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Speech by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Institutional Relations and Transparency, Raül Romeva

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Bona tarda a tothom, gràcies per acompanyar-nos en aquest acte.

Good evening and thank you for finding the time to join us here today. We appreciate your presence and your interest in what President Puigdemont, Vice-president Junqueras and I, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, want to share with you all.

I would like to start by thanking the MEPs who host this meeting: Josep-Maria Terricabras, Ramon Tremosa and Jordi Solé.

I am aware of all the good and hard work you are doing in the European Parliament.

I think this meeting itself illustrates your success in making Catalan affairs and their aspirations a well-known issue in this Chamber.

I am also glad to see amongst you some very familiar faces, those of friends and colleagues which I don't have the chance to meet on a daily basis, as I did during my 10 years as a member of this Parliament.

Those were busy and thrilling years, since as a Catalan I was fully aware of what a great honour it is to represent my people in matters which mean so much in Catalonia as the European ones.

Europe is a beloved idea for Catalans. We have always felt part of it and have always looked at it as a source of inspiration on how to shape our own reality.

We know we belong to Europe as much as we feel close to the Mediterranean cultures and peoples. I guess this mixture is at the core of our way to read the world and to take an interest in it.

It is from this deep affection to Europe and everything it stands for that we are concerned about its present and future and that we would like to be able to get even more involved in finding new solutions for nowadays challenges.

Effectivement, aujourd'hui la construction européenne doit faire face à des épreuves qui peuvent en faire risquer la viabilité et l'avenir partagé.

Une seule chose semble être claire : l'Europe ne pourra pas se construire en sous-estimant les citoyens. Quand on le fait, la réponse aboutit en désaffection, dont le Brexit n'est qu'une des expressions.

Alors l'avenir pour l'Europe doit se construire sur la participation des citoyens et notamment en promouvant leur engagement actif.

Quand nous parlons du *dossier catalan* nous faisons référence justement à une clameur immense qui naît d'un peuple qui veut s'engager pour exprimer démocratiquement ses désirs.

Une clameur qui se manifeste de façon constante, massive et absolument pacifique, grâce à l'une des mobilisations citoyennes les plus persévérantes et intergénérationnelles que l'Europe ait connues.

Cependant, nous ne sommes pas venus à exiger ou à réclamer. Nous sommes venus afin de nous expliquer, d'avancer nos arguments. Et ainsi le faire sans intermédiaires, sans distorsions.

Ce dossier catalan dont je viens de parler, il s'agit des droits et des conditions de vie de plus de 7,5 millions de personnes qui ont déjà la citoyenneté européenne. C'est pour ce motif que l'Europe en est une partie prenante.

Ce que les Catalans ont réitéré à plusieurs reprises comme leur objectif politique majoritaire, cela doit être vue comme une requête formulée par des citoyens européens dont le seul désir est tout simplement pouvoir voter légalement pour décider sur leur avenir. Il s'agit donc de demandes et de méthodes bien enracinées dans la pratique européenne.

La façon comme l'Europe gère les désirs d'approfondissement démocratique de ses peuples, aussi en tout ce qui concerne leurs identités, définira la crédibilité de sa défense de ses valeurs ainsi que ses principes fondateurs.

Si l'on veut, comme nous le souhaitons, que l'Europe ait la force suffisante pour rayonner à travers le monde un idéal de société inclusive et respectueuse des droits humains, c'est incontournable qu'elle n'hésite pas au moment de mettre en pratique ces valeurs.

C'est l'Europe qui doit sopeser la meilleure manière d'articuler la diversité de ses peuples, dans un contexte de liberté et de démocratie, avec un esprit et une pratique de la solidarité qui permet renforcer le projet commun de l'Union Européenne.

Une Europe qui devienne attractive et exemplifiant dans la scène mondiale doit être une Europe qui sache écouter ses citoyens et qui trouve les moyens politiques pour agir en conséquence.

Europe is now in a decisive moment. The EU needs to face its own destiny to definitively become an interesting and attractive project for the citizens.

A project which is able to manage challenging and pressing realities such as the ones I would like to point out next.

The Brexit, for instance, makes us rethink what unity really means. In which way do we want and are we able to work together?

British citizens had the chance to speak their minds and now it is up to their government to find the best way to implement that decision.

Consequently, Scotland will have to decide and be listened to as far as its European vocation is concerned. Just as Northern Ireland or Gibraltar will also need to express themselves, freely and without interferences or threads of any sort.

There are also other challenges to face: the economic crisis in Greece makes us recalibrate our ideas on solidarity and address the claims for equity and social justice within the Union.

The economic crisis unveiled the worst face of Europe and Greece reminds us our duty to make Europe better again, especially there where it was born, in the Athenian civilization.

In addition, Europe has to prove its ability to show humanity. The crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean, with thousands of refugees fleeing from a terrible war, has made it obvious that Europe can fail, that it knows how to fail.

To help people in need was our duty 25 years ago in Bosnia just as much as it is now in our European borders.

If we fail to address this humanitarian crisis, this will never be the Europe we would be proud of.

For the last example I would like to share with you, let me refer again to Catalonia, my country.

As you know, Catalan citizens are leading a pacific process to win their freedom and to be able to rule their own country, just as any other free nation in the world.

Our roadmap is founded on voting, polls and democracy. Our claim is fair, pacific, democratic and based on the respect to the will of the citizens.

Catalonia has always been pro-European and it will always be. However, Europe cannot close its eyes face to these realities, because it is its own credibility which is at stake.

That is why Europe is laying its own future on the line when dealing with Catalonia. Eventually, Europe will have to take sides and it is unthinkable it doesn't choose democracy. If it didn't, Europe would be acting against itself and its fundamental values.

In other words, Brussels needs to show that the citizens' claims across the Union are being heard and understood, that their opinions are important and that the European Union is the right forum to address them.

Otherwise, the EU will be seen as part of the problem and not the solution, which eventually would weaken the European Union itself.

I have no doubt that we will learn how to make this Europe together and that we will be able to make it better than ever: solidarity-oriented and fair, united and diverse, plural and deeply democratic.

Thank you / Merci / Moltes gràcies.

Raül Romeva i Rueda

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