

**The media portrayal of Queen Sofia of Greece  
in Spanish newspapers.  
Analysis of the press coverage of Queen Sofia  
in *El País* and *El Mundo*, May 2011 to August 2012**

*La narració sobre la reina Sofia de Grècia  
als diaris espanyols.*

*Anàlisi de la cobertura de premsa de la reina Sofia  
a El País i El Mundo entre maig de 2011 i agost de 2012*

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**ABSTRACT:**

This paper focuses on the narrative presented of Queen Sofia of Greece in Spanish dailies during the last years of the reign of King Juan Carlos I. The King's wife occupies a prominent yet legally undefined place in Spanish public life. Consequently, this position depends strongly on how the media represent her. The main objective of this study is to highlight the characteristic elements of the Queen's image and to analyze the role that the media assigned to her, taking into consideration the evolution which may have taken place in this image and role due to the series of scandals which broke out in 2012, marking the beginning of the so-called *annus horribilis*. The research is based on the analysis of a selection of articles from two dailies, *El País* and *El Mundo*, published between May 2011 and August 2012. The authors applied the methods of content analysis and semiotic analysis.

**KEYWORDS:**

Spanish Crown, Queen Sofia of Greece, Spanish newspapers, press, political communication, political celebrity.



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**RESUM:**

L'article se centra en la narració realitzada als diaris espanyols sobre la reina Sofia durant els darrers anys del regnat de Joan Carles I. L'esposa del rei ocupa una posició prominent però a la vegada indefinida dins la vida pública espanyola. Per tant, aquesta posició depèn de la representació que els mitjans fan de la reina. L'objectiu principal d'aquest estudi és posar en relleu els elements que caracteritzen la imatge de la reina i analitzar el paper que els mitjans de comunicació li han assignat, tenint en compte la possible evolució d'ambdós en vista del començament del període d'escàndols anomenat *Annus Horribilis*. La recerca es basa en l'anàlisi d'una selecció d'articles publicats a *El País* i *El*

## THE MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF QUEEN SOFIA OF GREECE IN SPANISH NEWSPAPERS

*Mundo* entre maig de 2011 i agost de 2012. Els autors hi apliquen els mètodes de l'anàlisi de contingut i de l'anàlisi de la semiòtica.

### **PARAULES CLAU:**

Corona d'Espanya, reina Sofia de Grècia, diaris espanyols, premsa, comunicació política, celebritat política.



## 1. Introduction

In modern Europe, where republicanism is the dominant political system, monarchies are rather an exception than a rule. The First and Second World Wars brought about far-reaching changes in the borders of Europe and a large number of empires and kingdoms vanished from the map. The few remaining monarchies had to adapt to the new reality and face some major challenges.

The greatest change involved the paradigm of power. As European kingdoms progressively adopted the political form of constitutional and democratic monarchies, generally culminating in the aftermath of the Second World War, the center of power shifted from crowns to the people represented by Parliaments. It created a new situation in which monarchs were obliged to seek the approval of the public eye. This loss of political supremacy limited the role of the crowns and increased their representative function as symbols of states and nations (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Blain and O'Donnell, 2003). The main function of royal families thus became the staging of national symbolics.

The second important evolution took place in the process of mediatization of the European royal families. Due to the development of the media culture and consumption cultures in the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, European crowns became a part of the mass media landscape. In order to face and to control, at least partially, this "consumption of royalty" (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003), European monarchies started to create their own "mythologies" (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003) or "brands" (Balmer *et al.*, 2006), which mainly consisted of the creation of a coherent narrative, legitimizing the existence of the Royal Household in the State.

When Spain adopted the constitutional monarchy system in 1978, Juan Carlos I as the head of the renovated Spanish monarchy had to deal with these new parameters. In the complicated political context of the years immediately following the death of the dictator Francisco Franco, the young king concentrated his efforts on the legitimization in the public eye of the return of the monarchy to the political scene. Thanks to his attitude in favor of democracy during the Spanish Democratic Transition, he finally succeeded in building the public image of a protector of democratic values and rights, thereby ensuring public approval of the monarchic institution (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003; Herrero de Miñón, 2006; Preston, 2004a, 2004b; Powell, 1995). As the years went by and the memory of the King's role in the implantation of democracy in Spain started to fade, Juan Carlos I took up the role of a "professional" king: a political actor whose presence on the political stage guaranteed national stability and a worthy international representation.

