

Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez

Nouvelle série

53-1 | 2023

50 years of Scholarship on the Southern European Transitions: A Comparative Approach

Dossier. 50 years of Scholarship on the Southern European Democratic Transitions: A Comparative Approach

From dictatorship to democracy: the institutional transitions. Transitions from above?

De la dictature à la démocratie : les transitions institutionnelles. Des transitions par le haut ?

De la dictadura a la democracia: las transiciones institucionales. ¿Transiciones desde arriba?

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<https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.18605>

Résumés

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Institutional building constitutes a distinct parameter of the democratic transition process. The comparative perspective of this article enables us to examine the question if the Spanish, Greek and Portuguese transitions converge or differ, in terms of ruptures and continuities, at the level of institutional reforms.

Our fundamental research questions is as follows: Is there a Portuguese/Greek/Spanish exception or, on the contrary, a “south European path” in what concerns the institutions of democratic transition and consolidation?

As a working hypothesis, this article builds on the idea that with regard to institutional change and structure, the three countries present different transitional experiences although the different paths followed end up converging in a certain institutional, political and “cultural”/civic modernisation—at which point we may wonder if the integration into the European Economic Community and “Europeanisation” have been perceived in all three cases as the capstone of the transitional institutional reforms and as a critical lever for their consolidation.



La construction institutionnelle constitue un paramètre distinct du processus de transition démocratique. La perspective comparative de cet article nous permet d'examiner la question de savoir si les transitions espagnole, grecque et portugaise convergent ou diffèrent, en termes de ruptures et de continuités, au niveau des réformes institutionnelles.

Nos questions de recherche fondamentales sont les suivantes : Existe-t-il une exception portugaise/grecque/espagnole ou, au contraire, une « voie sud-européenne » en ce qui concerne les institutions de la transition et de la consolidation démocratique ?

Comme hypothèse de travail, cet article part de l'idée qu'en ce qui concerne le changement et la structure institutionnelle, les trois pays présentent des expériences transitionnelles différentes, bien que les différents chemins suivis finissent par converger vers une certaine modernisation institutionnelle, politique et « culturelle »/civique. On peut alors se demander si l'intégration à la Communauté économique européenne et l'« européanisation » ont été perçues dans les trois cas comme le couronnement des réformes institutionnelles transitoires et comme un levier critique pour leur consolidation.

La construcción institucional constituye un parámetro distintivo del proceso de transición democrática. La perspectiva comparada de este artículo nos permite examinar la cuestión de si las transiciones española, griega y portuguesa convergen o difieren, en términos de rupturas y continuidades, en el plano de las reformas institucionales.

Nuestras preguntas fundamentales de investigación son las siguientes ¿Existe una excepción portuguesa/griega/española o, por el contrario, una “senda sudeuropea” en lo que se refiere a las instituciones de transición y consolidación democráticas?

Como hipótesis de trabajo, este artículo parte de la idea de que, en lo que respecta al cambio y la estructura institucional, los tres países presentan experiencias transicionales diferentes, aunque los distintos caminos seguidos acaban convergiendo en una cierta modernización institucional, política y “cultural”/cívica, punto en el que cabe preguntarse si la integración en la Comunidad Económica Europea y la “europeización” han sido percibidas en los tres casos como la piedra angular de las reformas institucionales transicionales y como una palanca crítica para su consolidación.

Texte intégral

Putting things in (institutional) context

- 1 When does the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy end? The question has been briefly answered: when democracy is “the only game in town”¹. However, this marks the difference between transition and consolidation; in fact, there is no consensus over when the democratization process ends. It has been argued that democratization begins with the breakdown of the authoritarian regime and concludes with the first democratic elections². Also, speaking either of transition or of consolidation, there are many paths to be followed until democracy becomes “the only game in town”: formal and informal, symbolic acts and political decisions, social mobilization and institutional arrangements.
- 2 In 1984, scholars still found it difficult to describe the “new Mediterranean democracies” of Huntington’s “third wave of democratization” as stable³. The steady functioning of democracy depends on broad consensus and ideological support, which in turn entails that society must come to terms “with the most painful elements of its own past”⁴. The fourth wave of regime change in the postcommunist world presented new challenges to transitional theories. Despite all the criticisms and debates on the actors, patterns, mechanisms and obstacles to democratisation theories⁵, an idea prevails: “Successful transition to democracy means that the political regime is at least a minimalist democracy”⁶. In this sense, whether it is a pacted, a bottom-up or a top-down and elite driven transition, there are some structural conditions that shape it: political culture, economic development, social mobilization and civil society, and last but not least, institutions⁷.



3 Institutional building constitutes a distinct parameter, as its design shapes the transition-consolidation prospects, the main actors' strategies and the broader support for a democratic regime⁸. The comparative perspective of this article enables us to examine if the Spanish, Greek and Portuguese Transitions converge or differ, in terms of ruptures and continuities, at the level of institutional reforms. Our fundamental research question is as follows: Is there a Portuguese/Greek /Spanish "exception" or, on the contrary, a "south European path" in what concerns the institutions of democratic transition and consolidation?

4 As a preliminary step, we define the institutional transition as the process of institutional (re)building in the medium term, which is not just at the "moment" of regime change but also in the course of the democratic consolidation. In this respect, we understand "institutions" in a broader sense: both institutions (Constitution, political regime, justice) *and* institutional framework, such as political system, socio-cultural change, and Europeanisation.

5 In what is already a classic study on this theme, O'Donnell and Schmitter⁹ define transition as a period of time in which "the rules of the political game are not defined". If this concept is widely accepted, the same is not true with regard to the definition of institutions. According to Steinmo¹⁰ "the most common definition for institutions is: rules". Some studies in this tradition focus on formal rules and organizations¹¹, while others address informal rules and norms¹². Whether we mean formal institutions or informal rules and norms, they are important for politics because they determine who participates in a given decision and, simultaneously, their strategic behaviour. As indicated, "institutions undergird, enable, and regulate the interaction of individuals and organizations in particular areas of life"¹³.

