



Conference by the President of Catalonia at the University of Geneva:

“An international mediation for Catalonia”

University of Geneva, October 17th 2018

Welcome and memories of the Catalan exile(s)

Ladies and gentlemen, Professor Esposito, Doctor Decrey, Professor Levrat, ambassadors, general representative of Flanders and Wallonia in Geneva, colleagues and friends,

Una salutació també molt especial per tots els catalans que avui ens acompanyeu,

First of all, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to be here today, at the University of Geneva, a center known for its longstanding history and academic excellence.

It is a particular pleasure since last week this very same university awarded an Honorary Doctorate to Dr. Teresa Cabré, a distinguished Catalan scholar who has devoted her career in the field of linguistics, but also defending and promoting the Catalan language.

During the last year, the Catalan people has come to understand that those basic rights that we had taken for granted since the death of General Franco, were not so. Freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and democracy itself have been put in question. And, above all, our international right to self-determinate as a nation has been persecuted as if it was a dangerous crime.

This is why I am thankful to the University of Geneva for giving us this opportunity to explain ourselves and to explain why Catalonia needs an international mediation in order to find a political solution to our current situation. I am not here to demand an international mediation; I am not here to put pressure on the Swiss Federation or anyone else. I am here just to explain the reasons why an international mediation is so dearly needed.

Two of our colleagues, members of the former Catalan Parliament dissolved by the Spanish authorities, Marta Rovira and Anna Gabriel are living here in Switzerland, in exile. It's embarrassing that Europe needs safe havens for democrats persecuted, but it is a fact. We are also thankful to the Swiss society for the treatment they have received. Catalonia will never forget your attitude.

Catalonia is remembering again what does it mean to go into exile, and once again, some of our people have come to Switzerland. It happened in the last 30's and 40's, when some of our best politicians, entrepreneurs and artists had to leave Catalonia to save their lives during the Spanish civil war.



Cardinal Vidal-Barraquer, so-called the bishop of peace, died here in Switzerland as his rejection of the Francoist regime made him the only bishop that remained faithful to the republic. He was 35 years buried in Switzerland, in Vailsante, and only when Franco died his corpse was allowed to come back to Catalonia.

Mercè Rodoreda, one of our greatest writers, lived for 18 years here in Geneve. Her most famous novel, *La Plaça del Diamant*, was written here, in Geneve, during her exile. Translated to more than 30 languages, *La Plaça del Diamant* is considered one of the greatest achievements of Catalan literature. She lived here, but she was always fleeing in her inside. Her world was not in her surroundings, but in her memories from her young life in Catalonia.

Exiles have been a constant in Catalan history during the last centuries. Exile is such a constant in our history that even a famous Swiss living in Barcelona had to exile himself...in Switzerland! Hans Gamper, son of Winterthur, and founder of our beloved Football Club Barcelona had to exile himself to Switzerland during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera in the 20's!

Unfortunately, not all exiles are so lucky. This Monday was the 78th anniversary of the execution of President Lluís Companys who, exiled in France, was arrested by the Gestapo and turned in to the Francoist regime in order to execute him after a military court sentenced him to death.

Catalonia and the Swiss Model

Going back to our present, I must say I lived in Switzerland some years ago. I was working in an insurance company back in Winterthur and I had enough time to learn about this country time-honored tradition with federalism, with bringing democracy as close to the people as possible. I must say I admire it and I am happy to say that Switzerland and Catalonia are great trading partners. 54,7% of exports from Switzerland to Spain, go in fact to Catalonia. The same happens in reverse, Catalonia is the origin of 54,1% of "Spanish" exports to Switzerland.

In fact, I admire it so much that I have even written a book about my experiences in Switzerland. I must say, it is written in Catalan. However, maybe there is a publisher in the room ready to translate it to French or German? It would be a great honor.

Its cities, its mountains, its peoples, its languages, its diversity, its history as a refuge for politicians and artists... The sole fact that Rhaeto-Romanic is official in all Switzerland despite only 50.000 people speak already speaks loudly about the Swiss character and is an example for the whole world.

Centralism is a temptation at which too many countries refuge themselves in order to justify a concentration of power that certainly is not intended to support its citizens rights, its freedoms or their prosperity.



