



MEMORANDUM

Societat Civil Catalana wishes to present to the diplomatic corps accredited in Spain, and to Spanish and international public opinion in general, its position with regard to the secessionist process.

1. THE PROCESS LACKS DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

The Catalan government wishes to make out that this is a struggle on the part of Catalonia for its freedom and that all of Catalonia is in favour of the so-called “right to decide” and of independence. The reality is very different. On 8 April of this year the Spanish Parliament voted on a bill proposed by the Catalan Parliament to devolve to the Catalan government the power to call a referendum on secession. It was supported by only 47 of the 350 MPs and more than half of those elected for Catalan constituencies voted against.

During the last 40 years the independence option has always been very much in the minority. Nevertheless, the current Catalan government has used the terrible crisis that is scourging southern Europe to try to increase that social base. To that end it has made wrongful use of the public and private media, which it subsidises financially, it has provided funds for massive demonstrations in favour of secession, and it has encouraged a large number of sporting and cultural organisations, trade unions and other bodies to become involved. It has also financed pressure groups to present campaigns in favour of secession to foreign governments and international media. This is being done to put across a threefold message: that the reasons for independence are enormous, that the consequences are insignificant, and that its arrival is inevitable. This is a message that is repeated relentlessly day after day with no let-up. Unfortunately, in a region of Europe that clearly has other priorities such as an extremely high rate of unemployment, an enormous public debt and very poor results in education, huge amounts of taxpayers’ money are being spent on trying to convince the population with arguments in which half-truths are mixed with exaggerations and outright lies.



2. THE PROCESS IS NEITHER TRANSPARENT NOR HONEST

A process concerning the paramount importance entailed in the secession of a state demands the greatest clarity in the way in which it is presented; such clarity is not to be found in Catalonia. The Catalan government, led by its President Artur Mas, is issuing undisguised propaganda in favour of independence, using public media and resources to convince the population only of the alleged benefits, offering no kind of accountability and claiming to speak on behalf of all Catalans.

Many Catalan institutions play with the deliberate ambiguity of mixing an outright claim for independence with an undefined “right to decide”, which makes it impossible to hold a proper debate on the process and its effects. One further relevant and significant aspect is the threat to override the Rule of Law if their demands are not met.

Beyond this lack of transparency it must be added that the debate suffers from high levels of manipulation. Assurance is being given, in the face of all legal evidence, that an independent Catalonia would continue to be a member of the EU and that a Catalan legality is possible separately from Spanish and international law. Finally, an aspect of no less importance is that a unilateral process of secession implies, by definition, breaking with existing legality, which would endanger the protection of the rights and freedoms of the people as they are recognised in domestic and international legislation.

3. THE PROCESS HAS NO JUSTIFICATION

The arguments used by the Catalan government and the forces of separatism to justify independence are exaggerated when they are not untrue:

-The historical rights

Unlike the case of Scotland, the invocation of Catalan sovereignty has no sound historical basis. The Kingdom of Castile and the Kingdom of Aragon, of which the Principality of Catalonia formed part, were united for centuries without there being any territorial annexation. The war that was waged between 1701 and 1715 was a European conflict concerning the succession to the Spanish throne. In this war England, Holland and the Holy Roman Empire supported one dynastic option and France another. In Spain it



turned into a civil war. In the kingdoms of the former Crown of Aragon there were certainly many supporters of Archduke Charles of Austria, but there were also a good number of supporters of the Bourbon claimant and in the dramatic final assault on the walls of Barcelona in 1714 there were Catalans to be found on both sides. This anniversary is being used to spread a falsified version of history. It is being pursued to the point of making the Catalans believe that at that time they lost their "own state" and that Spain has continuously mistreated Catalonia over the last 300 years.

-The grievances over taxation

Reports of the transfer of resources maximise the taxes paid in Catalonia, minimise the services provided by the central government, and include other highly arguable techniques to reach a tax deficit unchangeable over time of 8.5% of GDP. But the fact is that this deficit is really much less, probably less for example than the transfers from the North of Italy to the South or from the richer German Länder to the rest of Germany, and that it varies greatly depending on the economic cycles. Another parallel question is the financing of the autonomous communities, which has been revised a number of times, and always in their favour; it remains a field where there is room for improvement.