6 Even though there is already an abundant literature on institutions, the truth is that until recently, little concern was given to analysing and explaining institutional changes¹⁴. The assessment of these arrangements is of particular interest in periods of adjustment in the political system since "changing one set of rules can and often does have implications for others"¹⁵.

7 Democratic transition is a *par excellence* period of change in which institution-building or re-building is a matter of utmost importance and at the same time highly ambivalent. Rupture with the past should be pragmatic enough as to safeguard a smooth transition but also clear enough because if not, "the continuation of important sections of the authoritarian political elite and bureaucracy" could undermine the confidence and loyalty to the democratic regime and the accountability of its institutions¹⁶.

8 Thus, we aim to present and compare the critical institutional parameters of Portuguese, Greek and Spanish transitions to democracy. Although very close in time, these transitions present significant distinctions even though the final outcome—the political system that results from them—is essentially similar. The fact that the three countries converge in the desire to join the European Economic Community (EEC) also seems to point in that direction. Given the differences among the three Transitions, the comparison conducted will focus on a triple institutional question: (1) transitional justice, (2) regime change and political system formation, (3) European integration.

9 As a working hypothesis, this chapter builds on the idea that with regard to institutional change and structure, the three countries present different transitional experiences although the diverse paths followed end up in a certain institutional, political and "cultural"/civic convergence with European Union institutional framework. Therefore, we believe that the integration into the European Economic Community and Europeanisation have been perceived in all three cases as the capstone of the transitional institutional reforms and as a critical lever for their consolidation.



Smooth transition or rupture?

10 Considered one of the most peaceful and successful transitions of the so-called third wave, Spanish democratisation is, in fact, one of the least resolved in national public opinion. Controversy accumulates and Transition and its legacy have been under unprecedented questioning in the last decade. Initially held almost silently in the academy, the debate infected the public arena, rapidly spreading across all layers of society as a wave of criticism underlined the continuities and insufficiencies of the Transition. In fact, seemingly simple questions, such as that of its time frame, still divide academics and public opinion. Actually, unlike Portugal, where the beginning (April 25, 1974), the fundamental stages (three) and the end (November 25, 1975/April, 1976) of the Transition have been clearly identified, in Spain there is no consensus in this regard.

11 Some historians present the assassination of Admiral Carrero Blanco by the Basque separatist group ETA (December 1973) as a starting point of the Spanish Transition¹⁷. Others choose Franco's death or Juan Carlos' coronation as milestones, despite the argument that these did not bring about a real change. Accordingly, for Jiménez¹⁸ what truly triggered the change was the appointment of Adolfo Suárez as president of the government in July 1976.

12 Likewise, there is no consensus on the final landmark of the Spanish Transition. Some authors close the process with the approval of the new democratic constitution by referendum, on December 6, 1978. Taking into consideration that transition is the period that occurs between the disappearance of the existing regime and the advent of a new one, one should say that the Spanish Transition is concluded by the end of 1978. Still, the definition of the new rules of the game did not automatically guarantee their application. Given the existence of well-founded doubts on the ability of the first democratic governments to generate new policies of territorial organization of the State, some experts argue that the transition was not concluded until October 25, 1979, date of the approval by referendum of the first regional autonomy statutes for Catalonia and the Basque Country. Finally, one should highlight that the closure of the Transition is also often associated with the failed military coup of February 23, 1981, or even with the overwhelming electoral victory of the PSOE in October 1982, considering that only at that point were the challenges that the democratization process had to face overcome.

13 In the Greek public debate, the question of whether the democratic transition (*Metapolitefsi*) was short or long remains open. Most scholars tend to consider it as an ongoing process, which encompasses the period of democratic consolidation. In the mid-1980s, a controversy began over the question "When did *Metapolitefsi* end?" and was brought to the forefront of the "memory" debate in the economic crisis of the 2010s. In the literature there is a broad *consensus* on the smooth character of the democratic transition and the institutional-building of a modern socio-political system. It seems undeniable that *Metapolitefsi* marked a significant change of the basis of legitimacy of the (democratic) regime: a "normal" liberal democracy, a progressive-democratic civic culture, an inclusive state, instead of anti-communism, nationalist Greek-Christian ideology and cultural conservatism¹⁹. At the same time, the question of whether *Metapolitefsi* has been a radical rupture not only with the dictatorship of 1967-1974 but also with the so called "meager democracy" of the post-civil war state (1949-1967) remains open.

14 After 2010, a certain discourse has emerged blaming *Metapolitefsi* for the country's bankruptcy and arguing that all the maladies were already present in the founding moment of the Third Hellenic Republic: populism, clientelism, absence of institutional checks and balances, strong vested interests, etc. On the other hand, in the anti-



austerity movement, the rallying slogan “Junta didn’t end in 1973” became very popular—echoing those who believed that the continuities with the dictatorial regime were more significant than the ruptures. After all, was the democratic transition a pure and simple rupture with the dictatorship and/or the post-war period? Or should we rather consider it as a “chronotope”, as Avgeridis *et alli*²⁰ indicate, a transition “in progress” which has developed in multiple dimensions and temporalities?

15 In Portugal, the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the April 25 revolution (2014) revealed that, as in Spain or in Greece, the “transitional issue” was not closed. Old debates were rekindled in the academy, while in the public arena those who longed for the old order resurged (albeit timidly) under the impact of the huge economic crisis. The impact of external factors and the comparative weight of the various agents of change (army, political parties, social movements, etc.) are among the main discussions on the Portuguese transition. Some authors sought to raise the controversy about the use of the terms “Revolution” and/or “Transition” referring to the changes produced in Portugal in 1974-75. However, that is clearly an artificial or non-existent debate as the historiography is unanimous in this respect: the transition to democracy took place through a revolution. Far more interesting is the on-going debate on whether one should present the Portuguese revolution as a precursor of the third wave of transitions to democracy or as the last “Leninist theatre” of Europe.

16 The collapse of the dictatorship followed a systemic rupture and triggered a revolutionary process characterized by a crisis of State, the politicization of the Armed Forces and the radicalization of social movements²¹. In fact, among the specifics of the Portuguese Transition one should highlight the height of the colonial wars, the political role played by the military, the huge State crises, the radical experience of the revolutionary turmoil (nationalisations, land occupations, protests and demonstrations) and finally the importance of the 1975 elections for the Constituent Assembly.

