The first round of voting in the process of selecting a president needs an absolute majority to avoid it going to a second round, in which a simple majority is enough. Junts pel Sí has 62 seats in parliament and so will need a helping hand from CUP to see Mas reinstated as president. While full backing from CUP is unthinkable, JxSí might expect the alternative left party to hold its nose and sacrifice two of its votes, while abstaining with the rest, even if it be for the sake of Catalonia's independence.

However, if for some reason no understanding can be reached on the issue, a new two-month period will automatically open, to give the parties time to find a consensus candidate. Yet even this extension has its limit. If no type of agreement has been reached by January 9, the electorate will be called back to the ballot box to repeat the Catalan elections, which have to be held between 40 and 60 days later. That would take the issue into March next year, an eventuality that all the parties will be hoping to avoid.

The thorniest topic is whether Artur Mas should continue as president

Meanwhile, the countdown to the general election continues. On November 23, the candidates for 20-D will be officially announced, and on December 4 the electoral campaign will begin, no doubt with the Catalan issue front and centre. After the Spanish electorate has had a chance to vote on December 20, the deadline for forming the new Spanish parliament falls on January 14.

TRIBUNE

ORIOL MARTÍNEZ Member of the Economy Section of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC)

Catalonia's independence will strengthen the European Union, and Spain

One of the fears within the European institutions regarding the Catalan process is that, in the case that Catalonia becomes independent, it would open a Pandora's box and encourage other regions to follow suit. Thus, it is understandable that Brussels felt relieved when the Scottish people voted No in last year's binding referendum in Scotland. Nonetheless, and for many reasons, the Catalan process cannot be compared to any other similar political process, neither in Europe nor anywhere in the world. With hindsight it can thus be speculated that Brussels will be inclined, in the end, to regard the events in Catalonia in a more positive light.

For one thing, Catalonia is asking in its secession from Spain to become more European, rather than less so. As a state, Catalonia's voice will be heard in key European institutions, such as the European Council or the Council of Ministers. Catalonia should be seen in such institutions as a valuable new member, one that can contribute to strengthening the common European interests on issues such as transportation, energy, foreign policy or economic union. This newcomer will be detached from Spain's structural constraints, characterised by a largely semi-monopolistic type of economy, and therefore opposed to common European interests.

Additionally, as an independent state, Catalonia will have the assets to become the stable actor that Europe needs in the southern Mediterranean area. Throughout its history Catalonia has acted as a sort of a buffer region between France and Spain, having a culture as much linked to Spain as to France. For instance, it is to be expected that an independent Catalonia would be able to push forward the so-called Mediterranean corridor –a crucial infrastructure project that has remained dormant on Spain's agenda for political reasons, thus hampering the country's economy. So, as an example, 33 years after the opening of the country's first high-speed rail link between Madrid and Seville, German-based BASF and Daimler have frozen investments in Catalonia due to the poor freight connection between the port of Tarragona and France. Only by enjoying full political sovereignty will Catalonia be able to redress the precarious development of its communications network. Barcelona's port and airport, for instance, would be able to develop their full potential, which hitherto has been jeopardised by politically motivated decisions coming from Madrid.

In a similar way, once it is deprived of Catalonia's cash cow, Spain will be pushed to do its homework and launch the necessary reforms to bring the country up to snuff. The truth is that no Spanish government will ever confront the political and economic reforms the country so badly needs, unless confronted with a shock on the level of Catalonia's independence. Thus, Spain's budget deficit has averaged more than 8.5% between 2008-2014, bringing the country's public debt from 36% at the beginning of this period to a staggering 100% of its GDP at the end. Rationalisation of public expenditure –including pensions, public administration and infrastructure investments– are issues the country will, sooner rather than later, need to face.

Catalonia has not been able to change Spain's outdated political-economic structure from within. It is to be expected, however, that once it has become independent, it will be able to change some of Spain's dynamics from the outside. With a free Catalonia, Spain will be probably forced to see itself in a more realistic light. The competition that may emerge from this process can be beneficial for both regions, making their governments more efficient and effective. So, moving forward from the catastrophic scenarios imagined by some, the bilateral trade and investment between the two regions are not envisaged to be affected by the political crisis resulting from the Catalan process. The strong cultural and economic ties between the two regions are the main guarantees for that. An independent Catalonia should thus be thought of as an opportunity for Spain herself, for the neighbouring countries and for the larger European project.