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Barcelona, December 20th, 2021

Elisenda Paluzie
President
Catalan National Assembly
Marina 315
08025, Barcelona

Mr. Didier Reynders
Commissioner of Justice of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi/Wetsstraat 200
1049 Brussels

Dear Commissioner Reynders,

My name is Elisenda Paluzie, and I am addressing you as the president of the Catalan National Assembly, the largest Catalan civil society pro-independence organization, with almost 100.000 members and sympathizers. The most influential civil society organisation in Catalonia in its sphere, since its inception in 2012 the Catalan National Assembly has organised 1-million-strong demonstrations for independence every year up until the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, plus hundreds of smaller rallies and political initiatives to support democracy and to denounce Spain's repressive actions against Catalan activists and elected representatives.

The purpose of this letter is to express our concern in the light of your recent meeting of November 9th with Mr. Fernando Sánchez Costa and MEP Ramón Bauzá, representatives of the Spanish organization Societat Civil Catalana (SCC) to discuss the political situation in Catalonia and to allegedly pressure the European Commission to force the Catalan authorities to eliminate the Catalan language immersion system in education. As denounced on December 10th in a question for written answer by Catalan MEPs Carles Puigdemont, Clara Ponsatí and Antoni Comín, the SCC is far from being the "civic platform" it proclaims itself to be.

Created in 2014 to oppose the Catalan independence movement, the SCC was founded and financed by Spanish politicians and companies in order to create the appearance of a popular mobilization against the independence of Catalonia. The Catalan MEPs also denounced that it is not listed in the EU Transparency Register, and has kept its accounts and annual fiscal reports opaque.

On Wednesday 15th, your office's spokesperson, Mr. Christian Wigand, stated that the meeting was held responding to the SCC's petition, and justified it by stating that "our door is always open, and it is important for the European Commission to establish relations with the civil society and listen to different points of view". Sadly, we recall that since 2017, the European Commission has not held any public meeting with representatives of the Catalan pro-independence civil society organizations to discuss its democratic struggle, officially stating instead that it is an "internal affair of Spain". It is worth mentioning that Catalan pro-independence political parties won 52% of the vote in the February 2021 elections to the Catalan Parliament, meaning that pro-independence positions are supported by the majority of the Catalan people.

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What worries us particularly about your meeting with the SCC is its deep and clear ties to the Spanish far-right. Among its founding members are Spanish far-right party Vox MEP Jorge Buxadé and writer Javier Barraycoa, who held a book presentation at a neo-Nazi party headquarters. SCC founding President Ramon Bosch published videos of far-right ideological content under a pseudonym and attended a commemoration of dictator Francisco Franco's coup d'état. Moreover, representatives of the Francisco Franco Foundation and of racist and neo-Nazi parties often attend the SCC's events.

Additionally, we wish to remind you that international organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and institutions such the Council of Europe and the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention have criticized the disproportionate police violence and the political persecution of representatives of Catalan political parties and civil society, with nine civic and political leaders imprisoned for almost four years in 2017, sentenced to up to 13 years in prison. Precisely one of them, Mr. Jordi Sànchez, is the former president of the organization I represent, and was imprisoned for the role I now occupy. Former president of our organization and later Catalan Parliament Speaker Carme Forcadell was imprisoned in relation to the organization of the October 1st, 2017 independence referendum, in her case for allowing a debate in Parliament.

Concerning the topic of the language immersion system in Catalonia, several international organizations have praised it for its efficacy and its inclusiveness, and the recent Spanish Supreme Court ruling to impose 25% of Spanish language in Catalan schools goes against the [European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#). This model of education is supported by 82% of Catalans and by the whole educational community. In addition, it has been defended by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Mr. Fernand de Varennes, who in March 2020 called Spanish authorities to avoid reducing the amount of teaching in Catalan and to respect the rights of minority languages speakers in Spain. Mr. De Varennes also alerted to a "significant increase in hate speech, vilification, vandalism, physical threats and even assaults against members of the Catalan minority".

We fear that the European Commission's lack of action will continue to erode its role as a bulwark of human rights and the rule of law, but we are convinced that there are still opportunities for European institutions to recognize and defend the rights of the Catalan people.

For all these reasons, and in accordance with your expressed willingness to establish communication with civil society and to hear different voices, we wish to request a meeting at your earliest convenience to offer our point of view on the matter, as a civil society organization which, unlike SCC, is listed in the EU Transparency Register.

Many thanks in advance for your attention.



Elisenda Paluzie
President
Catalan National Assembly