

Spain (España), Portugal and Greece (Hellas)

Greece joined the European Community in 1981. Spain and Portugal became members of the European Community in 1986. All three are Mediterranean countries: Spain and Portugal are situated on the Iberian peninsula in south-western Europe while Greece stretches across the Peloponnesus peninsula and around 3,000 islands in the Aegean and Ionian seas in south-eastern Europe. All three countries have shown keen support for the EU project and are all members of the Eurozone. However, they have all experienced economic difficulties and have been significant recipients of EU subsidies and aid. Nevertheless, their development is impressive given that all three only established stable democracies in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Recent History

Spain, Portugal and Greece all have recent histories of dictatorship. Until 1974, Greece was ruled by military governments and Portugal was ruled by an authoritarian regime (called “Estado Novo” or “New State”), while Spain was controlled by Fascist dictator Francisco Franco until his death in 1975. Since then all three states have moved in the direction of representative democracy.

The current Spanish government is led by Socialist Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. His government came to power after a strong reaction against the previous Popular Party administration, led by José Maria Aznar, following the Madrid Bombings of March 2004. Zapatero was re-elected in March 2008, but the election was disrupted by a terrorist incident and economic troubles, and he failed to win an overall majority.

In Portugal José Socrates of the Socialist Party resigned as Prime Minister in March 2011, after all five opposition parties in the country’s parliament voted against the fourth successive austerity budget. In elections in June 2011, the centre-right Social Democrats (PSD) emerged victorious and the current Prime Minister-elect is Pedro Passos Coelho. The current Greek government was elected in 2009 under the leader of the centre-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok), George Papandreou. Greece suffered badly during the global economic recession which began in 2008. By 2010, it had a huge public debt, which caused a crisis when it struggled to borrow money to pay back its debt. The EU and International Monetary Fund (IMF) supported Greece with a loan. But there was violence in Athens as hundreds of people protested against government cuts to public spending. A further bailout loan was being negotiated in June 2011 amidst intense political debate and a governmental reshuffle. There was concern that the debt crisis would spread to further Eurozone economies and destabilise the single currency - Portugal and Spain’s credit ratings were also downgraded.

Government Structure

All three countries have representative parliamentary democracies.

Spain is a constitutional monarchy, which means that the King Juan Carlos is the Head of State. He appoints the Prime Minister (known as President of the Government) following a general election. The Spanish Parliament (*Cortes*) has two chambers: the Congress of Deputies (*Congreso de los Diputados*) and the Senate (*Senado*). The

first is fully elected using a *proportional representation* system, while in the second, 80% of the seats are directly elected. Spain has powerful provincial governments in its 17 regions, particularly in the Basque Country and Catalonia.

Portugal is a presidential parliamentary democracy. The President, currently Anibal Cavaco Silva, is elected for terms of five years and has limited powers. He appoints the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers following a general election. The Portuguese Parliament, the *Assembleia da Republica*, has 230 members.

Greece has a similar system with a President, currently Karolos Papoulias, who appoints the Prime Minister from Parliament following a General Election. The Greek Parliament, *Vouli ton Ellion*, has 300 members who have the power to elect the President.

Relations with the EU

Since joining the EU all three countries have always fully participated in key EU projects. Both Spain and Portugal were founder members of the Euro in 1998, while Greece made huge efforts to be admitted in 2001, before the launch of the Euro notes and coins. Spain held the 6-month EU Presidency until July 2010; whilst it was criticised for being a ‘low-key’ presidency, Spain did make progress on Croatia’s EU accession talks. Spain played a key supporting role in reviving the EU Constitutional project, and Portugal carried forward the resultant Lisbon Treaty when it took over the 6-month EU Presidency in June 2007. Yet, these countries’ membership of the European Community was not without initial controversy. Until Greece, Spain and Portugal joined the European Community, it had been largely a club of affluent, northern European industrialised countries. The new members represented Mediterranean Europe and had much poorer and more agricultural economies. Their membership meant the European Community had to alter the way it saw itself. The 1980s saw a major expansion of EU regional aid to help bring poorer regions of these countries closer to the European average. Spanish and Portuguese membership also led to alteration of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to accommodate their large fishing fleets. Greece faced criticism from the EU in 2008 because of its treatment of asylum seekers crossing its border with Turkey.

Facts and Figures

- Spain has a population of 47 million, while Greece and Portugal are smaller, both with populations of approximately 11 million .
- All 3 countries’ economies rely on tourism and agriculture, although they have other significant industries – shipping (Greece), construction (Spain), manufacturing (Portugal).
- They all suffered during the global economic downturn which began in 2008.

Technical Terms

Proportional Representation: electoral system where the overall number of votes determines the distribution of seats.

Links

- <http://www.la-moncloa.es/IDIOMAS/9/home.htm>
- <http://www.primeminister.gov.gr/english/>
<http://www.portugal.gov.pt/pt/GC17/Pages/Inicio.aspx>