

RANKINGS IN THE WRONG

TRIBUNE

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The spectacle of Spanish police brutality on October 1, 2017 shocked the world. While crushing peaceful crowds is not uncommon in world news (eg Tibet, Turkey or Tehran), it was understood that it was off the table in so-called liberal democracies: beating women and pensioners on a mass scale seemed to be crossing a red line. At least the world's mass media thought so, judging by their front pages, headlines and articles, including comments from renowned sources, such as Amnesty international, which claimed "Spain 'obstructing' investigation on police violence in Catalonia".

Paradoxically, two of the key rankings on the matter reflect a different reality: on one side the Economist Intelligence Unit's new 2018 "Democracy index" that insists on keeping Spain, close to Costa Rica, in the selected group of 20 "full democracies", but does not include, for example, the USA, Italy, France, Portugal or Belgium, all relegated to a second grouping of "flawed democracies"; and then Freedom House's 2018 "Freedom in the world", which scored Spain 94 out of a maximum of 100, alongside the UK and Germany, and quite a bit above France (90) or Italy (89). We wonder if the coming 2019 editions will change this perspective...

That being said, the EIU's previous item included in the executive summary a harsh headline: "Spain's democratic credentials suffer", while stating that "the national government's attempt to stop by force Catalonia's illegal referendum on independence on October 1 and its repressive treatment of pro-independence politicians have put it at risk of becoming a "flawed democracy". Nevertheless, this seemed a light rap

for a centralist power whose record of institutional murder, torture and violence did not stop, sadly, with the formal end of dictatorship.

After a thorough analysis on how those indexes are compiled (only possible with Freedom House, due to The EIU's methodology being absolutely opaque), we can conclude that they conceal and neglect Madrid's continuous abuse of democratic institutions and basic human rights. As

single policeman can unilaterally fine anyone for any reason whatsoever.

Although this was just an illustration, and itself possibly biased, it may help to pinpoint the pass that is seemingly given to Spain, precisely by some of the institutions that are meant to hold it accountable to basic democratic values (as with any other country). In fact, a third institution, the Varieties of Democracy Institute of the University of Gothenburg does appear as serious, scientific and unbiased, fully informing on funding, researchers, names of experts, methodology, and so on. In its last 2018 "Democracy for all?" it placed Spain in a much lower position, nº 35, below western nations, and just next to some of Eastern Europe's new democracies.

One rational explanation for the errors in the two mentioned indexes is that "experts' assessments" fall into a pro-centralist deception: ie foreign correspondents of international media, or institutions, live and focus in and around capital cities, and depend on them almost completely. Thus, their judgement is inherently slanted in fa-



Commemorative graffiti in Sant Julià de Ramis about Oct 1. ARCHIVE

way of example, take topic D4 of that same index: "Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution?" We see that while France scores 3 out of 4, Spain scores the full 4. Again, this is hardly unmerited, if we consider that two of Catalonia's main civil organizations, the Assemblée Nacional de Catalunya and Òmnium Cultural, have been gravely and openly persecuted by the state during 2017 and 2018; or that, for example, since mid-2015 Spanish police have levied almost 50,000 fines, unilaterally: following the so called "Ley mordaza" any

vour of the status quo of that given metropolis, especially if dealing with the cumbersomeness of a self-determination process such as the Catalan one. The central power remains unchallenged, with very few exceptions, and possibly, too, because these experts respond, almost by definition, to mainstream thinking. Additionally, in the current conflict between two nationalities (the Catalan versus the Castilian/Spanish) so-called experts remain attached to their national identities, by which their inherent Spanish nationalism ultimately engulfs any conceivable free thinking.