

# The Intelligence Services and the Mass Media in Spain

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## Introduction

The relationship between the nascent intelligence service and the mass media in Spain began only in the last thirty years. Yet the process began in the late 1960s, the beginnings of which were marked by opacity, misunderstandings and scandals. To follow this process, we analysed a set of articles published in the following Spanish daily and weekly newspapers: *El País*, *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, *El Periódico de Catalunya*, *Ya*, *Cambio 16*, *Tiempo*, *Diario 16* and *Interviú*. Each newspaper approached intelligence issues differently.

We divide our analysis of the different approaches into three time segments: from 1968 to 1983, from 1984 to 1995, and from 1996 to the present, each of which covers different stages of the development of the Spanish Intelligence Services as well as the changes in the way these are perceived by the public.

Most of the data used for the analysis has been retrieved through online archives provided by the respective news media. Furthermore, data dating back to the early years of the period of analysis have been collected through the Press Files of the Ministry of Defence and the Centre of Written Documentation of the National Radio of Spain. In addition, information is included which has been generated through interviews conducted during the past years with political leaders, members of the intelligence services, and journalists.

## The Mass Media in Spain

Media coverage of issues related to the intelligence services in Spain has largely been performed by daily and weekly newspapers. The focus of TV and radio coverage, on the other hand, has largely been limited to the ad hoc reporting of news prompted by various scandals. This form of news coverage largely lacked periodicity and long-term monitoring of the issues at stake. Overall, the media coverage of intelligence-related issues has been rather meagre. Until the 1990s, in-depth special reports on the topic were basically non-existent. Since then, the number of special reports has been limited to about half a dozen.

The three major daily newspapers *El País*, *ABC*, and *El Mundo* currently dominate the Spanish news media panorama. The daily *El País* was created in

the early years of the transition to democracy and is widely considered as the most influential Spanish newspaper today. However, during the late 1980s its proximity to the Socialist Party caused a certain deterioration of its reputation as an independent and authoritative source of information at the high end of quality journalism.

*ABC* is the oldest newspaper in Spain. It is considered a conservative newspaper with a monarchist outlook and touts an ideological proximity to the Spanish conservative party, although in recent years a new periodical, *La Razón*, has gained some popularity among the conservative political spectrum and is increasingly challenging positions taken by *ABC* as the leading source of information in conservative circles.

The most recently established major daily newspaper in Spain is *El Mundo*, which was created with the explicit aim of establishing a truly independent source of information. Shortly after its creation it became most successful in revealing several cases of the Socialist government's corruption in the mid-1990s. Its success in denouncing those scandals quickly increased its reputation as an independent source and consolidated its position as one of three major Spanish newspapers.

During the last years of General Franco's dictatorship, some newspapers began to develop an increasingly critical position towards the regime. By publishing critical reports, many of the journalists triggered the first and quite diffident public debate on necessary reforms and ways to improve the lives of the people in the times to come. At that time, public opinion, still affected by long years of dictatorship, was not conducive towards an open and free public debate, and the press became the crucial public forum in which public debates on alternatives to the regime after Franco's death could emerge.

Franco's dictatorship was characterised by strict censorship of all media. The censors' rigor varied over time depending on the state and condition of the regime. The least rigid control of the media was exercised in the urban centres of Madrid and Barcelona, allowing the local press to enjoy a certain degree of informative freedom. However, as the editor was generally made accountable for the content of the news, this relative freedom of information turned into a *rara avis*. This dilemma caused a decline in the newspaper's credibility, an overcautious attitude, and anticipatory obedience by the newspapers' editors in their effort to avoid sanctions and closings, as it happened to the newspaper *Madrid* which, after several closings, had its main building demolished in 1972.

Until the final stages of General Franco's dictatorship, the officially released information was largely descriptive and grossly distorted, reflecting the Francoist aversion against any form of public criticism of the Regime. Under these circumstances, the role of the media in stimulating public opinion was quite limited. Furthermore, the lack of access to independent channels through

which disagreement could be expressed created space for rumours and gossip, which were often relied upon as sources of information.

