

# Spain's king abdicates, his son will succeed him

By DPA, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.03.14

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Spain's Crown Prince Felipe (left) and his wife, Princess Letizia, are seen during a ceremony at La Zarzuela Palace in Madrid, Spain, Dec. 11, 2013. King Juan Carlos I has decided to abdicate in favor of his son Crown Prince Felipe, it was announced at a press conference June 2, 2014. Photo: Juanjo Martin/EFE/Zuma Press/MCT

MADRID — Spain's King Juan Carlos I told his country Monday he has chosen to abdicate to his son Felipe. In giving up his throne, he said that "a new generation demands, with justice, the leading role."

He said a younger generation deserves to take over, "one with new energy, willing to tackle with determination the transformations and reforms that the current situation demands."

His message was broadcast after Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced the king's decision to resign.

"(Felipe) is mature, well-prepared and has the sense of responsibility necessary to become head of state and launch a new stage of hope," Juan Carlos said.

## **Thwarted A Coup Attempt**

Juan Carlos once said that he wanted to be remembered as an "honest king who did his duty."

All indications are that he will do just that, but there have also been clouds for the king, who has reigned since 1975. More than other European monarchs, he had to fight for every scrap of popularity he attained.

Born in Rome on Jan. 5, 1938, Juan Carlos was the son of Don Juan of Bourbon and Battenberg. Don Juan was the heir to the throne of the Bourbon dynasty, which had been overthrown in 1931 with a provisional government taking power. After a civil war from 1936 to 1939, Francisco Franco became dictator.

When Franco decided that, after his death, the country's monarchy should be restored, he picked Juan Carlos as heir. The 10-year-old boy had to return to a homeland he did not know.

Juan Carlos was educated in military colleges and at the University of Madrid, but he was seen as a figurehead, the dictator's puppet. He was once pelted with tomatoes when touring Spain. His 1975 coronation was met with indifference.

Still, Juan Carlos won the hearts of Spaniards by championing democratic values. He became a source of support for democratic prime ministers and thwarted a coup attempt in 1981 when members of the military tried to take over the government.

During the coup, the king rallied loyal generals and ultimately gave a stirring televised speech to the nation. He became one of the European monarchs to have had the greatest impact on his or her country's modern history. The king was said to have turned Spaniards into "juancarlists" rather than monarchists. A monarchist supports a form of government headed by a king or queen.

## **An Unstuffy Monarchy**

"You have to earn your crown every day," Juan Carlos told his son and heir, Felipe.

He did not forget that his position was unstable. He lived a relatively modest lifestyle in the Zarzuela Palace, which is not much bigger than many a company chairman's home.

Juan Carlos' friendly and easy-going personality helped to add a common touch to an exceptionally unstuffy monarchy.

A keen sportsman and lover of fast cars, the king was at his best at social gatherings where his sense of humor could flow freely.

His relaxed style was balanced by his more formal wife, Greek-born Queen Sofia. His three children — Prince Felipe and Princesses Elena and Cristina — shared their parents' popularity.

Thankful for the democratic freedoms, which it partly saw as the work of the king, the press initially protected the royals.

So, in 1992, an attempt to report that Juan Carlos was unfaithful to his wife was quickly hushed up. A failed attempt by Basque terrorists to kill the king shocked Spain in 1995. The weddings of Juan Carlos' children created widespread popular enthusiasm.

But that protective aura has since ebbed. That became noticeable when criticism emerged about a 2012 luxury hunting expedition to Botswana. The elephant hunting trip took place in the middle of an economic crisis that eventually left nearly one-quarter of the Spanish workforce jobless.

## **No Longer Hush Hush**

After years of hushing up rumors of love affairs, the media suddenly felt safe to speculate about them.

Juan Carlos apologized. But the wounds were reopened when his daughter, Cristina, was charged earlier this year with committing tax fraud and other financial crimes. They were in connection with a long-running corruption case focused on her husband, former Olympic handball player Inaki Urdangarin.

Next came questions about the royal family's finances, leading earlier this year to the introduction of salaries for members of the royal family.

Nor was the king's political role always appreciated. Separatist groups in several regions in Spain wish to secede — or separate — from Spain and form their own independent countries. The groups have long targeted the monarch as a symbol of a country to which they do not want to belong.

There were also diplomatic missteps, such as the infamous 2007 exchange between the king and former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, who had just called Juan Carlos a fascist. "Why don't you shut up?" was the king's off-the-cuff response.

Health issues also might have played a role in Monday's decision. Juan Carlos has had multiple surgeries in recent years, including hip replacements. However, even as his health became worse, the monarch had, until Monday, insisted he would not let them force him off the throne.

But none of the issues quite undid the king's personal popularity. Through it all, Juan Carlos was cited as a role model for other European royals. He was said to know something that every royal family should remember — that kings are not born, but made by the people.

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the following BEST explains a central idea of the article?
- (A) Juan Carlos I, the king of Spain, made an announcement to his country on Monday that he will abdicate the throne to his son Felipe.
  - (B) The popular Spanish king is abdicating to his son after a series of difficult political, marital and health issues threatened his legacy of progressive leadership.
  - (C) Juan Carlos was appointed to serve as Spain's king when he was only 10 years old after a dictator decided to restore the monarchy.
  - (D) Juan Carlos wanted to be remembered as an honest and dutiful king and many feel he will be despite his recent difficulties.
- 2 Which of the following details from the section "Thwarted A Coup Attempt" BEST supports the main idea of the article?
- (A) Born in Rome on Jan. 5, 1938, Juan Carlos was the son of Don Juan of Bourbon and Battenberg.
  - (B) When Francisco Franco decided that, after his death, the country's monarchy should be restored, he picked Juan Carlos as heir.
  - (C) Juan Carlos was educated in military colleges and at the University of Madrid, but he was seen as a figurehead, the dictator's puppet.
  - (D) He became a source of support for democratic prime ministers and thwarted a coup attempt in 1981 when members of the military tried to take over the government.
- 3 According to the article, how has the press had an impact on Juan Carlos' popularity as king?
- (A) The press has always protected and publicly supported the king because reporters are grateful for the freedoms he granted that allow them to write about whatever they want.
  - (B) The press has always invaded the king's privacy to publicize and criticize any scandal among the royal family because misconduct makes for popular and profitable news.
  - (C) While the press initially protected the king because they benefited from freedoms he established, they later highlighted the financial, marital and political mistakes that led to his stepping down.
  - (D) The press reported the news without any bias, highlighting the king's positive accomplishments and unfavorable mistakes as they occurred during his rule.

4 Juan Carlos is praised as a role model for other European royals for all of the following reasons EXCEPT:

- (A) He was well educated in military colleges and at the University of Madrid.
- (B) He advocated for democratic values and supported leaders elected by the public.
- (C) He lived modestly in a small palace without excessive extravagance.
- (D) He approached his position as king as a title he had to earn, not a role to which he was entitled.

## Answer Key

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