“11-M” refers to the catastrophic terrorist train bombings in Madrid on March 11, 2004, which had tremendous social and political consequences for the country. “11-M” is similar to the American abbreviation 9/11.

Below is the entry about March 11, 2004 in the online version of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. All VT students have a free subscription through the university, which can be accessed by going to the library main webpage (http://www.lib.vt.edu/), clicking on the link in the upper left column for Articles/Databases, then from there going to “Encyclopaedia Britannica” and clicking on that link, which connects you into the britannica.com website for free as a VT student. From there, you can enter the URL http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9398435?query=march%2011%20spain&ct=eb into the search box and view this article, together with hyperlinks to terms within the article that might interest you.

In case you get lost in that complex process, I have also pasted the contents of the article (without the hyperlinks, of course) below.

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Spain suffered its worst terrorist attack ever on the morning of March 11, 2004, when 13 bombs exploded on four packed commuter trains heading toward Atocha station in central Madrid, leaving more than 190 dead and more than 1,500 injured. Coming just three days before the general elections, the attack was bound to have major political consequences. The nature of these consequences, however, depended on the identity of the terrorists and the way that the conservative Popular Party (PP) government of Prime Minister José María Aznar handled the situation.

Understandably, after more than 30 years of violence and at least 800 deaths at the hands of the armed Basque separatist organization Euzkadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), both the government and the media immediately attributed the bombings to ETA. The following day an estimated 11 million Spaniards turned out to nationwide government-sponsored demonstrations. This display of national unity rapidly broke down, however, as the police investigation began to focus on the Islamist militant group al-Qaeda. On March 13, as the first arrests of Islamist suspects were being made, the government continued to point the finger at ETA. That evening spontaneous, illegal protests took place in Madrid, Barcelona, and other cities as demonstrators chanted, “We want to know the truth before we vote.” With some 90% of Spaniards opposed to Aznar's support for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the
Islamic connection inevitably put Iraq back on top of the political agenda, which thereby favoured the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE), which had strongly opposed the war.

The March 11 attack and the government's bungled response to it undoubtedly contributed to the Socialists' surprise electoral victory on March 14. The PSOE took 42.6% of the vote and 164 of the 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies, compared with the PP's 37.6% and 148 seats. The Socialists easily negotiated the support of various minority leftist and nationalist parties for the investiture of their young leader, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (see Biographies), as prime minister. Zapatero was formally sworn in by King Juan Carlos on April 17.

Police investigations and a subsequent parliamentary inquiry confirmed the al-Qaeda connection and identified possible intelligence and security failings prior to March. More suspects, mainly Moroccans and Algerians, were arrested in October, and plans were uncovered for additional attacks on other targets in Madrid.

The new government lost no time in carrying out one of its main electoral pledges, withdrawing the 1,300 Spanish troops stationed in Iraq. This and the Socialists' realignment with the “Old Europe” of France and Germany inevitably damaged relations with Washington. The breach appeared to widen in September when Zapatero gave a speech in Tunisia encouraging other countries to follow Spain's example. In October the U.S. ambassador's failure to attend the military parade and reception held to celebrate Spain's national holiday confirmed the strains in bilateral relations. The government put on a brave face after the reelection of U.S. Pres. George W. Bush on November 2, emphasizing Zapatero's desire for renewed cooperation between the two countries.

Amid signs of coordination problems, the Socialists also moved rapidly on a wide range of internal issues. Responding to public concern about domestic violence, the first bill the new government presented to the parliament introduced tougher sentences for perpetrators (although, controversially, only in the case of men) and increased support and protection for victims. The government froze the PP's educational reforms, which among other things had boosted the status of religious teaching in schools, and announced laws introducing gay marriage and adoption as well as measures to facilitate the regularization of Spain's estimated 800,000 illegal immigrants.

In October Zapatero hosted a summit of the presidents of Spain's 17 regional governments. The first such occasion in the history of Spain's young democracy, the meeting symbolized the Socialists' more conciliatory approach to the demands of Basque and Catalan nationalists, including a willingness to modify the
constitution to permit effective cooperation between the central and regional
governments. In part ideological, the Socialists' position was also pragmatic, given
their need for the votes of nationalists both in the Congress in Madrid and in the
Catalan regional parliament.

Neither the obdurate opposition of a disconcerted PP nor the Roman Catholic
Church's protests against changes in education and marriage laws as well as talk of
reviewing state funding for the church seemed to dent support for the new
government. With inflation in Spain running at around 3%, however, the European
Commission reduced the optimistic Spanish estimates of 2.8% GDP growth in
2004 and 3.2% in 2005 to 2.6% in both years. The lowered projections provoked
fears of increased unemployment and a possible collapse in rocketing house
prices. The issue of Basque independence also remained a pressing issue,
especially after the Basque parliament approved a plan in December that would
give the region greater autonomy.

Justin Byrne