

Cataluña Libre?

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Yesterday's historic vote – the Referendum decided by the Government of Cataluña, called illegal by the neoliberal Rajoy Government of Madrid – turned into an event of abject police violence against masses of unarmed voters. The Referendum may have been illicit according to the Spanish Constitution, but voting in a referendum as an expression of opinion is a human right, regardless of whether the central government of Madrid would or would not accept the result of the vote.

In the early Monday morning hours, the Catalan Government issued statements saying that about 2.3 million Catalans, 42.3% out of 5.3 million eligible voters, casted with 90% a 'yes' ballot for Independence. Without the violent interference of the national police and civil guard, the Catalan Government estimated that at least 80% of eligible voters would have cast their ballot.

Clearly, the Spanish Government's demonstration of ruthless and brute force was and is a reminder that in Europa fascism is alive and well, that Generalissimo Franco in Spain is not dead. Brussels, miserable, spineless puppets to the transatlantic empire and the European oligarchy, remained shamefully silent – arguing it was a Spanish internal affair, as if Spain, a full member of the EU wasn't a European Union's 'internal affair'.

At the end of the day of the Referendum, 1 October, **President Rajoy** had the audacity to declare literally that there was no referendum taking place in Cataluña. He congratulated and thanked the Spanish police to protect law and order in Barcelona and elsewhere in Cataluña and to uphold the Spanish Constitution. Yet, the media showed and reported all-day long violent police battles against peaceful voters. The forceful, riot-clad Spanish police smashed windows and broke into schools where voting booths were located, attempting to prevent voter from voting; they also removed and destroyed ballot boxes.

At the end of the day nearly 1,000 people – 844 officially – were injured by national police force, extreme violence, by utterly harmful and potentially deadly rubber bullets and batons smashing indiscriminately into nonviolent unarmed voters, including elderly people, women and children. There were hundreds of thousands of people, families who came with kids to this historic event, some camping since Friday in the schools to make sure that their right to vote was protected.

Since the Catalan police decided a hands-off policy, not to interfere with the referendum, but rather to protect the voters from possible violence, the fascist Rajoy Government sent in police and the civil guard from other parts of Spain to prevent the vote to take place. Their brutal and excessive violence against unarmed voters was shocking. They clearly had firm instructions for their brutality from their masters in Madrid – the very masters that congratulated them for carrying out their duties. It was a horrible sight to see.

President Rajoy lauding the violent police that left hundreds of injured, many seriously wounded, is yet another testimony that fascism in Europe is growing. Franco's blood must be running in Rajoy's veins. Brussels, the headquarters of the European Police state - of the growing European military regime - already today engulfing the bulk of the 28 EU member states, concurred with this violence by remaining disgracefully silent.

Let's look a bit closer at some of the reasons behind this horrendous crackdown on people who were merely intent of expressing their opinion - a full human right, according to the UN Charter.

Cataluña with a population of about 7.5 million (out of Spain's 46 million) and a surface of about 7% of Spain's 506,000 km² contributes about 20% to Spain's economic output, produces 25% of Spain's exports, receives 23.5% of Spain's foreign tourist, and 57% of foreign of Spain's investments. There is a lot to lose by Cataluña's secession.

Cataluña today receives about 1,800 euros per capita in tax devolution from Madrid, but contributes at least double that amount to the Spanish Treasury. This imbalance has long been a sore thumb in the relations between Barcelona and Madrid. But Rajoy's PP (Partido Popular) Government has always staunchly refused any dialogue for more autonomy and more financial justice.

Spain's northern Basque Region fought for decades (1959-2011) for independence. The Spain-ETA armed political conflict, also known as the Basque National Liberation Movement, caused hundreds of violent deaths. When they finally reached disarmament and a peace agreement in 2011 with the central government in Madrid, they settled for a considerably fairer fiscal agreement with Madrid.

Looking at history, Cataluña became part of Spain in the 15th Century under **King Felipe VI** and **Queen Isabella**. In the 20th Century, under the Spanish Republic, Cataluña with her own culture and language, received full autonomy in 1932. It was abolished by Franco, when he came to power in 1938. After Franco's death in 1975, Cataluña regained temporary autonomy which lapsed in 2006, when a Spanish High Court challenged the Statute of Autonomy and ruled some articles of the Statute 'unconstitutional'. That was the time when the most recent Catalan Independence Movement began. Since then several mock referenda took place, including the latest in 2014, when 80% of those who voted (about 30% of eligible voters) opted for independence.

The 1st October 2017 Referendum was the first serious attempt at secession since 2006. Though non-conform with the Spanish Constitution, the forceful and violent suppression of the people's freedom of expression - was a grave human right's abuse. It will most likely backfire - badly.

This fierce oppression by Madrid, the unwillingness for dialogue, has definitely turned most Catalans against Madrid and for independence. A few weeks ago the polls in Cataluña indicated a close call with a slight edge for those who wanted to remain with Spain. After threats from Madrid for weeks and the violent police crackdown of yesterday's election, at least 80% of eligible Catalan voters now seek independence. A similar trend could be found within Spain. A couple of months ago, 10% to 20% of Spaniards were neutral or favored independence for Cataluña. After yesterday's police fiasco, close to half of Spaniards in solidarity with their Catalan brothers support Cataluña's independence.

The fight is by no means over after Madrid's violent attempted oppression of the vote. We can just hope that civil war can be avoided.

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