



Catalonia and the right to self-determination: an international perspective

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Boas tardes e obrigado por terem vindo a esta conferência sobre a Catalunha e o direito à autodeterminação.

Em primeiro lugar queria agradecer a oportunidade que me presta o ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa de poder exprimir em primeira mão o que está a acontecer no nosso país.

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O meu mais sincero agradecimento ao professor Filipe Vasconcelos Romão, investigador na área da política internacional no ISCTE-IUL e autor do livro “Espanha e Catalunha. Choque de Nacionalismos”.

Estou feliz por estar aqui em Lisboa porque gosto de pensar que somos duas nações unidas por algum sentido de fraternidade.

De facto, tenho muita pena em não conseguir falar em português hoje. Falar na língua do outro e estar disposto a entendê-lo é, e deve ser, o princípio mais básico sobre como concebemos as relações entre os nossos povos: desde o respeito total perante a identidade do outro. Neste sentido, acho que foi um gesto muito positivo quando Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, político catalão e ex-vice-presidente do nosso governo, visitou Lisboa e falou em português. As nossas línguas são a alma das nossas nações.

Falando sobre visitas passadas de políticos catalães, quero lembrar a todos que há apenas 3 anos, nesta mesma universidade, Raül Romeva, nosso ex-ministro de Relações Exteriores, fez um discurso em defesa do direito da Catalunha a decidir seu próprio futuro. Agora ele está preso, enfrentando um julgamento injusto e acusado de rebelião e sedição, arriscando até 16 anos de prisão. Quero lembrar o Raül, um bom homem, cujo único crime foi defender democraticamente suas convicções. E quero agradecer ao Instituto Universitário de Lisboa por ser um baluarte da liberdade de expressão, apesar das pressões que sofreu.

Portugal e Catalunha, Catalunha e Portugal. Partilhamos o privilégio de estar em lados opostos da Península Ibérica. Um no Oeste, olhando para o Atlântico, Portugal. O outro no Este, olhando para o Mediterrâneo, a Catalunha.

Ambas são nações que olham para o exterior. Nações que cresceram com base no comércio com o mundo exterior, e que são hoje grandes parceiras comerciais entre elas. Pequenos países, como Portugal e a Catalunha, já não precisam ou sentem a pressão de fazer parte de um estado maior com o intuito de terem acesso a um mercado maior para seus produtos. A nossa adesão à UE permite-nos negociar livremente com tarifas e barreiras perante o comércio com cada vez menores constrangimentos.



Pequenas nações como a Catalunha e Portugal são, em média, mais prósperas do que as grandes. Mais democráticas e pacíficas.

I am here because Catalonia is at a crossroads. These are grave times for us. With the existence of political prisoners, exiles, and hundreds of Catalans being investigated and judged, only truth and justice can be our way forward and our guide to freedom.

A Catalan poet, Zoraida Burgos, said once that we must look for our roots in the mythical idea of peace and freedom.

Catalonia, like Portugal, is an old European nation, and its people are diverse in their origins, in their languages, in their beliefs...it is certainly a society attached to its native language, culture, and tradition, but it strongly believes in the value of diversity and openness to the world, and at the same time it knows that if we lose our values, we lose everything.

I speak about a nation with a millennial history and culture. A nation that was free once and wants to be free again. A successful nation in many fields that now wants to hold its future in its own hands.

Catalonia and Portugal are also united by history. Teixeira de Pascoes said 100 years ago: "The word Catalonia has in the Portuguese ear the sound of brotherhood, a brotherhood that comes from far away...from 1640. History twinned our peoples".

It is true. Many Portuguese and many Catalan may have forgot it, but at the end of 1640, when Portugal declared its restoration of independence from Spain on December 1st, just 45 days later, Pau Claris, President of the Generalitat of Catalonia, also declared the Republic.

Luckily, for the Portuguese people, you were able to keep your independence, however Catalonia not only had to re-integrate itself into the Spanish crown after a long war, but also lost a part of its territory to France. Spanish King and his private, Conde Duque de Olivares, focused many military efforts to achieve such objective.