17 It is not our aim to debate the concepts of liberalization, transition and consolidation, which are essential to resolve the dispute on the essence of the Portuguese Transition. Nevertheless, another issue may emerge in this context. Despite the huge changes that took place during the 1974-75 Revolution, we will have to wait for the democratic consolidation to check their fate. Does this mean that the Portuguese Transition only ended in 1982? Schmitter’s analogies are very useful to frame the Portuguese institutional transition, as he presents transition as a “war of movements” and democratic consolidation as a “war of positions”. In fact, in mid-1976 the situation was clarified. The approval of the new constitution and the legislative and presidential elections (April-July) established the end of the revolutionary crisis. The new institutions were then defined and uncertainty as to the nature of the regime ended²². However, the process was only truly completed when political stability was achieved and the military tutelage ended in 1982.

And (transitional) justice for all?

18 Consolidation of a liberal democracy equals consolidation of the rule of law. This means a set of coherent legal rules but also a democratized elite for the judiciary and a broader sense that justice has been done for the anti-democratic deviations of the dictatorial regime and those who collaborated with it. The trials that follow the collapse of a dictatorial regime constitute a new “official history”, while at the same time being the first step in a series of cycles of memory²³.



Has justice been done in Greece? The term that was introduced for this relatively short, but not instantaneous process was “dejuntification”²⁴. The conservative

Karamanlis government chose to gently manage transitional justice²⁵ and, according to Haralambous, “the post-junta state was anxious to absorb rather than expel remnants of the authoritarian past”²⁶. Nevertheless, compared to the other democratic transitions in Southern Europe, the heaviest penalties were imposed in Greece, confirming Huntington’s hypothesis that the collapse of the regime facilitates remediation, while in a transition by reform the regime’s elite continues to have a role and therefore the scope for sanctions is limited²⁷. In fact, the persecutions were short-lived (autumn 1974 to late 1975) but widespread; yet social pressure preceded them and the conservative government followed²⁸.

20 In the first days of *Metapolitefsi*, a Presidential Decree was issued granting amnesty to all but the “leaders” of the junta. In October 1974, five key protagonists of the regime were arrested and deported to Kea, a small island off Attica. A few days earlier, the Greek Parliament had decided that “democracy was never overthrown in law” and the junta was for the first time officially described as a “coup”. The most important trial that followed was that of the protagonists. In July 1975, 20 of the 24 officers that were brought to justice were convicted²⁹. However, 107 non-military ministers of the junta were not brought to justice because the Supreme Court ruled that the offense was “instantaneous”; i.e. it concerned only the coup of April 1967 and not the collaboration in the 7 years that followed.

21 In the Army, officers who had been persecuted by the regime were reinstated. As for the persecution of the regime’s collaborators, the government seemed reluctant, probably due to the threat of an episode with Turkey³⁰. The real breakthrough came after the “pajama coup” (24-2-1975): within a month, 139 officers were discharged, as well as all the officers of the ESA (the military police investigative unit) and most of the military coup plotters of 1967 and 1973. In the Security Forces, more than 600 police officers prosecuted by the junta returned to their service. As for the prosecutions in *Metapolitefsi*, however, it is rather clear that the responsibilities of the Police were reduced to a minimum. As concerns the judiciary, 23 persecuted judges were reinstated in 1974, but only one judge of the supreme court of Areios Pagos and two members of the Court of Auditors were persecuted for collaboration with the regime³¹.

22 It is worth noticing that in terms of “dejuntification” the picture was different at the University. It is estimated that about 10% of the university teaching staff were fired due to relations with the junta, while those who had been expelled by the regime were reinstated. In this case, the “dejuntification” seemed deeper, as a consequence of the pressure of the dynamic student movement³².

23 In Portugal, transitional justice assumed mainly three *formulas*. First, there were institutional reforms directed mainly to abusive state institutions such as the political police (PIDE-DGS) and political courts (*Plenary courts*), that aimed to dismantle the repressive apparatus and prevent the recurrence of human rights abuses and impunity. Secondly, criminal prosecutions were addressed to perpetrators considered responsible for repression and abuses. Finally, lustration or political purges (*saneamentos*) were, in fact, the most common form of transitional justice.

24 As referred to by Pinto, the rupture with the past, unleashed after the April 25, 1974 coup, gave way to a “rapid and multi-directional” movement of political purges, evident in the immediate decision to push aside the most “visible elements of the dictatorial political elite” (President of the Republic, President of the Council, members of the government, deputies, and so on)³³. Once the dome of the state apparatus was purged, a rapid and limited purge of the armed forces was carried out. With this measure, the National Salvation Junta (JSN) tried to put an end to the process. However, this claim quickly fell apart, as widespread social and political mobilisation demanded a broader and deeper intervention. In the end, purges would affect almost all sectors of national



life (public servants, municipalities, the business sector, the media, etc.), often escaping the control of the authorities, in a process full of tensions, without which we would hardly understand the complexity of the Portuguese transition. Thus, the idea that, in Portugal, the political purges were limited and temporally circumscribed should be qualified.

25 Although the core measures of transitional justice were performed during the 1974-75 Revolution, the trials of the political police officers and collaborators only began after the new constitution was approved. There is no consensus regarding the total number of judicial processes instituted and trials carried out, but it is estimated that almost 75% of PIDE's agents and collaborators were sentenced. According to Pimentel (2016), the penalties applied were extremely gentle, "given that most of the inmates were in fact sentenced to penalties equivalent to the time of preventive detention already served". This idea of a benevolent treatment is shared by Raimundo³⁴, who argued that the criminalization and prosecution of the Portuguese political police was a punitive transitional justice process that also involved forgiveness and reconciliation.

26 Spain presents a far more complex situation concerning political justice, making it difficult to establish any parallel with the two previously mentioned cases. Once again, the frequently repeated idea of a peaceful transition vanishes under intense controversy that presently runs throughout Spanish society and academia. The recent exhumation and removal of the remains of Franco from the *Valle de los Caídos* (2019) revived a debate that intensified with the subsequent exhumation of victims of the Civil War. It is worth noticing that these processes were undertaken after the release of a critical report of the United Nations³⁵, denouncing that "no state policy was ever established with respect to truth". Because of the traumatic collective memory of the Spanish civil war, the victims of the Francoist regime were not properly rehabilitated and the dictatorship was not formally condemned until recently.