As in the majority of modern states, King Juan Carlos I, in his capacity as Head of State, was supported by his wife, Queen Sofia of Greece. During his entire reign (1975-2014), Sofia assisted the King in official ceremonies and acted in the fields of social aid and culture. This public involvement as well as the social status of the King's spouse attracted media attention and gave her position a great public vis-

ibility. Public interest was reflected in extensive media coverage, especially in the press. Although the Queen undeniably reigned over the women's and gossip press, she was also present in the general information newspapers, considered in Spain as the most trustworthy medium (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Such publicity could be positive as it helped to spread the official message of the Queen and, indirectly, that of the Crown of Spain. However, the complex relations between politics and the fourth estate do not allow public persons to control their public image completely and it becomes clear that the media have a large impact on the perception of politicians in the public eye (Stromback, 2008; Walgrave, 2008). The intensity of the spotlight cast on the Queen thus raises the question of how Spanish newspapers shape her image and of how they contribute to delivering narrative messages regarding the Royal Household.

## 2. Scope of investigation and methodology

This study was undertaken to analyze the Queen's public image in the Spanish newspapers in a time of progressive turmoil for the Royal Family. The investigative line was defined by two main objectives. The first was to identify the characteristic elements of the Queen's public image and the second was to analyze the role assigned by the media to Sofia of Greece on the basis of the narrative discourses of the newspapers under study.

The main method of investigation consisted of analyzing press clippings of articles from two Spanish dailies, *El País* and *El Mundo*. The selected articles were published between May 2011 and August 2012 and contained the key expression "Queen Sofia" (or its variations such as "Doña Sofia", "the Monarchs", etc.).

As regards the choice of the media to be analyzed, the general information newspapers fit optimally into the investigative scope due to their large influence on the social and political perception of the public eye (Kiousis, 2001; Schudson, 2002). According to Schudson (2002), "the media are an increasingly important and autonomous force in politics, independent of political parties". Even Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) confirm the high confidence level which they enjoy, despite the fact that they are more skeptical about the autonomy of the Spanish newspapers, which they place within the journalistic tradition of the Southern European and Latin American press.

The decision to analyze articles from *El País* and *El Mundo* was mainly based on the prominent positions held by these papers in the Spanish newspaper market. Both are leaders of the Spanish general-information press market<sup>2</sup> as the flagship titles of, respectively, the political left (Imbert and Vidal, 1986; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Seoane and Sueiro, 2004) and right (Ramírez and Robez, 1991; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). In consequence, the mix of a large audi-

ence and divergent political ideologies allows a genuine impact on the Spanish public opinion to be attributed to their particular focuses. They may also be considered to offer a broader scope for analysis of the Queen's portrayal in newspapers.

As to the timeline considered, the period of fifteen months between 1 May 2011 and 31 July 2012 provided an extensive range of press clippings, offering rich and solid material for the investigation. Moreover, this particular time span comprises two stages of the picturing of the Spanish Royal Household. The first stage corresponds to the period from May 2011 to March 2012, when the Spanish Royal Family enjoyed an overall positive press coverage and could influence the press focus (Zugasto, 2007). The second stage, from April 2012 to the end of July 2012, was characterized by a significant change in the focus and agenda of Spain's Royal Household due to the outburst of scandals and image-damaging situations. Those four months were the beginning of what the media commonly called the *annus horribilis*, namely the first image crisis of the Spanish Crown in democratic Spain.<sup>3</sup>

