

Destination Europe: the future of Catalonia in the European Union

Before I come to what will be the core of my speech, may I just put Catalonia into context for you. Most of you know who we are and can situate us geographically; what I mean is that I am the President of an ancient nation of Europe. A nation which in the ninth century lay within the boundaries of Charlemagne's Europe, what was known as the *Marca Hispanica*. The roots of the Catalan people have always been European; their European vocation has never ceased to exist at any time in history and is as alive and present now as it has ever been.

I am the president of a country with a deep democratic tradition, which by the eleventh century had already developed the "assemblies of peace and truce", embryo of what is regarded as the first parliamentarianism. I am the president of an institution, the *Generalitat de Catalunya*, whose origins lie in the fourteenth century, and in spite of the fact that it was prohibited for three hundred years, I have the honour to be its 129th president.

On 14 May 2001, and so more than eleven years ago, I gave a speech in Barcelona entitled "Between defiance and compromise: towards a new positioning of Catalonia in the world", in which I expressed ideas such as the following (literal quotations):

"Spain has changed a great deal, and mostly for the better. Spain has ceased to be an isolated state, underdeveloped and bare, to become a state that is fully integrated into Europe, highly developed and notably modern. Catalonia has been decisive in this process of modernisation, and the majority Catalanist politics have played a leading role in this."

...

"Indeed, it is true that thanks to this recent historic process Catalonia has achieved its greatest degree of autonomy and self-government for the last three hundred years, but it is equally true that our decision-making power is still very limited. If by decision-making power we mean to have the last word—that doesn't mean the only word—it has to be said that we have it on many fewer issues than those we need to take our country forward."

...

“Now the key question is: will Catalonia have a second opportunity to round off and fill out its political autonomy, in other words, its ability to decide for itself?”

... everything leads us to think that it will not be at all easy for Catalonia to have this second opportunity, at least within the framework of the state of Spain.”

...

“...the core idea I would like to get across this evening is this: this second opportunity for Catalonia might come from Europe.”

...

“What I am proposing is that, without turning our back on it, we can go beyond the Spanish framework. We have done so, successfully, in the economic sphere. We are doing so, albeit more timidly, in the cultural sphere, and also in the field of communication. Why can we not do so in the field of political structure? We have to take advantage of all the opportunities offered by the construction of the new Europe.”

End of quotations. Eleven years have gone by and we find ourselves in the scenario described then. An old nation of Europe, Catalonia, that has not been able to satisfactorily resolve the way it fits into the framework of a Spanish state that will not allow it to grow or develop its self-government; an old nation which, being profoundly European as it is, would like to be one more player taking part in the construction of this shared project.

At the moment in the European Union, particularly at the heart of the eurozone, attention is mostly focused on how to get out of the economic crisis and on a discussion of what mechanisms must be established to avoid more crises such as this one appearing in the future. And on how to deal more swiftly and effectively with whatever crises may occur.

These questions, which this very day will receive particular attention in the press conference that commissioner Rehn is giving to present the economic forecast for the 27, or indeed in the speech which Chancellor Merkel will give this afternoon to the European Parliament, cannot leave aside one fundamental, urgent issue: the need to adjust the EU's political and institutional structure to the new realities of a world that is changing ever more

rapidly and which calls for brave, imaginative responses from those in power.

The Paris and Rome treaties, as well as that of Maastricht, and even that of Lisbon, have been surpassed by the current crisis and there is a need to think of a new Europe that will recover its cohesion and its executive capacity so as to present itself to the world as a politically strong, coherent group, and to its citizens as a guarantee of their security and well-being and as a defender of the individual who must feel he or she is properly represented in its institutions.

At the political level the unilateral interests and visions of the states carry much more weight than do the search for common positions and the design and implementation of common action. Albeit with some reservations, the characterisation of the European Union as an “economic giant and a political dwarf” is still valid.