27 The adoption of the so-called *Pacto del Olvido* (Pact of Oblivion) may explain why Franco was the only dictator whose remains had survived in a mausoleum in a democratic country. Rather than establishing a truth commission to come to terms with the past, during the democratic transition political elites and parties agreed on drawing a curtain on history. Political purges were not carried out, as would happen, decades later, in Poland and Hungary, where attempts at lustration failed or were blocked. According to Aguilar³⁶, political leaders chose not to use the past as a weapon, fearing that this would compromise the establishment of a democracy. Rejecting the thesis of the law's "self-amnesty", Molinero goes further in her interpretation, defending that amnesty was a demand of anti-Francoist parliamentarians as a measure of rupture with the past and to promote reconciliation, which was understood as "overcoming—not forgetting—of the dictatorship"³⁷.

28 It took almost three decades before the Spanish political elite truly committed to the recovery of the memory of Francoism's repression. The 2007 "historical memory" law and 2018 Royal decree were important milestones in this process and despite its delay, Spain seems to be moving towards a much deeper political justice than that implemented in Portugal or Greece.

Different paths to democracy: regime and political system



According to Fishman, there are four fundamental dimensions to assess the functioning of democracy: authenticity, quality, depth and consolidation³⁸. In fact,

institutional building, regime change and re-shaping of the political system are long-term components of the democratic consolidation that transcend the transition phase *stricto sensu*. It has been argued that consolidation begins when a new Constitution is in place and free elections are held. Nevertheless, this is not enough. As political parties are channels for democratic participation, representation and legitimization, a competitive party system needs to be formed as it will ensure not only elections and effective governance but also that the “losers” will remain in the democratic game³⁹.

30 The Greek Transition has been characterized as “by far the most rapid transition in southern Europe”: 142 days from July 21 to December 9, 1974, when the monarchy was abolished⁴⁰. Konstantinos Karamanlis immediately formed a government of “national unity”. The 1952 Constitution came back into force and the army withdrew from Athens, while on June 7, 1975 a new Constitution was ratified by the parliament, leading to a regime change, via the referendum of December 8, 1974 when the monarchy was abolished. On September 23, 1974, the orthodox communist party KKE was legalized and on November 17, 1974, the first free elections were held. On 12 June 1975, Greece submitted an application for the acceleration of the process to become full member of the EEC.

31 In Spain, after Franco’s death some demanded a referendum on the form of the state—such as the one held in Greece in December 1974—, while peripheral nationalists advocated the establishment of provisional governments in their own spheres of action, but that was not the path followed in Spain. The central role of Juan Carlos I as the engine of change is widely accepted⁴¹. Despite being Franco’s chosen “heir”, the way Franco prepared succession through a monarchic restoration made it almost impossible to foresee the role of the King in the Transition or the huge institutional transformations that would take place after his death⁴². According to this thesis, currently the subject of criticism, in Spain a plan to achieve democracy within the rule of law (an archetypal transition) was conceived by Juan Carlos, while in Portugal or Greece there was no pre-established plan. In Portugal, the programme of the Armed Forces Movement (MFA) was a precarious compromise between different visions of the road to follow, enabling an intense political struggle and a dangerous state crisis.

32 Triggered by the Colonial War, the turbulent Portuguese Revolution lasted almost two years (April 1974–November 1975), during which various solutions were envisaged, polarizing positions in military circles, within the new political elite and amongst popular movements. On the one hand, the defenders of a model inspired by the state socialism of the Soviet type considered the existence of a military vanguard as a unique opportunity to fulfil their aims. This project was promoted by sectors connected to Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves and counted on the support of the Portuguese Communist Party. A more ideologically diffuse group, involving revolutionary military units with considerable fighting power, advocated a self-managed socialist revolution. This group had Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho (a chief strategist of the April 25 operations and commander of a special military corps called the Operational Command for the Continent-COPCON) as a reference pole and was supported by left-wing parties. Finally, there were the supporters of a pluralistic social democratic regime, to be implemented by free elections. Represented in the military by the “Group of Nine” (the “moderates”), they had the strategic support of the Socialist Party. The confrontation between these groups, in a context of wide mobilization and social conflict, was one of the dominant features and strongly guided the Portuguese Transition.

33 In contrast, in Spain the King had the resources to establish a new regime without breaking with the existing legality. As the engine of political change, he acted more as a catalyst than as a direct agent, leaving ground for other actors, such as Torcuato Fernández Miranda (head of the Council of the Realm) or Adolfo Suárez. Considering



that Suárez had served as general secretary of the National Movement under Franco's regime, one of the most interesting aspects of the Spanish Transition relies on the fact that the institutional mechanisms designed to maintain Franco's system made it possible to bring a democratic constitutional monarchy into life. The presentation and debate of the Program of Political Reform (*Ley de Reforma Política*)⁴³ was an important milestone in institutional reform, as Suárez called for a bicameral legislature based on universal suffrage, managing to pass the law within the regime's constitutional framework⁴⁴. This reform was described as 'cross-eyed' since it appeared to satisfy incompatible demands: "full democracy for the opposition, constitutional continuity for regime conservatives"⁴⁵. The wide popular adhesion to the referendum on that law and the overwhelming vote in favor expressed the social support to the political reform.

34 After the December 1976 referendum, the process of dismantling the dictatorship structure and launching the new democratic institutions speeded up. The legalization of political parties stands as an important milestone in this context. One should note that although the Spanish Transition is considered as a model of political engineering, this does not mean that the opposition played an irrelevant role. In fact, the main opposition forces merged into a political platform (the "Platform of Democratic Organizations") in order to gain negotiating capacity and enact their terms⁴⁶. Many scholars argue that neither the regime reformers nor the opposition was strong enough to impose their model, leading to the "negotiated rupture" outcome.