Two scientific methods, content analysis (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984; Wimmer and Dominick, 2010) and semiotic analysis (Barthés, 1964; Eco, 1978), were applied to the examination of the press clippings. The complementarity of the qualitative and quantitative approaches offered by these two methods led to the creation of a database focused on the frequency of the articles' appearance (publication dates), the position of the articles in the newspapers (section) and their appearance in geographical editions (national or local), agenda-setting (determination of the primary and secondary subject of each article), emphasis placed on the Queen (measured on a scale of 1 to 4, 1 being an article featuring the Queen and 4 being a mere mention of the Queen's name in the text) or on other members of the Royal Family mentioned in the articles (adopting the same system as applied to the Queen), political and social context, visual complementarity (analysis of pictures accompanying texts), role attributed to the Queen (use of names, description of her functions and actions), and the attitude of the newspapers toward Queen Sofia (tone of the article, use of connotations, names, adjectives, verbs and rhetoric).

The main investigation methods were complemented by documentary research. The greatest interest was given to books and scientific articles presenting and analyzing different aspects of the reign of King Juan Carlos I (Herrero de Miñón, 2006; Powell 1995; Preston, 2004a, 2004b; Vilallonga, 1993; etc.). On reading these texts, special attention was given as well to the Queen and to her public actions and interactions that had interfered with her private and public affairs.

The documentary investigation also included popular literature, especially biographies of the Queen (Carol, 2012; Eyre, 2012; Peñafiel, 1994, 2008; Urbano, 2009; etc.). Despite a lack of scientific rigor, these books were valuable testimonies on the Crown and the Queen, as they were often written by journalists who had direct access to La Zarzuela. They therefore offered an interesting, albeit sometimes controversial, outlook on royal affairs.

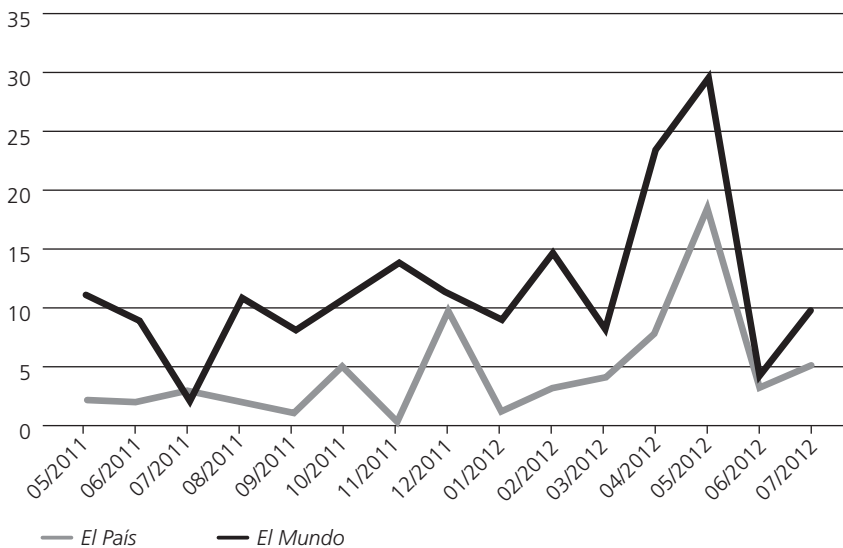
The last part of the documentary research tended to expand the understanding of the modern European monarchies, their relations with the media and the public opinion (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Blain and O'Donnell, 2003; Van Dalen, 2012; Macia and Herrera, 2009) and democracy (Bogdanor, 1998; Ünaldi, 2012), and the way of understanding the modern role of the wives of heads of State, commonly called *first ladies* (Beasley, 2005; Burns, 2008; Le Bras-Chopard, 2009).

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Thematic structure of the press coverage of Queen Sofia

The press clippings analyzed for this paper comprised 245 articles, including 68 articles published in *El País* and 177 articles in *El Mundo* (for the number of articles per month, see table 1). This large number of articles covering Queen Sofia shows that the Spanish press, like the press in other monarchic countries in Europe, considered Sofia of Greece, in her capacity as a member of the Royal Household and as the wife of the Head of State, to be a “marketable” subject (Blain and O'Donnell, 2003).

