



Catalonia: the moment for politics, the moment for dialogue

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Catalonia is experiencing a time of unprecedented political and social tension, the result of the irresponsibility of two governments that have been making electoral gains for years from a political confrontation without president in a democracy: a Catalan government, committed to achieving independence, even without the support of a majority of the population and at the risk of placing Catalan institutions outside the law, and a Spanish government that has been unable to recognise the existence of a problem of integration between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, as well as to put forward proposals for dialogue, and has delegated to the justice system and the police a solution that can only arise from politics. But the Spanish government of the Popular Party (PP) is not only responsible for its immobilist strategy, for its inability (or lack of will) to pursue dialogue with a view to resolving the situation through political channels, but has also been at the root of the problem, since it was the PP that lodged an appeal against the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia that had been approved by the Cortes Generales and the majority of citizens in a referendum (and which other Autonomous Communities in Spain have been able to maintain), which culminated in a ruling of the Constitutional Court which restricted that Statute itself.

In the years leading from that ruling to the present, the Catalan autonomous government has been raising the stakes of its demands: from governing with the support of the PP itself after the ruling on the Statute, they moved to asking for a fiscal pact in 2012 that was rejected and from there changed partners to ally themselves to the separatists with the aim of proclaiming independence in plebiscite elections in which they did not obtain the social majority required. Only two years later, they have dared to call a unilateral referendum on independence without any kind of democratic guarantee, based on a clearly unconstitutional law which breaches the Statute and has been suspended by the Constitutional Court and to shift the conflict to the streets, with the consequences for the population that we saw on 1 October, after a totally disproportionate action by the State security forces against peacefully gathering citizens.

At this point, only the opening of an urgent political dialogue without conditions and negotiation between the two governments responsible for bringing this situation to an extreme can help to avoid a Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the Catalan government that would lead to a strong reaction by the state and would probably end with a suspension of Catalonia's autonomy if not with an intervention by the army. That is why the Catalan and Spanish socialists have stood firm in defending the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the rule of law and also sought a resolution of the conflict by dialogue. In fact,

we are prepared to do everything in our power to encourage negotiation and to build bridges between the parties that will make it possible to avoid a new step on the path of unilateral independence that would put Catalan self-government at risk.

The socialist proposal on the current political conflict is well known. We propose renewing the constitutional agreement, a federal constitutional reform that strengthens Catalonia's political autonomy, recognises the plurinational and multilingual nature of Spain, improves Catalonia's funding and can be submitted to a referendum and validated by all citizens. There will be no solution without a vote.

But neither independence, which does not have a sufficient popular majority, nor the maintenance of the *status quo* are the solution. Profound reforms are needed in Spain, which will hardly come with a PP government. But while we are working to achieve a socialist majority in Spain, it is necessary to act. Too many red lines have been crossed in recent days, and only the politics of dialogue can bring a solution to the current state of affairs. It is urgently necessary to work for a new constitutional agreement, bringing together the broadest possible majorities, and thus contributing to the restoration of coexistence in Catalonia and the standing of institutions that have lost their legitimacy and already put themselves outside the law. It is still possible to achieve this if there is a will. This is the time for politics, this is the time for dialogue. If not now, then when?