

Secession can strengthen EU federation

Two small western European nations, both with a long history and a number of resemblances concerning their early industrial development, are today on the path to gaining full autonomy from their nation states. Having both lost sovereignty in the early 18th century, their governments have organised popular referendums to be held during the second half of 2014. At the same time, at the European level, some important political leaders, such as Barroso, Van Rompuy and Reding, have publicly shown their discomfort with these processes.

EU institutions are indeed worried about having to cope with a further atomisation of the Union (considering that the 5th and 6th, mostly Eastern, enlargements increased the number of member states from 15 to 28) if more nations were to secede. However, is the number of members in the Union that relevant? If the mandate to allocate a new EU commissary for every EU member state is left aside, the processes going on in Scotland and Catalonia may then appear as opportunities for pursuing a deeper integration and a stronger EU.

The EU has developed ambitious policies, such as the common currency, in

order to consolidate its internal market. Yet, current problems concerning huge intra-European macroeconomic imbalances can be ultimately related to the non-existence of true European federalism, which would permit a necessary economic and fiscal coordination between the nations. Such imbalances are largely related to the dogmas of the larger members, which remain anchored in Westphalian conceptions and are thus not eager to cede sovereignty to a stronger EU. A graphic instance of this attitude was Spain and Italy's recent attempt to boycott the first common patent system – their complaint, motivated by language concerns (English, French and German being the dominant languages) was eventually rejected by EU's highest court a year ago.

Today, nobody could deny the EU's success. Thus, almost all Eastern European nations are already part of the Union and those who are not are eager to join it. However, for the project to be sustainable it needs a common policy that emphasises a true and efficient distribution of the Union's governance: on the one hand, a decentralisation of nation-state policies in favour of the regions, the EU's true econ-

omic and industrial powerhouses; and, on the other, a delegation of power in favour of a central governing body in order to harmonise policies that spur growth and employment. Scotland and Catalonia's ongoing independence processes push towards that direction and not against it. Regardless of the ideologies behind these processes, small nations are fully aware that relying on their internal markets is not enough to secure high standards of living and social welfare.

Therefore, a stronger federation can be part of the solution for the EU's partial integration rather than a problem *per se*. Smaller states have indeed much to lose if policies for a common market come to a halt. At the same time, they are highly interested in furthering the EU's agenda, which includes a limit on members' bureaucracy, a strong competition policy, the enforcement of common policies on product regulations and technical standards. Subsequently, once initial fears of breaking the status quo disappear, it is expected that the positive effects for the EU of an independence scenario in both Scotland and Catalonia will appear more clearly.

GALLERY

TERRY PARRIS writer

Winter trees

April is that month where thoughts of "O to be in England/ Now that April's there."

We may agree with Robert Browning, the poet, that living on the cusp of the cold and blustery winds of March, we long for the delights of April's daffodils, anemones, violets and bluebells.

On my daily walks in the countryside with Tilly, the dog, my awareness is very

attracted to the trees in Winter: the bare silhouettes of the trunk, branches, twigs and twiglets, which seem to me to be petitioning with their hundreds of outstretched hands.

It seems to me that a tree in March/April can be a map of our life.

The solid trunk marks the beginning and, as we grow, we branch out into many directions, perhaps in an unconscious

search for our purpose. Many of the branches prove to be blind alleys and we thankfully return to the friendly trunk.

Fresh animation makes us try again, and we climb further and further up, and flow into the twiglets of multifarious experiences.

We end asking the warm sun, as in the trees' twiglets, to bless us with the green leaves of April joy and contentment.

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"I do not rule out a unilateral declaration of independence" Artur Mas, president of Catalonia

It is not the ideal scenario; neither the best nor the one Catalan people want, but the refusal from Madrid to negotiate a referendum could leave Catalonia without any other option.