The analysis of the articles allowed a categorization of subjects. Three groups were considered on the basis of the subjects' features: structural, traditional and



**Table 1.** Number of articles in *El País* and *El Mundo* on Queen Sofia (on a monthly basis)

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of data collected from the press clippings analyzed.

transitory. The first group, corresponding to structural subjects, refers to events that the newspapers cover regularly, on an annual basis. Their extent is limited to the holidays of the Bourbon family in Palma de Mallorca and to their official or unofficial participation in national holidays. Structural subjects can concern both private and public affairs.

Traditional subjects are those usually covered by the press when reporting on Queen Sofia. These themes appeared in the newspapers for many years and formed the core of the press coverage on the Queen. Generally, they are related to the Queen's public duties, such as her participation in cultural and social projects or the diplomatic representation of the Crown of Spain abroad. This is the most frequent category, yet articles that are classified here are usually shorter and more descriptive.

Transitory subjects include those that were covered during a limited period of time. They represent a disruption in the agenda dominated by traditional subjects. In most cases, transitory subjects concern private affairs, such as the first communion ceremony of one of the royal grandsons or the Queen's legal battle against a webpage that had used her image abusively. Nevertheless, at times they concern public events that do not relate to the Queen's traditional duties, for example the lowering of the Royal Household's budget at the beginning of 2012.

Unsurprisingly, both newspapers favored traditional subjects, especially in the case of *El Mundo*, which extensively covered the Queen's participation in local events in its regional editions. Nevertheless, as from the end of 2011 the press coverage started to be dominated by transitory subjects, mainly related to various scandals damaging the Crown's public image and leading finally to the *annus horribilis*. The first scandal, which was a prelude to the image crisis that affected the Royal Household of Spain in 2012, came to light when the Spanish media started to inform about the possible involvement of the royal son-in-law, Iñaki Urdangarin, in a corruption affair (called by the press the "Institute Néos case"). The media information about various details concerning the financial scandal and the legal decision to investigate the involvement of the Duke of Palma de Mallorca finally started to impact negatively the public image of the Royal Family. In December 2011 the media informed about the Royal Household's difficulties in facing the situation. Although the King said publicly that everyone was equal before the law, the Queen refused to break off contact with her daughter's family. Moreover, the corruption accusation made against Urdangarin, combined with a difficult economic situation in a Spain still struggling with a financial crisis, drew public attention to the budget of the Royal Household. Under social pressure, for the first time in history the King made public the royal accounts and limited the expenditure of La Zarzuela for the following year.

After four months of relative calm, April 2012 was marked by an almost simultaneous outburst of two scandals involving other members of the Royal Family. On 9 April, the press informed that Felipe Froilán de Marichalar y Borbón, one of the Monarchs' grandsons, had been hospitalized for a wound in his foot. It was discovered afterwards that Froilán had shot himself while playing with a firearm belon-



## THE MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF QUEEN SOFIA OF GREECE IN SPANISH NEWSPAPERS

ging to his father. The accident stirred controversy as the use of firearms is forbidden in Spain to people under the age of 14 (Froilán was 12 years old at that time). However, a true media storm arose less than a week later when the information about the King's operation after his accident on a private trip to Botswana electrified the media in Spain. On the following days, new details of this affair produced controversy: the King's costly expedition was paid for by a Saudi businessman; during that trip Juan Carlos I had hunted legally protected animals, which countered his official image as an animal protector and as the president of honor of an organization for the protection of wildlife; lastly, he had been accompanied on this trip by Corinna zu Sein-Wittgenstein, at that time his adviser. This latter information fueled rumors about the King's purported love affair with Corinna. Consequently, the media started to publish articles giving intimate details about the King's personal life. Alongside the significance of this change, in strictly quantitative terms May 2012 marked an absolute peak of information, as shown in table 1.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Number of articles in <i>El País</i></b>	<b>Number of articles in <i>El Mundo</i></b>
2011 and 2012	Royal holidays in Palma de Mallorca	Structural	4	9
2011 and 2012	Appearance during national holidays	Structural	7	7
June 2011	Opening of Balenciaga Museum in Getaria	Traditional	0	4
October 2011	Ibero-American Summit in Asunción, Paraguay	Traditional	3	0
November 2011	World Microcredit Summit in Valladolid	Traditional	0	10
Since the end of 2011	Corruption scandal involving Iñaki Urdangarin and its consequences for the private affairs of the Royal Family	Transitory	6	10
December 2011, January 2012	Budget of the Royal Household of Spain	Transitory	5	6
January 2012	Celebration of the European Green Capital Award for Vitoria	Traditional	2	8
April 2012	Firearm accident of Felipe Froilán de Marichalar	Transitory	1	7
April and May 2012	King's accident in Botswana and marital problems of the Monarchs	Transitory	15	13
April and May 2012	Dispute over Gibraltar and deterioration of Spanish-British diplomatic relations	Traditional	8	12