35 Despite the thorny process of legalization of the Spanish Communist Party, on June 15, 1977 free elections were held. The victory of Suárez' new party, the Union of Democratic Centre (UCD) represented the triumph of moderation. Despite the severe crisis that the country was going through, the real thorns to democratization were the territorial problem and, above all, terrorism. Despite their differences, ETA, GRAPO (First of October Anti-Fascist Resistance Groups), FRAP (Revolutionary Antifascist Patriotic Front) and various right-wing groups agreed on the understanding that, due to their inability to directly influence political life, they needed to incite the Army to adopt a regressive attitude and delay the transition to democracy⁴⁷. It should be noted that terrorism was also a common trait in the Greek case, with the organisation of "17 November" (and ELA) that punctuated the transition in the long run, nevertheless with lesser political impact and active popular support. The Spanish military did not respond to the provocation and surprisingly, since it had been the backbone of the dictatorship, did not interfere in politics⁴⁸. Even the Tejero Molina failed *coup d'état* (February 23, 1981), promoted by a small and noisy right-wing sector of the armed forces, was more complex than a simple reaction to terrorism.

36 After the 1977 elections, the need to agree on minimum political norms aimed at facilitating coexistence until the approval of the new constitution and the Moncloa Pacts symbolized the spirit of consensus that resulted in the 1978 Constitution⁴⁹. According to Linz & Stepan the Moncloa Pacts were not "a *social pact* between trade unions and employers' organizations, but a *political pact*" by which Suárez wanted to involve political society⁵⁰. One of the great challenges at this stage was the drafting of a new constitution. In August 1977, the Constitutional Committee of the Cortes elected a parliamentary commission in which the most important political parties (national and regional) were represented. These included the Catalan nationalists, the UCD, the Communist party, the Socialist party and the Alianza Popular. Although members of the group disagreed over sensitive issues such as regionalism, education, abortion or labor policy, the negotiations took place under the sign of dialogue and compromise. By October 1978, the new constitution was approved by the Parliament, having the merit of being "neither the unilateral imposition of a party or the expression of one ideology, but rather the synthesis and reconciliation of divergent and potentially antagonistic



ideological positions”⁵¹. At the time, the only major groups left out of the consensus were the Basque Nationalists and the tiny minority of revolutionary groups to the left of the Communist party. Even the conservative party formed by regime reformers, the Alianza Popular, went on to participate as an opposition party after disapproving of the Constitution. The referendum of December 1978 on the Constitution marked the end of institutional transition and gave way to a relatively quick consolidation, which will end with the 1982 general elections⁵², which marked the first peaceful transfer of power from the UCD to the Socialist party, which had evolved into a “catch all” center-left party. The party system stabilized around an “imperfect bi-party system” that rotated between the Socialist party and the Alianza Popular, later renamed the Partido Popular.

37 In Greece, rupture and continuity coexisted: much of the political personnel remained the same (Karamanlis, Mavros, Papandreou, Kyrkos, Florakis) and the 1975 Constitution was considered a revision of the 1952 Constitution although the monarchy was no longer there. On the other hand, the army returned to the barracks and the two great divisions of 20th century Greece were healed: the democrats-royalists cleavage with the abolition of the monarchy and the communists-patriots division with the legalization of the KKE, which had been outlawed since the civil war of 1946-1949⁵³. The transfer of power was smooth; constitutional and legislative reforms legitimized the new-born democracy, and with the 1981 elections, which marked a spectacular government change (a triumph of the socialist PASOK), democracy had actually become “the only game in town”.

38 *Metapolitefsi* flagged the end of a system of power that prevailed in Greece after the Second World War and the Civil War, but also closed an unfortunate parenthesis to the broader socio-political modernization that had been triggered in the 60s. The political system’s basis of legitimation changed, as the post-war state based on anti-communism, nationalism, occupation of the state by the Right, nationalism, and social conservatism, came to an end. The post-war state was “democratic for some citizens, authoritarian for others”, whilst the army and the monarchy were key centers of power. With the fall of the dictatorship, Greece moved to a “self-regulating democracy”⁵⁴.

39 Nevertheless, as in Portugal and Spain, some parameters of the transition have been controversial. The 1975 Constitution invested the President of the Republic with increased powers, allowing the opposition to present it as a revival of a “crownless monarchy”⁵⁵. The army returned to the barracks, but the *esprit de corps* from which the protagonists of the junta had emerged was not automatically eliminated⁵⁶. Justice played a leading role in the first phase of the transition, although “dejuntification” in its ranks was rather limited.

40 Perhaps the most crucial rupture at the institutional level was that a “normal” party system and a functioning European-style liberal democracy were now in place (a feature that, incidentally, will be somewhat shared by the other case studies being evaluated). Regardless of how the party system can be classified—limited but polarized bipartisanship, absolute polarized tripartism, non-polarized bipartisanship⁵⁷, namely with two main players, the conservative New Democracy (ND) and the Socialist PASOK, plus a strong left-wing communist component—the major change was that it included all the legitimized the partisan players and finally ensured a smooth alternation of power.

41 In fact, a major shift in political culture took place: the conservative New Democracy was renovated, but chose oblivion over revision⁵⁸. On the contrary, PASOK, with the alliance of the communist Left in critical areas, emerged as a powerful innovator of social reform, while at the same time appropriated the radical dynamism of the 1960s; major institutional reforms were promoted, thanks to which the Greek society and democratic consolidation were in tune with the cultural progressivism of the era. These included: the right to vote at the age of 18 (Law 1224/1981), introduction of civil



marriage (Law 1250/1982), decriminalization of adultery (Law 1272/1982), modernization of family law (Law 1329/1983), and establishment of Gender Equality Council (Law 1288/1982). ND had already put forward an educational reform in 1979: the colloquial language (“dimotiki”) became the formal language of the state; and then in 1983 a major reform on the democratization of tertiary education was passed by PASOK. Also, reforms were carried out in public administration (the end of the “state of the Right”, even if old and new networks of clientelism re-emerged) and in local government (decentralization). The law for the democratization of the trade union movement (1264/1982) was promoted by PASOK and the communist party (KKE); however, in practice the control of the trade union movement was maintained by the party in government (PASOK).

