



SYMPOSIUM CONCLUSION



THE CATALAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT IN TODAY'S GLOBAL CONTEXT

human rights · stateless nations
challenges and opportunities



assemblea



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At the international symposium “The Catalan independence movement in today's global context”, Assemblea brought together Catalan and international experts and academics to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that the new international scenario presents for the Catalan independence movement and stateless nations.

The event was structured around three round tables, which addressed –from complementary perspectives– the political, social and international implications of the struggle for self-determination in today's global context.

First round table:

The Catalan independence movement at the new global crossroads: dangers, challenges and opportunities, moderated by Jaume Bardolet, with Núria Franco and Abel Riu.

Starting from the observation that the world no longer pays attention to Catalonia as it did in 2017, given the emergence of other conflicts that have largely overshadowed the Catalan independence movement, the panel generally agreed that international law and the defence of human rights now carry even less political weight as persuasive arguments than they did then. Furthermore, in the Catalan case, state repression and the loss of the pro-independence majority in Parliament have significantly changed the Catalan political landscape.

In this regard, Abel Riu emphasised the need for the Catalan independence movement to rebuild what he calls a “Catalan national subjectivity”. This is necessary not only so Catalonia can act as an international actor with its own agency in defence of the collective Catalan interest, but also as a tool to counteract denationalisation within the country. Riu also spoke about the importance of linking the defence of self-determination with a renewed notion of nation-building and the defence of Catalan identity, both domestically and abroad—overcoming the complexes and foreign narratives that tend to eclipse or suppress it.

The political scientist insisted that the current global climate of war and genocide has inevitably affected Catalonia, leading to an increase and normalised media hatred and racism, as well as a decline in international interest in the Catalan case compared to other, more dramatic conflicts. Nevertheless, Riu stressed the importance of Assemblea continuing with its policy of denouncing the Spanish state before the UN and other international bodies, as it recently did during the Universal Periodic Review and during the analysis of Spain's implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Finally, he called for a renewed foreign action strategy based on the “unification” of the Catalan diaspora around the world.

Political scientist Dr. Núria Franco focused her remarks on the politicisation of immigration in Catalonia—and in the broader context of stateless nations—a topic that had been at the centre of her doctoral thesis. Franco addressed the worrying phenomenon of the emergence of the radical right-wing within the independence movement, noting that this development is altering the way traditional pro-independence parties approach immigration issues. She warned that the kind of “identity closure” promoted by Aliança Catalana is highly detrimental to the Catalan independence movement as a broad-based and potentially winning cause. Franco argued that it is essential to attract and not alienate the two million new Catalans

(those who have arrived in Catalonia since 2000), especially given that Catalonia lacks political tools and competences in immigration policy.

At the same time, Franco stressed the possible “internal minoritisation” that immigration could bring about, highlighting the importance of how newcomers perceive their new home—specifically, whether they feel loyalty to the state or to the nation that welcomes them. She emphasised the vital role of what she called “welcoming angels” in fostering the latter’s sense of belonging. Franco also underlined that it is very important not to react aggressively to newcomers’ lack of Catalan language skills, as this can generate rejection. She shared her own contrasting personal experiences as an immigrant—feeling very welcomed in Scotland, but having the opposite experience in Australia. She concluded by stressing the importance of using intelligence and creativity in Catalonia to welcome immigrants effectively, given the absence of tools to manage immigration directly.

Second round table:

The Role of the Catalan Independence Movement in the Framework of Stateless Nations. Moderated by Teresa Calveras, with Elisenda Paluzie, Vicent Partal and Pello Urzelai.

Elisenda Paluzie began her remarks by explaining that, at first glance, the erosion of multilateralism and of the human rights system established after World War II negatively affects stateless nations, as it undermines their ability to exercise the right to self-determination democratically. However, despite the changes brought about by the rise in violent conflicts, Paluzie does not see any viable alternatives to the path taken in 2017, though she believes it must be pursued again with greater awareness, learning from past mistakes, and with the resolve to go all the way once such a struggle begins. The economist stressed the need to learn from the independence movements of the 1990s, emphasising mutual solidarity among nations and their representative organisations. In this regard, she highlighted the work of the UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization), of which the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) is a member. She noted that this membership has allowed the ANC to use international human rights mechanisms with some success, even though self-determination remains frozen at the United Nations level. Paluzie argued that independence must be achieved through political action within the country, rather than waiting for it to be granted from without.

Despite this, she reaffirmed that the right to self-determination was born as an antidote to imperialism, and that defending it can be reinvigorated in today’s global context. She also emphasised the need to present self-determination as a stabilising factor, adding that it should not be seen as an isolated right, but rather as inextricably linked to all other rights and freedoms. Similarly, Paluzie stressed that the independence movement must be truly cross-cutting, offering arguments and motivations capable of appealing to all ideological perspectives. In this sense, she argued that when independence movements offer a hopeful, transformative alternative, they also act as an antidote to the rise of the far right.

