

## **Spain: For Catalonia!**

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When does the confrontation between the government in Barcelona and the government in Madrid stop being an intra-Spanish issue? When one realises that the task at hand is neither contempt for the constitution nor a backwards-oriented issue of sectionalism that Spain has to suppress. And if one realises that Europe's self-understanding is at stake here, the confrontation becomes an issue of the self-understanding of a European democracy.

This is not only about contempt for the constitution. Because democracy can only be alive if it occupies a place inside and also outside of the constitution, the only place from where impulses towards changes in the constitution can come. As problematic as the relationship between an inside and an outside of the constitution can be in a democracy if democracy wants to shield itself from antidemocratic tendencies and pure arbitrariness, it is nonetheless also clear that a legalism denying the relation between an outside of the constitution and the constitution itself has already given up on democracy and put blind forces in the place of historical development.

Democracy is not a given. Politics are only democratic if they are prepared to reflect upon the drawing of borders between their interior and exterior and to negotiate them; that is to say to recognise their self-understanding as dynamic. Democracy only deserves to be called that if it is willing to expose itself to such dangers. When those who govern today's Europe from Brussels, Paris, and Berlin side with the Spanish government in the name of “unity” and “law”, they thereby position themselves against democracy. They suspect that the conflict in Catalonia is also a conflict about the principles of their own governance: the submission of politics under the existing status quo, the degradation of democracy to a powerless business, a business defined and regulated in advance (yet by whom?). They define Europe via the principle of stardom and against democracy. Thus, to side with Catalonia means to side with democracy.

The conflict in Catalonia is not just about backwards-oriented sectionalism. Whoever as a democrat witnessed the participation in the most recent Catalan referendum will not be able to deny his/her enthusiasm about the fact that so many young and old voters, belonging to all levels of society, refused to be intimidated and entered the election booths so as to protest against attempts at intimidation.

They waited patiently and peacefully, oftentimes for several hours, to cast their vote for or against a declaration of independence for Catalonia. As Kant declared, “enthusiasm is the idea of the good with affect.” In this instance, affect was sparked in the observers not so much by the impressive commitment to the project of independence but rather the inkling that this was about much bigger things, no matter whether the partisans of a Catalonian Republic were aware of it or not. It was all about a lively understanding of democracy, about a democratic praxis, which in the final analysis depends upon the conviction that Europe can

be more than the name for a politics working for the abdication of politics, can be more than a name for a neoliberal alliance with capital.

When today's European governors side with the Spanish state against Catalonia they reward Spain for the fact that in the past decade Spain, like almost no other European state, has shown itself to be a good European in this ill-conceived manner. The voting Catalans on the other hand had hoped for solidarity from another Europe. To be for Catalonia is to be for another Europe.

This is also about the question of identity, now urgently echoing across all of Europe, which one might disdainfully dismiss as an outdated question in order to hide one's helplessness or to try and settle it with an anti-foreigner stance. Catalans do not disseminate an ethnic understanding of identity but do fight against xenophobia. Isn't it time to reformulate the concept of a Europe of regions, which is of a conservative origin, into a potent instrument of a new progressive politics?

The refusal of the Catalan president to declare, or not to declare, the republic with an unequivocal yes or no eludes the rehearsed political rules of the game. This refusal is neither a sign of insecurity nor a mere ruse, but a brave move heralding a politics which refuses to follow the operative model and crumble under the pressures from the outside. This kind of politics aims at reopening a temporal space for an exchange so far not held. The unrestrained application of paragraph 155 of the Spanish constitution by the Spanish Prime Minister must on the other hand be seen as the act of a sovereign deciding on the state of emergency because he cannot endure the openness of the political space. In order to do so, Rajoy must reinterpret the brave opening of the political space which Puigdemont had effected (also against the expectations from his own supporters) as an unambiguous decision; he must declare Puigdemont the enemy so as to block off the possibility of politics.

Criticism of the Catalan independence movement aims at its mere economic selfishness, in whose name, however, it is then called to order along the lines of *realpolitik*. It is aimed at the private interests of its political leaders and the political naiveté of its young members. Yet if one thinks such criticism pertinent, one blinds oneself to the movement's democratic passion. One remains unable to confront the fact that the increasingly massive resistance against the Europe of the rulers who tolerate and support Rajoy, which is also a resistance against Europe's surrender to globalisation, is triggered by extreme-right populists and neo-Nazis who have entered the parliaments.

If one wants to oppose this fatal alternative, one has to come down on Catalonia's side. One should trust enthusiasm and not mistake it for fanaticism.

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