The democratisation of the country, and especially the inclusion of the freedom of the press in the Constitution of 1978, marked the beginning of a new era for the Spanish media. Thereafter, journalists' interest on issues related to intelligence services grew significantly, producing reports on a manifold range of topics. Generally, the journalists' stance on such issues can be broadly divided into three distinct categories: First, the group of journalists who endorsed the Intelligence Services' perspectives and attitudes, represented by the journalist Pilar Urbano<sup>1</sup>; second, the group of journalists reflecting a generally belligerent and critical view on the work of CESID (*Centro Superior de Información de la Defensa*, the Higher Centre for Defence Intelligence), represented by Fernando Rueda<sup>2</sup>; and the third and most recently emerged group of journalists seeking to combine historical rigour with a solid journalistic style, represented by the journalists Bardavío, Cernuda and Jauregui<sup>3</sup>. Lately some authors belonging to this group have published books reflecting remarkably solid research and appealing didactical style<sup>4</sup>.

### Intelligence Services in Spain

Until the mid-1970s, intelligence services in Spain did not operate as real functional units. During the dictatorship, the control and repression of the society was an intrinsic part of the duties of the Civil Guard, the Police and the Army. These forces considered the task of gathering information as a necessary precondition for effective societal control. The international isolation of the country and the absence of a proactive foreign policy made the deployment of Intelligence Service staff abroad largely dispensable.

- 1 Pilar Urbano, *Yo entré en el CESID* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1995).
- 2 Fernando Rueda, *La Casa: el CESID, agentes, operaciones secretas y actividades de los espías españoles* (Barcelona: Ed. Temas de hoy, 1993); *Espías: escuchas, dossiers, montajes... el mercado negro de la información en España* (Barcelona, Temas de Hoy, 1995); *KA: licencia para matar: qué hacen y cómo son los espías más peligrosos del Cesid* (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 1997); *¿Por qué nos da miedo el CESID?* (Madrid, Ed. Foca, 1999).
- 3 Joaquín Bardavío, Pilar Cernuda y Javier Jauregui, *Servicios Secretos* (Madrid: Plaza & Janés, 2000).
- 4 Francisco Medina: *Las sombras del poder* (Madrid: Ed. Espasa-Calpe, 1995); Fernando Muniesa, *Los espías de madera* (Madrid: Ed. Foca, 1998); Juan Alberto Perote, *Confesiones de Perote. Revelaciones de un espía* (Barcelona: Ed. RBA Actual, 1999); Xavier Vinader, *Operación Lobo. Memorias de un infiltrado en ETA* (Madrid: Ed. Temas de Hoy, 1999).

In 1972, the *Servicio Central de Documentación* SECED (Central Information Service) was created. The institutional structure in which the SECED carried out its tasks of information gathering was placed under the aegis of the *presidente del gobierno* or prime minister. It was more sophisticated than previous structures, and displayed some characteristics of a modern Intelligence Service. The main mission of this Service was to monitor purportedly subversive activities in universities, the labour movement, the Army, the clergy and intellectual circles. The latter included artists, writers and journalists.

The Alto Estado Mayor ALTO (Supreme General Staff) was in charge of military intelligence, but it also played a major role in controlling the population within the Francoist repression system. In the course of democratisation the new government of President Suarez initiated reforms of the Francoist Administration, thereby merging the SECED and the ALTO into a single institution named the Higher Centre for Defence Intelligence *Centro Superior de Información de la Defensa* (CESID). This organisational structure would eventually become the most modern and complete Intelligence Service that Spain ever had. Still, these modern structures did not prevent the CESID from becoming involved in some scandals, largely caused by its inexperience and the lack of appropriate oversight mechanisms.

### The Mass Media and the Intelligence Services

By describing the evolution of the Spanish mass media as well as the Intelligence Services, the previous two sections provide the basis for the following analysis of the relationship between these two institutions. The analysis is structured into the three time segments already mentioned in order to explore the dynamics in the evolution of the Spanish Intelligence Services over the past thirty years, as well as the ways these dynamics have been perceived and reported upon by the news media.

In the first time segment from 1968 to 1983, news coverage on issues related to the Intelligence Services was scarce due to the restrictions on the press imposed by the authorities. Expressing oneself freely could be considered as an act of bravery. This was even true for addressing openly issues concerning the security apparatus of the Franco regime. In this context, the expulsion of a Dutch journalist from Spain in 1979 for publishing an article in a Dutch newspaper implicating the involvement of the Security Forces in a terrorist attack in Madrid, might serve as a good example illustrating the daunting atmosphere of those times.

