

# *The confusion of independence*

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Since the beginning of the euro crisis, since the first rescue of Greece, one of the issues that has created great confusion has been whether that country would leave, or be expelled, from, the Eurozone (and, by extension, the European Union). The difficulty - or impossibility - of paying debts and fulfilling *Troika* programmes of austerity has often led the Greeks to raise the flag of independence from the euro. German frustration with *the non-compliant Greeks* has also provoked calls for exclusion or, in other words, an *imposed* independence. In both cases these are more rhetorical threats than an authentic solution to the crisis. But rhetoric is often far from trivial, it fuels confusion, tension.

Confusion, because these threatened actions not being the solution to the problem, obfuscate the way forward, and distract from the steps that must be taken. It is not very difficult to see independence is not the solution to the problem (which does not mean that it can not happen) either for Greece or for Germany. For the former, because the morning after they would have a State which was yes, more sovereign, but which was even weaker in facing the same problems; they could get back the drachma, but what value would the old currency have? The Germans do not need to expel the Greeks from the euro if what they want is to reduce transfers and, if they were to expel them they would lose legitimacy in leading the integration project of diversity called Europe, a leadership that for Germany has turned out to be a great way to compete in the global economy.

Confusion, because shouts for independence veil contradictory visions of what, in fact, should be done. The Greek clamour shows, on the one hand, an emancipatory will to *take the reins of one's destiny*, of *empowerment*, and not accept impositions from outside; but, on the other hand, the clamour also masks the self-deception of not facing up to the real situation – claiming to be victimized by the ‘imposed solutions’ – and maintain the acquired rights. The German voices express, on the one hand, rationality - the union is not, and cannot be, a blank cheque - and, on the other, contempt and a lack of solidarity. When independence is not an argument, but a clamour, these antagonistic differences are silenced and confusion often favours reactionary views, postponing decisions and feeding sectarian prejudices. In short, transforming the crisis into a deep recession.

Instead, when it is clear that the exit of Greece from the Eurozone is not a solution, as it is not the transfer of its debt problem to the other countries of the euro (because the debt is a simple reflection of historical problems), it is when these moorings are released and it is possible to face the situation and one can start sailing.

The dialogue is (and should have been made) clearer: it is the responsibility of the Greeks to offer solutions, and to implement credible policies; it is the responsibility of the Eurozone countries to help a member in crisis and engage their various weapons to support it (ECB, MEDE, etc.), but since risk sharing does not mean making permanent transfers, this responsibility is not a blank cheque: it is conditional. Conditional on what is possible, which in turn depends on what is done (for example, as was foreseeable, not all debts could be paid, and the pension policy had to be changed to make it credible). But the agreements that affect

both parties are a common responsibility, not a one-sided one: for example, how and in what time-frames the transfers need to be repaid (this should have been part of the *Memorandums of Understanding*, but the time-frames imposed lacked *common sense*)

Catalonia is not Greece, although both reflect how complex it is to establish political unions in diversity, solidarity in adversity. They have something in common: the way they leave the euro-crisis will determine their growth, well-being and identity in the coming decades. Catalonia is not Greece; among many other things, it is not a State, although it is easy to argue that it has more capacity for self-government ... if it could exercise it. In this sense, the question of whether you want to be a State of the European Union seems fair and reasonable, as it could have been to ask the Greeks if they wanted to continue in the Eurozone. These are questions of great depth and emotion; we will leave aside the latter to assess the former.

As I have said, it was not the right question for Greece despite the fact that Papandreou proposed it in November 2011 and, it seems, Merkel suggested it in May 2012). Is it the right question for Catalonia?

It is difficult to answer a question rationally when it has already been politicized, the ink runs and it touches us so closely. This is why I think of Greece, which is also Mediterranean, but is further away from me. Unfortunately, in the Catalan clamour for independence (better to call it by its name) I also see confusion and similar contradictory visions: the *empowerment* of September 11 and the dream of those who are already opening a Catalan embassy in Paris; the rationality in those who ask for *seny* (common moderate sense), remember the seriousness of the crisis and speak of federalisms and, at the same time, the contempt of those who use the crisis to postpone decisions on a historical problem, and their speech is pure rhetoric.

I think of Greece and, as the theory of decisions (and games) teaches us, I try to see the final solution and, using backward induction, see which is the right way. Confusion. I understand the frustration of those who say that "attempts to fit Catalonia into the Spanish State are today wishful thinking not a path", but I do not see, as others do not see, the route of the Catalan State's fit into the European Union. It is not for lack of imagination or for a simple economic calculation, but because it is a political option that is not on the agenda of the European

Union, and it is on the interest of many Member States that it is not, even less so in the Eurozone, and nobody with a minimum of *seny* wants to balkanize the problem. The confusion can transform the desire for a 'Catalunya a state of the European Union' into a resentment towards Europe, a new distraction in times of crisis.

On the other hand, when it is clear that as long as the European Union is a Europe of States (and the new proposal of eleven Member States, including Spain, strengthens this direction, EL PAÍS September 19, 2012), the Catalan State of the European Union is a daydream, to use the words of Juan Luis Cebrián (EL PAÍS, September 23, 2012). When this confusion has been cleared away, it will be both possible and necessary to confront the new situation that 30 years of autonomy - historical and less historical - has created and that the demonstration of September 11 in Barcelona, the crisis of the savings banks, and the cuts of the Autonomous Communities, have reminded us.

It is possible to see that, precisely because the European Union - and, especially, the Eurozone - absorb a large part of our political-economic space, different options are possible within the Spanish State, without the King losing his crown.

With a good dose of cold rationality on the part of all, the emancipatory *empowerment* will of the Catalan can, and should, help to find a better political union in diversity, to find solidarity without grievances in the adversity of the crisis. Perhaps this is the strategy, not without risk, of the Catalan Government: the *empowerment* and the question of great significance as a bargaining chip. Perhaps from the confrontation a new understanding will be born. But perhaps this confusion is not necessary...

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