

AN ODD VERSION OF THE NOBEL PRIZE

TRIBUNE

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Sweden is rightly praised as a role model of Scandinavian values, for its stance on freedom and democracy, at home and abroad. This has feasibly projected the Nobel Prize as the highest acknowledgement for individual accomplishment worldwide (in six related spheres). Sweden's strong democratic credentials are nothing new - the phlegmatic tone adopted by Stockholm when Oslo unilaterally declared its secession from its rulers is well-known.

This sense of fair play was especially notable back in 1905, long before the creation of multilateral institutions such as the League of Nations, precursor to the United Nations. In another sample of Scandinavian pragmatism, the Nobel Peace Prize (created in 1901, just prior to their separation) is, interestingly, awarded by Norway's Peace committee, oft criticised because its benevolence does not always equal that of its awardees.

No one imposed this way of behaving on the Swedes. In fact, they ruled over much of Northern Europe in a centuries-old competition with the Danes, Sweden's possessions stretching from Bremen to Saint Petersburg. Take a tour around Stockholm to grasp the country's past imperial grandeur: hundreds of beautifully decorated palaces along its vast shoreline, a wealth of museums, with riches from the four corners of the empire, and public palaces that now

seem excessive for a country of just over 10 million. In fact, the five Swedish Nobel Prizes also display this grandeur: even if Alfred Nobel - a genius both as an inventor and a businessman - was a product of Sweden's civil society, the Prizes' committees are formed from different fields of Swedish academia, and are granted ceremoniously by the king himself.

Some 3,000 km to the South, another dwindling empire, and still much haunted by it, has its own prize: the Princesa de Asturias Prize (Princess of Asturias, feminized after the daughter of the current king) may not be familiar to many outside the kingdom, but it is Spain's attempt at a Nobel Prize. In fact, it was created just three years after the first free elections in many decades, in one way, to lend legitimacy to the

frail new democracy and, most importantly, to the king himself (the father of the current one), previously surmounted as direct successor by none other than Franco.

What to expect from the Spanish Nobel Prize? The fact is that Madrid mostly uses it for his own filthy political agenda. Take the award given in June 2017, just prior to Catalonia's Independence referendum, to the cupola of Brussels, Messrs. Tajani, then head of the Parliament, Juncker, of the Commission, and Tusk, of the Council. In exchange for the prize, and its associated value, the three awardees jointly declared that "Spain joined the European project 30 years ago with enthusiasm and constructive spirit. Today it is one of the greatest contributors to the European project".

That seemed like a low blow from the three European stars back then, easily subjugated by candies from a State that was already visibly using torture, extortion and political imprisonments against peaceful Catalan pro-independence activists; furthermore, just a few months later Madrid would be using mass beatings on those voting at Catalonia's Independence referendum. With or without a prize, that has nothing to do with positive international values, but is rather a clean-the-face operation.

The current conflict in Catalonia has shown that the Spanish state is incapable of accommodating any differences, and that it moves between paternalistic and authoritarian tendencies, and is unfit to offer any positive contribution to the European project.



King Felipe hands Juncker the Princess of Asturias prize in 2017. EFE