What came afterwards is widely known. While Catalonia has been trying in one way or another to preserve its rights as a people inside Spain or has tried to separate itself in order to escape from the abuses of Madrid centralism and repression, Portugal has preserved its nationhood, and has continued to be independent until today. It wasn't easy, but at least it has not been forced to spend so many energies into its survival as a nation. Portuguese language has never been put at risk and the finances of the Portuguese are managed in Lisbon, not in Madrid. I wonder how Portugal would be if it had been under Castillian rule. It would probably be a history very similar to the Catalan one: always trying again and again to reach your political freedom. If it had been the contrary situation, and Catalonia was an independent now, but Portugal a Spanish province, I have no doubt that the Catalan people would be supporting you in your struggle.

Today, with the repressive answer of Spain's political establishment to the Catalan question, the Iberian Peninsula is losing its biggest opportunity to reach its maximum geopolitical weight. Today Spain, our biggest neighbor, is so deeply obsessed with keeping its own unity that suppresses its own geopolitical strength and misuses it in order to justify its undemocratic behavior. How big would it be the influence of the Iberian nations in Europe and the world if their relation was based on brotherhood and freedom?

It's is time for an alliance of Iberian nations for democratic development. An alliance of equals that can reach to the world and can build a better Peninsula, looking to the future and



with an increased cooperation in all fields. I would like to see Catalonia and Portugal further cooperating the coming years, and this is why we will reopen the Delegation in Lisbon very soon and I want to thank all the Catalans that during this time of uncertainty have contributed to keep strong the relation between our nations.

Meanwhile, the solution for the Catalan conflict, de facto, has only one way: self-determination.

Self-determination is the key for a joint future, based on democracy and mutual respect. The future of the Iberian Peninsula is not only a plurinationality, which is undeniable, but also a plurality of independent states. Allies among them, but not trying to meddle into each other. I hope to see the day when an Iberian Council will exist to increase our mutual cooperation based on our mutual right to self-determination.

Today while self-determination is treated by Spanish institutions like a crime, it is recognized in the Portuguese Constitution in its seventh article: “o direito dos povos à autodeterminação e independência”.

Obviously, Scotland and Quebec exercised their legitimate right to self-determination in our recent past, and no one could imagine the British or Canadian government sending the police to beat voters or using the judiciary to put in prison Scottish or Québécois leaders. Meanwhile in Spain one month before the referendum, Carlos Lesmes, President of the Supreme Court, said “the rule of law in Spain is based on the unity of the state”. Accordingly, every violation of human rights that the Spanish government has promoted or consented to in the last year, is considered legal if it is directed to keep Catalonia inside the Spanish kingdom.

But why is this happening now? Why does Spain act in that way?

Unfortunately, Spanish transition was incomplete even if highly applauded. It left untouched the Francoist structures of the state, particularly the judiciary, the police and the army. Contrary to the case of Portugal, there has never been a real look into the past in Spain and Franco has been buried with all honors in a fascist mausoleum paid with public money for the last 44 years.

However, masks are falling regarding the true nature of the Spanish state. This week a manifesto by 41 French senators was made public calling for the end of repression, a political solution for Catalonia and the mediation of the EU. A week ago it was 700 Italian intellectuals. But I want to remain in October 2017 it was Portuguese intellectuals who supported the Catalan people, one year ago it was the Portuguese Assembly that approved a text that said: “Apela a que seja encontrada uma solução política a questao nacional em Espanha, no respeito pela vontade dos seus povos e, consequentemente, da vontade do povo catalao, e da salvaguarda dos direitos sociais e outros direitos democráticos dos povos de Espanha”.

A political solution, for a political problem. This is what the European public opinion requests.

Silence is not an option. Allowing the existence of political prisoners and exiles inside the EU is a precedent that will have stark consequences for the future of the same Union. Other countries may follow the example of Madrid if Brussels and European capitals don't stand up for human rights.



Moreover, in times of growing authoritarianism, defending the right to self-determination of Catalonia is in Europe's geopolitical self-interest.

It is in Europe's own interest to protect small nations and defend the principle of self-determination that is at the core of its own national existence.

As long as there are political prisoners, exiles, and the rights of the Catalan people continue to be denied, the door will remain open for authoritarian countries to feel justified in repressing their national minorities.

A Catalan independent state would be an example of how to resolve historical conflict in a democratic way, and would also be a partner in the effort to promote a more democratic world, a more European world.

After the events of the last 12 months, there is a lot of debate about the next step.

There is certainly tension in Catalonia, but the tension caused in a society that has seen its legitimate political leaders be sent to prison or exile. To be banned from using their political rights. A society that has seen judges override electoral results. A society that sees how innocent men are forced to go into hunger strike in order to protest and defend their most basic rights.