After Franco's death in 1975 and during the subsequent process of democratisation, some newspapers like *Cambio 16*, *Diario 16* or *Interviú* developed some interest in the activities of the intelligence services, the police and the security forces in general. At that time, the existence and operation of

the intelligence services were largely unknown to the general public. Journalists also suffered under this widespread ignorance, not merely lacking specialist knowledge, but also reliable sources within the apparatus. Overall, the incentive to engage in more serious investigations on the security community in general, and the world of spies in particular, was rather low.

During this period, most of the intelligence-related news published in Spanish dailies either focused on CIA activities within the Spanish national territory, or with the activities of the KGB and Cuban agents, including their quite frequent expulsions from Spain. The reporting style of these articles frequently resembled the style of fiction literature, in which espionage was displayed as a game. Emphasis was laid upon covert actions, the Cold War, and cloak-and-dagger operations. The world of espionage described in these reports was largely considered to be unrelated to the Spanish Intelligence Services, which were widely viewed as amateurish. More in-depth analyses were rare exceptions and limited to specific issues such as the declassification of US intelligence files containing information about espionage by the *Tô* network during the Second World War, which consisted of a group of Spaniards spying in the United States for Japan.

In the first years after democratisation, several political leaders, trade unionists, and professionals claimed their offices had been raided and wire-tapping carried out. The sharp increase of such stories during this period cannot be understood without referring to mass psychological dynamics among the citizenry, in which paranoid fears of being targeted by spies was quite virulent. The distinction between these imaginary acts, stemming from a phenomenon, which is usually explained as an after-effect of Francoist repression, and real acts of espionage and surveillance against those collectives, became increasingly difficult.

In those days, many of the Spanish state agencies preserved some pre-democratic attitudes, which became obvious in their disrespect for the media and the new provisions granting their rights and freedoms, which had been just proclaimed in the new Constitution. But in contrast to the pre-democratic era, these state agencies were now confronted with a media sector which was no longer willing to accept these attitudes, openly denouncing them instead.

Chart I shows the number of news articles on intelligence-related issues in Spain over time since 1976. Included are only those news articles published by *El País*, since it is the only source for which these articles can be traced back for the entire period from 1976 to 2000. However, as random samples of other sources such as *ABC* show similar reporting patterns over time, the *El País* sample is nevertheless able to provide generalised data on reporting trends for the period of analysis.

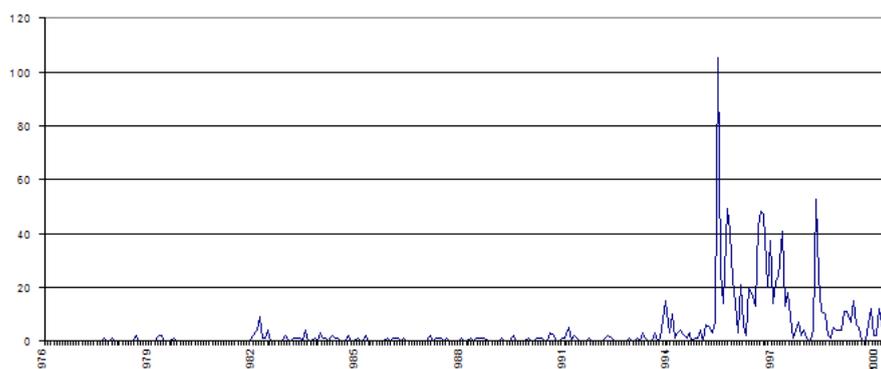
Chart 1: *Number of News Articles on CESID in El País (1976-2000)*

Chart 1 shows that the attention paid by the media to issues related to the Intelligence Services was virtually non-existent during the first years. In some years, fewer than five articles related to these services could be found in the press and, in others, not even a single article had been published. Media interest in intelligence witnessed a first peak in 1981, when news about the attempted *coup d'état* on February 23 spread, in which some members of the CESID were involved. The aftermath of the attempt and the trials of the involved officers generated further reporting on intelligence.