**Table 2.** Among the 245 articles under analysis from 1 May 2011 to 31 July 2012, most of the events covered related to Queen Sofia

*Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of data collected from the press clippings analyzed.*

During this period, *El País* devoted 28% of all its coverage (19 articles) to this subject as opposed to 17% for *El Mundo*, despite the fact that *El Mundo* published one-third more articles than *El País* (30 articles).

### **3.2. Portrayal of the Queen by *El País* and *El Mundo*: struggling between public duties and personal affairs**

The portrayal of Queen Sofia in the newspapers was characterized by a clear dichotomy based on differences between the spheres of monarchy (connected to the political institution) and of royalty (relative to the dynasty). The Queen was presented in a twofold role: that of "a great professional",<sup>4</sup> a stakeholder on the Spanish political scene, and that of a royal wife and mother. Both roles are strongly influenced by the emotions.

The role corresponding to the monarchic paradigm portrayed Queen Sofia in her official responsibilities as the Spanish Queen and a member of the Royal Household of Spain. Although no law defines the public duties of the Spanish Queen, as in the case of American first ladies (Burns, 2008), the media coverage of her activities defines *de facto* her field of action in the public eye. *El País* and *El Mundo* thus participated in this definition of the Queen of Spain's role. Numerous articles illustrating her everyday official activities created a public image of this function. Through their media coverage, they centered the Queen's role on representative functions, such as participation in various social and cultural events, especially in the fields of music, youth and sport promotion, and the representation of the Bourbon dynasty on the international scene, for instance by participating in meetings organized by other royal families in Europe.

In terms of political power, it may be observed that *El País* presented the Queen as a public person lacking any genuine political power. Her presence was perceived as being limited to mere presence, as may be deduced from the general use in the articles of the verb "to attend" or the expression "to be present". The articles relating to the representative actions of the Queen were generally short and descriptive and there was no particular interest in analyzing her role on the public scene. They were generally published in the "Society" section, indicating the relatively small importance attributed to the Queen's public activity.

Nevertheless, the image crisis affecting the Spanish Crown stimulated *El País*'s journalists to revamp Queen Sofia's role in Spanish politics. Articles became longer and more analytical. Several feature stories were published between May and July 2012. They analyzed the role of the Queen in past events such as the coup of 1981, and her influence on the relation between Juan Carlos I and General Franco or on the preparation of Prince Felipe for his role as the future King of Spain. Lastly, it was affirmed that Queen Sofia had a positive influence on the stability of the monarchic institution. Moreover, the daily also recognized her "soft power" based, on the one hand, on her ability to assuage situations and to foster dialogue and, on the other, her sensitivity, illustrated by her engagement in social and cultural projects.