We are here in Geneva, the city of the UN and many international organizations, but also of Calvin. An old Protestant enclave just across the border from France, it is not a coincidence. Swiss federalism has always been an institutional design directed to protect the collective rights of its peoples. To protect their religious and linguistic diversity without opting for uniformity.

Europe should take note from the Swiss if it wants to survive for long.

Spain should have understood long ago that going against its own minorities it is a recipe for its own demise.

Catalonia shall always remember it once we become independent. We shall have a commitment to respect our internal political, cultural and economic diversity if we want to succeed.

The principle of self-determination, respect for human rights and direct democracy is a recipe for success for any democratic society and Switzerland is thus an example on how to face the challenges from the 21st century.

In 2014, Switzerland held 12 referendums. In 2015 6 referendums. In 2016 13 referendums. In 2017, 7 referendums and in 2018 7 more. 45 referendums in only 5 years. Can you imagine anyone going to jail for holding one of them or citizens being beaten in front of the ballot boxes by the police?

In the Swiss Federation, holding a referendum is a democratic routine. In Catalonia, a referendum is, according to Spanish law, an absolute impossibility that if tried is punished with physical and institutional violence. Or, even worse, with jail without trial.

What's going on in Catalonia?

Strange as it may sound to you, today the Catalan government cannot consult its own citizens on any issue. Every political consultation is considered unconstitutional! What kind of democratic constitution forbids consulting the people?

In a world where citizens are demanding more clarity, more accountability and more participation in democratic decisions, many Catalans feel trapped in a state that even though it is superficially democratic, its authoritarian instincts hold the real power. There are many State structures in Spain that never lived through any kind of democratic transition: the judiciary is one of those, the police another one. Some people forget that the article in the Constitution consecrating the unity of Spain was written directly by the military and passed through to the politicians to copy. All this has consequences.



As you know, last year we held an independence referendum, based on our right to self-determination according to international law and treaties. Around 2.3 million people voted, 90% of them did it for independence. Police violence could not stop them. Many of us, for the first time in our lives had to face fear of violence, but we resisted and non-violently defended our ballot boxes with our own bodies.

I advise you all, to read the report of Human Rights Watch about it, where the use of excessive force by the Spanish police is explained.

One year ago, I was not a politician, but a civilian, a cultural activist. But I was peacefully defending my electoral college, with my family, with my friends, with my neighbors, with people that I didn't know and people that I may never see again. We were together all day, waiting for the police to come, ready to pay the price of our commitment to democracy in order to allow the people to cast their votes.

That day something new was born in Catalonia. Something that there is no way back from.

That referendum was done thanks to the commitment of our people, but also to the commitment of our politicians, from our government, from our social leaders. Today, 9 of them are political prisoners, seven are in exile.

I am proud, I am very proud, of their bravery. I am proud to be able to say that our political class has been ready to pay a personal price for their ideas. We are proud of them and our efforts will never falter until they are released, allowed to return home and our right to self-determination is respected.

There is a particular case that explains very well what is going on in Catalonia. Adrià and Tamara are two youngsters accused of terrorism because they participated in the blocking of a road. Terrorism. Now Adrià is in exile in Brussels, he cannot come back home. Tamara is at home, but contrarily she cannot leave. The Spanish "justice" forbids her to leave her town, if she does, she will go to prison. Adrià and Tamara are unknown faces of the Catalan democratic and non-violent resistance to the abuses of the State.

In this political environment, it is a miracle that the pro-independence parties won again the election of 21st December 2017. Elections imposed by Madrid after the forced dissolution of the Catalan Parliament just after our declaration of political independence. That absolute majority in Parliament was certainly against all odds and calculations in Madrid, and with 80% of participation, it showed that the will for self-determination is not a temporary feat of Catalan politics, but a permanent will of democratic majority.

The march ahead



We are in the middle of something big. After the events of the last 12 months, there is a lot of debate about the next step. Some, normally unionist, say that Catalonia is divided into two camps. That there is a lot of tension.

There is certainly tension, but the tension caused in a society that has seen its legitimate political leaders been sent to prison or exile. To be banned from using their political rights. A society that has seen judges override electoral results.

This is why the commitment of my government is to reinstate the legitimate President of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, and all his government at the first chance.

However, there are three very big issues where Catalan society has a consensus according to the polls. A consensus that crosses party lines and appeals directly to citizens.