In the years between late 1979 and 1983 several clandestine operations took place in Spain and France against members of the terrorist groups ETA and GRAPO, as well as against certain groups and radical collectives in the Basque country. Militants within extreme right-wing organisations, who had been members of the Francoist Central Service of Documentation (SECED), carried out these operations. Some evidence exists in support of allegations raised against certain agencies during the late Franco era of being involved in an undercover war against ETA, and having created a clandestine group called the Basque-Spanish Battalion, *Batallón Vasco-Español* (BVE) for this purpose.

The database of *El País*, which also includes articles of other news media on the activities of this paramilitary structure, provides 167 entries dealing with the topic within these three years. Overall, the articles hardly probe the SECED background of the agents involved. The likely reason for this is the fact that SECED as an agency was not directly involved in this dirty war against ETA. Rather, the SECED agents acted under the umbrella of a distinct organisation. Furthermore, the fact that SECED was dissolved during the country's transition to democracy in 1977 makes it logically impossible that these agents were formal members of SECED at the time of their action in 1979. This issue,

however, would eventually regain major importance a few years later during the trials against some leaders of the Socialist Party on charges of supporting the illegal activities of the Antiterrorist Liberation Groups (GAL)<sup>5</sup> against ETA. In these trials, evidence proving the fact that this dirty war had begun some years before the Socialist government under Felipe Gonzalez assumed office in 1982 was considered crucial in the Socialist leaders' effort to disclaim responsibility for these actions.

The creation of CESID in 1977 marked a major turning point and a departure from the tasks assigned to the Information Services of Franco's oppressive regime, which had been focusing on the surveillance and elimination of allegedly subversive elements among the political class, the trade union, as well as among religious and student leaders. Clearly, such practices were incompatible with the newly established democratic outlook of the country. But despite being integrated into the democratic structure, charges against the service of being involved in a campaign of political espionage were frequently raised. The majority of the public was convinced that the services continued to be involved in undemocratic practices – especially so during 1985.

During this time, basically all the leaders of the political parties in opposition to the socialist government of Felipe González, who won the presidency in 1982, reported wire-tapping, illegal surveillance and intrusions into their headquarters and offices. Their suspicion was further aggravated by imprudent remarks of Vice-President Alfonso Guerra, who publicly expressed his pride in being the best-informed person in the country, and of being able to read the speeches of opposition party leader Manuel Fraga before the speaker himself had read it. In 1984, even the President of Congress became a victim of the espionage of CESID. And between 1995 and 1996, the then Minister of Defence Federico Trillo, who later became President of Congress, uncovered surveillance operations directed at himself, which were presumably executed by the Intelligence Service of his own Ministry.

Apart from those glaring episodes, most of the news reports dealt with unspectacular issues such as the pending reform of the Intelligence Services, the replacement of the director of the CESID, who had a military background, by a civilian successor, and the mechanisms that should be used to coordinate all Security Forces with the Intelligence Services. Over the next 20 years, these issues were continuously addressed with varying intensity. In the course of these two decades, several journalists began to specialise on Intelligence Services, although often in a rather rudimentary way. Most frequently, those

5 GAL: *Grupos Antiterroristas de Liberación* (Antiterrorist Liberation Groups).

journalists among the editorial staff who covered the broader area of security and defence were assigned to cover the intelligence sphere as well.

The 1995/96 scandal was one of several setbacks the Spanish Intelligence Services suffered at that time. In fact, the period from 1995 to the present is characterised by continued disorder. Calamities started with Colonel Juan Alberto Perote's pilfering of 1,245 microfilms containing classified material. Perote had been in command of an elite special operations unit within the Spanish Intelligence Services, the *Agrupación Operativa de Misiones Especiales* or AOME, from 1982 to the time he left CESID in 1991. The revelation of his in-depth knowledge of the inner structures and operations of *La Casa*, as the intelligence service is called, shook the democratic structures of the State to the core.

As it turned out, the Intelligence Services were indirectly involved in two plots aimed at toppling President Felipe Gonzalez and forcing him to call for early general elections. The first attempt tried to instrumentalise the precarious situation of the bank *Banesto* for this purpose. Under its CEO Mario Conde, large-scale mismanagement left the bank on the brink of insolvency, forcing the Bank of Spain to take over in order to avoid a crash. The second plot was related to the attempt of some politico-economic groups to implicate the government of González in the undercover war against ETA. The government was accused of having created the GAL and financing them with secret funds.