By contrast, *El Mundo* adopted a more ambiguous attitude towards the matter of the Queen's power on the public scene, an attitude that varied according to the national or regional editions involved. The Queen was covered more frequently in regional editions (97 articles relating to representative duties of the Queen were published in regional editions as opposed to only 38 articles on the same subject in the national edition), although she was given little emphasis. Her name appeared often in titles or in the opening sentences of articles, without any further mention being made of her in the rest of the article. She was thus treated as a sort of "lure" since she could draw the attention of readers and her presence at any event enhanced its prestige. On the contrary, the national edition gave her greater importance on the public scene and covered significant events, such as official trips abroad. Although the daily did not directly analyze the importance of the Queen's diplomatic actions, events such as her trip to the Philippines in 2012 within the framework of a cooperation program between the two countries or her absence from the ceremony of the 60th anniversary of the accession of the British Queen, Elisabeth II, during that same year, obtained thorough coverage in *El Mundo*. This may indicate that the right-wing daily attributes Sofia of Greece considerable international importance. Moreover, the analysis of linguistic aspects of *El Mundo's* articles supports this conclusion. The common use of connotative verbs such as "to preside", "to inaugurate" and "to decide" stressed the Queen's leadership and helped to create an image of an independent and powerful stakeholder. More often than in *El País*, articles in *El Mundo* relating to the Queen's public actions were published in the "Spain" or "International" sections.

The role corresponding to the royal paradigm, which defined the Queen by her position within the Spanish reigning family, is the second facet of her public image. Despite being the essential part of the Queen's image, the role of royal wife and mother was secondary in the general information newspapers. However, since the outburst of scandals involving various members of the Royal Household of Spain and the change in the media coverage of the Queen, this secondary aspect of the Queen's public image has been emphasized.

The recent significance of this role, belonging traditionally to the women's and gossip press, indicates major changes in the discourse of *El País* and *El Mundo*. First of all, a process of tabloidization, in which hard news is replaced by soft news such as entertainment and scandal (Esser, 1991; Peters, 2011), marked the Queen's portrayal in both newspapers. The predominance of scandals over the traditional subjects also modified the tone of articles. The dominating neutrality of articles faded because of the introduction of emotional elements. *El País* and *El Mundo* centered on the Queen's frustration, loneliness and love for her family. Moreover, the focus on the Queen during the scandals as a victim rather than as a person responsible for the negative public image of the Crown (table 3) creates an impression of compassion addressed to the Queen. Such a trend is far from anecdotal but rather it allows a further observation: the way the newspapers

focus on women in politics is inextricably connected to a generalized gender bias. There is an abundance of literature showing that women are underrepresented in news coverage (Kroon Lundell and Ekstrom, 2008; Norris, 1997) and that, even when they finally achieve coverage, women are presented more in their private life than in the parliament, more attention is paid to their appearance and age, and they are often mentioned by their first name (Trimble, Wagner, Sampert, Raphael and Gerrits, 2013; Lachover, 2012). Nowadays this trend is strengthened all the more by the process of personalizing politics so typical of today's political life and by the appearance of celebrity politics (Wheeler, 2013; Marshall, 1997). Even if it is common to both men and women, this personalization has a specifically negative effect on the latter. As personalization concentrates especially on the values and attributes of womanhood such as appearance, age, motherhood and other gender stereotypes, the resulting focus increases the pre-existing distance between the idea of womanhood and public life (Van Zoonen, 2006). However, when set against the focus of celebrity politics, in which we can include Queen Sofia, the gap is widened even more. Indeed, "while individual male and female politicians may have to come to terms with the same kind of pressures, on the level of gender discourse celebrity politics seems to produce a stronger symbolic distance than before between hegemonic ideas of femininity and the political sphere" (Van Zoonen, 2006: 297).

The second phenomena that is visible through the changes in the discourse on the Queen in *El País* and *El Mundo* was the change in the relations between La Zarzuela and journalists, and the King's loss of control over the agenda. During his reign, Juan Carlos I benefited from a certain complicity of the media based on the role he played during the transition to democracy (Preston, 2004a; Powell, 1995; Zugasto, 2007). The media, wishing to protect the Spanish democracy, decided to protect the symbol of Spanish political change as well. This protection, which took the form of a partial self-censorship, mainly translated into avoiding the publication of private news that could be annoying for La Zarzuela. This attitude was not unrelated to *El País* and *El Mundo*, whose coverage never included controversial events. Private affairs occupied a small place and their focus was controlled by La Zarzuela; for instance, the Royal Family's holidays in Palma de Mallorca, a subject that was generally covered by all the media, were a traditional aspect of the communication strategy of Spain's Royal Household. Likewise, private affairs that should theoretically not be covered by the press, such as the first communion of one of the royal grandsons, were covered with a professional photograph of the respective child with his grandparents, leading one to conclude that La Zarzuela helped the media to disseminate this information. Although reports were never published on the matrimonial life of the Monarchs, Queen Sofia was presented as a loving and caring mother and grandmother. The return of Juan Carlos I from his safari trip to Botswana profoundly destabilized the balance of power between the Crown and the fourth estate in favor of journalists (Widlak and Pont, 2015). In this

