

## 1. Spain, a democratic state

- Spain is a democratic state in Europe. The fundamental law of the Spanish state is the Constitution.
- Like most countries in Europe, Spain is a democratic state. Democracy in Spain means that:
  - everybody has the same rights and obligations. For example, we are all free to express our ideas, but we have to obey the law.
  - we are all equal in the eyes of the law, whatever our gender, race or religion.
  - power resides with the people, who freely elect those who govern them. In Spain, the head of state is the monarch (the king).
- The Spanish Constitution is the fundamental law of Spain and was enacted after the country's 1978 constitutional referendum. The Constitution establishes the system of government in Spain.
- Spain is a **parliamentary monarchy**, which means the king is head of state, but he does not govern.
- Spain is a democracy. This means that those in power must obey the law like any other citizen.
- The state has an obligation to guarantee the wellbeing of its citizens (through the welfare state).
- Spain is divided into 17 autonomous communities and two autonomous cities.
- The Constitution recognises the rights and freedom of Spanish citizens; it establishes obligations, too.
- In a democratic state, the people elect their government by voting. The election process works like this:
  - Every four years, citizens over the age of 18 can vote in an election, in which they choose representatives to govern their country.
  - Voters choose candidates from political parties, which are organisations of people who share the same ideas.
  - The party with the most votes forms the government.

## 2. The separation of powers in Spain

- The Constitution divides state power into three branches: the **legislature**, the **executive** and the judiciary. The judiciary must be independent of the legislature and the executive.
- Parliament is the institution that represents the people. In Spain, the name of the parliament is the Cortes Generales. It makes laws, approves the state budget and controls the decisions the government makes. **Legislative power** is held by **parliament**.
- **Executive power** is held by the **government**.
- **Judicial power** is exercised by **judges**.
- The judiciary guarantees that the law is obeyed. To become a judge, you have to pass an exam. The function of judicial power is to judge people or institutions that might have broken the law and to pass sentence on them if they find them guilty.
- The judiciary is made up of: the **courts of first instance**, **higher courts**, the **Constitutional Court** and the **Supreme Court**.

### 3. Territorial organisation in Spain

- The 1978 Spanish **Constitution** established the autonomous communities. The communities are divided into provinces and municipalities.
- **An autonomous community** is an area of Spain that shares geographical, historical and cultural characteristics. They all have a capital, except the Canary Islands, which have two.
- Spain also has **two autonomous cities**: Ceuta and Melilla. They have less power than the autonomous communities, but more than an ordinary city.
- The citizens of each autonomous community voted in a referendum for a **Statute of Autonomy**. The autonomous communities have the power to legislate and govern on issues such as education, health and the environment.
- In order to govern, autonomous communities have: **an autonomous parliament** and an **autonomous government**.

### 4. The European Union

- The European Union (EU) is an **economic and political union** of 28 European countries.
- In 1957, six countries founded the **European Economic Community** (EEC) with the aim of creating a common market. Over the years, more countries joined and Spain became part of the European Community in 1986.
- In 1992, the EEC became the European Union (EU). The EU introduced the single European currency, the euro, in 2002.
- The EU aims to promote peace and the wellbeing of its people.
  - It promotes **economic stability and growth, economic aid and solidarity** among member states.
  - It allows **free movement** between the countries of the EU and is working towards the **political union** of member states.
  - It promotes **scientific and technical progress**.
  - It fights against **inequality, defends the rights of children and promotes cultural diversity**.
- The European Union has several institutions that perform different functions: the **Council of Europe**, the **European Parliament**, the **European Commission** and the **European Court of Justice**.
- The **28 states** of the EU have very different: **geography**, from flat plains to high mountains, **climates**, from the cold of the Arctic to the heat of the Mediterranean, and **cultures**, with 24 official languages and several religions.

## 5. I live in a European Union country

- Being part of the European Union and a large single market enables us to enjoy the rights of European citizenship.
- In the single market of the EU, people and goods can travel freely as if they were in the same country. Border controls and taxes (custom duties) no longer exist. All citizens in the European Union have European citizenship. This encourages a feeling of unity between the people of Europe.
- Being part of the single market allows us to:
  - Buy products from any country in the EU without paying customs duties.
  - Pay in the same currency (the euro) in many EU states.
  - Enjoy a guarantee of quality on all products produced in the EU.
  - Benefit from financial aid given by the EU to build infrastructure (roads and hospitals), create employment and develop rural areas.
  - Protect the environment together, encourage the use of renewable energy and improve the disposal of waste.
  - Take part in scientific and technological research projects in Europe.
- European citizenship gives us the right to:
  - Defend our rights:
    - By complaining to the Ombudsman (an official who investigates complaints by private citizens).
    - By sending a petition (individually or with others) to the European Parliament.
  - Receive medical attention in any EU country thanks to the European Health Insurance Card.
  - Vote and be a candidate in:
    - Local elections if we are resident in any municipality in the EU. European Parliamentary elections.
  - Travel, live, study and work freely in any EU country.
  - Guarantee the human rights expressed in the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights.

## The Geographer's Apprentice: Elections

- All Spanish citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote. Suffrage (the vote) is individual, free and secret.
- Elections take place at national and local level. Elections are held every four years, except for European Union elections, which take place every five years.
- Each party puts together a manifesto explaining how they intend to govern. The voters learn about the different manifestos and candidates in an election campaign.
- On the day of the election, voters choose the list of the party whose manifesto and candidates they support the most.