



THE ONLY SOLUTION FOR CATALONIA AND SPAIN: DIALOGUE AND REFORM

Javi López, September 29th 2015

On September 27 important regional elections took place in Catalonia. It was the third election in five years and there was a record high voter turnout of 77%.

The elections were presented as a plebiscite and a substitute for a referendum by those in favour of Catalonia's independence. The party of the current Catalan Government (CDC), the leading party of the opposition (ERC) and a number of independent candidates made up a joint list ("Junts pel Sí" in Catalan, which means "Together for the Yes") with the objective of carrying out a unilateral declaration of independence outside of the Spanish constitutional framework.

Junts pel Sí won the elections with 62 seats out 135 and 39% of the votes, but lost the plebiscite, as there was no majority of votes favourable to independence. Together with the CUP, a pro-independence list from the extreme left which has already recognised the defeat of the "plebiscite", they obtained 47% of the votes and a majority of seats. The difference between seats and votes is due to the fact that the rural vote is overrepresented in the Catalan Parliament.

The formation of a Catalan government, with the support of the two pro-independence forces, now starts. It will be difficult to manage due to its heterogeneity. The continuity of Artur Mas, the current President of the Catalan Government and candidate of Junts Pel Sí, at the head of the Catalan Government is in danger. This is because the CUP is not willing to vote for his inauguration due to his pro-austerity policies and the serious corruption cases in which his party is involved. The CUP, which is key in ensuring a pro-independence parliamentary majority, supports quitting the EU, the euro and NATO.

As a result of society's polarization, Ciudadanos, a centre-right Spanish nationalist party, came second in the elections. The Socialists overcame very bad pre-election polls and remained as the third party in the Parliament with 16 seats and continued as the first party of the left. Support for the conservative Popular Party fell dramatically and they will now have 11 seats, down from 19. The Catalan brand of Podemos also scored a bad result, obtaining only 11 seats.

The pro-independence majority in Catalonia did not obtain a democratic mandate to push for a unilateral rupture. Yet the biggest loser in Catalan politics is the option of not doing anything. The central government has denied the existence of a serious problem with regards to the

relation between Catalonia and Spain. This strategy has only helped to increase the support for independence. Catalonia is today split into two halves.

Spain's territorial crisis is intimately linked to its institutional crisis. The agreements that lied at the basis of the democratic transition and the 1978 Constitution have been undermined by time, young generations and the effects of the economic crisis. The rise of Podemos and Ciudadanos, which campaign for a regeneration of Spain's political life, is a proof of the new times.

The left is one of the great losers of the current situation. In Catalonia the social agenda has been completely overshadowed by the debate on independence. Centre-right political forces, whether pro-independence or Spanish nationalists, dominate the political system in a society which, however, declares itself to be mostly progressive. The conflict reinforces the Popular Party and limits the possibilities of a Socialist victory in the upcoming general elections, as Catalonia has traditionally been one of the major sources of votes for the latter. The paradox is that in order to find a solution to the Catalan question the defeat of Mariano Rajoy is urgently needed.

Against this context, the Catalan and Spanish socialists have been working during the past few years on a proposal for a constitutional reform which would recognise the particularity of Catalonia and its national identity, improve the representation of the regions in the decision-making process and produce a fairer distribution of tax revenue among the regions. In short, we are asking for a reform of Spain in a federal direction.

In the face of the PP's paralysis and pro-independence sentiments, we, the Socialists, defend the only possible path: the path of dialogue, negotiation and agreement. We are pushing for a reform which should be endorsed and voted on by all Spanish citizens and include constitutional improvements with regards to social rights and democratic transparency.