

## 19.11.2014 The right to self-determination. A historic three months for Europe!

The combination of events in Scotland and in Catalonia has had a considerable impact in Europe. The right to self-determination, the freedom to decide, has been claimed by two European peoples who have hitherto had no voice on the European stage. By freeing their political expression, by challenging the States by democratic means, Scots and Catalans have opened a breach. It is not one that will soon be closed.

The force of these moves towards self-determination lies above all in the capacity for mobilisation which is being developed in the territories concerned. And this needs consideration in the longer term, beyond the moment of decisive mobilisation, and all the work that needs to be carried out to build the foundations must be assessed.

The national movements in Scotland and Catalonia have been on the top rung of the institutional ladder for many years. They manage high-performance administrations in the service of their citizens, and they organise a dynamic and structured civil society around the struggle for identity. Their leaders are experienced in managing public affairs and they have demonstrated their capacity to take on the burden of the society that they want to build. It is this strong political and societal infrastructure which forms the hidden part of the iceberg, the crucial part which, when the day comes, will provide the necessary basis for developing the decisive power relationship with the State.

Scotland was thus able to force a referendum because under the devolved system achieved in 1997 Alex Salmond's nationalist government, strengthened by its economic and social achievements for the benefit of the Scottish people in its first term, won an absolute majority of seats at the Scottish Assembly elections of 2011. In September 2012 David Cameron was obliged to agree to the referendum which was the SNP's key policy during its election campaign. However, support for independence at that point remained weak, 20 - 25% according to the polls, a figure which was rapidly overtaken and which rose to 45 % by 18 September, thanks to the extraordinary work carried out at every level of Scottish society, to the extent that the "no" win was transformed into a victory for the SNP, leaving the Scottish nationalists more than ever the masters of the field\*.

In Catalonia, the position of strength of Catalan nationalists could be measured by the length of the queues at the polling stations that were "improvised" as a result of the decision of the Spanish constitutional court to outlaw an official referendum. But this response from Catalan society has been many years in the making.

The idea of consulting the Catalan people has been taking root for five years, since September 2009 when for the first time one of Catalonia's 947 municipalities, Arenys del Munt, population 8,000, organised a "citizens' referendum" on Catalan independence. No fewer than 166 other small and medium-sized municipalities followed suit in December 2009. Between March 2010 and April 2011, five other "referendum days" were organised to cover all the municipalities of Catalonia up to the largest, Barcelona. In total 800,000 Catalan supported these ad hoc initiatives, making it possible to set up a volunteer system which showed its mettle on Sunday 9 November 2014.

The fight for the freedom of a people is a long struggle. In 50 years of building the European Union, no stateless nation has managed to impose its right to self-determination. And these last three months have been a historic time for Europe. Catalans and Scots have not yet reached the end of their journeys, but each of them has now reached a point of no return.

The engines of the European Free Alliance which are the Scottish National Party and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya have taken a decisive step along a new road. All the stateless nations of Europe are encouraged by their success. Each, with its own individual political situation, has gained impetus on its own path towards empowerment in the context of the European project.

And Corsica is part of this.