Mario Conde unsuccessfully negotiated with the government for a solution which would allow him to save his investments. His frustration about this failure and his suspicion of being spied upon induced him buy some of the microfilms that Perote had stolen from the intelligence service. After secret negotiations with the government failed to produce any results with regard to the *Banesto* situation, Mario Conde decided to use the files he had purchased to push the Gonzalez government with the information he had about the *dirty war* against ETA. Concerned about the explosive material that the banker had, former President Suarez mediated between the government and Conde; Conde's lawyer and the Ministers of Interior and Justice met on several occasions but no deal was reached.

At the same time, some of the information contained on the tapes concerning telephone tapping and other operations of the Intelligence Services was leaked to the daily newspaper *El Mundo*. Former Colonel Perote denied any involvement in passing this information over to *El Mundo*, and the true source was never discovered. On June 12<sup>th</sup> 1995, *El Mundo* published a full-page report on the Intelligence Services' spy operations on top representatives of the State, including King Juan Carlos I, several ministers, businessmen, journalists and political leaders.

The *El Mundo* report triggered a scandal unprecedented in recent Spanish history, causing great indignation among political, social and economic leaders of the country. In the aftermath of this political earthquake, rumours abounded about who might have been the victims. CESID issued an official statement about the wiretappings. Furthermore, representatives of the service claimed that King Juan Carlos had actually been informed by the Director General about the possibility of private conversations on mobile phones being intercepted. In fact, several of these wiretappings had been stored in the archives of the CESID Headquarters.

The pressure exercised by the opposition, the mass media, and the public forced the Minister of Defence to provide the Parliament with all available details of the misconduct of CESID. Nonetheless, the government's strategy of transparency failed to calm down the widespread public outrage, which finally caused the resignations in June 1995 of the Vice-president of the Government, Narcís Serra, the Minister of Defence, Julián García Vargas, and the Director of CESID, General Emilio A. Manglano.

The information published by *El Mundo* undoubtedly originated from the microfilms implicating the Intelligence Services in secret operations against ETA, thereby revealing its link to GAL. It further brought to light some rather bizarre stories about kidnappings of beggars in order to test the impact of narcotics on them.

For several months, the Spanish public was confronted on almost a daily basis with new cases of political and economic corruption and the involvement of the Intelligence Services. The strategy used by the newspaper *El Mundo* in this ongoing public dismantling of the socialist government was to confront the government with just marginally incriminating information and then wait for the government denial. Once the government fell into the trap, *El Mundo* published the whole set of incriminating evidence, thereby exposing the government's false statements. This strategy forced the government to acknowledge several of the accusations made, even if the government itself was not sure yet about their validity. Furthermore, this strategy allowed *El Mundo* to double-check the validity of its information in cases of doubt. Along this logic, the acceptance of responsibility by the government for certain accusations automatically proved that *El Mundo* was on the right track.

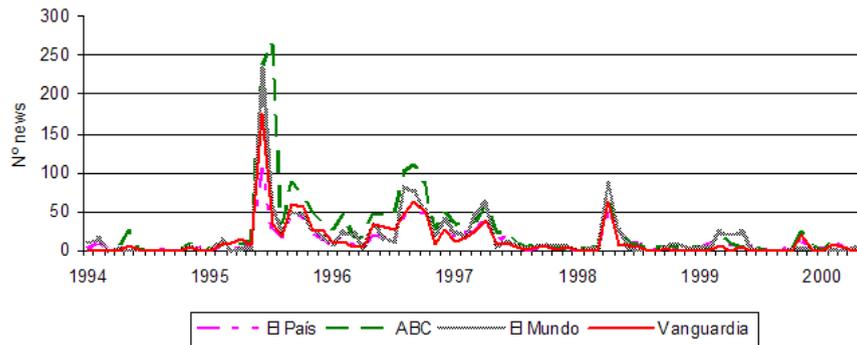
On 31 March 1998, *El Mundo* published a report on an operation of the Intelligence Services in which the Basque party *Herri Batasuna* (HB) had been wiretapped. The Intelligence Services had acquired the flat above the headquarters of HB some years before, equipping it with a wiretapping system. *El Mundo*'s revelations severely affected the security of the agents living in the flat, forcing them to leave on the run, and to abandon some sensitive equipment exposing their identity. Once their cover was blown, the Intelligence Services

