

New far-right party VOX launched in Spain

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A new extreme right-wing party, VOX, is being launched in Spain by former members of the ruling Popular Party (PP), the Terrorism Victims Association (AVT) and the Defence of the Spanish Nation foundation (DENAES). VOX describes itself as centralist, monarchist and liberal and will contest the European Union elections in May.

Two years ago, some of VOX's leading members formed "Restructuring Initiative" (Iniciativa Reconversión). They wrote a letter to the PP prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, demanding a return to the centralised Spanish state as conceived of in 1978 during the transition to democracy after the end of the Francoist dictatorship. They complained that too many powers had been given to the regions.

The four main pillars of the VOX founding manifesto are opposition to abortion, protection of the family, opposition to the autonomous regions system, defence of the unity of Spain and no to negotiations with Basque or Catalan separatists. The programme calls for a rewriting of Spain's constitution and the scrapping of regional autonomy and regional parliaments.

Although the manifesto contains some populist calls for the end of institutional corruption, against tax increases and against austerity measures, the real message is reminiscent of Franco's motto, "Spain One Great and Free"—in their words, "a single government and a single parliament which alone would represent the national sovereignty and a Supreme Court that will act as a last legal arbiter in on all matters, including the Constitution."

Its anti-terrorist message takes a domestic form: against the Basque separatist organisation ETA, the "Basque left," and against Catalan independence, which it calls "sedition of a regional government." It accuses the PP government of pursuing left and extreme-left policies and of being soft on terrorism, including submitting to a ruling by the European Court

last year condemning prison sentences, some thousands of years long, which gave no hope of release, as a violation of human rights. Dozens of prisoners are affected by the ruling.

Most of VOX's founding members come from families connected with the fascist Franco regime, the military, the monarchy, big business and right-wing think tanks. Their heirs have spent their lives within the PP but are now exerting their independent perspective.

One of VOX's founders is businessman and high commissioner Iván Espinosa de los Monteros. During the Franco era, his father Carlos was a civil servant in the Ministry of Commerce and then in the Spanish Delegation in Chicago. His great uncle, Eugenio, was appointed governor general of Madrid by Franco at the end of the civil war and then ambassador in Berlin in 1940. There is an infamous photograph showing him standing between Franco and Hitler when the two dictators met in Hendaye, France, in October 1940.

The father of another VOX founder and DENAES president, Santiago Abascal, was a leading member of the right-wing coalition, Alianza Popular, predecessor of the PP, founded by Manuel Fraga in 1976 with six other former Franco ministers in an attempt to maintain Francoism intact. His grandfather was mayor of Alava during the Franco dictatorship.

Others have their origin in the AVT, which is an extreme-right movement that helped the PP unseat the Socialist Party (PSOE) government. It includes prison governor and ex-PP member José Antonio Ortega Lara, who was kidnapped by the ETA in 1996 and held for 532 days.

Following the launching of VOX, Alejo Vidal-Quadras, one of the PP's most prominent leaders and Member of the European Parliament since 1999, resigned after 30 years of party membership. He wrote a letter to Rajoy, declaring that Spain was facing "an economic, institutional, moral and national unity" crisis

and yet his government was “giving palliative pills when major surgery is required.”

Referring to the planned referendum on Catalan independence in November, Vidal-Quadras criticised Rajoy for “offering dialogue without an expiration date” to “Catalan separatists, who have already set a day and a question for the liquidation of Spain as a nation.”

He added that “when the enemy is hitting without pause and keeps the persistent advantage, each non-fought fight is a lost fight.”

Other leading members of the PP have stepped up the pressure on Rajoy to adopt more right-wing economic and political policies, threatening to defect if he doesn't. Jaime Mayor Oreja, the former interior minister and spokesman for the PP in the European Parliament, has refused Rajoy's request to head the next European Election campaign this year.

Former PP prime minister José María Aznar, who was kicked out of office in 2004 after a working class rebellion against his economic and military policies, is reported to be waiting in the wings to see what response VOX obtains in the European elections. Before the end of 2015, Spain faces not only European but municipal, regional and general elections. Aznar also applied the pressure by snubbing his successor Rajoy and not attending a party's conference at the end of January.

The formation of VOX demonstrates the collapse of all the institutions, including the Constitution of 1978, created by the so-called “peaceful transition from fascism to (bourgeois) democracy”, agreed on between Franco's fascist politicians and military men, the PSOE and the Communist Party. The transition agreements included a political amnesty for the murderers of the Spanish working class during and after the civil war of 1936-1939 and led to a pact of silence on the past that has lasted until today.

Another arrangement was the creation of 19 different autonomous regions with devolved powers in an attempt to keep national unity and suffocate the anti-fascist movements that developed after the death of Franco in 1975, particularly in Catalonia and the Basque country.

The exodus of leading PP members is exacerbating the crisis within the ruling party. But its crisis is not unique. The PSOE and United Left (the umbrella

organisation founded by the Communist Party) are facing their own crises, due to their own and the trade unions' betrayals. It is they who are politically responsible for preparing the ground for the emergence of the extreme right.



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