

Rationale for Catalonia's independence

The Catalan independence process has come a long way since 2010, when the Spanish Constitutional Court severely undermined the Catalan autonomy statute of 2006, which had been approved by both Spanish and Catalan parliaments and a majority of Catalans in a referendum. Renowned Spanish jurist, Javier Perez Royo, said the act was tantamount to a coup of the constitutional agreement between the central government and one of Spain's "historic" nations, Catalonia –the Basque Country remained unaffected thanks to its special agreement with the state.

From then on, disaffection among the Catalan population has grown. Today, after years of political tension between the sides, a majority of Catalans favour independence. Almost all polls show a clear lead for pro-independence support, even polls by media clearly against independence, such as a recent one by Spanish online newspaper El Español which gave a 50% to 46% lead to independence.

Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the singularity of the Catalan Process, alone in the developed world in seeking independence after a unilateral, transparent, democratic process. This is in contrast to the independence referendums held in Scotland and Quebec, which were agreed with their respective central governments. Subsequently, an additional

factor for independence is Madrid's authoritarian mandate over Spain's diversity, particularly, but not only, under PP governments.

Meanwhile, Spanish institutions have shown an overly undemocratic side, in opposition to the normal functioning of most states in Western Europe. Even Italy somehow managed to sanitise its highly corrupt political structures through the "Mani pulite" judicial process of the early 1990s, a political catharsis unfeasible in Spain. In fact, Spain has long been tainted by the institutionalised corruption of the two main political parties, PP and PSOE. The first has the record of over 700 of its civil servants under judicial process.

A confluence of factors

The fact that the independence movement today has the support of a majority in Catalonia is due to a confluence of factors, Madrid's democratic deficit being just one. In fact, that majority can ultimately be explained by the clear-cut economic rationale below, without which the process would have lost momentum long ago.

A significant shift has been the decoupling of the Catalan and Spanish economies. For instance, Catalan exports to Spain have fallen (in relative terms) from 63% of the total in 1995 to around 37%

last year, due mainly to the upsurge in exports to the rest of the world. This makes Catalonia much less dependent on the Spanish economy than it was 20 years ago. Several reasons account for that, including Catalonia's magnetism, with Barcelona at its forefront, to foreign multinationals. But another is the skills Catalan firms have gained to compete internationally, having benefited from the common market.

The growing breach between the economies is easy to perceive elsewhere: take the contrast between the key role played by industrial companies in Catalan business compared to the crony-capitalism in the Spanish economy; this is epitomized in the famous IBEX-35 list of firms, mostly made up of regulated sectors, such as defence, banking, infrastructure or energy. This cluster of firms determines the country's public institutions, from law-making and diplomacy to the centripetal design of the State, to which resources from the rest of the country are siphoned.

By exposing the fundamentals of the troublesome Spain-Catalonia relationship, and taking into account the dead-end of the Spanish constitutional framework, this author thinks that the optimal outcome is the peaceful democratic divorce.

RANDOM THOUGHTS

TERRY PARRIS Writer

The gifts of life

When I was a little girl we often sang in church 'Give us grace to persevere'. I used to wonder who was the mysterious 'Grace' and the man 'Percy Vere' and why we had to give Grace to Percy? At that age I had sense enough not to ask.

Now, today, the phrase 'Give us Grace to Persevere' fascinates me. Those of a mystical bent might say that 'Grace' is a gift of God. But if that is so, why would we have

to ask that this should be given us? Surely 'grace' would be innate?

Those of us with a more mundane nature would ask of Life to give us enough energy or 'get up and go', to keep trying. . 'Persevere' in the OUP dictionary yeilds 'continue steadfastly, persist', which may remind us of the Scottish King Bruce who learnt perseverance from watching a spider begin spinning and hanging its web.

Is perseverance important to you? It is to me. I need, in physical 'old-age', to keep knowing 'what is, is' and not fall victim to self-pity at the loss of independence and many other things. I needed perseverance to turn my mind to positive questioning: What have I got still to give, and then wrote a children's story. Perseverance pays off. I'm now on my second book. Rain or shine, what a gift life can be!

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"Violence can never be an instrument in politics." European Commission statement, presented by spokesman Margaritis Schinas

The EU response to Spanish police brutality on October 1 was too little too late. While the EU's reluctance to be dragged into a political conflict is understandable, it still should have shown the courage to openly criticise the unacceptable behaviour of a member state.