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Royal Jobholder Wants Spain to Get to Work for Young Generation

By Angeline Benoit - Jun 19, 2014

For the man who just became [Spain](#)'s newest employee, work is now a priority.

King Felipe, sworn in yesterday after waiting until the age of 46 to get his current position, told lawmakers that the country must redouble its efforts to find jobs for the young. With Spain plagued with the second-highest unemployment rate of the European Union, that theme builds on unfinished business from the reign of his father, Juan Carlos.

“We have to send a message of hope, particularly to the youngest,” the new head of state said yesterday in Madrid. “Solving their problems, and especially finding work is a priority for society and for the state.”

The former king said he wanted to abdicate to let a younger generation repair the scars left by Spain's six-year slump. That may prove a challenge for Felipe as the same lawmakers who proclaimed him monarch also [plan to scrap](#) a youth council created with Juan Carlos's [blessing](#) when Spanish democracy was five years old, a victim of cost cuts enacted by the 59-year-old Prime Minister [Mariano Rajoy](#).

“There is no real effort to tackle the problem,” said Carlos Alcaraz, a 27-year-old native of Alicante in the southeast of Spain, where the youth jobless rate is 29 percent. He is retraining to be a teacher after struggling to find work as an architect. “A new king isn't going to make a difference.”

Jobless Rate

As Felipe settles down at his new desk, the unemployment rate for people under 30 years old in Spain reaches 43 percent compared with a 25 percent general rate as the younger generation, raised during an era of prosperity after Spain joined the European Union, aren't benefiting from the same labor market conditions as their elders. About half of those who do work have a temporary contract. that is twice the average rate for the working population, a situation that keeps 75 percent [living with their parents](#), data published by the youth council show.

“There is no sign of the renovation the King has called for,” said [Luis Ortiz Gervasi](#), a sociologist at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. “On the contrary, the government is scrapping bodies such as the youth council or the women's institute which are precisely pointing at the main social inequalities which are getting worse.”

Rajoy, who started his political career two years before the youth council was created in 1983, is slashing it as part of the deepest austerity measures in Spanish democratic history. It'll be replaced by a less costly structure that'll be democratic and independent, said a Health Ministry spokesman who asked not to be named in line with government policy.

Youth Empowerment

“There is no real political will to empower Spanish youth with democratic tools,” said Alejandro Quiroga, a political scientist at Newcastle University in the U.K. and Alcala de Henares University near [Madrid](#). “The youth council isn't so much an expense as a critical voice being silenced at a time when the main plan for young Spaniards is that they go abroad to work, as happened under the dictator Franco's regime, rather than invest in areas that would generate jobs for them.”

Hector Saz Rodriguez, 30, the youth council's president, expects the new structure to drop campaigns such as lobbying the government to replicate successful initiatives in northern [Europe](#) as it implements a European youth employment program, rather than extending prevailing inefficient methods.

In an [address](#) to the nation on June 2 to explain his decision to abdicate, Juan Carlos, 76, said that “a new generation is rightly demanding to play the main role” in forging the future, as his generation had done in “another crucial moment” of history.

Hidden Reasons

Juan Carlos chaperoned Spain's democratic transition in the late 1970s after succeeding the dictator [Francisco Franco](#), who enabled the second restoration of Spanish monarchy four decades after overturning the country's Republican regime.

“Generational change is a sensible argument to hide the many reasons for which Juan Carlos has lost his people's support,” said [Javier Del Rey Morato](#), a political communications professor at Madrid's Complutense University. His prestige was damaged by reports of an affair, corruption allegations against his daughter Princess Cristina and her husband and an African hunting trip that emerged at the peak of the crisis riling Spaniards suffering from the downturn, he said.

Juan Carlos's abdication has boosted support for the monarchy in Spain, according to a [Sigma Dos poll](#) published on June 9 by El Mundo newspaper. The survey showed that 73 percent of those questioned believe Felipe will be a good king for the country.

‘Extreme Poverty’

Meanwhile, economists forecast the country's [unemployment rate](#) will remain little changed by 2016, at 24.2 percent, according to a Bloomberg News survey published this week.

“The job situation in Spain is difficult and it's nothing new,” said [Jose Garcia-Montalvo](#), an

economy professor at Pompeu Fabra University in Barcelona. “It won’t improve without a structural and substantial change.”

In Alicante, Alcaraz says young people can only count on loved ones. He makes about 600 euros (\$818) a month from giving private lessons, teaching languages learned during his studies in [Germany](#) and the U.S., and will supervise a holiday camp to keep up his income during the summer. “If it weren’t for our families’ support, we’d be faced with extreme poverty with the kind of wages we’re earning.”

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