First, that 80% of the Catalan people is against the existence of the monarchy. Unionist, doubtful or pro-independence. It does not matter. Eight out of 10 Catalans believe that the king has no legitimacy to be the head of state.

Second, 80% of the Catalan people is against the use of repression as a political tool to solve the Catalan conflict, and particularly against the imprisonment of our politicians. 80%. Meaning that even many voters from C's and PP, that are completely supporting the imprisonments, are in fact against it.

Finally, 80% of Catalans support that there is a legally binding referendum agreed between Catalonia and Spain, as there was a legally binding referendum agreed between Scotland and the UK.

From the Spanish side it is notable that in a whole year with political prisoners and exiles, there has not been a single demonstration to support their freedom. Those who turn in Spanish media will be shocked to see that unanimity is the rule: they broke the law, they deserve it. But the question is: which law? Is it a crime to practice democracy? Can it be illegal to vote?

Does someone know that according to Spanish criminal law, both to declare independence and to organize a referendum are not a crime to be punished for? Spanish politicians, prosecutors and judges have read their own criminal code?

Maybe they have done it. And this is why they had to invent the crimes of rebellion and sedition against our politicians and social leaders. As both crimes need to be associated with violence, judges and prosecutors made it up.

It must be noted that in all the massive demonstrations with more than 1M held in Catalonia during the last 8 years, there has never been a violent incident. Never. Not even a broken glass. Always peacefully, always civic, always radically democratic.



Yesterday was the first anniversary of Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart imprisonment. They are Catalan social leaders that are accused of having instigated violence in a protest that was completely non-violent. And they have been in jail for a year. What's more, there are videos where they were even calling people to go home!

One year in pre-trial prison is a long time. A long and stolen time for them and their families. Our leaders are treated worse than common criminals just as a revenge against them. Even the former President of the Supreme and Constitutional Court of Spain, Mr Pascual Sala, has said that "rebellion charges are impossible to sustain". But they are still in prison.

It is also great news that Amnesty International has called for their immediate release and dropping the charges against them. In addition, our government hopes that this will be the first of many international organizations that shall speak up against this unjust imprisonment.

It must be remembered that the crimes of rebellion and sedition can be punished with between 15 and 30 years in prison. The state prosecutor, now nominated and dependent of Pedro Sanchez, has already leaked that will not drop such charges.

It seems that it does not matter that the court of Schleswig-Holstein rejected the crime of rebellion in President Puigdemont case. It does not matter that Belgium plainly rejected the euro-arrest warrant. All informed people in Europe know that there was no rebellion or sedition in Catalonia. Simply because there was no violence at all and voting cannot be a crime. However, the will of the Spanish justice is not serve its name, but to punish. The current Spanish Government is doing nothing in to charge things.

Everyone knows that the Spanish right-wing parties are very radical in their belief in a unitary Spain. They treat it as a sacred entity, as if borders were eternal, as something that cannot change democratically. But they are not the only ones, till now PSOE seems to think the same. This is why there is such a media pressure against any possible opening by the government, and this is one of the reasons why an international mediation is so urgent.

The judiciary process will start soon. The moment when a sentence of many years of prison against Catalan politicians is closer than many think, and the Catalan society will not accept it. Neither will my government. Because it is unacceptable in itself that a democratic act as a referendum is, is being treated as a criminal crime. Because it is unacceptable to treat ballot boxes as a sources of violence, and not of solutions.

If they want to send our government to prison for so many years, I can tell you, that my government and myself will not remain indifferent to such a violation of human rights.

We will answer to it in a radically democratic, peacefully and non-violent way. With the same spirit, we acted one year ago during the day of our self-determination referendum. We will never stop in order to defend democracy and our right to self-determination.

We live in 2018 Europe, and we are not going to tolerate a revival of the Spanish Inquisition.



Why a mediation is needed in Catalonia

At this point in time, I guess it becomes obvious why Catalonia needs an international mediation in order to find a solution for its future. But let's go back in time again to understand it more thoroughly.

In order to understand why do we need international actors to be part of negotiations it is fundamental to know that even when there has been a formal deal between Catalonia and Spain, as it was the new Charter of Autonomy of 2006, the Spanish side of the equation has not complied with its terms: on the contrary, it has broken them.