had to dismantle some of their operative bases and networks in the south of France and the Basque country. Several agents and informants were exposed, and had to be relocated elsewhere. *Egin*, a newspaper sympathetic to the views of ETA and HB, published personal details of some of the uncovered agents and their families, as well as photos of their homes. This fiasco was a major setback in the counter-terrorist struggle of CESID, as it destroyed much of its clandestine structures, which had been quite successfully built up prior to their revelation by the press.

*Herri Batasuna* was considered the political branch of the terrorist group ETA. However, at the time of the scandal it acted as a legitimate political party, as it was banned only in 2003. The scandal caused a tremendous earthquake among the political class, forcing the Minister of Defence to explain before the Parliament why the Intelligence Services had been spying upon a legitimate political party. In his statement, the Minister defended his position that CESID had not spied upon the political party itself, but upon a group of people belonging to the support complex of ETA, who were using the party's infrastructure. This line of argumentation did not convince most of the MPs, who unsuccessfully demanded his and the Director of CESID's resignation.

The most likely date for the start of these wiretapping operations is 1992. The wiretapping continued even after the change of government which brought the Popular Party to power in 1996. In the aftermath of the scandal, the CESID hunted desperately for the source of the leak which had caused it. In the course of this investigation, and in contrast to the 1995 scandal, the CESID not only spied on the involved journalists, but also on two advisors of the Ministry of Defence.

Chart 2 gives a more detailed picture of the trends in reporting on intelligence during the period from 1994 to 2000. Included in the analysis are the three major Spanish national dailies as well as *La Vanguardia*, the most influential Catalan daily newspaper.

Chart 2: *Number of News Articles on CESID (1994-2000)*

As the chart shows, the coverage of intelligence-related issues by the different newspapers is very similar throughout the six years of analysis, clearly reaching its peak at the height of the scandal in 1995. Interestingly, coverage of intelligence-related issues by the daily *ABC* was significantly higher than among the other major dailies until July 1997, when its director Luís María Anson left the newspaper and joined the ranks of a competitor. After this date, the intensity of the coverage by *ABC* dropped to the levels of the other major dailies. While the exact causality between the political views of the editors and the number of articles on intelligence issues remains unclear, the figures for *ABC* might still serve as an indicator for the existence of a reporting bias. A further indicator for the existence of such bias is the fact that at the height of the corruption scandal of 1995, those daily newspapers which are considered more sympathetic to the views of the Socialist government, such as *El País*, published significantly less intelligence-related articles than those newspapers less inclined towards the government line, such as *El Mundo* or *La Vanguardia*.

Chart 3: Number of Articles on CESID per newspaper (1994-2000)

