

IT'S THE ECONOMY, STUPID!

TRIBUNE
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The famous phrase from James Carville to George H W Bush in 1992 could apply to the needs of Catalonia today.

Catalonia is considered a relatively rich community. At the same time, it is estimated that around €20 billion in taxes leave Catalonia for Madrid every year that are never reinvested in the community. This adds to other important sources of revenue such as Barcelona's airport and port, owned and run by the Spanish central administration, and whose surpluses are mainly not used to improve these key infrastructures, but to finance those in deficit in other parts of Spain.

I won't dwell on how blatantly the Spanish administration wastes these and the other resources it collects. But just to mention a few indicators: the inefficient use of resources includes crony capitalism that favours friends and revolving doors between large firms and unqualified politicians, spending on airports or high-speed trains without passengers, an inefficient and historically high level of spending on the military, or uncontrolled funding of a corrupt monarchy, among many others.

I will focus instead on the situation for Catalonia's citizens. With an average salary of €24,040 a year, youth unemployment of 24% (it is 17% and 21% in France and Portugal), and an average

price of housing of €7,159 per m² in Barcelona, it's no wonder that Catalan youth are among the last in Europe to leave the parental home, while the birthrate is 1.2 children per woman, among the lowest in Europe. Meanwhile, social assistance is scarce to say the least. I know a teacher with three children, which he supports mostly by himself, that has been denied the "large family category" on bureaucratic grounds and receives no subsidies at all. This is the situation of many families that make ends meet through austerity and family solidarity.

Catalonia has urgencies that pertain to any nation but without the resources to cover them. For example, the need to protect and foster the use of its language, Catalan, which studies say suffers a mid-term danger of disappearing. This brings a need to take firm

measures, such as supporting the local production of cultural products like films, theatre or, at least, dubbing or subtitling foreign movies into Catalan. Yet these measures require funds not available to the Catalan government. Along the same lines, Catalonia has a great public health system. Yet it runs thin on medical staff, so that waiting times for first-visit appointments is often more than a month, and stress has been reported among medical staff during the pandemic. Other resource-consuming concerns regard environmental protection and gender equality.

All these issues are often mentioned by Catalan politicians, particularly when elections are around the corner. They are nonetheless well aware that solving these problems requires a level of funding and decision-making power that is impossible under the

fiscal plundering of the Spanish administration. So, to consistently pursue these goals, first it would be required to be free of these bindings and achieve the economic and political power pertaining to an independent state. Otherwise, the declarations regarding such objectives, without a plan for independence, sound like marketing campaigns to attract votes, and not serious aims to achieve during a governmental mandate.

In conclusion, a message to the Catalan politicians that are full of talk about social and environmental policies would be very much in line with that of Carville: It's the economy (and therefore independence) stupid!



A bilateral Spain-Catalonia meeting. ACN