Some will say that now that Sánchez is Prime Minister, everything will change. That is unfortunately false. Of course, he speaks more about dialogue than Mr. Rajoy, but he has not shown any will to move beyond that. Sadly, Sánchez and the Socialist Party was a necessary collaborator of this year events. They voted for the dissolution of the Catalan Government and Parliament. And they have done nothing to change the situation of our political prisoners and exiles. Neither regarding our right to self-determination.

How can we trust a government that has agreed to send the police to beat our citizens during a referendum? How can we trust a government that waged economic war against our people by retiring deposits from our banks and blackmailing companies to move out of Catalonia? How can we trust a government that protects a king, that instead of being a referee, behaved last year like a hooligan with a crown? How can we trust a government that collaborated in suspending our autonomy? A government that has been de facto supporting the imprisonment and exile of our political and social leaders? How can a government that allows all this be trusted?

The need for an international mediation has thus two sides: first, the need to ensure that a political solution is actively looked for. Secondly, to ensure that if ever a political solution is agreed with the Spanish government, it is complied with by Madrid afterwards.

Finally, we all know what Madrid position on all this is. Complete rejection. But this is why, we need public political pressure in order to make mediation possible.

Madrid's refusal to have a mediation cannot be an excuse for international actors to have a constructive role. We live in a time when authoritarian politicians and regimes are gathering strength. Also inside the EU and Europe. The precedent set by Spain with Catalonia is a very dangerous one: can the imprisonment of political rivals be a legitimate tool for governments to solve their problems. What is going to happen with the idea of democracy, solidarity and plurality of Europe?

Moreover, without a mediation, the Catalan issue will worsen and will keep centering all political attention in Spain.



This is a problem for many reasons:

- If Catalonia centers the whole debate, there is no room for a debate on many other issues that need the attention of Madrid's Government. Is education working well when school leave is still around 25%? Has public administration been reformed? What is the demographic trend of Spanish society? Should wages be centralized or decentralized?
- These are only some debates for which there is no time nor political capital to spend into. All Spanish political parties are focused on who is softer or who is harder on Catalonia. Who gives privileges to the Catalan people or who wants to keep the hard line. Who is in favor and who is against of the use of Catalan language in schools. Etc.

However, the world is moving, and it's not going to stop to wait for Spain to solve its internal problems. Europe needs Spain to be prepared for the next recession.

- The Catalan question can be solved easily if there is a political will. As I said before, a referendum in the Scottish style has the support of 80% of Catalans. That would be a clean and quick solution. In contrast, it is impossible to reform the Spanish Constitution and being a demographic minority Catalans will never have recognized their right to self-determination. A new Charter of Autonomy would be absurd for everyone, after last year referendum of self-determination and declaration of independence.
- There is, of course, another option. That Catalonia doesn't find a solution in Spain and will continue its quest for self-determination without Madrid's consent. Some will label this as unilateral, however, that wouldn't be fair as the real unilateral action here is the systematic rejection by Madrid of a bilaterally agreed referendum. After the repression suffered this year and the many years in prison that our politicians and social leaders could be condemned to, the Catalan case for a remedial secession is more and more strong.

As long as there are political prisoners and exiles in Catalonia and our right to self-determination is rejected, both Catalonia and Spain will suffer from political instability. Spain's public debt has reached 100% of GDP and Catalonia is, with 16% of its population, an economy worth 200 billion euros, as much as Finland or Portugal. Catalonia is also the main export region with 25% of the total and the main producer of patents of the state with 38% of them, 3 times its natural per capita ratio.

Political instability is not good for anyone. Either Spain let's Catalonia go, or negotiates in good faith. Any other option is not feasible. Last week the Spanish VP denied that the Scottish referendum was ever agreed with London in order to deny that Catalonia has anything similar to it. So, the real question is: for how long can the Spanish political class deny reality? How in the 21st Century is it possible to rule over nations without the consent of their peoples?



Generalitat de Catalunya
Departament de la Presidència

Oficina del President

Gabinet de Comunicació del President

As you see, it is my will and the will of my government to find a political solution based on the right of self-determination. However, we see that the Spanish political class is not at all open to it. This is why an international mediation is needed. We'll push our case in all international fora. The future of Catalonia and Spain, and the quality of democracy in Europe is at stake.

Thank you very much,

Quim Torra i Pla

President of the Government of Catalonia