

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's New Cabinet in Spain Draws Criticism From Opposition



Madrid, November 5 (RHC)-- Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy brought six new ministers into his cabinet, but opposition leaders said his new team showed no sign of being open to the dialogue his minority government will need to survive.

The conservative Rajoy named a new, younger 13-member cabinet – including five women – for his second term after he won a parliamentary confidence vote on Saturday, ending 10 months of political paralysis that included two inconclusive elections.

But Rajoy's lineup was strongly criticized by opposition parties, who said he would pursue the same austerity policies as before and seemed disinclined to negotiations. Rajoy has promised to win support for his legislation.

Rajoy retained trusted confidants like Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Saenz de Santamaria, who will take charge of relations with Spain's autonomous regions at a time when the wealthy northeastern Catalonia region plans an independence referendum.

He gave an expanded role to Economy Minister Luis de Guindos, handing him the industry portfolio as well, but kept Cristobal Montoro as budget minister, dashing expectations that he might create one powerful economy and finance ministry.

Rajoy replaced 72-year-old Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo with Alfonso Dastis, Spain's ambassador to the EU, reflecting Madrid's wish to play a more prominent role on the European stage at a time when there will be negotiations on Britain's exit from the bloc.

Popular Party Secretary-General Maria Dolores de Cospedal was given a cabinet post for the first time, as defense minister.

The cabinet is drawn mainly from Rajoy's PP, with no gesture to rivals such as appointing a true independent. Unless it can get parties such as the Socialists on board, Rajoy's government will have problems passing its budget and other laws, and analysts say it might not survive a full term.

Anti-austerity Podemos, the third biggest party in parliament, also condemned the cabinet, predicting it would push through more public spending cuts.

"With this government, the cuts, insecurity and social suffering are going to continue," said Rafa Mayoral, a Podemos legislator.

Rajoy, 61, governed with an absolute majority between 2011 and 2015, a period when unemployment peaked at 27 percent and Spain's banks needed a \$45 billion European bailout, but he must now adapt to a new political reality.

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