THE MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF QUEEN SOFIA OF GREECE IN SPANISH NEWSPAPERS

new context, the media started to cover themes that had been protected by the self-censorship policy until then.

In this particular context of tabloidization and liberalization of the press coverage of Queen Sofia, the focus on the Queen's role as a royal wife and mother became more emotional and more subjective. *El País* decided to portray the Queen in her private role by adopting an institutional angle of analysis. The paper recognized unbreakable bonds between the monarchy and royalty and confirmed that the stability of the monarchic institution is based above all on the internal stability of the Royal Family. Consequently, Queen Sofia started to be seen as the essential stakeholder within Spain's Royal Household with a genuine influence on the preservation of the monarchic institution. Her capacity to deal with her personal pro-

Event	Portrayal of the Queen in <i>El País</i>	Portrayal of the Queen in <i>El Mundo</i>
The budget of Spain's Royal Household in the context of the economic crisis and the Institute Nóos case	Indirect representation in the press coverage of the presentation of the Royal Household's budget and of La Zarzuela's decision to lower it in comparison to the previous years	Indirect representation in the press coverage of the presentation of the Royal Household's budget and of La Zarzuela's decision to lower it in comparison to the previous years
The King's knee operation in the context of his health problems (January 2011)	A wife, always close to her husband	A wife, close to her husband, who gives good news (positive information about Juan Carlos I's health condition)
The Nóos case and its negative influence on the Royal Family's unity	A person divided between her official role as a queen obliged to follow La Zarzuela's official decision to break off contact with the Duke and Duchess of Palma de Mallorca, and as a mother who cannot easily separate herself from her daughter's family	A mother, but above all a grandmother, who refuses to leave behind her daughter's family even if her son-in-law is a suspect in a corruption case
The firearm accident of Felipe Froilán de Marichalar	A grandmother often visiting the hospital during Froilán's stay A public person criticized for extending a chauvinist tradition according to which women try to repair mistakes made by men	A grandmother, the first to arrive at the hospital (with the mother) A public person who tries to downplay the seriousness of the situation
The Botswana safari and the Monarchs' marital problems	A person who lives in a contractual marriage and only keeps up appearances for the sake of her family and the institution she represents	A woman hurt by her husband's infidelity and who suffers because of the position she finds herself in because of her husband

**Table 3.** Portrayals of the Queen by *El País* and *El Mundo* in events damaging the Crown's public image

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of data collected from the press clippings analyzed.

blems and to act for a greater good thus became the main focus of attention for *El País's* journalists.

In a different way, *El Mundo* adopted a societal angle in which the Royal Household was seen as a family which should serve as an example for the Spaniards because of its prominent position, rather than being seen as a political institution. The scandals involving different members of the Royal Family were thus seen in this case not as a crisis of the institution but as a crisis of values. The general discourse about the Crown became more moralistic and negative, but even so the Queen succeeded in maintaining a positive image. A large concentration of personal affairs led to an emphasis on feelings and emotions and to a focus on her image as a victim, suffering in silence from her family's breakdown and the loneliness in her marriage. Even if the right-wing newspaper noted some minor mistakes on the part of the Queen (for instance *El Mundo* criticized her for her lack of interest towards her husband after his accident in Botswana or for her attempts to dismiss the gravity of the use of a firearm by her grandson), in the final balance the discourse on the Queen in *El Mundo* was marked by the newspaper's approval of her moral conduct during the *annus horribilis*.

