

The historical illegitimacy of Catalan separatism

Lecture given at the European Parliament in Brussels on 6 March 2019 at the event organized by the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Vox: “Catalonia, region of Spain”.

It is my duty and responsibility to briefly explain to you **the falsehood of the historical legitimacy for the secession of Catalonia**. Given the limited amount of time, I will briefly present eight points in response to the unceasing historical falsification made by the separatists.

1. The first, almost unnecessary, point is that, obviously, **Catalonia has no right to self-determination**, a right very clearly defined by the UN and whose intended beneficiaries are the old colonial territories or those subjected to foreign domination, which, obviously, is not the case with Catalonia.

2. The second point consists of the separatists' obsession with **extracting the right to secession in the 21st century from the past existence of a kingdom**, a duchy, a county, a republic or any form of state. Could you imagine the existence of the kingdoms of Essex, Wessex or Mercia in the 8th century prompting someone to deduce the right of its inhabitants to separate from England in the 21st century? In Italy, there were the republics of Venice and Genoa, the kingdoms of Sardinia, Naples and the Two Sicilies. Shall these Italian regions have the right to separate from Italy in the 21st century? There were thirty-nine states in the German Confederation, including the kingdoms of Bavaria, Prussia, Saxony, Hanover and Württemberg. Could you imagine the laughter in Germany if it occurred to someone to maintain that the inhabitants of the territories where those kingdoms once existed have the right to become independent in the 21st century? And let us not forget one tiny little detail, that all these kingdoms I just mentioned at least had the merit of existing, whereas an independent kingdom of Catalonia has never existed. So, if the inhabitants of these territories have no right to separate from their nations, what gives those in Catalonia that right?

3. The separatists maintain that **Catalonia is something foreign to Spain**, that its link with it has been very weak. But Catalonia has always been part of Spain, since the time Rome began to provide a government for the peoples of the Iberian Peninsula and the Catalan city of Tarragona served as the first capital of Roman Hispania. And subsequently, the Catalan city of Barcelona became the first capital of Visigoth Hispania. Catalans have since played a part in every historical undertaking in Spain: the eight-century Reconquista against the Muslim invaders, the discovery and conquest of America, etc., as there were many Catalans who accompanied Columbus and Hernán Cortés, and a large part of the first evangelists in America were Catalan monks. And as we are in Brussels, we cannot help but remember the Army of Flanders, in which many Catalan soldiers fought under the orders of the Duke of Alba, although, of course, the Catalan separatists never mention it.

4. Fourthly, the Catalan separatists maintain that **Spain is a disjointed nation, imperfect and unstable**. But if we look at Europe, we will see that unquestionable and sound nations such as Italy or Germany only became unified one hundred and fifty years ago. Another very obvious example is France, into which Savoy and Nice were incorporated very recently, in 1860. And Alsace and Lorraine were incorporated even more recently, exactly one hundred and one years ago, in 1918, at the end of the First World War. As for Poland, its size and location on the map fluctuates based on which century we look at it, even disappearing for an extended period of time. Spain, on the other hand, has never changed over the past six centuries. So if none of the regions in these countries, despite their recent incorporation, have the right to secede, why then, does Catalonia, which has been part of Spain for two thousand years?

5. The fifth point refers to **Scotland**, whose legal referendum of 2014 is commonly used as an example by the Catalan separatists. But the example is misplaced, as British constitutional law is not the same as Spanish constitutional law, and it is thus unclear why it should extend to Spain or to any other country in the world. British law, obviously, is based on the history of Great Britain: in 1707, two parliaments, the Scottish and the English, of two kingdoms, Scotland and England, agreed to merge and form the Kingdom of Great Britain through the Acts of Union. In Spain, however, there has never been a Catalan parliament of any kingdom of Catalonia to reach an agreement on equal footing with a Spanish parliament of a kingdom of Spain to form a United Kingdom of Spain through any Act of Union. The historical explanation and legal consequences are thus completely distinct.

6. Another essential component of the false separatist propaganda is that **Catalonia was invaded by Spain in 1714**, an element commonly used both abroad and domestically, abroad to win the sympathies of the uninformed, who believe in the idea of a small country being invaded by a much greater power, and domestically to brainwash Catalans, especially children. For example, the separatist leader Artur Mas declared to Le Monde in February of 2012 that “Catalonia has belonged to the Spanish state for three hundred years by force, after having lost battles and wars”. But this is nothing more than a lie. What took place in Spain in 1714 was a war not between Spaniards and Catalans but between the supporters of the Habsburg candidate and those of the Bourbon candidate. And there were both of them in every Spanish region, including Catalonia. But as Barcelona was the last resistance of the eventually defeated Habsburg candidate, it is purposely misrepresented as a war between Spaniards and Catalans. And incidentally, the main reason for the likely majority of support in Catalonia for the Habsburg candidate was the traditional anti-French sentiment in the region, a detail that Artur Mas, of course, did not explain to Le Monde.

7. Another lie, used to great effect in propaganda, with which the European public is frequently poisoned consists in maintaining that Catalonia deserves secession for having suffered heavily under the **Franco regime**. This is of course neither the time nor the place to explain it. Allow me to just briefly state three facts: there were more Catalan volunteers fighting for the Nationalist faction than for the Republican faction; the Franco regime was riddled with ministers, parliamentarians, ambassadors and other senior Catalan officials; and Catalonia was the region that benefitted the most from Franco’s economic policy. We could go on forever, but I will leave you with just

one single fact: in 1975, when Franco died, Catalonia, which represents 6% of Spanish territory, had 45% of the country's kilometres of highway.

8. Lastly, another argument of great sentimental efficiency: **the Catalan language as justification of secession**, an absurd argument if ever there was one but often used in propaganda. Since when did a language become equivalent to a nation? It is estimated that some 6000 languages are spoken throughout the world, and there are 193 nations represented in the UN. So what happens then? What is wrong here? Are there 5800 extra languages in the world? Or are there 5800 nations missing from the UN? But let us focus solely on Europe. The only European country where only one language is spoken is Iceland. All the rest are multilingual. Here in Belgium, for example, three languages are spoken: French, Flemish and German. And in France or Italy, seemingly monolingual countries, more languages are spoken than in Spain. Is France, the République Une et Indivisible, prepared to concede independence to Alsace because German is spoken there, to Brittany because Breton is spoken there, to Provence because Provençal is spoken there, to Corsica because Corsican is spoken there, to Pyrénées-Atlantiques because Basque is spoken there and to Roussillon because Catalan is spoken there?

In conclusion, Catalonia has no historical, legal, ethnic, linguistic or cultural right, nor any type of right, to secession. Or as the separatists say, no "right to decide", which is the euphemism in place of mentioning the inapplicable self-determination.

What special privilege, what special superiority gives Catalans the right to unilaterally decide the destruction of Spain while every other Spaniard would have to keep their mouth shut? Because let us not forget that the oft-repeated Catalan nation-building is nothing other than the national destruction of Spain.

Would you, citizens of France, Italy, Britain, Poland, Germany, agree to the inhabitants of a single region deciding upon the destruction of your nation without the inhabitants of the remaining regions being able to participate in that decision?

In fact, the right to decide does exist: it is the right of all Spanish citizens to decide on Spain's existence or disappearance.