

## Each authoritarian step by Madrid only pushes Catalonia further away

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*«Spain CANNOT reverse course concerning Catalonia and maintain political credibility internally». (Eric Willey).*

One of the twelve Catalan political prisoners, Raul Romeva, an MP in the European Parliament for eight years and former Catalan Foreign minister, just wrote an article headlined «Gràcies» (hvala). He greeted the many supports during his more than two years of imprisonment without trial. But he also greeted the Spanish Supreme court, for by its abhorrent punishment (which included mistakes and breaches of the law itself), condemning to up to 100 years Catalonia's independence process main leaders —bar those in exile, and three who have apologized— they were also making the Catalan republic inexorable: the cruelty of a fully politicised tribunal has raised awareness of the lack of rule of law in the kingdom, even to a bunch of sceptics towards Catalan institutions. Romeva's analysis is already shared by many, amongst which American pundit, Erik Willey (Tweeter @erikwill), who recently wrote "Spain CANNOT reverse course concerning Catalonia and maintain political credibility internally. They have set a course and must stick with it. This will end with Catalonia becoming an independent Republic. International intervention will come."

Spain, Madrid for the matter, has tried to solve the Catalan issue its way, and it has only made it worse, much worse. The way of Western democracies, as seen a couple of times in Canada, with Quebec, and in the UK, with Scotland, has been through agreeing referendums on their nations' self-determination wills. Madrid has denied Catalonia of any such treatment. On the contrary, it has abused all the resorts of the state, even breaching the confines of human rights and western democratic standards: threatening and blackmailing Catalan pro-independence politicians and leaders and institutions, fabricating endless fake news to discredit the Catalan movement (supported by a shameful obeying uncritical mainstream media), and even using brute force several times, the worst of which during the independence referendum of 2 years ago, in which more than 1.000 people were accounted injured.

Possibly, had Madrid abided to the democratic way, when there was still time for it, things would be on a very different path today. Back 10 years ago, independence was far from being part of the Catalan mainstream; most possibly, Catalans would had voted to stay in Spain, having had the chance to doing so. Since then, after several denials from Madrid to deal with Catalonia on a bilateral stance, support from independence has gone upwards, gradually but firmly. Possibly, today it is already well beyond the critical 50%, considering that in the last European elections of June 2019 pro-independence parties gathered up to 50,1% of valid votes. Yet, for Madrid, recognizing Catalonia's right to vote would mean recognizing it as a nation, which is anathema: it violates the supposed sacrosanct unity of the kingdom.

In fact, if the reader tries raising this issue when encountering a Spaniard, most likely will turn a normal citizen into a fervent Spanish nationalist, swearing whatever comes to his

mind towards Catalonia and the Catalans. Amongst these myriad of disqualifications, just a glimpse from Josep Borrell, former Spain's Foreign Minister and recently acquainted EU's High representative (notwithstanding the several corruption cases in which he has been involved): at a speech while on political campaign (December 2017) he said that "Catalonia needs to be disinfected" (of independentists), whilst also mocked the then recently imprisoned Oriol Junqueras -the political prisoner who's been charged with the longer sentence of up to 13 years.

Arguably, Spaniards are seen from abroad as friendly and hospitable. However, on a general basis, confronted with the Catalan issue, they just over react, as if you were taking a body-part out of them. In fact, Catalonia is felt by Madrid as no more than «tierra conquistada», conquered land. One of the Partido Popular (Spain's main right-wing party and heritor of Franco) old founders, Mr. Millán Mestre said (June 2019) that "I am saying that for the first time, but Madrid is treating Catalonia like a colony".

This mistreatment results in that Catalans neither shape nor influence Spanish institutions: e.g. just very few Catalans occupy key seats to the highest State bodies, such as the judiciary, the military, or the diplomatic corps. It is worth noting that these are mostly shaped by the same families since centuries, mostly with origin in or around Madrid.

Additionally, the «tierra conquistada» has factual features that permeate through the relationship between Madrid and "its territories". Chief of which is the constant flow to the metropolis. Accordingly, one of the constants of Spain the last 25 years is the stream of a big chunk of Catalan's wealth to Spain, and especially to Madrid: taxes gathered by the Catalan economy and not reinvested back to the region have accounted, year after year, to not less than 8% of its GDP. That pattern parallels in the case of Valencia, and Balearic Islands, curiosity enough the two other regions that were severely ransacked in the War of Succession on early 18<sup>th</sup> century -a contest on the king of choice between the two kingdoms that shaped the then confederation between the crowns of Castilla and Catalunya-Aragó.

Highly likely Spain would not be sustainable as it is today, without this constant influx: Spain having one of Europe's worst ratios of debt over GDP, to almost 100%, would be pushed to run a huge State reform to balance its budget. But high politics are alien to Madrid, when using the Catalans as the permanent scapegoat works better: if has immediate rewards and no penalties. Only today, this way of doing is slowly eroding Spain's democratic credibility. This was painstakingly gained after the Dictator died, and skyrocketed when entering the then European Economic Community on 1986, but now, Spain is the laggard in Western Europe in freedom and democracy.

Madrid can only blame itself to remain today without room for manoeuvre with Catalonia. It is worth remembering that the initial claims from the today pro-independence parties were pretty lenient: in short it proposed a truly federal pact between the sides. This agreement, set in the new Catalan constitution of 2006, was sanctioned by landslide in a Referendum by Catalans after being approved by Spain's congress, but finally obliterated by Spain's highly politicised Constitutional court on 2010. Following many experts, including renowned Spanish lawmakers, that came to be the straw that broke the camel back.

10 years after of all sorts of attempts to make their voices listened, after experiencing Madrid's humiliations translated in beatings, threats, jails, anything but the will to deal with Catalonia on a bilateral basis, a majority of Catalans is just tired of trying the way Madrid wants. Spanish politics is too weak to control the "deep state", directly inherited from the cruel francoist regime, and chiefly lead by a king with no democratic credentials, and even less political acumen. Yet, that same authoritarianism repeated on and on, has made Catalans less fearful of repression. These days we are experiencing widespread, and imaginative, nonviolent resistance against Madrid's power, all of which of the utmost civic nature (such as the 5 long walks that are going to confluence to Barcelona this Friday 18/10).

Madrid seems eager to intensify its repression, possibly justified after another desperate set up from its secret services, but that will only put Catalans and Catalonia a step further each time.

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