## 4. Conclusions

As a final conclusion it should be noted that the portrayal of the Queen by the newspapers using both monarchic and royal paradigms offers the press the possibility to embrace the duality of the Queen's role. Overall, the coverage of the public activities of the Queen helped to delineate the Queen's official function. However, the newspapers' discourse also supported the Crown's narrative. Indeed, the frequent coverage of the Queen's public actions created a public image of the Queen who conscientiously fulfilled her duties. Consequently, she contributed to the validation of the image of the Bourbon's dynasty as a modern reigning family that was concentrated on working for the Spanish democracy. However, despite this image of "professional Monarchs" (Blair, 2002), the newspapers did not acknowledge that Queen Sofia had any genuine political power. Her public role was limited to the traditional representative functions of a typical first lady (Beasley, 2005; Burns, 2008) and her public function was clearly presented as a complement to the King's role.

An outburst of scandals involving the Royal Household of Spain had negative consequences for the public image of the Crown and the King. It also influenced the public image of the Queen, although it may be affirmed that during the *annus horribilis* she managed to maintain a positive press coverage and, paradoxically, even to improve it. In the case of Sofia of Greece, the information about her private problems allowed her image to be "humanized". Indeed, for many long years the

## THE MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF QUEEN SOFIA OF GREECE IN SPANISH NEWSPAPERS

Queen was perceived only in the light of her official role: she was a “great professional” with “royalty in her blood” (Vilallonga, 1993: 195), but her ability to get close to the public opinion was impeded by her discretion. The new press coverage showing a woman who, on the one hand, struggled to keep her family united and, on the other, became a guarantor of institutional stability, created an emotional resonance in the discourse, which generally has a positive impact on the perception of a public person in the public eye (Dakhliya, 2008). The deconsecrating of the Queen’s image and the tabloidization of her press coverage put a more intensive spotlight on her and gave rise to a new kind of a political celebrity on the Spanish public scene (Street, 2004; Babock and Whitehouse, 2005).

Despite the differences between the two newspapers, it may be observed that the depiction of the role of Queen Sofia as both a member of the Royal Household and an actor in Spanish political life does not easily adapt to the narrative parameters of a quality print medium which, by its close relationship to the public sphere, traditionally “reinforced the norm of politicians being men and portrayed women as novel exceptions” (Wright and Holland, 2014).

However, a different perception of the role of the Royal Household determined the focus that each paper adopted in its treatment of the Queen. *El País* centered its attention on the institutional aspect, whilst *El Mundo* concentrated on the royal facet. In consequence, the left-wing newspaper focused on the Queen in terms of her actions on the political scene and their influence on the stability of the institution. The right-wing daily, on the other hand, singled out her role as a mother and wife. ■

## Notes

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**2** According to the Circulation Audit Office (Oficina de la Justificación de la Difusión) and information on readership in Spain in 2013 presented in the *Marco general de los medios en España 2014* and published by the Media Research Association (Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación), in 2013 *El País* had an average daily circulation of 172,400 copies and reached 4.6 million readers during the year. During the same period, *El Mundo* had an average daily circulation of 133,140 copies and its readership in 2013 totaled 2.8 million people.

**3** As regards "a crisis", the definition of Seeger, Sellnow and Ulmer (1998) was set out: "A specific, unexpected, and nonroutine event or series of events that create a high level of uncertainty and threaten or are perceived to threaten an organization's high-priority goals" (p. 233). In the case of the Spanish Crown, the public image got damaged, as the media coverage became more controversial and the public opinion started to express its mistrust in polls. (The significance of the rise in public dissatisfaction can be seen from an analysis of the results of annual surveys on the trust of Spaniards toward their public institutions conducted by the Center for Sociological Research or Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas. The Spanish Crown, for decades perceived as the most trustworthy political institution in Spain, suffered its first significant drop at the end of 2011 and continued to follow this negative trend in the subsequent years).

**4** The expression "great professional" was popularized by the book based on an interview with the King, *El Rey: conversaciones con D. Juan Carlos I de España* by Vilallonga (1993). Juan Carlos I used those words in the interview with the author to describe his wife.

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**E. WIDLAK, C. PONT I J. GUILLAMET**

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