

Catalonia: It's About Democracy

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Raül Romeva i Rueda. Photo courtesy of Government of Catalonia

Novinite is publishing a piece by Raül Romeva i Rueda, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency of the Government of Catalonia.

Mr Romeva's statement is a response to the article of Mr José Manuel García-Margallo that [appeared on Novinite](#) on Monday.

Other parties concerned are encouraged to also voice their positions on the issue.

None of the two pieces necessarily reflects views shared by Novinite staff.

A significant number of Catalans have reached the conclusion that in order to strengthen the welfare state, to preserve social cohesion, and to protect our cultural personality in all its diversity, we need our own country, because these goals, civic and democratic, are not possible within the today's Spanish state.

In the most recent Catalan elections the pro-independence political parties – which cover a broad ideological spectrum, except for the far right - won an absolute majority in Catalonia's Parliament. In addition, the Members of Parliament who support an independence referendum make up almost two-thirds of the chamber. In spite of this, our request for a referendum like those that were held in Quebec and Scotland has not only met with total rejection from the Spanish government, but also a refusal to enter into any kind of dialogue or negotiation which has been accompanied by a judicial persecution of our pro-independence.

Why does such a broad section of our society conclude that we need our own country? The majority of Catalonia's political parties had long supported seeking reforms from Spain, and while doing so they have supported all of Spain's efforts towards democratization and modernisation from the Republic to the transition to democracy after the end of the Franco dictatorship. This road to reforms had allowed for significant progress until the ultra-conservative José María Aznar government launched a recentralisation and involution campaign that did not stop even during the social democratic government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and which has incrementally increased under the baton of Mariano Rajoy.

Let us not forget, for example, that our main self-government law, Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy, was approved by a large majority of Catalans at the ballot boxes in 2006, though it was trimmed back substantially by the Spanish Parliament, and finally in 2010 substantial parts of the Statue were annulled by Spain's Constitutional Court at the orders of the Popular Party. It must be noted that Spain's highest court has become highly politicised, and is presided over by a former member of this same party.

The visible deterioration in the quality of Spain's democracy, addressing Catalonia's political problems solely through legal persecution are seen in the constant politicised use of Spain's state mechanisms against Catalonia. And finally the threats and penal persecution of Catalan political officials, has ensure that more and more people give up their belief that it is possible for reforms to happen in Spain, and instead they opt to advance democratically and peacefully towards independence.

The call for independence is not in any way the expression of ethnic-based nationalism or any sense of exclusion. Catalonia is a country with a long history of welcoming people, and during the 20th and now the 21st century a large part of our population was actually born somewhere else, with many coming from other parts of Spain, and more recently from immigration from outside UE. Catalonia has created a model that is inclusive and open, with a plural and flexible identity, where language and culture are highly valued, but where we have reached levels of social cohesion that is something we want to preserve. The independence movement is not an attempt to avoid solidarity with other parts of Spain and the rest of Europe. With an economy that has a strong industrial base, Catalonia is, and has always been, a net contributor Spain's budget as well as that of the EU. We don't seek to stop that, but quite the opposite, our aspiration is to improve the inefficient manner our funds have been managed by handling them more justly ourselves, making them more structurally useful for everybody.

The independence movement is scrupulously democratic, peaceful and driven by civil society. In spite of all that, the Spanish government responds by closing the door to any kind of dialogue. They affirm that the objective of independence is not legitimate, and even metaphysically unviable. They continually threaten us saying that any step in this direction is illegal and that it will be persecuted. They argue that the unity of Spain is sacred, and therefore impermeable to the desires of its citizens. Nothing can be done, and in addition, we cannot even ask people what they want.

When there is such a broad and diverse movement in a country as we have seen with the Catalan independence movement, the minimum citizens can expect is for their voices to be heard by their government, that there be dialogue. But that has not happened. The Catalan government, in accordance with the democratic mandate of the voters, wants independence, and we want it to be our citizens who can decide with their votes whether they want Catalonia to become a Republic. A parliamentary majority has reached the consensus that the tool we need to do this is via a referendum, we will do it.

We call on the Spanish government to negotiate everything: the date of the referendum, the question, the democratic guarantees for the vote, the majority needed to validate the vote – everything. It is very difficult to understand that using democracy so that citizens can decide their future could possibly be a crime. And that instead the maximum expression of democratic morality is to deny citizens a vote, to block them from deciding their future, and considering their opinion as irrelevant. Our request is just and peaceful. And in spite of the Spanish government's failure to understand, in the face of their negation, intransigence, and the lack of alternatives, we have a democratic proposal: to put out the ballot boxes and accept the result.