

DOUBLE STANDARDS

TRIBUNE

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This author recently crossed the peninsula westwards to reach Santiago de Compostela, the charming Rome-like village on the verge of the Atlantic Ocean. After the Catalan speaking regions (Valencia, Balearic Islands and Catalonia), Galicia and the Basque Country are so-called “nacionalidades históricas” with their own working languages. Galicia is often taken as the benchmark for the relationship between a (historical) community and Madrid. Last November, The Economist published an article with self-explanatory headlines, “Us Gallegos-Galicia shows how devolution can work-An idiosyncratic region that remains comfortable in Spain”.

Magazines are not meant to be academic papers, yet serious ones should avoid making up a reality to justify a foregone script. This is an approach shared by most foreign correspondents based in Madrid; i.e. blindly toeing the line that the central power dictates. We are told that the normality of Galego contrasts with the “language wars in Catalonia”. The fact is that the 1998 law regulating the official use of Catalan had huge consensus, only opposed by the successors of Franco’s regime, the Partido Popular (PP). Most recently, only the hyper (Spanish) nationalist Ciudadanos, with its bulldozer strategy against Catalan institutions, has worked hard (with little success)

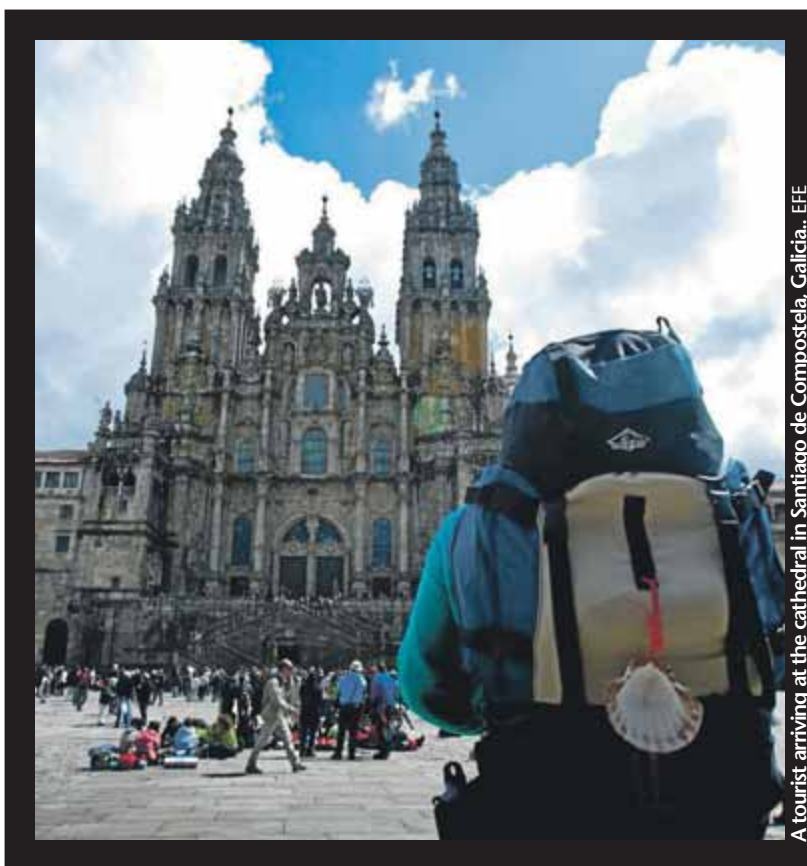
to blow apart the general consensus on the language issue.

In fact, any a visitor to Galicia can straightaway grasp the extent to which Galego has been driven away from Portuguese, the language it shares roots with, while bringing it closer to Spanish. Galego-speakers themselves will agree on that matter; some even regretting the cultural loss it entails, considering that the “lusofonia” (the Portuguese speaking world) includes 300 million speakers throughout the five continents, from Macau to mighty Brazil. Indeed, similar politics of “folklorisation” were employed by the corrupt arm

The inbound journey via the northern shore of the peninsula allowed for superb sightseeing, especially in Asturias, as well as in Cantabria and in the Basque Country. Euskera, the distinctive language there, is also spoken in Euskalerrria, which includes the three provinces of Guipúzcoa, Alava and Vizcaya, plus Navarra and the French Basque Country. Besides their unique non-Romance language, the Basque Country and Navarra share a special relationship with Madrid; so much so that they are often compared to “confederate states”. Accordingly, the Basque Country “concierto” is an at-par agreement between the

three provinces together with Madrid. Under it, they keep the keys of the treasury, just needing to pay a “cupo” (quota) to the kingdom’s coffers, corresponding to their share of population. The Catalan speaking regions have a long collection of rebuttals in their aim to blow the dust off fiscal mistreatment from Madrid, dating back to the occupation by the centralist forces in the War for Succession of 1701-1714. Recently a group of Catalan economists have reckoned that a “concierto”-like agreement would entail an addition of more than nine billion euros to Catalonia. Once more, this is another of the self-imposed taboos by most foreign media, and one which thwarts many from understanding events, including the al-

ready 10-year struggle for Catalan independence. It is regrettable this depriving the public of a necessary transparent debate on such key political topics, for when a presumed democracy needs to conceal and lie, it becomes nothing more than an autocracy in the making.



A tourist arriving at the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela, Galicia. EFE

of the PP in Valencia, continuing the dictatorship’s politics of friendly and colourful regionalisms. To take just a glimpse, today, after a Supreme Court ruling, official communications between institutions from Catalonia and Valencia cannot be conducted in their common Catalan language!