



Deputy Prime Minister María Teresa Fernández de la Vega chairs the new body on Monday. / EFE

## Commission comes under attack

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Having been highly active in supporting the efforts of victims' groups, De la Vega will preside over the work of the commission, which includes representatives from the Justice, Interior and Culture Ministries. According to the deputy prime minister, the goal of the body is to achieve the "moral and judicial rehabilitation" of victims through a series of initiatives, including recovering the remains of the deceased from mass graves and offering financial compensation to families.

The Justice Ministry has made it clear, however, that the government is unlikely to acquiesce to demands to apologize formally for the execution of Companys or any other victim of the Civil War and the dictatorship — raising the ire of Catalan nationalists who believe the restoration of his honor so far is insufficient.

They are not alone in criticizing the commission, which has also come under fire from the conservative Popular Party, albeit for different reasons.

In a press conference yesterday, PP Congress spokesman

Eduardo Zaplana argued that the government should "stop constantly looking at the past."

"This revisionist process is nonsensical," Zaplana declared. "We can't feel proud of the history of this country's journey toward democracy, but history is history and today we live in a free country where permanently looking at the past makes no sense and has no explanation."

He said that the government should instead be dedicating its time to the current problems of the Spanish people.

## New report on RTVE lays bare a culture of chronic overspending

Revelations comes amid demands for tighter control on channels' diet of "trash television"

A. EATWELL, Madrid  
The crippling debts of Spain's public television and radio broadcaster RTVE are a direct result of a lack of planning in program scheduling, inflated salaries for producers and presenters, and over-payment for under-watched programs.

Those are just some of the conclusions of a tax office report that was made public recently, and which paints a dire portrait of the management of Radio Televisión Española under the previous Popular Party administration. Based on data collected in 2001, the report indicates how ineffectively taxpayers' money was used for programming at RTVE, and how a lack of efficient accounting contributed to ballooning the broadcaster's debts above €6 billion.

The tax office notes, for example, that RTVE frequently paid exorbitant amounts to independent production companies for programs without first obtaining different cost quotations, or that it obtained film broadcast rights through intermediaries who inflated the price. Its own staff were underused, the report states, and many programs that could have been produced by RTVE itself were offered to independent production companies, resulting in higher costs.

Most striking perhaps are the

broadcaster's running costs — a direct reflection of a lack of forward planning and efficient accounting, according to the tax office. Every hour that the television arm TVE broadcast cost an average of €65,675 in 2001, while average revenue amounted to just €37,247 — effectively resulting in RTVE's deficit expanding by €28,428 per hour in that year. For José González Ferrari, the director general of RTVE over the period, the tax office's report details a situation that was "absolutely normal" at the state broadcaster.

Following the election of the Socialist administration in March, a sweeping restructuring of RTVE has begun, scrapping presenters who were paid but never appeared, and films that were acquired at inflated rates but never shown. It remains to be seen how far the reform will go toward reducing the public broadcaster's debts, however, amid changing viewing habits and a falling audience share.

The crisis at RTVE comes amid a broader debate about the Spanish television sector, particularly over junk TV and the need for more stringent regulation. Private broadcaster Tele 5 announced this week that it has told producers to tone down programs, especially gossip shows, during times when children could be watching.

GEORGE ARGYROS / US Ambassador to Spain

## "Governments learn as they go along, the same as new ambassadors"

HERMANN TERTSCH, Madrid  
After three years as US ambassador to Spain, George Argyros is preparing for the final stretch of his mandate amid mounting tensions between the US and Spanish governments.

In an interview with EL PAÍS, Argyros did not spare the Zapatero government from criticism, but deliberately skirted some of the thorniest questions over the diplomatic divide between the two countries. Spain and the United States "are allies and friends," Argyros said when questioned about his failure to attend the Columbus Day celebrations on October 12.

"Things are improving and will continue to improve. We have a new government here, but I don't know if it was prepared to win [the elections] or just happened to do so. It's making efforts. The United States greatly appreciates its ties with Spain. We have a lot in common. A new government learns as it goes along, the same as an ambassador. And mistakes are made. We all make them. In any case, I hope the situation will improve: we're going to work on it."

Argyros arrived in Spain in November 2001, during the zenith of the Popular Party's eight year rule under former Prime Minister José María Aznar. In the months following his appointment, Spain emerged as one of President George W. Bush's staunchest allies in the war against international terrorism, supporting the military campaign in Iraq and deploying 1,300 soldiers to join the US-led coalition.

With the victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) in Spain's March 14, 2004 general elections, however, the bilateral marriage ended. Newly elected Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero withdrew the troops from Iraq and Spain's relations with the White House deteriorated. In the opinion of political analysts, Argyros' absence from Spain's National Day military parade and from the ensuing reception at the Royal Palace is a reflection of this widening rift.

When prodded, this US business leader and Republican Party supporter, admitted to taking offense at Zapatero's decision to



George Argyros, US ambassador to Spain. / ULY MARTÍN

remain seated as US soldiers carrying the American flag marched past the grandstand in last year's National Day parade.

At the time, Zapatero was still the opposition leader, and had fiercely criticized the presence of Spanish troops in Iraq.

"It bothered me in the same way as I think it would bother

any American," Argyros said. "I don't know what his reasons were, but I considered it a real insult to America and its people."

The US ambassador, meanwhile, does not accord great significance to recent polls revealing that almost 80 percent of Spaniards oppose President

Bush's administration. The White House, Argyros said, "is doing what it has to do" in Iraq and Afghanistan. "Sometimes democratic governments have to rise in defense of their own future. It's tough, and not everybody will love you when you do what you have to do... Leadership implies doing what you deem correct and necessary."

Argyros did not withhold his criticism when prodded about the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq earlier this year. "Zapatero was chosen by his people," he said, "and therefore he can act as he chooses. Of course we didn't like this decision, which we deemed ill-timed and inappropriate... It was absolute appeasement."

While stressing that the United States and Spain share common interests in Latin America, and that the strong ties of friendship between the two countries will be long-lasting, the US representative in Spain requested that the Spanish government stay out of the presidential race pitting President Bush against Democratic rival John Kerry.

"Spain must stay out of it," Argyros said. "We didn't intervene in the elections here and Spain must not do so there."

On the other hand, Argyros refused to comment on the recent steps taken by the Spanish Socialists to soften European Union sanctions on Cuba. He did not want to respond either to Zapatero's statement calling for other countries to join Spain in its withdrawal of troops from Iraq.