Today, there are 3 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. 8 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.

And third, 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.

Unfortunately anti-Catalan speech arouse spirits and give votes in the rest of Spain, and this is exactly why Spain will never reform itself to accommodate our aspirations.

Even when 1 million Catalans demonstrate every year on the 11th of September, the Catalan National Day, even when 100.000 Catalans demonstrated in Madrid in an unseen show of force and determination, the result is always the same: that Spanish politicians either dismiss our democratic claims or directly call the judges to act against the pro-independence movement. In fact, the state prosecutor has just launched a lawsuit against me for disobedience with the will of banning me from office.

Another example, yesterday the State lawyers, directly dependent of the Socialist government of Pedro Sánchez, announced that would indict the citizens that peacefully voted on the referendum. Indict the citizens that peacefully voted in the referendum!

So, Mr. Sánchez should know that I was one of them, that I voted and peacefully defended my right to vote. And I would do it again, and again, and again. And the Spanish people should know that we are thousands of Catalan citizens ready to accuse ourselves as guilty of the crimes of having voted, guilty of having defended our idea of democracy, guilty of wanting



to exercise our right to self-determination. If they are guilty, I am guilty too because I also voted in the referendum. If voting is a crime, I am guilty. If defending democracy is a crime, I am guilty. If defending the right to self-determination is a crime, I am for sure guilty.

Se votar é crime, sou culpado. Se defender a democracia é crime, sou culpado. Se defender o direito á autodeterminação é crime, sou também culpado.

That referendum was done thanks to the commitment of our people, but also to the commitment of our politicians, from our government and from our social leaders.

Now the trial against our political prisoners has started. It is scary that Catalan politicians and social leaders have spent more than 1 year (some of them 1 year and a half), in pre-trial prison and now can be condemned to a decade in jail just because they organized a referendum on self-determination. It is scary to follow the trial and see how the State imposes a false storytelling of violence on the Catalan people. Everyone saw the truth, you the Portuguese people saw the truth, but they don't seem to care and meanwhile the right to defense of our political and social leaders is continuously violated.

The late Gene Sharpe said in one of his books: "Freedom is not something which rulers "give" their subjects. It is something achieved in the interaction between society and government".

Today Catalonia faces the most important of its challenges: the peaceful and non-violent struggle for freedom.

Freedom of speech. Freedom of conscience. Freedom of assembly. Freedom of demonstration. Freedom to have rights. Freedom to choose our destiny in a democratic way.

If Spain is really a democratic state, it should listen to the demands of the people of Catalonia. Spain should listen to Amnesty International and the World Organization Against Torture when they call for the release of our political prisoners. Spain should listen to the American PEN club. Spain should listen to the Canadian and American academies of political science. Spain should listen to Human Rights Watch when it says that on the first of October there was an excessive use of police violence. Spain should listen to the UN rapporteurs, it should listen to the Nobel Peace Prize winners that call for the end of repression. It should listen to all the democratic voices around the world that are calling for a political solution for a political problem. Without threats.

The trial is showing to the world how ridiculous it is to suppress a democratic movement in 21st Century Europe. As I said before, French politicians have protested this week with a manifesto, Italian politicians and intellectuals did the same last week. International observers to the trial cannot understand how such a violation of fundamental rights is being allowed. And meanwhile, the Spanish Foreign Ministry uses public funds to justify the imprisonment of our colleagues.

Also the Catalan people is watching the trial. And every day that passes, that 80% that rejects repression is more united in knowing that our political prisoners should be released and our exiled allowed to return home. All the trial is made up to justify the imprisonments, and this is why as Emile Zola wrote, we have to say "J'accuse" "Jo acuso" "Eu acuso".

Coming back to the beginning, the potential of the Iberian Peninsula will keep being unrealized as long as Catalonia's rights as a nation are suppressed. Catalonia's people and



government deserves to have the same rights as Portugal or Spain in order to approach the changes of the 21st century with the proper toolbox of an independent state.

The goal of the Catalan people is self-determination, and our way is democracy and nonviolence. I would like to finalize with some words from a famous poem by Manuel Alegre, *Liberdade*:

“Esta chama ateadada no meu peito
por quem morro por quem vivo este nome rosa e cardo
por quem livre sou cativo.
Sobre esta pagina escrevo o teu nome: Liberdade”.

On the page of democracy, the Catalan people will write the name of our freedom.

Quim Torra i Pla

President de la Generalitat de Catalunya