



**PARLAMENT DE CATALUNYA**

**Carme Forcadell i Lluís**

Presidenta

## The Coppieters Prize Ceremony

*Brussels, September 26, 2017*

Dear Ladies and gentlemen. First of all, I would like to thank the jury and the Maurits Coppieters Centre for this award. It is a great honour.

I don't think I have done anything extraordinary to deserve this recognition. I have accepted civic commitments to defend the language, culture, education and the political freedom of my country. I have worked and have accepted responsibilities for social organizations and institutions. I perform them as well as I can. But what I have done is not extraordinary.

What is extraordinary is the persistent mobilization of Catalan society to claim its right to democratically decide on its political future.

It is extraordinary, that every year, more than a million people (in a country with a population of seven a half million) demonstrate in the streets peacefully, festively, without causing a single incident. Precisely in this moment, there are thousands of citizens on the streets defending the Catalan institutions.

It's a very transversal movement that distinguishes neither origin, nor social class, nor mother tongue. A movement, where everyone who respects democracy, is welcome. A movement, that looks not to the past, but to the future. A movement of an open, plural society, which is inspired by the values of peace and freedom, and which clamours to exercise the right of self-determination.

Faced with this extraordinary social movement, the successive Spanish governments have offered NO political response.

They have not even accepted any dialogue with the political representatives of the people of Catalonia in order to answer the claim of millions of citizens.

The answer to the continued requests to hold a referendum - formally presented before the Spanish Congress and the Spanish government - has always been "No". NO to any political solution.



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The only thing that they HAVE done is to make a perverse use of the courts, ignoring the principle of separation of powers. Violating civil rights and freedoms to try to silence the political representatives and the citizens of Catalonia.

The case that affects me personally is just one example, though a very significant one. But what is unbelievable is that five of the seven members of the Parliament's Bureau face criminal prosecution for allowing a parliamentary debate. For allowing MPs to table parliamentary initiatives. We have been criminally charged for not having censored debates which concern our citizens, but which the Spanish government does not like.

Another example is the disqualification of the former president of the Catalan Government and three former Ministers for having organized a political participatory consultation. They also received fines of up to one hundred thousand euros. And now, together with other seven senior officials of the former Catalan government, they face a new fine of five million euros. A very high price for the "crime" of giving voice to the citizens.

But judicial repression has not been the only answer we have received. Spain has also used the police forces and institutions of the State to investigate and spy illegally on citizens. To fabricate false accusations against political representatives, in order to discredit them. One of the cases, known as "Operation Catalonia", came to light thanks to the recorded conversations of the former Minister of Interior, in which he conspired to make up scandals against political opponents and leaders, with the alleged complicity of the media and members of the judiciary. Despite the extremely explicit content of those recordings and the information that has since emerged – for example, that the Minister of Interior presumed of "having destroyed the Catalan public health system" – no court investigation has been opened.

In the face of the State's dirty war and court repression, Catalan society has persisted in its request to exercise the right of self-determination for seven years.

Seven years living in a democratic anomaly: our autonomous framework is fixed by a text that has NOT been ratified by Spain's political representatives nor the people of Catalonia.



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Seven years, with three general elections in Spain, with different governing majorities in Spain. Seven years without any of them showing any will to find a shared political solution for the claim of the Catalan citizens.

We have considered, that has been long enough for us to promote a solution of our own: to hold a referendum on self-determination, ideally agreed with the Spanish Government, but that we would hold anyway.

And what was the response of the Spanish Government when the Catalan executive called for the referendum on October 1?

It treated the vote as a crime. It implemented a covert State of Exception in Catalonia: it increased the level of threats, and more court actions. And it suspended - in practice- the Catalan autonomy by decreeing the intervention of the accounts of the Catalan Government. This means that the Catalan Government needs the authorization of the State for each payment it makes. This budget blockade can jeopardize the provision of the Administration's services.

