

# DEPARTMENT OF HISPANIC STUDIES

## TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN

Forty years of democratic Spain: political, economic,  
foreign policy and social change, 1978-2018

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Whichever way one looks at it, Spain has been profoundly transformed since the 1978 democratic Constitution that sealed the end of the 1939-75 dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, the victor of the three-year Civil War. Be it economically with, for example, the creation of significant numbers of multinationals or the world's second-largest tourism industry in terms of visitors (81.8 million in 2017), politically with a vibrant democracy that ranks high in classifications, socially with the greatly improved status of women, or in foreign policy – where Spain has reclaimed its place on the international stage – the country bears no resemblance to what it was like 40 years ago. All the more remarkable is that the transition, guided by King Juan Carlos I, was achieved in the face of considerable adversity. It was not guaranteed to be successful: the Basque terrorist group ETA killed an average of 50 people a year in the first decade of democracy (and mounted assassination attempts in 1995 on both the King and the Prime Minister, José María Aznar), and in 1981 Francoist officers staged a coup in an attempt to turn back the clock. The economy, which was entering a period of recession, galloping inflation and rising unemployment, was also subjected to unprecedented competition after decades of protectionism. Today's problems, such as the very high jobless rate, acute income inequality, increased social exclusion, the illegal push for independence in Catalonia and corruption in the political class do not detract from the fact that Spain has enjoyed an unprecedented period of prosperity and stability over the past 40 years. Spain has achieved conditions that are similar to – in some cases better than – in the rest of Western European nations, disproving the theory, still beloved in some quarters, of the country's 'exceptional nature' or 'anomaly'.

William Chislett (Oxford, 1951) covered Spain's transition to democracy (1975-78) for *The Times* of London and was later based in Mexico City for the *Financial Times* (1978- 84) covering Mexico, Central America and Cuba. He returned to Spain permanently in 1986 and has been an associate researcher at the Real Instituto Elcano, Spain's leading think tank, since its foundation in 2002. Elcano has published four books of his on Spain. He writes a monthly essay on Spain for Elcano called *Inside Spain*, as well as *Working Papers*. He has spoken on Spain at the universities of Harvard, Princeton, Chicago, Suffolk, Georgetown, Williams College, London School of Economics and Oxford. He has been a visiting scholar at the King Juan Carlos I of Spain Centre, New York University, and at Bilkent University, Ankara. In 2013, Oxford University Press published his book on Spain in its well-known series: "What everyone needs to know". In 2018, he curated the exhibition on the writer Arturo Barea at the Cervantes Institute in Madrid, which then travelled to Manchester and Dublin. He occasionally writes opinion pieces for *El País* and *ABC*.