

Official Statement by the President on the political situation in Catalonia

Barcelona, 10 October 2017

I stand here before Parliament to present to you the results of the referendum held on October 1 and to explain the political consequences derived from it. I am conscious, as I'm sure are many of you, that today I also stand before the people of Catalonia and before many others, who have focused their attention on what happens today in this chamber.

We are living in an exceptional time, of historical dimension. The consequences and effects run beyond our country and it's evident that, far from being an internal and domestic affair, as we have often had to hear from those who neglected their responsibility by not wanting to know about what's happening, Catalonia is a European issue.

Do not expect, from my speech, threats, blackmail nor insults. The current moment is serious enough for everyone to assume their corresponding responsibility and for the necessity to de-escalate tension and not to contribute to it, neither through word nor gesture. On the other hand, I wish to address the people; those who came out on the 1st and the 3rd of October, those who went to the demonstration on Saturday to advocate for dialogue, and those who came out massively on Sunday in defence of the unity of Spain. And to those who haven't come out in any of those gatherings. All of us, with all of our differences, with all our points of understanding and divergence, all form part of the same people, and we must continue to work together, whatever happens, because that is how the history of a people who want to build a future is made.

Obviously, we will never agree on everything. But we do understand, because we've already demonstrated it, that the way forward can be none other than through democracy and peace. That means respecting those who think differently, and finding a way to make possible collective aspirations, with the realisation that that requires a large dose of dialogue and empathy.

As you may well imagine, in these recent days and hours many have spoken with me, suggesting both what needs to be done and what needs not be done. All of those suggestions are valid, respectable and appropriate for a moment like this. In all cases where I could I appreciated receiving them, because in each one I've heard good reasons which are worth listening to. I have also asked the opinion of many people, which has helped me and enriched the analysis of this moment in time and the perspective for the future, and I want to give them my heartfelt thanks.

But what I'm presenting to you today is not a personal decision, nor is it the obsession of any one person: it's the result of the 1st of October, of the will of the government which I preside over having maintained its commitment to call, organise and hold a referendum of self-determination, and naturally of the analysis of the following facts which we have shared at the



core of Government. Today is the time to talk about the results in the Parliament and that's what we're going to do.

We are here because on the 1st of October Catalonia held a referendum of self-determination. It was done in conditions, which were, rather than difficult, extreme. It's the first time in the history of European democracies that an election day was held in the midst of violent police attacks against voters who were queuing to post their vote. From 8 in the morning until the close of polling stations, the Police and Guardia Civil beat defenceless people and obliged the emergency services to attend to more than 800 people. We all saw it, as did the world, which was horrified as the images came through.

The objective was not only to confiscate ballot boxes and voting papers. The objective was to cause panic and make people, as they saw the images of indiscriminate police violence, stay at home and renounce their right to vote. But those politically responsible for these ignominious acts shot themselves in the foot. 2, 286, 217 citizens overcame their fear, left their homes and voted. We don't know how many were unsuccessful in doing so, but we do know that the polling stations which were closed down violently represented the votes of 770,000 more people.

More than two million two hundred thousand Catalans were able to vote because they overcame their fear, and because when they arrived at their polling station they found ballot boxes, envelopes, voting slips, constituted voting tables and an operative and reliable electoral list. The operations and police searches of the previous weeks in seeking ballot boxes and voting slips did not prevent the referendum. Phone taps, following people, cyber-attacks, the closure of 140 websites, interference in correspondence, none of these things could stop the referendum. I repeat: in spite of the efforts and resources dedicated to prevent it happening, when the citizens arrived at the polling stations, they found ballot boxes, envelopes, voting slips, constituted voting tables and an operative and reliable electoral list.