The Spanish government has sent security forces raid Catalan ministries, private homes, the headquarters of political parties and of the media.

Public workers, civil servants and governmental officials have been arrested.

With the same warning, the Prosecutor General has called 712 of the 941 Catalan Mayors before the courts and threatened to detain them, because they give support to the referendum.

The police have entered printing houses to search them, without waiting for a court order.

They have entered the offices of newspapers to search them.

They have confiscated thousands of posters that only displayed the word "democracy".

Public debates to talk about the referendum have been banned... even outside Catalonia.

They have sent the local police to cultural events, confiscating material that they considered linked to the referendum.



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They have given orders to the public Post Office to with-hold the dispatching of publications, including a local magazine, because it included an article about the referendum.

They have ordered telecommunication service providers to block access to the Catalan Government's websites, preventing free access to Internet content.

All in all, the Spanish Government wants to hide the referendum, to make it clandestine; they want to generate fear. But when posters are seized, the citizens print them at home and plaster the streets with them.

In response to the arrests, in response to the police searches for electoral material, citizens turn up to protest peacefully, offering carnation flowers to the police, as in the Portugal revolution.

As I speak, a new search or arrest may be taking place. But for every threat they make, there are citizens who respond with a smile and a growing desire to vote. Citizens, who protest firmly and peacefully, stubbornly standing.

Fear is the main threat to freedoms. Catalan society is not afraid. And we Catalans are not prepared to give up our freedoms.

The repression we are suffering has led to shows of support for Catalonia in other parts of Spain.

Despite all the obstacles, despite the threats and criminal proceedings, we will hold the effective and binding referendum to decide our future on October 1.

For ours is no longer just a struggle for a political objective, it is a struggle for democracy. And democrats are not afraid of ballot boxes.

Now, here in Brussels, in the heart of Europe, I would like to express my gratitude for all the support messages we received from all over Europe. I would also like to thank all of you, Catalans living abroad, for standing up for democracy.

But also, I would like to address the European Institutions:

Will they do nothing to protect fundamental rights and freedoms of European citizens? Will they not defend those rights that are enshrined in article two of the Treaty of the European Union?



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Will they continue looking away while the freedom of expression is violated in Spain?  
And the freedom of information?

And the ideological freedom?

And the freedom of assembly?

Will they silently accept the repression carried out by Spain against the Catalan institutions, against 712 mayors, against public servants, against social organizations and against citizens?

Repression for wanting to vote?

For defending democracy? For demanding it?

Will they also ignore the votes of millions of Catalans, who are also European citizens?

We think that today, in 2017, the future of Europe will also be decided in Catalonia. Today, the European Project will also be decided by the reaction of its institutions in the face of Spain's antidemocratic attacks. We are a very pro-European society and we call on a Europe that was born to defend peace, democracy, freedoms, respect and tolerance. A Europe that works for finding political answers to political problems.

We strongly believe that the idea of a stronger, more democratic Europe, that will win back the respect of European citizens, includes Europe's action in relation to the October 1 vote in Catalonia.

Because our referendum is an act of freedom and democracy that unites all those who believe in these values. And honestly, we would like to feel the support of our European brothers, in defending rights and freedoms in Catalonia.

We simply want to decide our future: freely, peacefully and democratically. We want to feel free in a free and democratic country. And we understand that there is no real democracy if we are prevented from exercising fundamental rights and freedoms. When peaceful and democratic ideas are being criminally prosecuted.

Come what may, the Spanish Government will not be able to stop the Catalans from voting. We know that this cannot be resolved without going freely to the polls, in a referendum, so that the citizens can decide on their future.



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Seven hundred years ago, the great Ramon Llull wrote in Catalan, "He who perseveres lives happily. Persevere in goodness and you will not be afraid. Persevere in justice and loyalty, and you will not be defeated."

I assure you that the Catalan people will persevere, firmly insisting on the defence of our rights, loyal to our commitment with our freedoms.

Moltes gràcies. Thank you very much.