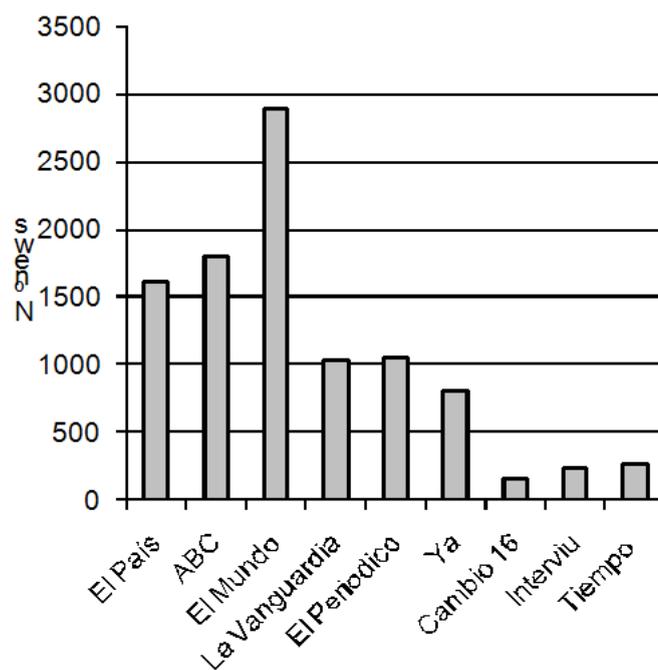


Chart 3 shows that, while reporting by *ABC* was highest during the first three years; it was the daily *El Mundo* which displayed the highest interest in intelligence-related issues throughout the entire period of analysis. Furthermore, reporting by the two Catalan dailies *La Vanguardia* and *El Periódico* was above average, too. This fact appears somehow surprising considering the fact that the representatives of the Catalan regional parties in the Spanish Parliament supported both the Socialist government of Felipe González as well as the first conservative government of José María Aznar. The two weeklies *Interviú* and *Tiempo* showed the least interest in CESID activities.

Generally, news media paid greater attention to the scandal of 1995 than to the scandal of 1998. One reason for this imbalance might be that in 1995 several powerful groups had a strong interest in the resignation of the Socialist government of Felipe González, while during the scandal of 1998 the Aznar government enjoyed a much greater level of support throughout the country. This support can be also explained by the fact that the victims of the espionage scandal of 1998 were related to the terrorist group ETA.

In sum, both scandals caused a considerable deterioration of public trust in the intelligence service, and consequently lead to its reform in 2002 in order to make it more accountable and to provide the legal framework for changes of the inner functioning of the service, which took place during the following years. The new National Intelligence Centre, *Centro Nacional de Inteligencia* (CNI), replaced CESID as the main Spanish intelligence service in 2002.

The most recent encounter between the intelligence services and the media in Spain occurred on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Again, it was the daily newspaper *El Mundo* which accused the Director of CNI, Alberto Saiz, of misappropriating public funds for private hunting and fishing activities. This news article triggered further stories on illegal activities by the Director of the Intelligence Service, including charges of nepotism, misappropriation of public monies, and a lack of oversight over the service.

The charges raised by *El Mundo* might be best understood in the context of the ongoing struggle over the extension of the director's term for a further five years which was highly contested. In the course of the creation of the CNI in 2002, the constituting laws limited the directorship to a five-year term, triggered by the negative experience with Alonso Manglano, whose 14-year long directorship was seen as a major cause for the scandals in the mid-1990s. However, in 2009 this clause was reinterpreted, allowing the director to renew his tenure every five years. Obviously, this reinterpretation reversed the original intention of this clause. In the debate concerning the renewal of Saiz' term as director of the CNI, the Vice-President of the Government, who was strongly in favour of the renewal and masterminded the reinterpretation of the corresponding legal provisions, and the Minister of Defence, who strongly opposed the term extension, were pitted against each other. Finally, the Vice-President prevailed and the cabinet renewed the director's contract on 24 April 2009.

With the prospect of having to serve another five years under the directorship of Alberto Saiz, several of the top intelligence service staff entered complaints against Saiz to the CNI's general secretary, who then informed the Minister of Defence. One month later, the top officers of the anti-terrorist units within the service resigned, openly calling for the dismissal of Saiz. At this point, the government started to dissociate itself from Saiz, asking him to clarify the charges raised against him.

On June 24<sup>th</sup>, the director decided to take the forward escape route by questioning several CNI agents on their involvement in the conspiracy, which, in his view, was masterminded by former members of the CESID. In his declarations, the director accused these individuals of resisting reforms and being reactionist. However, at the time he raised these accusations, *El Mundo* continued to reveal more cases of nepotism, misuse of public funds, and blatant mismanagement. Finally, on July 3<sup>rd</sup> President Zapatero withdrew his support

of Saiz and asked for his resignation. Saiz was immediately substituted by Félix Sanz Roldán, a former division commander. General Sanz Roldán had served as Chief of Staff and advisor to the Presidency, and had been President Zapatero's unsuccessful candidate for Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. On 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2009, *El Mundo* published the last of its articles on the affair, summarizing: "Yesterday at 1 p.m. the demission of Saiz was officially declared. He is no longer the Director of CNI. Once again investigative journalism was successful in allowing the public to see behind the curtains of power".

