the King in the Spanish city of Girona, a sign of his declining popularity, but Spain and the wider world sat up and took notice when he famously told the President of Venezuela to shut up at a summit in Chile. While most saluted his stand, some saw it as another sign of his interference in politics, going far beyond what would be acceptable in other European countries from their respective royal families.

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The King wants to be king of all Spain, and not have different regions strongly in favour of the monarchy and others against.

Spain's economy has done well under King Juan Carlos, and his intervention to prevent a coup in 1981 has benefitted in particular the tourism market, with Spain and her islands now the destination of choice for more Europeans than any other country when taking a holiday.

And it's not just the holidays in Majorca market where the royal family spend their summers that have done well over the last twenty five years.

The Costa del Sol and Costa Blanca are well known as holiday destinations, and before King Juan Carlos replaced fascist leader General Franco the holidays market was limited as many Europeans would not holiday in Spain, knowing their tourist money would support an unacceptable regime, in the same way many people boycotted South Africa while it had apartheid.

Cheap flights to Majorca airport from the United Kingdom for example have seen the island's economy transformed. And Spanish airlines operating both from the mainland capital Madrid and from Barcelona have also taken advantage of the travel market today, with millions of Spaniards employed in the airlines, hotels and holidays industries.

While Spain used to in the early days of her tourism be known as a cheap holidays destination, the country has moved into the upmarket leisure scene too, and new hotels in Majorca are being built, one of which will be the best hotel in Spain.

Overall, Spain's economy has done well since Juan Carlos became king, the country has joined and is a fully active member of the EU, and political parties of different persuasions have held democratically elected power with the PSOE, Spain's Socialist Party, recently winning the general election and entering their second term in office, with all these things highly unlikely if Franco's successor had been another fascist.

At 70, hopefully it will be some time before the question of a new monarch is asked. Majorca will certainly want that!

About the Author

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