Let us think of the early days. Let us recover the spirit of the founders. The project of Schuman and of the founding fathers mixed pragmatism in the method with the broadest ambition in its aims. If you closely re-read the declaration of 9 May 1950, whose topicality is still surprising, you will see that it contains the basis of a project whose ultimate aim is the creation of a federal structure that will group the States of Europe together. I have named this old ambition the United States of Europe. The current president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, spoke to me more a year ago about his youthful dream to see a United States of Europe.

In these recent years of severe economic crisis, there has been a lack of European, supranational, focus when it comes to confronting problems and proposing solutions. The impression has been given that Europe is not governed by the Commission, nor by the European Central Bank, nor even by the Council of Ministers or the permanent president of the Council.

Today's European citizen has the impression that decisions in Europe are taken in just a few chancelleries and capitals of the most powerful member states and not in the European institutions themselves. And that the only subjects of debate are currency, market and economy.

As president Delors said, “No-one will fall in love with a Common Market”. European citizens need to be enthused with more

transcendental ideas than a mere market and so build, on the basis of our very diversity, a truly common project.

I know that the main ideas of this model of European construction that are current in Brussels can be summed up in two points :

1. The proposal published in the book *Debout l'Europe!*, by Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Guy Verhofstadt, which heralds a Federal European State and in which the authors note *“L'Europe ressemble de plus en plus à un monument historique. Un continent marginalisé qui se bat pour survivre dans une nouvelle ère et un nouveau monde”* and also *“L'Europe ne joue plus aucun rôle significatif. C'est la faute de la conception bornée de la souveraineté par laquelle les États membres ont amputé les Traités de notre drapeau et de notre hymne”*. I know that the main political observers regard this as unrealistic because while it is considered necessary for member states to share sovereignty, to eliminate it altogether provokes great reticence. Europe is too big and too diverse not to be federal. The question is whether history weighs too heavily on Europe for it to achieve a federal solution.
2. The one known as the “Delors Formula”, of a federation of nation states, and the alternative proposal built on the same thesis by the President of the Commission José Manuel Durão Barroso.

Delors bases his proposal on the “community method” which is the basis of the entire system and which needs to be strengthened and improved while accepting the possibility of reinforced cooperation which would lead, in fact, to a multi-speed Europe.

President Barroso again takes up the federal formula, but rejects the hypothesis of a two-speed Europe.

Between these two theses we can talk of the need to build a United States of Europe, a United States that cannot be a copy of the USA on account of the significant importance of people's own languages and culture, as well as their own histories. But this new, much more federal, European reality must be built on the basis of those nations which, having a clearly defined territory, history, language and culture, as is the case with Catalonia, have the will, as expressed democratically at the ballot box, to be their own player in the construction of this new Europe.

Our proposition is a clear one: to cede all the powers necessary to give real strength to the European Union while implementing policies that are closer to the people in fields such as health, education and social policy in those places where this can be done more efficiently and consistently. Just as the States can not act as a brake on the construction of the European project, neither can they act as a brake on the will of those nations without statehood that democratically and peacefully express their will to be one more player in this process of European construction.

To want one's own state within the framework of the European Union is to be willing to cede sovereignty to the European institutions. Consequently, our process is much more than the recognition of our national identity within the framework of a united Europe, it is much more than a process to what some people call sovereignty, given that we are totally in favour of a Europe with federal structures where decisions do not require interminable negotiations and lengthy ratification procedures before coming into force. When I am asked in Catalonia if I want an independent State I reply that what I want for Catalonia is its own State that must, necessarily share interdependencies within a more united and stronger Europe.

That is why I am proposing a real European integration. For us, the Catalans, the border has never been a defining element of our identity and neither do we want to build new borders. On the contrary, we are an example of how European integration has enabled us to depart from the limits of the classical State in a whole range of fields: infrastructure, companies, university students and culture. All our large strategic projects have a European dimension and acquire their full meaning within the European space, and in our case, the Mediterranean space too. I will give you an example: Catalonia as a logistics centre within the

Mediterranean corridor within the trans-European transport network. When Catalonia aspires to be the point, or one of the points, of entry in southern Europe for goods from Asia or Africa it does so, not thinking in terms of the Iberian peninsula, but rather it does so with a European vocation and dimension.

