



## Spain: launch of a wide-ranging government reform programme

Seen as too bureaucratic, still insufficiently open to new technologies and fragmented between central and local government bodies (Autonomous Communities, municipalities), it was generally agreed that the Spanish government system was in need of radical reforms.

In order to address these problems, the Rajoy government started with a detailed evaluation of the current situation which, at the end of 2012, it entrusted to an *ad hoc* committee, the Cora (Comisión para la Reforma de las Administraciones públicas), headed by the State Secretariat for Public Administration. The Committee was made up of four sub-committees ('Overlap of administrative responsibilities' between Central Government and the Autonomous Communities, 'Simplification of administrative processes' to make it easier for citizens to access services, 'Service management and pooling of resources' in order to centralise management, and 'Institutional Administration' in order to develop structural reforms), and produced its conclusions at the end of June 2013.

### An ambitious restructuring plan

As a result, on 21 June 2013, the government presented a wide-ranging plan containing 217 measures, to be implemented by an 'Administrative Reform Office' (Oficina para la Ejecución de la Reforma de la Administración). The Office will circulate a quarterly progress report to the ministries and will produce an annual report.

Those measures, the purpose of which, apart from making government more efficient, is to achieve savings, include the following:

- the sale of around 15 000 government-owned properties;
- centralisation of management and public procurement (according to the Cora report, the Spanish State holds 4 823 bank accounts, less than 10 % of which are with the Banco de España);
- increased e-government and digitisation of services;
- job cuts, although the government insists that 'no essential posts' (health, education etc.) will be affected.

This last measure and also that concerning coordination with local authorities will obviously be the most difficult to implement and will also encounter the most resistance, both from trade unions and from the Autonomous Communities and the municipalities.

### The impact of the holder's status on job security

At 1 January, staff employed within the Spanish civil service which, including all categories (Central Government, the Autonomous Communities, local authorities and universities) totalled nearly 2.57 million, were in fact divided into 'career' civil servants ('funcionarios', 1.652 million), contract staff ('personal laboral', 613 000) and various types of temporary and part-time staff (312 000). The career civil servants were not affected by the job cuts, however, things were very different for the contract staff and temporary and part-time staff covered by the 2012 'reforma laboral' (reform of the Labour Code).

Apart from increasing working hours and reducing wages, that reform introduced the principle of collective redundancies in Spanish government bodies, and around 111 000 'insecure' jobs have already been cut between January 2012 and January 2013<sup>1</sup>. The Spanish trade unions, whilst criticising the government for not involving them in the reform programme, particularly fear the effects it will have on employment and the progressive transfer of public services to the private sector, as is currently occurring in Portugal.

## A complex system of government which makes the task more difficult

However, because of the complex federal set-up peculiar to Spain, the greatest difficulty lies in cooperation between central and local government. Those responsible for the government reforms which have now been set in train will therefore have to find a way of coordinating them with the 'Law on local government rationalisation and sustainability' ('Ley de Racionalización y Sostenibilidad de la Administración Local'<sup>2</sup>), adopted by the Council of Ministers in July and passed by Parliament on 27 December 2013<sup>3</sup>. That Law in particular clarifies the respective responsibilities of the various local authorities (transfer of responsibilities for health and education from the municipalities to the Autonomous Communities), greater budget controls and also staff 'adjustments' in order to reduce costs. Taking the latter example, those local authorities will therefore have to apply new criteria introduced by central government as part of the 'reforma laboral', which require compulsory collective redundancies once an authority's budget decreases by at least 5 %.

Although that provision will apply automatically in the majority of cases, it will not be possible to apply it to the Autonomous Communities with 'special status' (Basque Country, Asturias, Andalusia, Catalonia, Navarre, Canary Islands etc.). Likewise, experts point out that the government's plan to abolish Autonomous Community agencies which duplicate tasks carried out at central level (meteorology, energy etc.) 'is very unlikely to be adopted', since 'the law does not allow central government to impose such measures on the Autonomous Communities'<sup>4</sup>. This is similar to the difficulties encountered with the reform of local authorities, which was launched at the beginning of 2013 and which requires the municipalities to submit up-to-date accounts, failing which they could be merged, which could lead to the disappearance of around 3 500 rural municipalities. In addition to the fact that it will be difficult for them to put their accounts in order, particularly for those municipalities which are close to bankruptcy, the government has still not found a solution for the Autonomous Community of Castile-Leon where, under the 'special local government law', municipalities are not required to have their budgets and accounts audited<sup>5</sup>. Following the tabling of a very large number of amendments (over 400), this local government reform is scheduled to pass to the Senate before 7 February 2014.

To accompany and support these government reforms, a law on transparency (Ley de Transparencia, Acceso a la Información Pública y Buen Gobierno), long demanded by Spanish public opinion, was adopted on 10 December 2013<sup>6</sup>.

**Claire Fargeot-Boll**

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.seap.minhap.gob.es/dms/es/publicaciones/centro\\_de\\_publicaciones\\_de\\_la\\_sqt/Periodicas/parrafo/Boletin\\_Estadis\\_Personal/BE\\_ENE2013.pdf](http://www.seap.minhap.gob.es/dms/es/publicaciones/centro_de_publicaciones_de_la_sqt/Periodicas/parrafo/Boletin_Estadis_Personal/BE_ENE2013.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.minhap.gob.es/Documentacion/Publico/GabineteMinistro/Notas\\_Prensa/2013/CONSEJO\\_DE\\_MINISTROS/15-02-13/Reforma\\_Administracion\\_Local.pdf](http://www.minhap.gob.es/Documentacion/Publico/GabineteMinistro/Notas_Prensa/2013/CONSEJO_DE_MINISTROS/15-02-13/Reforma_Administracion_Local.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.boe.es/diario\\_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2013-13756](http://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2013-13756)

<sup>4</sup> [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/06/18/actualidad/1371587980\\_147866.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/06/18/actualidad/1371587980_147866.html)

<sup>5</sup> [http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/02/23/actualidad/1361635036\\_408259.html](http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2013/02/23/actualidad/1361635036_408259.html)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12887.pdf>