The case of the demission of Alberto Saiz as Director of the CNI serves as an apt example of how the news media acts as an effective control mechanism, thereby compensating for missing institutional control such as an efficient parliamentary committee to supervise the work of the intelligence services and prosecute any misconduct within the CNI. Undoubtedly, the media play a crucial role in controlling democratic institutions. But the Spanish case also demonstrates the control exercised by the owners: large private companies. These companies have their own agenda which is not always congruent with public interest. Ideally, the checks and balances within a democracy should rest on the shoulders of many, and not just on those news media which provide us with day-do-day information and thereby quintessentially shape our opinion.

## Conclusions

Chart 2 shows the great impact the two scandals of 1995 and 1998 had on the public interest in intelligence matters in Spain. Prior to these events, the intelligence services were largely non-existent in the perception of large segments of the Spanish public. In 1995, this widespread ignorance towards intelligence issues was suddenly ruptured by daily news on undercover activities by the Intelligence Services in the course of the GAL affair.

The two crises of 1995 and 1998 reopened the debate on the Official Secrets Act of 1968, which had only been superficially reformed in 1978. Behind the scenes, the 1995 scandal triggered an informal debate among Members of Parliament and the new Minister of Defence, Eduardo Serra. The debate gained momentum when news spread about the CESID wiretapping of *Herri Batasuna*, fostering the government's resolve to retake full control of the Intelligence Services.

Yet another immediate consequence of the 1995 scandal and its repercussions in the mass media was a significant budget cut suffered by the Intelligence Services in 1997. Above all, these cuts affected the acquisition of technical equipment for communications. In 1996, the Socialist government, still struggling with the repercussions of the scandal, was unable to push the budget cuts through Parliament. However in 1997, after the take-over of the govern-

ment by the Conservative party, the Catalan Members of Parliament acted as the main driving force to push through the CESID's budget cuts. They reacted to Catalan public opinion, which traditionally displays a very strong aversion against any form of suspected surveillance by the Spanish Intelligence Services.

Clearly, the main reason why the two scandals mushroomed into severe crises of the state institutions was a fundamental lack of control, next to widespread political incompetence, and the government's inability to foresee the potential magnitude of the scandals. The failure of the government to manage the crisis called the press into action, which assumed the role of a public forum in which the service's wrongdoing could be denounced. Instead of being handled by the appropriate democratic institutions, the crisis management was taken over by the press, with devastating consequences for the Intelligence Services' reputation. The crisis did not lead to any fruitful debate on how to improve their performance, but instead led to a destructive and discrediting campaign against them.

It is evident that the nature of the Intelligence Services makes it impossible for them to speak publicly and openly about their activities, projects or achievements, as other parts of the public administration may do. The lack of any communication policy and the absence of channels to allow for a regular exchange of information between the Intelligence Services and the mass media, create dependence by the media on unconfirmed information provided by individuals who have a personal interest in its distribution. It is simply impossible for any Intelligence Service to deny all published news related to its work. It is against this backdrop that the Intelligence Services, which neglected public relations until the mid 1990s, were incapable of influencing their deteriorating public image in the course of the scandals.

Under the impact of the damage to the reputation of the services caused by illegal wiretapping, the new director of CESID, General Javier Calderón, launched a public relations campaign in 1997 to improve the public image of *La Casa* in Spain. The Service organised summer courses on intelligence work, created its own website, and promoted a book<sup>6</sup> with the aim of giving the intelligence service a more favourable and modern public image.

Spanish Members of Parliament have learned about the scandals from the press, and, on the basis of these press articles, subsequently asked the government to clarify the facts. The analysis of the minutes of corresponding Parliament's Defence Committee meetings shows that 89% of all questions raised by the deputies on the intelligence service were based on media information. This points to a severe lack of oversight mechanisms, which in

6 Pilar Urbano, *Ibid.*

turn assigns to the press the role of a mechanism to supervise the State administration and the political leadership. Undoubtedly, it is a genuine task of the press to inform its readership about any matter it considers to be of interest. Still, this duty to inform by the mass media should not be confused with the task of ensuring the proper functioning of the State administration. The responsibility for this task should lie exclusively in the hands of the elected representatives. In contrast to other parts of the public administration, the relationship of the Intelligence Services with the news media is almost exclusively determined by reports on scandals. This peculiar relationship is likely to continue in the foreseeable future.