42 In Portugal, the path followed to establish, and then consolidate, democracy was quite different from that of the Spanish and Greek cases. The rapid dismantling of the dictatorship leads us also to question whether it had a quick and consensual institutional transition. Actually, undoubtedly longer than the Greek, in Portugal the institutional transition stage is seemingly shorter than in Spain. Nevertheless, one should note that even if the new institutional framework was defined in a few months, some important issues were left open or unresolved.

43 In Portugal, the road from dictatorship to democracy was tumultuous. The dismantling of the most characteristic features of the previous legal-institutional order and the design of the new one were unleashed taking the Armed Forces Movement Program as a starting point. It established disassembling of the organs and institutions of the overthrown regime; amnesty for all political prisoners: the re-establishment of basic freedoms: the launch of a new economic and social policy: the call ‘within 12 months of a national constituent assembly, elected by direct and secret universal suffrage’: and, finally, the launch of a colonial policy that would “lead to peace”.

44 In fact, an important benchmark of the Portuguese transition was the role of the military. Even though no place was provided for the MFA in the new provisional constitutional scheme, the military soon became central pivot in political life, emerging as political actor, as agent and promoter of the Revolution and, from 1976 to 1982, as watchdog of “April achievements”. It is also important to note that during the Revolution the military had their own government power structures. The first was the Council of Chiefs of Staff, and then a series of bodies were created and extinguished as the revolution evolved but which constituted a web not always easy to unravel: MFA Coordinating Committee, Council of Twenty, the above mentioned COPCON, 5th Division of the General Staff, etc. The most enduring and important of these was the Council of the Revolution (CR), which will survive the revolution itself, only being dismantled during the 1982 constitutional review.

45 One of the most interesting aspects of the Portuguese institutional transition is that the party system had its origin in the revolutionary process. The MFA’s Program was not explicit as to the creation of political parties, but the overthrow of the dictatorship immediately brought to light those that, until then, acted underground and opened up the possibility for new parties to be created. At the outset, political parties were in a fragile position. Some, such as the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP), had to adapt to the new circumstances of legality. Others, like the newly established Socialist Party (PS), had to overcome the internal problems that were to lead to the first schisms. Yet others, such as the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) and the Christian Democratic Party (CDS), faced difficulties arising from their youth. All of these parties suffered from organisational and financial deficiencies, staff shortages, and weak party machines.

Despite the weakness of MFA’s program in this area, the parties were quick to claim a leading role in politics. At first, they limited themselves to participating in the



provisional governments. An important step was taken with the approval of the Law of Parties (Decree-Law 595/74, of 7 November) that established the freedom of formation of parties. The crucial turning point would be the elections for the Constitutional Assembly (April 25, 1975). It is worth mentioning that only six parties gained representation in the Constituent Assembly despite the myriad of parties that came to life in the period. Four of them—PS, PPD, PCP and CDS—ended up monopolizing political life as a sort of ‘party cartel’ that will only be broken in 1985 by the short-term Democratic Renewal Party (PRD).

47 The establishment of the Council of the Revolution (CR) (March 75) represented an important increase of power to the military since it was placed at the top of the power structure and endowed with extensive constitutional, military and supervisory powers. Nonetheless, after the 1975 elections the behaviour of the political parties changed substantially as they began to demand an active role in politics. Finally, in February 1976, the revision of the Constitutional Agreement Platform between the MFA and the political parties substantially limited military power. Political power was transferred to civilian parties.

48 During the revolution, the key issue was not the “regime question” but that of the political system. At the top of the pyramid lay the National Salvation Junta (JSN), a strictly military organ. The Provisional (civilian) government was responsible for the ‘day-to-day management’ until legislative elections could be held. Finally, the Council of State was a heterogeneous body gathering civilians and military. This scheme remained almost untouched until March 11, 1975, when the CR assumed the leadership. Revolutionary legality prevailed over electoral legitimacy.

49 The approval of the new Constitution (April 2, 1976), followed by the legislative (25 April) and presidential elections (27 June) represented the triumph of a democratic, multi-party and pro-western regime. The new Constitution was an “advanced” and “hybrid” document that devoted Portugal to a “transition to Socialism” and a collectivization of the means of production; declared nationalization and land expropriations irreversible; and maintained the military tutelage. Despite its stylistic Marxist overlay and the definition of a “guided democracy”, it instituted a democratic and pluralist regime.

50 According to António Reis, one of the most remarkable aspects of the Constitution lies in the establishment of “a prudent system of checks and balances”. By adopting a semi-presidential system, or a mitigated parliamentarism, “it designed a wise division of powers at the highest level of the State”. Additionally, the consecration of a proportional electoral system “has made single-party majorities difficult, in an implicit invitation to the formation of coalition governments”⁵⁹. As a result of this agreement, democratic consolidation (1976-1982) will be characterized by twofold concern: political stability and the definition of strategies for solving the economic and financial crisis, in view of the fast development of the country under the European integration process.

Europe as a horizon of democratic integration

51 Where do all these institutional reforms point to? The three different paths to democracy are equally three roads to “Europeanisation” for these countries of the European “periphery”, both in terms of democratic institutional building but also in terms of a certain modernisation of the political and civic culture. In this sense, the intuition behind the comparative perspective of this chapter is that belonging to



“Europe” signified something more than strictly economic prosperity; it seemed to translate to a sense of belonging to a geopolitical, historical, institutional and cultural space – hence the resilience of ‘Europeaness’ in all three countries even in the context of the deep crisis of the 2010s.

52 *Metapolitefsi* is also the history of the attachment of Greece to European integration and has specificities that oblige us to present it separately from the Spanish and Portuguese cases. In the early years of the post-junta period, Greek society was wary of the “West”, as the trauma of the junta was very recent and US intervention was considered to have played a decisive role in enforcing it. The then hegemonic New Democracy considered the country’s belonging to the “West” unquestionable; the radical PASOK emerged rapidly in Greek politics, investing its political discourse with theories of dependence and third-worldism. Karamanlis considered that for a small country with weak democratic institutions, membership in the EEC was necessary for consolidation⁶⁰. However, along with the “West”, the suspicion of Greeks also concerned the EEC. The questioning of the EEC reached its peak in the 1981 elections, when PASOK triumphed. A certain normalization did not take long to come: with the pro-European transformation of PASOK, Greek society quickly became one of the most pro-European in the EEC. The 1990s saw a limited revival of Euroscepticism (mainly by far-right parties), but Greek support for the European project collapsed dramatically in 2010-2011 as a result of the crisis and political austerity imposed on the bankrupt country, to recover until the end of this decade. Nevertheless, the Greeks’ loyalty to EU was never practically questioned and Grexit has never been a real choice⁶¹.