It is because the citizens of Catalonia have shown their will in huge numbers on the streets that I have decided to call the next elections. In order to verify this will in the only way things can be so verified in a democracy, through the vote and through the ballot box. And so the people of Catalonia can say, clearly and unequivocally, if they want to be consulted about their future and Catalonia's status as a political subject during the next legislature.

We will be holding elections in Catalonia on 25 November. They are early elections that I have called after 1.5 million people demonstrated peacefully through the streets of Barcelona on 11 September last, and after the Spanish prime minister, Mr. Rajoy, slammed the door on the possibility of negotiating a Fiscal Pact which had been approved by an ample majority in the Catalan Parliament.

Our proposition is based on the essence of democracy, on the expression of democracy based on the right to decide. Catalonia must be able to decide democratically and peacefully what it wants its future to be within the framework of the European Union.

During the course of the next four years this process will lead us, if so approved at the election, to consult the people of Catalonia about what they want their future to be.

What do we want this process to be like? What do we promise it will be like?

Once the consultation process is endorsed by ballot it must be framed in the following terms:

- Scrupulously democratic. The entire process must be endorsed in its most significant aspects by the direct decision of the people of Catalonia.
- Absolutely peaceful. This process must show Europe and the world the way Catalans do things: with a positive spirit, the

absence of violence and the willingness to reach agreements.

- Demonstrably transparent. The process must be clear and have a defined road map. Everyone must be sure about the situation facing them.
- With an ample majority. There must be an ample majority in Parliament on which to base the right to decide in order to start the consultation process. Having started the process this too must be endorsed by a sufficient majority, one that does not divide the country in two halves. I have always said that I would not want a majority of 50.5% against 49.5%.
- And finally, as I have already said, the Catalan process has a vocation to remain within the framework of the European Union and the euro. It would be senseless for a nation that forms part of the European Union and the euro, and that wants to continue forming part, should not be able to do so.

Catalonia has never in its history let Europe down, now we trust Europe will not let us down.

There are those who have wanted to question the viability of a future Catalan state on account of its size, despite the fact that Europe clearly demonstrates that on most occasions it is the small states that have greater ability to respond to the new challenges that arise.

In Europe the countries that have led the rapid economic recovery, from the end of 2009 until mid-2011, were the small central-European, Scandinavian and Baltic countries, based on a brilliant recovery of industrial exports and the prior restoration of the flow of bank credit to companies and families.

In their book, *The size of nations*, Alesina and Spolaore, teachers at the MIT, point out that the more open and integrated the world becomes, the greater the incentive for small countries to create their own state: efficient, more homogeneous and governable and more responsive to the preferences of their inhabitants.

I will provide you with some data that demonstrate the viability of a future Catalan state and that demonstrate also that in the south of Europe too there are realities that work and that can work.

A future Catalan state would be in seventh position amongst European countries in terms of per capita GDP and, as it has been up to now, it would continue to be a net contributor to the Union. In terms of aggregate GDP we would be in thirteenth position.

In terms of population and territory we are a small country. With 7.5 million inhabitants and 32,000 square kilometres we would be the sixteenth and twenty-third countries in the EU-27 respectively.

With regard to openness to foreign trade Catalonia would occupy the thirteenth position, the European average.

More significant data about Catalonia: 40% of the research funds assigned to the State of Spain come to Catalonia; 28% of total exports from the State of Spain leave from Catalonia; Catalonia receives 15 million foreign tourists, representing 25.5% of the tourists who visit Spain.

With regard to foreign investment, Ernst & Young's European Attractiveness Survey situates Barcelona, and by extension Catalonia, as the third most attractive area after London and Paris. These are only some of the most basic data to demonstrate the viability of Catalonia having its own state.

Please allow me to finish as I started. I am the 129th President of the Generalitat de Catalunya, the president of an ancient European nation with more than 1,000 years of history, a cradle of democracy and, as our renowned cellist Pau Casals said, with one of the oldest parliaments in the world. A nation that feels, and wants to continue to feel, European on account of its history, its traditions and its vocation. A nation that expects Europe not to let it down.

Thank you.