I wish, therefore, to recognise and appreciate all of the people who made possible this logistical and political success. To the volunteers who slept in the polling stations. To the citizens who kept the ballot boxes in their homes. To those who printed the voting slips. To the computer technicians who came up with and developed the universal electoral list. To the workers in the Government. To those who voted yes or no, and those who voted blank. To so many anonymous people who did their part to make it all possible. And above all, I send my best wishes and solidarity to all those injured and mistreated in the police operation. Those images will remain in our memories forever. We will never forget.

We must recognise and denounce that the actions of the state have caused tension and worry in Catalan society. As President of Catalonia, I'm very conscious that at this time there are many people who are worried, anxious and even scared about what is happening and what may come to pass. People of all ideas and political leanings. Gratuitous violence and the decision of some companies to transfer their headquarters, in a decision, allow me to say, more related to their markets than to real effects in our economy (what does have real effect on our economy is the 16 billion Catalan euros which are obliged to leave each year), are facts which without doubt have clouded the picture. To all those people who are afraid, I wish to send them a message of comprehension and empathy, and also of serenity and tranquillity: the Government of Catalonia will not deviate one millimetre from its commitment to social and



economic progress, democracy, dialogue, tolerance, respect for difference and a willingness to negotiate. As President I will always act with responsibility and keeping in mind the seven and a half million citizens of the country.

I would like to explain where we are, and especially why we are where we are. Today as the world is watching us, and indeed, today as the world is listening to us, I think it's worth going back and explaining ourselves.

Since the death of the military dictator Francisco Franco, Catalonia has contributed at least as much as anyone else to the consolidation of Spanish democracy. Catalonia has been not only the economic engine of Spain, but also a modernising and stabilising influence. Catalonia believed that the Spanish Constitution of 1978 could be a good starting point to guarantee its self-government and its material progress. Catalonia was deeply involved in the process of returning the Spanish state to European and international institutions after 40 years of isolation.

The passing of the years, however, began to show that the new institutional structure which came out of the Transition, which Catalonia saw as a good starting point towards evolving to new heights of democracy and self-governance, was seen by the hegemonic elite of the state not as a point of departure, but in fact as a point of arrival. With the passing of the years, the system not only stopped evolving in the desired direction for the people of Catalonia, but began to devolve.

Consistent with this finding, in the year 2005, a large majority, 88% of this Parliament, I repeat an 88% majority in this Parliament, following the steps marked out by the Constitution, I repeat, following the steps marked out by the Constitution, approved a proposal for a new Statute of Autonomy, and sent it to the Spanish Congress of Deputies. The Catalan proposal unleashed an authentic campaign of Catalanophobia, tied to an irresponsible manner by those who wanted to govern Spain at any price.

The text which was finally submitted for referendum in 2006 was already very different from the initial proposal from the Catalan Parliament, but despite that was approved by the citizens who voted on it. Turnout was 47%, and the votes in favour of the Statute were 1,899,897. I'd like to point out that that's 145,000 votes fewer than the yes vote for independence on the 1st of October.

The state, however, hadn't had enough with the first reduction. In 2010, four years after the entry in law of the watered down Statute, a Constitutional Court made up of magistrates hand-picked by the two main Spanish political parties, emitted an disgraceful sentence which watered down the Statute for a second time, modifying the content which had been voted on by the people in a referendum.

It's worth remembering this, and underlining it. Despite having followed all the procedures of the constitution, despite being backed by 88% of the Parliament of Catalonia, and despite popular approval in a referendum, the combined action by the Congress of Deputies and the Constitutional Court converted the Catalan proposal into an unrecognisable text. And it's worth remembering and underlining also: this unrecognisable text, doubly edited and not voted upon



by Catalans, this is the current law in force. This has been the result of Catalonia trying to modify its Juridical Statute by constitutional means: a humiliation.

But that's not everything. Since the sentence of the Constitutional Court against the Statute voted upon by the people, the Spanish political system not only has not moved a finger to try to go back and repair this break, but rather it has activated an aggressive and systematic program of recentralisation. From the point of view of self-government, the last seven years have been the worst of the last forty: continual degradation of competencies through a series of decrees, laws and sentences; inattention and lack of investment in the basic system of infrastructure in Catalonia, a key part of a country's economic progress; and hurtful disrespect towards our language, culture and the way of life in our country.