53 How can this reversal be interpreted? A key to understanding it is the way in which “Europe” was conceived. In the 1960’s, in the context of Cold War, the major controversy concerned the question of whether the EEC was a favorable environment for the economic development of the country, a salvation or the destruction of the rural population, etc. Since 1974, the debate has focused on the democratic and geopolitical element: “Europe” was perceived as a guarantee for the young democratic institutions.

54 For decades, Spain and Portugal were marginalized from the European integration process for political reasons. The institutionalization of democracy in the two Iberian countries opened new perspectives in this regard which were quickly exploited: with only a slight difference of time, Portugal and Spain applied to join the EEC (March and July 1977). The Portuguese negotiations began in October 1978. The route was expected to be difficult, but, despite the magnitude of the task, the Portuguese authorities were confident of an outcome within three years. In the end, the negotiation turned out to be more complex than desired, dragging on for almost a decade. Among the obstacles to the Portuguese claim was the fact that the EEC assumed that both Iberian candidacies should be considered together as “Siamese negotiations”⁶². According to Sanz, “this was the option that most suited the interests of Spain, which supported the globalisation formula in order to avoid being overtaken by the smaller countries of the South”, although Portugal would have preferred “to follow the Greek trail”⁶³.

55 To Portugal and Spain, “belonging to Europe” also meant something more than strictly economic prosperity. It suggested the end of their international isolation, a guarantee of democratic consolidation and a prospect of modernization. The challenges for Portuguese democratization were even more evident than for Spain, given that accession implied a constitutional revision redefining, among other things, the organisational structures through which political power was exercised, and a new national defence that definitively consecrated the subordination of the armed forces to the civilian political authorities. Finally, after a long and hard road was covered, Portugal and Spain joined the EEC in January 1, 1986.

If the accession negotiations had caused multiple frictions (namely in the fisheries



sector) and a decade of not always peaceful bilateral relations, full membership of the EEC brought the two Iberian states closer. According to Sanz, this “was a demonstration of the unifying power of European integration [and] an expression of a wider process and of the Europeanisation of Portuguese and Spanish societies and political structures”⁶⁴. The crisis in the early 21st century highlighted the structural weaknesses that, despite joining the European Community, remained in the two Iberian states, as in Greece. However, and despite the situation of institutional instability experienced in Spain following the demands of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia, belonging to the European community was not questioned. The European framework remains as a backbone for foreign and national policies in both countries, and, especially in Spain, the strength of today’s Europeanism is coupled with the role European integration played in the democratic transition⁶⁵.

Comparative discussion

⁵⁷ Despite the substantial cross-national differences found, it was possible to identify common points of comparison. Each of these countries claim an exceptionality; nevertheless, a long term overview of the changes in Greece, Portugal and Spain lead us to conclude otherwise – the similarities are much more evident than the differences (on the transnational and comparative perspective also see Muñoz and Balios).

⁵⁸ The three cases examined made it clear that any assessment that circumscribes the institutional transition to the period of political transition *stricto sensu* is likely to be reductionist. In all three countries it is easier to determine the beginning than the end of the transition. In Spain there is no consensus on the limits of the transition (ranging from 1973 to 1982); in Portugal the immediate period of the transition seems more clear-cut (1974-1976) but its consolidation goes at least up to 1982; in Greece everyone agrees that the transition begins with the collapse of the junta in 1974 but to this day there are countless different approaches on when it ends.

⁵⁹ In Spain and Greece, the transition was smooth, while in Portugal there was a revolutionary situation. This dual pattern should, however, be relativized. Recently, the public debate in Spain, as we have seen, has challenged the smooth and peaceful nature of the transition. Similarly in Greece, an endless public debate about the “end of *Metapolitefsi*” indicates that it is rather a “transition in progress”; also, it is debatable to what extent it meant an immediate rupture with the post-war “semi-democracy”. Portugal’s revolutionary path meant radical institutional changes, but at the same time involved far more negotiation and compromise between the different actors than the term “revolutionary” suggests. In the end, and regardless of the differences, the approval of constitutional texts in the three countries represented an important milestone in institutional stabilization and, therefore, in democratization.

⁶⁰ Despite the similarities, Greece, Portugal and Spain experienced, within a short time, quite distinct transitions to democracy. Geographical proximity (particularly with regard to Portugal and Spain) as well as the cultural and historical similitudes of these countries, hardly allowed observers to foresee such an outcome. As shown in this chapter, the different paths chosen for the building of the democratic order are notable, particularly in what concerns the institutional parameters.

⁶¹ Although it is impossible to ignore the importance of the “street pressure” and of civil society in the democratization process⁶⁶, in Spain transition was launched front above. The negotiations, arrangements and pacts that took place among the elites make it hard to talk about a real break with the past. Recent battles over memory and history are one of the most obvious signs of the heavy legacy of the transition in Spain. A radically



different situation is found in Portugal, where the institutional transition was characterized by a strong state crisis and a radical institutional change. The importance of the military as leading actors, but not as a cohesive or even harmonious body, acting under different “covers” and establishing unclear networks with distinct political and social groups, has made the Portuguese transition quite unique. The Greek case lies in the middle. *Metapolitefsi* was an elite-driven process; nevertheless, the pressures coming from a radicalized society were significant (as in the case of “dejuntification” in the universities). The transition under Karamanlis was based on a centre and centre-right founding coalition, whilst the consolidation was supported by virtually the entire political spectrum⁶⁷. The break with the past has been significant, at least in the sense of the dual character of *Metapolitefsi* as both an epilogue to a system of power and a continuation of a long historical cycle of socio-political modernization.

