

# LENIENCE ON CORRUPTION IN SPAIN AS AN ARGUMENT FOR CATALONIA'S INDEPENDENCE

## TRIBUNE

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**T**here is no country that can claim to be completely free from the disease of corruption. Human nature, the quest for power and money, exposes us regularly to the devils of temptation and breach of the law. Yet, it would be unfair to treat countries as if all were affected by the same degree of corruption, for it renders us blind to the devastating harm and social injustice caused by it. Therefore, considering its impact as well as the way the social and political spheres confront it, the degree of corruption varies significantly from country to country.

A case in point is Spain, where corruption increases as we move southwards across its geography. Thus, Andalusia, epitomises the irresponsibility with which public institutions handle taxpayer's money. The ruling party since the advent of democracy in 1978, the Socialist PSOE, has been accused by the country's anticorruption office of embezzlement of public funds for up to 714 million euros. A dramatic instance of corruption at the municipal level is Marbella, the city that hosts some of the world's most extravagant millionaires, from Russian oligarchs to Saudi princes, which has been found to be the hub of an organisation accused of laundering up to 2.4 billion euros.

Nonetheless, this 'regional' fraud is just the tip of the iceberg of what can be categorised as institutionalised corruption at the highest level. Last year, Spain's Economic and Financial Fraud Police accused the governing Popular Party (PP) of being a

'criminal organisation.' In fact, the PP was accused of setting up what investigators christened the "Trama Gürtel", a system of double accounting wherein regular under-the-counter payments were made to numerous PP leaders, using illegal money obtained through fraudulent real-estate operations –centred in Madrid but with ramifications in almost any city governed by the PP. Among the recipients of such illegal payments was Spain's president Mariano Rajoy, as testified by accounts with payments to a certain 'M. Rajoy'.

The very fact that such institutionalised

corruption schemes have hardly had any political costs and consequences for the two largest political parties is telling of the troublesome state of democracy, and of the extent to which Spanish politics and corruption go hand-in-hand, added to the lack of realistic political alternatives in sight to change the state of things: neither in the emergent left wing Podemos party, unable to ever carry out its regenerating political programme, and even less in Ciudadanos, the emergent alternative to PP, which appears to be the worse remedy possible for Spain's institutional and political crisis.

Having emerged from among Spain's far right milieu, banked by a retrograde oligarchy, Ciudadanos' main raison d'être has hitherto been fighting Catalonia's independence movement by any possible means, from dirty demagoguery to gerrymandering and wallowing in self-victimisation. Proof of their sheer lack of moral values is the case involving Cristina Cifuentes, the recently dismissed PP president of the

Madrid Community; throughout the whole scandal Ciudadanos remained overtly ambiguous and only adopted a critical position after knowing the results of an opinion poll on the matter, but alas not based on its moral principles.

Back to Catalonia, Jordi Pujol, the region's greatest political figure since the coming of democracy, was verbally lynched, labelled the incarnation of corruption by the Spanish media. But even his case demonstrates the contrasting way Spanish and Catalan societies deal with corruption. Indeed, contrary to what has been the case for most of Spain's political leaders involved in cases of corruption –including the monarchy– Mr Pujol has been practically out-cast from Catalan society, together with his family, notwithstanding a lack of solid evidence publicly showing his wrongdoing.

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