Finally, she observed that independence movements tend to come in waves, urging Catalonia to take advantage of upcoming ones while also working to generate a new one, expressing her conviction that sooner or later, such a wave will come.

Vicent Partal countered the idea that national struggles are no longer “in fashion,” asserting that all current wars and major conflicts in the world are, in fact, national in nature. He also stressed the need to present self-determination as a stabilising force, warning that without it, democratic turbulence will persist. Regarding the evolving struggles of national minorities in a world increasingly hostile to them, he pointed to the cases of Northern Ireland and New Zealand, where the recognition of Māori identity is gradually advancing.

Partal also emphasised the potential of modern tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) and argued that the decline and discrediting of democracies represent both a crisis and an opportunity for independence movements and national minorities. While acknowledging that this emerging world is one with less freedom and poorer living conditions, he suggested that this situation nonetheless opens up “a window of opportunity,” since “everything is in motion.” He concluded that Catalonia could contribute to this global reconfiguration by offering the example of October 1, 2017—a remarkable instance of grassroots democracy capable of inspiring change in a world where democracy shows alarming signs of decay.

Partal concluded by recalling the figure of Julian Assange, who had described the Catalan case as exemplary, a benchmark of democratic quality in the Western world. Likewise, in response to those who see Catalan politics as internally divided, the journalist reminded the audience that Estonia went through the same situation, with three different and mutually opposing proposals. The only difference with Catalonia, he noted, is that Estonia achieved independence—and Catalonia “has not—yet.”

Pello Urzelai expressed his conviction that, in difficult times like the present, stateless nations must represent an alternative in the face of the rise of the far right and authoritarianism, and that we must not fall into “paralysing pessimism.” He argued that stateless nations can offer society a hopeful alternative, one connected to human rights, dignity, social justice, feminism, and solidarity.

Urzelai also expressed confidence in the movements in Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and Quebec, which, he said, reflect “the potential of alternative sovereignty.”

He highlighted three priority tasks for the Basque and Catalan independence movements:

- To deepen a sovereignty that conveys hope.
- To strengthen pro-independence majorities.
- To establish cooperative ties among stateless nations.

The Basque representative also stated that, despite differences in pace, the Basque and Catalan movements can synchronise their efforts, citing the “Via Pirinenca”—a joint act of protest in 2022—as a very positive experience demonstrating that this cooperation is possible.

Third round table:

Sustaining stateless nations in the face of shrinking rights and increasing state intervention, with John Packer, Neus Torbisco and Timothy Waters, moderated by Ariadna Heinz.

John Packer described the current situation as a globalised world in which everything is being questioned, including the very concept of the nation-state. He pointed out that this disorder creates risks, but also opportunities, which national communities must learn to adapt to.

Beyond the pursuit of new nation-states, the professor argued that political communities should use their capacities to ensure and strengthen the well-being of their members, something that the current status quo may no longer be able to guarantee.

Packer also stated that, in the current context, sovereignty is a myth, and that, in fact, “self-determination is an oxymoron in itself,” since no one truly determines themselves. The professor called for exploring new ways to assert and protect cultural and identity elements, arguing that greater pragmatism and effectiveness—and less rhetoric—are needed.

Timothy Waters agreed with Packer on the difficulties the new global order poses for causes like the Catalan one, while also identifying potential positive outcomes. Although the international obsession with “stability” continues to block the creation of new states, Waters predicted that the justification for such a policy will likely weaken over time, eventually allowing communities access to more areas of local power. He also suggested that, in the future, if current trends persist, it may become easier for stateless nations to obtain external cooperation or assistance.

While he acknowledged that strategies based on democratic and human rights claims may lose influence on the international stage, Waters argued that geostrategic, economic, and interest-based approaches will likely gain importance, and that efforts should be focused there. In this sense, the professor noted that the Palestinian case demonstrates that human rights violations or “democratic abuses” no longer carry the same weight as decisive factors in strengthening international support for causes such as the Catalan one.

Professor Neus Torbisco centred her presentation on the precarious situation of stateless nations within the current geopolitical context, marked by a new neo-authoritarian populism, the reassertion of state nationalism, and the retreat of human rights as determinants of international politics. Faced with this scenario and the current resistance to recognising new states, Torbisco emphasised the central role of civil society in sustaining stateless nations and their claims to sovereignty.

In her view, these nations should be seen as frameworks that guarantee a renewed, strengthened democratic and multilateral order, composed of communities that promote participation, cooperative sovereignty, and the protection of diversity.

Therefore, Torbisco argued that self-determination movements must avoid ethnicist or racial positions that mirror the logic of neo-authoritarian states, and instead focus on defending cultural survival, the right to equal recognition, and the identity of all national communities, while resisting assimilationist policies that seek their disappearance. Self-determination and the rights of so-called minorities, she concluded, are as significant as they are urgent, forming part of what she defined as a decolonising project—one that is mocked as “woke” by the radical right.

You can find the full video of the symposium here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bb7WoLdA5nY>