- The judgment of the Constitutional Court

The reform of the Catalan Statute in 2006 was a tortuous process from the beginning and it certainly had a bittersweet ending. The debate wearied the public greatly and in the referendum only 48.9% of the electorate turned out to vote. The fact that the decision as to the constitutionality of the Statute was made after its approval at the ballot box and not before produced a clear distortion. In spite of that, the truth is that the judgment of the Constitutional Court saved the Statute since legally its practical effects were small. The Catalan Government now has more autonomy than before from all points of view. However, the independence movement has built a narrative that presents the judgment of the Constitutional Court as a serious affront to the dignity of the Catalan people.

- The central government's policy of cuts

During these years of economic crisis Catalonia, like other autonomous communities in the rest of Spain, has undergone wide-ranging cutbacks in the welfare state that its citizens enjoy. These restrictions are equivalent to those suffered by other countries in southern Europe. Even so, the Catalan population enjoys an acceptable degree of welfare despite the very high level of unemployment and the rise in poverty. It is unfair to attrib-



ute all responsibility for Catalonia's large debt to the Central Government or to the effects of the crisis. There is a direct responsibility in the management of the different Catalan governments up to the present time.

- The lack of investment in infrastructures

Another argument that is used in favour of independence is the shortage of infrastructures. Apart from anything that may be lacking, Catalonia (with approximately seven and a half million inhabitants) has three major commercial airports. The new terminal at Barcelona was opened in 2009 and is exceptionally modern. Catalonia has two world-class international ports, while the four provincial capitals (Barcelona, Tarragona, Girona and Lleida) are linked by high-speed rail lines. The cities of Catalonia enjoy sports and cultural facilities that few regions of the world, even some of the richest, can claim

- The attacks on the Catalan language

In Catalonia, Spanish and Catalan have been common languages for centuries (for example, the great Spanish poet and translator of the Renaissance Juan Boscán was a Catalan) and today they are official languages together with Aranese in the district of the Valle de Arán. Thanks to Spanish democracy and self-government, the Catalan language has made extraordinary progress in all fields of social, cultural and economic life, and never in all history have so many people spoken Catalan. The victimist discourse of the Catalan government is quite ungrounded.

4. THE PROCESS IS NOT POSITIVE FOR THE CATALAN PEOPLE

The risks of a hypothetical independence and of the process intended to bring it about, which is already in progress, place us in a scenario of uncertainty and tension. The extent to which it is taking over the debates and consuming energy means that the real economic and social problems that Catalan society is suffering from are left untouched.

A view of Catalonia is being presented internationally that does not correspond with the plurality of its civil society and, while it is announced that the referendum planned for 9 November 2014 is principally intended to find out the opinion of the Catalan people, the fact is that the Government of Catalonia is working with the sole scenario of preparing for independence.



With regard to the secession of Catalonia we must point out that, contrary to what is claimed by the nationalist propaganda, we would find ourselves in a situation that would cause grave damage to the material interests of the Catalan people. In the academic debate, even in the unlikely scenario of a velvet breakaway the conclusion is that the loss to the GDP would be substantial.

All in all, independence would turn us into an isolated and poorer society, giving up the chance to take part in common projects with the rest of Spain and Europe. It would break not only the economic links but also the bonds of social relations and affection that the Catalans have with other Spaniards and Europeans.

5. IT EXERTS UNACCEPTABLE COERCION ON A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY

Spain is a democratic state that is fully integrated in the European Union and in the international community. No process that raises the question of a breach of legality, even as a hypothesis, is acceptable. The Spanish Constitution can be reformed, laws can be changed, political conflicts can be resolved through dialogue and negotiation, but obedience to the law and respect for the rules by which a democratic state operates are not negotiable.

What democratic country would allow a part of its territory with a social base that is so insufficient and so dependent on current circumstances to break away? For all its faults, Spain is now a consolidated democracy, a constitutional state with the Rule of Law and a free country in the framework of a Europe that is advancing towards union. We do not deny the great problems of the moment. On the contrary, we believe that with the worst stages of the economic crisis behind us, Spain must deal with the public concern to bring about a better country.

The Board of Directors of Societat Civil Catalana.

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