

For a new political party in Catalonia

After twenty-three years of conservative nationalism, Catalonia has changed government to rule by left-wing nationalists. Nothing significant has changed. Suffice it to say that the current government has set as its primary political objective the formulation of a new Home Rule Statute. Many Catalan citizens believe, as we do, that this decision arises from the inability of the government and its constituent parties to address the real problems faced by the general public. As with any ideology which pays homage to symbolism, nationalism muddles the analysis of fact with its adherence to abstract notions. The formulation of a new Home Rule Statute for Catalonia as the main political task demonstrates that the realm of the symbolic has yet again displaced the logic of necessity.

Characterised by Jordi Pujol, the former president, nationalist tactics during more than two decades, and now also pursued assiduously by the three-party coalition, have consisted in fomenting a state of permanent conflict between Catalan and Spanish political institutions, and between Catalans and other Spaniards. The rhetoric of hatred promulgated by official Catalan government media against everything “Spanish” is more alarming than ever. The nation, postulated as a homogeneous entity, has taken occupation of the space where an undeniably diverse society lives.

Nationalism is the current government’s obsessive response to any eventuality. What remains are the problems themselves, which are becoming more pressing and complex. For example, those of Catalonia’s children and youths. Language policies applied to education have not prevented Catalan students from taking the lowest rankings in the developed world for oral and written comprehension. This is but one of the more telling results after two decades of nationalist mismanagement. Twenty years during which the political powers have rejected the opportunity to take advantage of the immense cultural riches and economic openings afforded by the Spanish language, while denying its character as the mother-tongue of many Catalans.

The political decline in which nationalism has mired Catalonia has its economic correlative. For some time now wealth has been growing at a slower rate than in other comparable Spanish and European regions. Various key indicators such as direct foreign investment in production or Internet user figures trace a profile of Catalonia

which is very different from the self-styled role as the economic powerhouse of Spain which the nationalists proclaim.

The nationalists' response is the time-worn excuse that economic decline is to be blamed on supposedly unfair distribution of state public funds, discriminating against Catalonia. It is worth remembering that one of the traditional criticisms by the left of the previous conservative government was that they were incapable of efficient management of the available resources and claimed political persecution in order to hide their administrative failings.

It has taken very little time for the coalition government to resort to this same defensive, and all too often shameful, stance. One of our government ministers had no problem whatsoever in asserting that while the north of Spain is industrious, the south is dilapidated. The growing isolation of Catalonia from the rest of Spain and its noticeable loss of prestige amongst Spanish citizens seem not to have halted this decline.

Nationalism, however, has certainly been an efficient partner for corruption. From the early debacle of the Banca Catalana affair to the recent "three percent" illegal commissions scandal (which will go down in history as having provoked one of the most degrading parliamentary sessions ever seen in Spain), any accusation of fraud within the rules of the game has been camouflaged by consensus. A complicity which is not only manifest in parliamentary dealings but which is evident in every walk of life. It could be said that institutional corruption in Catalonia acts in a way which affects every citizen who aspires to holding a public post or who wishes to bid for public projects. In general terms, the prerequisite for gaining public employment, for receiving a grant or to take advantage of favourable legislation is to have contributed to the myth of identity, rather than professional merit or having the practical interests of society at heart.

As the political powers represented today in the Parliament of Catalonia have shown themselves impervious to this state of affairs, those who have signed below do not feel that we are represented by the current parties and we argue that there is a need for a new political party to correct the democratic deficit evident in the parliament. This party, siding with tenets held dear since the Enlightenment, civil rights and liberties, secular values and social justice, feel the urgent duty to denounce the political fiction that has been inculcated in Catalonia, to oppose the ever more brazen efforts to wreck the bonds between Catalans and Spaniards, and to oppose the destruction of the fair-minded accord of the transition to democracy which has, in just twenty-five years, returned Spain to the fold of free countries. The best guarantee of respect for liberty,

justice and equality amongst citizens, implicit in a state answering to the rule of law, is the full implementation of the current Statute of Autonomous Communities, as outlined in the 1978 Constitution.

Clearly, nationalism has been the common strain in the theory and practice of all Catalan parties to date; precisely because of this, it fails to represent the broad spectrum of society. We call, therefore, for the citizens of Catalonia who identify with our proposal to demand a political party which will contribute to the restoration of realism.

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