

Independence and Catalan business

I remember a childhood joke that said the best way to get through the jungle is to carry a rock. That way, if a lion appears you can drop the rock and therefore run faster. This seems to be the situation with Catalan business: Catalonia has been carrying a huge weight for years –the fiscal deficit, boycotts, lack of infrastructure compared with other places in Spain, motorway tolls, and so on. Independence would mean casting off this weight.

All Catalan business people are familiar with this type of thing, such as transportation costing more than competitors in other areas, thanks to unfair motorway tolls from a lack of spending in public roads that are free in other parts of the Peninsula. Another obstacle is the lack of trained staff in certain sectors (metallurgy, textile, chemical) due to a chronic undervaluing of professional training. And how about less institutional support than in other areas? Regions with a fiscal surplus (thanks to the Catalan deficit) provide unfair competition to Catalan companies lacking the same institutional support. Catalonia also has higher taxation press-

ures than the rest of the state, while working hours are lost due to poor infrastructure, such as train delays. What's more, finding international contacts and investors requires an extra effort since Barcelona airport was relegated in importance behind Madrid. Meanwhile, the inexcusable delays to construction of the Mediterranean

Regions with a fiscal surplus provide unfair competition

corridor continues to limit economic activity, while Catalan business lacks a bank oriented towards small and medium-sized businesses.

Having a state that genuinely supports business would provide a boost to industry, allowing the Catalan industrial tradition to return updated and encouraging cooperation between businesses, particularly abroad. Research and innovation would also be boosted, as would the Cata-

lonia and Barcelona brands. An independent country would also provide adequate financial services to small and medium-sized firms while removing absurd red tape and making the setting up of new companies easier. It would also make possible the creation of a prestigious system of professional training and provide companies with support mechanisms for their activities abroad. The infrastructure required by Catalan business could also be built, using money from foreign investment thanks to a Catalan-run international airport and ports with direct access to the rest of Europe, attracting trade from Asia.

However, not all the improvements would depend on a newly-independent state, as Catalan businesses would also have to make an effort to get more out of their activities in a more conducive business environment. Catalan firms need to improve their internal management and maximise their capacity in terms of languages or foreign trade. They also need to overcome their tendency towards individualism by building conglomerates capable of competing in global markets.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

The pros and cons of weaning

The word 'wean' has been a lot on my mind lately, probably because a granddaughter has recently had the intention of weaning her baby daughter. I looked up the verb in the dictionary and read that there are two definitions : (a) to cause a child (or young mammal) to replace mothers' milk by other nourishment and (b) (usually followed by 'from') to cause to desert from habits, pursuits etc.

Definitions are useful but they are not meant to express the anguish caused by the action of weaning! The mother may

sincerely want independence for herself and for the baby, but every time the baby cries she cannot bear not giving the comfort of the breast to the child. Her intentions are good, right and proper, but the action causes her suffering, leading to regret that yet again she has not succeeded.

In everyday life we may wish to wean ourselves from smoking, alcohol, marijuana, dependence on others, the overuse of the mobile phone, dependence on unhealthy or unhappy personal, economic, or political relationships, but habits seem

ingrained and often prove immensely difficult to change. Having pondered all this and finding it rather negative I was immensely heartened to find that the origin of the word (Olde English) means 'to accustom or get used to' and, taken positively, enables me to feel that once a baby or adult is weaned from something, he or she may eventually accustom themselves to independence, and, in time, get used to that independence. But, then again, perhaps my interpretation is just me looking for a happy ending!

VERBA DOCENT, EXEMPLA TRAHUNT GERMÀ CAPDEVILA gcapdevila@cataloniatoday.cat



"Yes, we will vote on September 27" Artur Mas, president of Catalonia

This short sentence was what the people of Catalonia were waiting for, after rumors rose following the results of the local elections. Catalonia will decide between becoming a new state or remaining part of Spain.