Everything that I explain in these short lines has had a profound impact in Catalan society. It's got to the point that during this period many Catalans, millions of Catalans, have come to the rational conclusion that the only way to guarantee survival, not only of self-government, but of our values as a society, is the foundation of Catalonia as a state. The results of the last elections to the Parliament of Catalonia are a testament to this.

Furthermore, something even more relevant has happened: in parallel with the formation of a pro-independence absolute majority in the Parliament, a broad consensus has been forged that the future of Catalonia, whatever it may be, had to be decided by the Catalan people, democratically and pacifically, through a referendum. In the most recent poll by an important newspaper in Madrid, not from here, from Madrid, 82% of Catalans expressed this idea.

With the objective of making possible this referendum, in the last few years the Catalan institutions and civil societies have generated many initiatives before the Spanish government and its institutions. It's all documented: up to 18 times, and in all possible formats, opening a dialogue has been proposed to agree a referendum similar to the one held in Scotland on 18 September 2014. A referendum with the date and a question agreed between the two sides, in which both sides could campaign and present their arguments, and in which both sides commit to accepting and applying the result through a negotiation which protects their respective interests. If that has been possible in one of the oldest, most consolidated and exemplary democracies in the world, as the United Kingdom is, why could it not also be done in Spain?

The answer to all of those initiatives has been a radical and absolute no, combined with police and judicial persecution of Catalan authorities. Ex-President Artur Mas and ex-ministers Joana Ortega and Irene Rigau, as with the ex-minister of Presidency Francesc Homs, have been banned from holding office for having promoted a non-binding participative process without juridical effect on the 9 of November 2014. And not only banned from public office, but also fined in an arbitrary and abusive way: if they do not deposit more than 5 million euros to the Spanish Court of Accounts, all of their assets will be embargoed and their families may be affected.

Apart from them, the bureau of this Parliament and dozens of municipal elected officials have been charged for expressing support for the right to decide and permit debates on the referendum. Charges have been brought against the President of the Parliament and its



bureau to prevent them permitting the debate to take place. The last wave of repression against Catalan institutions has resulted in the detainment and arrest of 16 officials and public servants in the Government of Catalonia, who had to appear in court handcuffed and without being informed of the accusation against them. The world needs to know too that the leaders of the entities which have led the biggest peaceful demonstrations in Europe's history are charged with the crime of sedition, which carries a sentence of up to 15 years in prison. These are people responsible for having organised demonstrations which amazed the world for their civility and lack of incident.

This has been the answer of the Spanish State to Catalan demands, which have always been expressed in a peaceful way and through the majorities obtained at the polls. The people of Catalonia have demanded the freedom to be able to decide for years. It's very simple. We have not found anyone to dialogue with in the past nor are we finding one in the present. There is no State institution that is open to talking about the claim of the majority of this Parliament and of Catalan society. The last hope we could have left was for the monarchy to exercise the arbitration and moderating role that the constitution attaches to it, but the last week's speech confirmed our worst assumptions.

I now turn to the citizens of the whole of the Spanish state who are following with concern what is happening in Catalonia. I want to convey a message of serenity and respect, a willingness to dialogue and of political accord, as has always been our desire and our priority. I am aware of the information that is conveyed to them by most media and the narrative that has been established. But I dare to ask them to make an effort, for the good of all; an effort to know and recognise what has led us here and the reasons that have driven us. We are not delinquents, nor are we crazy, nor are we attempting a coup, nor just some bad people: we are normal people who ask to be able to vote and who have been willing to undertake all necessary dialogue to carry it out in an agreed manner. We have nothing against Spain and the Spanish. Quite the opposite. We want to understand each other better, and that is the desire of the majority in Catalonia. Because today, for many years now, the relationship isn't working and nothing has been done to reverse a situation that has become unsustainable. And a people can not be compelled, against its will, to accept a status quo that it did not vote for and does not want. The Constitution is a democratic framework, but it is equally true that there is democracy beyond the Constitution.

