

27.5.2016 Bloque Nacionalista Valencià. A decisive party conference

Spain is in the full throes of political crisis. Six months on from the parliamentary elections of December 2015, new elections are to be held in June 2016 because it has proved impossible to form a coalition to govern Spain. The dominant party, the Partido Popular, the traditional Spanish right is embroiled in massive corruption scandals. One of the epicentres of these scandals, which are so far off the scale that they're hard to measure, is the city of Valencia, capital of the Pais Valencià, which is collapsing under the debts inherited from mismanagement. The results are plain to see in the form of the abandoned building sites scattered across the cityscape. The local TV station has been shut down and public finances are in disarray. Youth unemployment stands at 50%.

The Pais Valencià was a bastion of the post-Franco right, riddled with clientelism and regularly re-elected with more than 50% of the vote. But the corruption scandal has lost them everything: the Generalitat, now controlled by a left-nationalist alliance, and even the city of Valencia, whose new mayor belongs to the Compromís coalition which has the Bloque Nacionalista Valencià as its largest component. All the elected representatives of the outgoing majority group are up before the courts, and the sums siphoned off are dizzying.

Faced with this emergency, with the traditional left impotent, ineffective and devoid of credibility, an alternative sprang up in the form of the Compromís coalition, an initiative taken by Bloque a few years ago, by allying with a green left party and other non-nationalist alternatives forces. Compromís brought together many aspirations. It took a seat at the European elections in June 2014, and at the last elections to the Generalitat it became the third force in the Pais Valencià. Its alliance with the socialists allowed them to take power and overturn the regime of the corrupt.

While the Socialist party has stagnated, Compromís has moved up to the second rank of political forces behind the Partido Popular, still the largest grouping but continuing to lose ground. The new legislative election of June next may well mark a new step forward, and bring the coalition up to become the leading political force in the Pais Valencià. In a few years Compromís has become a booming autonomous political movement that has built up a strong direct membership, including the new mayor of Valencia.

For the Bloque Nacionalista Valencià, this electoral success is a double-edged sword. It has given it a representation that it had never had previously. The president of the party, Enric Morena, has become the president of the elected assembly of the Generalitat. They have ministers, dozens of elected members, and they have a presence in the main assemblies of the Pais Valencià. But the Compromís coalition is not nationalist, and the nationalist message is struggling to be heard despite the electoral successes. For the Bloque, the dilemma is a deep one. Does it have to be overwhelmed by Compromís? Does it need to return to a configuration where Bloque regains its autonomy to relaunch its demands for self-determination? Activists and leaders have come close to splitting with the Conference ending in serious deadlock. However, concessions on both sides allowed the party to maintain its unity. The new elected representatives are from two trends, like the executive pairing formed by Agueda Micò and Rafa Cardonell.

In the end, the democratic debates within the party and the final compromise were conducted in an excellent spirit of responsibility and have strengthened the Bloque. Their campaign for the parliamentary elections has therefore got under way in the best shape, and, while the commitment to Compromís has not been put into question given the urgency of the situation in the Pais Valencià, there has been room for the desire and determination to take a strongly nationalist approach to make themselves seen.

For this fast-growing party, its recent membership of the EFA represents a nationalist guarantee that was given a ringing endorsement by all the activists present on the occasion of the speeches given during the final session by François Alfonsi and Lorena Lopez de la Calle, EFA President and Vice-President.