

Spanish King Juan Carlos to abdicate throne after 38 years

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USPA News - Spanish King Juan Carlos announced Monday that he will abdicate after more than four decades as head of state, saying it was time for a younger generation with new energy to push through needed reforms and allowing his son Felipe to take the throne. Juan Carlos, 76, made his intend official by signing a document at the Palace of Zarzuela on Monday morning that stated he had decided to abdicate the throne. He now needs to wait until the country's parliament passes a constitutional law to approve the abdication and to name Felipe, the Prince of Asturias, as his successor.

"I would like to say that the king is convinced this is the best time to change the head of state and transfer the crown to the Prince of Asturias in order for the process to take place with complete normality," Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said. "For my part, I will call an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers to be held on Tuesday, 3 June so that the constitutional requirements in this regard can be met." Rajoy said he expected that the Council of Ministers would "soon" be in a position to proclaim Felipe as the country king, though no date was given. "I am convinced that the people of Spain will no doubt write this new page in our history books within a climate of peace and tranquility, and with enormous gratitude to His Majesty the King," he said. Felipe is the youngest child of King Juan Carlos, but because he is the only son he is first in line to the Spanish throne that preferences male offspring. Juan Carlos later addressed the Spanish people in a message broadcast on both radio and television, saying he had been considering to abdicate the throne since turning 76 in January. "I thought it was time to prepare the handover in a few months to make way for someone who is best placed to ensure stability," he said. Monday's surprise announcement makes King Juan Carlos the third European monarch to abdicate in just over a year. Dutch Queen Beatrix abdicated in favor of her eldest son Willem-Alexander in April 2013, making him the kingdom's first king in more than a century. Belgium's King Albert II abdicated in favor of his eldest son Philippe in July 2013, saying he had become too old and frail to continue. Juan Carlos was long regarded as one of the world's most popular monarchs, but an elephant hunting trip to Botswana and rumors of extramarital flings meant many Spaniards lost confidence in him at the height of the financial crisis that crippled Spain's economy. A long-running corruption investigation into the business dealings of his daughter and her husband further tarnished the king's reputation. But looking back, Juan Carlos said, he "can only feel pride and gratitude" after nearly four decades as head of state. "Pride for the many good things we have achieved together over the years. And gratitude for the support you have given me to make my reign, which began at times of great uncertainties and difficulties, a long period of peace, freedom, stability and progress," he said. Juan Carlos, however, also recognized that "the long and deep economic crisis" had left "serious scars in the social fabric". "These difficult years have allowed us to make a self-critical assessment of our mistakes and our shortcomings as a society," the king said. "All this has awakened in us a desire for renewal, to improve, to correct mistakes and to make way for a decidedly better future." For those reasons, the king said, it was time for a younger generation with new energy to take the throne and to push through transformations and needed reforms to confront the challenges of the future. "My only ambition has always been and will continue to be to contribute to the welfare and progress in freedom of all Spaniards," he added. Juan Carlos said his son Felipe "embodied stability" and is ready to take on the responsibilities as the country's head of state, together with his wife Princess Letizia. "The Prince of Asturias has the maturity, the readiness and the sense of responsibility needed to assume the leadership of the state and to open a new era of hope combined with experience and the drive of a new generation," he explained. Rajoy, during Monday's press conference, also expressed the government's confidence in Felipe, who enjoys more popularity when compared to his father. "His preparation for accession, his personality and the extensive experience in public affairs he has gained over the last 20 years constitute a sound guarantee that he will perform his duties as head of state accordingly and meet the most demanding of expectations," he said.

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