Institutional transitions			
	Spain	Portugal	Greece
General Parameters			
When does the transition starts/end?	No consensus (from 1973-1976 to 1978-1982)	1974-1976 (consolidation in 1982)	No consensus (up until the 80's, but its end constantly questioned)
Smooth/consensual or rupture?	Smooth (but recently questioned)	Revolution (transition to democracy or failed transition to socialism?)	Smooth (but no clear rupture with post-war semi-democracy in progress)
Memory revisiting and the transition	Revisiting the “smooth” transition model	Revisiting the “weight” of main actors and the revolution’s “legacy”	Questioning the ruptures vs questioning the quality of institution-building
Specific questions			
Army	No interference in politics	Central role	Returned to barracks
Transitional justice	Partial amnesty, oblivion rather than purges – victims’ reparation reopened in the 2000-2010s	Rapid political purges, widespread via social pressure	Short but widespread, gently managed (with heavy sanctions), deeper in universities
Regime & political system	Monarchy not questioned Pro-established plan: democratic constitutional monarchy, no rupture	Republic not questioned Social mobilization and conflicting plans (socialist and modest)	Monarchy abolished Parliamentary democracy
	New Constitution (1978) Constitutional democratic monarchy	New Constitution (1976) Semi-presidential democracy with checks and balances	New Constitution (1975) Democracy of political parties (not monarchy or army)
	“Normal” party system Smooth alternation of power	Autonomous power structures for the military, later parties demanded the leading role “Normal” party system Smooth alternation of power	Smooth alternation of power Socio-political modernization (major reforms after 1981)
Europeanisation	Insertion to the EEC: 1986 (applied: 1977)	Insertion to the EEC: 1986 (applied: 1977)	Insertion to the EEC: 1978 (applied: 1975)
	End of international isolation	End of international isolation	Geopolitical security



	“Europe” as guarantee for democratization	“Europe” as guarantee for democratization	“Europe” as guarantee for democratization
	Socio-political modernization	Socio-political modernization	Socio-political modernization
	Resilience of “europeanism”	Resilience of “europeanism”	Resilience of “europeanism” but vivid Eurosceptic feeling at the transition stage

Strengths and weaknesses of the institutional transitions

62 We have examined some critical aspects of the institutional transitions: transitional justice, political system, and insertion into the European Community. Despite some significant differences, the European countries of the “third wave” share a common ground: in a relatively short period of time, they have generally managed to “catch-up” with the modern liberal European democracies. One can rightly say that their “modernization”, i.e., convergence with European Union institutional frameworks, has been profound, but no one can deny that in some respects it has been imperfect—the cycles of (ambiguous) memory of this period stem from this dual character.

63 Has justice been done for the victims and the accomplices of dictatorial regimes? The answer is not unanimous. “Dejuntification”, “Saneamentos”, “Pacto del olvido”, have been three different ways of enacting (or not) transitional justice mechanisms, three different responses to the demands for truth and justice, but in a pragmatic way that would not destabilize the fragile young democracies. In Portugal and Greece, transitional justice was rapid but widespread, especially thanks to social pressure. Political purges were the main tool in the Portuguese case, while in Greece the sanctions were heavy but restricted to the main protagonists of the regime. On the other hand, Spain chose the path of oblivion rather than purges, for reasons of pragmatism but also because of the type of transition.

64 The shadow of the recent and distant past continued to fall on the shaping of democratic political institutions in each case. All three countries quickly acquired a new Constitution (Greece 1975, Portugal 1976, Spain 1978) as a major symbolic indication of a break with the past—and more than symbolic, in the sense that significant changes were constitutionalized in the direction of institutional renewal. Old political actors, connected or not to the dictatorial regimes, did not always disappear, but new ones definitely emerged. In Greece, the two main pillars of post-war “semi-democracy” were no longer part of the democratic game: the army returned to the barracks and the monarchy was abolished by referendum. New parties emerged or were reborn, but much of the basic political personnel remained the same. Monarchy was not questioned in Spain, while the king was a central player in the transition towards a constitutional monarchy with no radical ruptures in this regard. The army, however, did not interfere in the political situation of the period, unlike Portugal where it played a leading role.

65 While continuities remained, all countries established the fundamentals of a “normal” democracy and political system: pluralism, free elections, and most importantly smooth alternation of power. Indeed, political parties now participated freely in political life and in free elections, and emerged as key players in the democratic game, whether it was older parties that were reborn with a different physiognomy (such as the conservative *Nea Dimokratia* in Greece) or new parties that emerged (e.g. through the revolutionary



matrix of Portugal). In this context, major reforms of socio-political modernization were promoted.

66 Occurring very close in time, the three transitions present significant differences even though the final outcome –the political system that results from them– is essentially similar. The fact that the three countries of the Southern European “periphery” converged in the desire to join the European Economic Community also points in that direction. The integration into the EEC has been perceived as the capstone of the transitional institutional reforms and as a critical lever for their consolidation – but also in terms of a certain renewal of the political and civic culture. European integration and “Europeanisation” represented profound changes in those countries but also a temporary camouflage for their structural deficits. Despite the reduced time difference between the institutional transitions and applications for membership in the EEC, the “Mediterranean enlargement” will take place in two steps since Greek negotiations moved at a faster pace than the “twin negotiation” of the two Iberian countries.

67 During the transition period, the relationship of the three countries with “Europe” was established or more accurately redefined. Participation in the project of European integration was explicitly presented as a guarantee for democratization and institutional and socio-political modernization, despite the existing Euroscepticism. Especially for Portugal and Spain, it meant the end of international isolation after decades of non-democratic regimes, while for Greece it was an additional guarantee of geopolitical security. For the three countries, however, belonging to “Europe” was also belonging to a wider geopolitical-cultural space, which explains the resilience of pro-European feelings even when these were seriously challenged in the framework of the post-2008 crisis.

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Référence électronique

Ioannis Balampanidis et Maria Inácia Rezola, « From dictatorship to democracy: the institutional transitions. Transitions from above? », *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* [En ligne], 53-1 | 2023,

mis en ligne le 14 avril 2023, consulté le 13 décembre 2023. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/mcv/18605> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/mcv.18605>

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