

## 27.3.2017 Catalonia, Scotland. Events are speeding up

By mere coincidence, both Scotland and Catalonia were at the forefront of the European stage on 13 March 2017. The launch of the Brexit process by Teresa May's conservative British government with no plan for a precautionary measure to uphold Scotland's links with Europe despite the fact that 62% of Scots voted against Brexit, led the Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon to announce on 13 March 2017 her intention to call a referendum on Scottish independence at the end of 2018 or the beginning of 2019, i.e. before Great Britain actually leaves the European Union.

On the same day, the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal sentenced Artur Mas to two years of loss of civic rights. Artur Mas was the President of the Generalitat de Catalunya at the time of the consultative referendum that saw 2.3 million Catalans go to "parallel" polling stations to support the Catalan people's "right to decide". More than 80% chose to support independence. This sentence, that Artur Mas will appeal and will take to the European Court of Justice, marks a turning point. Indeed, by sentencing an elected leader for organising an electoral consultation, Spain has taken a further step forward in the denial of democracy. This, in turn, will lead to a further step being taken in the march towards independence initiated by the nationalist majority in the Catalan Parliament 18 months ago. This majority, bolstered by the vote on the budget, has also announced a referendum on self-determination for this autumn.

What could be the outcome in each one of these cases? In Scotland, the European Union would be obliged to recognise their own, i.e. the 62% of the Scottish people who voted in favour of Europe. In Catalonia, Catalan independence is making headway. A force such as Podemos, including the mayor of Barcelona Ada Colau, has made very clear its total opposition to the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal's decision and has declared that nothing will be able to break the democratic decision of the Catalan people if it is validly made. The official position of the leftist party in favour of Catalonia's "right to decide" breaks apart the anti-Catalan front in Madrid.

In Barcelona, the nationalist majority has created parallel institutions to the state institutions, for tax collection and for social security, and these will be put into operation as soon as the referendum result is given. In September 2017, if the Yes side wins, Catalonia will launch de facto its separation from Madrid.

In Edinburgh, by timing the referendum just before Brexit comes into effect, Scotland wants to advance its exit from the United Kingdom and remain European. Having been faced with a "wall of intransigence" by London, Edinburgh has chosen to set in motion this separation procedure that, if the Yes side wins, will lead to the independence of Scotland and its continued membership of the European Union when the United Kingdom leaves. The two processes won't run problem-free. Madrid and London have announced that they will oppose these consultations. And there is, of course, the question of the outcome of the vote. In Scotland, "No" won in 2014 and the increase in "Yes" is not yet great enough, according to opinion polls.

In Catalonia, the nationalist parties have obtained a majority of seats in the Parliament, with a total of 48% of the votes. But the campaign is underway and the Catalan people, just like the Scottish people, are now looking history directly in the face.