Ladies and gentlemen, with the results of the referendum on October 1st, Catalonia has earned the right to be an independent state, and has earned the right to be heard and respected.

I must recognise that today Catalonia is being listened to and respected beyond our frontiers. The yes to independence won an absolute majority in the elections, and two years later it has won a referendum under the attacks of batons. The ballot boxes, the only language we understand, say yes to independence. And this is the route I am committed to traveling.

As is known, the Referendum Law establishes that, two days after the official proclamation of the results, and in the case where the number of Yes votes is superior to the number of No votes, the Parliament (and I cite the wording of the law) "will hold an ordinary session to put into effect a formal declaration of the independence of Catalonia, its effects and agree the beginning of the constituent process".

There's a before and after the 1st of October, and we have achieved what we committed ourselves to at the beginning of this legislature.

Arriving at this historic moment, and as President of the Generalitat I take it upon myself to say, in presenting to you the results of the referendum before Parliament and our co-citizens, that the people have determined that Catalonia should become an independent state in the form of a republic.

That is what needs to be done today, responsibly and with respect.

In with the same solemnity, the Government and I myself propose that the Parliament suspends the effects of the declaration of independence so that in the coming weeks we may begin a dialogue without which it is impossible to arrive at an agreed solution. We firmly believe that this moment needs not only a de-escalation of tension but also a clear and committed willingness to advance the claims of the people of Catalonia from the results of the 1st of October. We must keep these results in mind during the period of dialogue which we are willing to open.

It is well-known that since the referendum different mediation initiatives have been put in place, regarding dialogue and negotiation and at national, state and international level. Some of these are publicly known, while others are not known yet. All are serious attempts, and were difficult to imagine happening just a short time ago. The cries for dialogue and for no violence have been heard from all corners of the globe; yesterday's declaration by a group of eight Nobel Peace Prize winners; the declaration the group The Elders led by the ex-secretary general of the United Nations Kofi Annan and made up of people of great world relevance; the positions of Presidents and Prime Ministers of European countries, European political leaders...

There's a prayer for dialogue which runs through Europe, because Europe already feels interrupted by the effects of what could happen with a bad resolution of this conflict. All of these voices deserve to be listened to. And all, without exception, have asked that we open a time to give dialogue with the Spanish state a chance.

That is also what needs to be done today, responsibly and with respect.

In finishing, I call on the responsibility of everyone. To the citizens of Catalonia, I ask that we continue to express ourselves as we have done up to now, with freedom and with respect from those who think differently. To companies and economic stakeholders, I ask that they continue to generate wealth and not fall into the temptation to use their power to influence the population. To the political parties, I ask that they contribute with their words and actions to lower the tension. I also ask this of the media. To the Spanish government, I ask that they listen, not to us if they don't want, but to those who advocate for mediation and to the international community, and to the millions of citizens around Spain who ask that they renounce repression and imposition. To the European Union, I ask that they get deeply involved and hold up the fundamental values of the Union.



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de la Presidència
**Direcció General de Comunicació
del Govern**

Today the Government of Catalonia makes a gesture of responsibility and generosity, and again reaches out its hand in dialogue. I'm convinced that, if in the coming days everyone acts with the same responsibility and fulfils their obligations, the conflict between Catalonia and the Spanish state can be resolved in a manner that is serene and with accord, respecting the will of the people. For us, this will not stop here. Because we want to be true to our long history, to all who suffered and made sacrifices, and because we want a future of dignity for our children, for all those people who want to make Catalonia their land of welcome and hope.

Thank you very much.

Carles Puigdemont Casamajó
President of the Catalan Government