

SPECIAL
DOUBLE ISSUE

WINTER 2019 / ISSUE NO.13

\$ 15.00 | € 10.00 | 1500 RSD

HORIZONS

JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



THE NEW GREAT GAME



**DEBATING
MIGRATION**



**RUSSIAN
QUANDARIES**



cirsd.org

ABDULLAH • BOUKRI • ČIČAK • DORSEY • ECONOMY • HAWKINS • KARAGANOV • KER-LINDSAY
LALONDE • MACHARIA • MARSH • MCCABE • NATELAGAWA • NEMETH • NOLAN
RUDD • SACHS • SHAPIRO • SULLIVAN • SUSLOV • TOLORAYA • VALLS • VUKADINović

WHAT'S AT STAKE IN CATALONIA?

Manuel Valls

BARCELONA was the destination chosen by George Orwell when he traveled to Spain with the intention of writing newspaper articles on the ongoing civil war.

The young journalist knew that what was at stake in the Spanish Civil War would not only affect its belligerents. Orwell, like so many volunteers in the International Brigades, was conscious of the fact that it was much more than a civil war. What was happening in Spain at that time was clearly set to have global impact.

While being a civil war, it was also the first phase of an international conflagration that was pitting two world-historical forces against each other. Societies had been mobilizing these forces since the second decade of the twentieth century: different kinds of illiberal authoritarianism and liberal democracies. And, as expected,

World War II broke out as soon as the Spanish war ended, with barely a break in between.

But Orwell's experience in the Catalan capital did not only serve to foresee global conflagration, but also to understand the inevitability of the major conflict that would follow in its aftermath, and ways in which it would affect the world, dividing it into two blocs. I am obviously referring to the Cold War. Indeed, in Barcelona Orwell experienced the famous war within a war, i.e. the one that was unleashed on the Republican side between the libertarian faction and the communist one—the faction that took orders from Moscow.

In fact, in his admirable *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), the English author produced the most brilliant chronicle ever written about the “war within,” an absolutely premonitory chronicle

Manuel Valls is a former Prime Minister of France and a candidate for mayor of Barcelona. You may follow him on Twitter @manuelvalls.



Photo: Guiver Image/Getty Images

Manuel Valls (left) during a March 2018 Unionist demonstration in Barcelona

that showed for the first time the horrific face of Stalinism, and its persecution of every glimmer of criticism and freedom.

BAROMETER OF EUROPE

Today, Catalonia is once again a testing ground upon which opposing forces are colliding and raising tensions among political communities all around the planet. In the Catalan capital, the two movements that pose the greatest threat to the survival of liberal western democracies are ever-present: the revival of nationalism on the one hand, and the rise of populism on the other.

What is at stake in Barcelona also compromises us as Europeans. To put it bluntly, my decision to run for mayor of the city of Barcelona has much to do with this international dimension of the conflict. As a politician versed in the defense of values sustained by democratic rule and the rule of law, the fight against the two aforementioned dangerous tendencies is not just something I view as interesting, but as a moral obligation. Moreover, I am from Barcelona, which means I feel highly involved in the challenge to help my city escape the critical situation into which it has sadly been led by its governors.

To an international observer, what is happening in Catalonia must seem extremely surprising. Barcelona is among the cities with the highest standards of living in the world; at the same time, it is the capital of one of the richest regions of Spain, the economic driver of the country. Its level of self-government is comparable to—and in most cases greater than—that of many existing federal states. And its language and culture have been generously pampered throughout the four decades of Spanish democracy, in compensation for the scorn and persecution that it had to endure under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

So much so that another paradox has arisen in Catalonia. Since the promotion of the Catalan language is the main target of positive discrimination policies, and the Catalan-speaking population is traditionally better positioned in Catalan society—be it politically, financially, socially, or culturally—the result is that the aforementioned measures have ended up positively discriminating sectors that were already subjected to positive discrimination in the first place.

In other words, Catalan acts indirectly as a social filter to determine who should benefit from those measures, whereby the main measures of positive

discrimination are applied against—and not in favor of—the most underprivileged sectors of society.

CATALANIZATION

With this being the case, how can there be a revolution of the rich against equality in a Western society?

How can it be possible for a segment of Catalan society—which consists of some of the most privileged people in the West—to embark upon an unilateral, illegal, and deeply damaging separatist process? How come they are engaged in a process that threatens themselves and the entire society?

The answer can be short. If we were to refer to those moving verses written by Rudyard Kipling to summarize the reasons for the Great War: “If any question why we died, / tell them, because our fathers lied,” we would hit the biggest nail on the head—the Catalans were lied to, and that is as far as it goes. Fortunately, we have enough space in this article to somewhat elaborate on that lie.

The first thing to note is how far back the lie goes. If Catalonia has been ahead of its time with the instigation of “revolutions of the privileged” seeking to further extend their privileges—this sort of thing is catching on in other rich regions of the European

Catalonia is once again a testing ground upon which opposing forces are colliding and raising tensions among political communities all around the planet.

Union—it is because their drive is deeply rooted in the past.

In my recently published autobiography, I write about how Josep Tarradellas—President of the *Generalitat* in exile during Franco’s rule, who became the first president of the Catalan government when it was reinstated, and an all-round icon of reconciliation—warned as early as 1981 of the grave dangers associated with the way his successor, Jordi Pujol, behaved. I cite a few paragraphs from a letter addressed to the editor of the largest Catalan newspaper:

The European Union must not sit on the fence between those who defend liberal and democratic rule and those who seek to destroy it with illiberal ideas and divisiveness.

A period that had begun with splendor, confidence, and hope on October 24th, 1977 had been interrupted, and I sensed that a new one was beginning that would lead to the breaking of the bonds of comprehension, good understanding, and constant agreements that had existed between Catalonia and the Government during my administration.

[...] For those last ten months, everything had been well orchestrated to cause the rupture of the politics of unity, peace, and brotherhood that had been accepted by every citizen of Catalonia. The unfortunate result is that we can state today that, due to certain biased propaganda and the deceptive spirit

that beats within it, we are again faced by a situation that reminds me of other deplorable attitudes in the past.

Tarradellas’s tremendously lucid diagnosis did not take long to be confirmed. The lie we were talking about was none other than the fruit of a plan that had been plotted for decades, and

most succinctly exemplified by the so-called “2000 Program” issued by Jordi Pujol—Tarradellas’s successor and president of the Catalan government from 1980 to 2003—to his councilors in late July 1988.

In this document dating back more than three decades, which is compulsory reading for anyone wanting to understand what is happening in Catalonia today, the nation-building ideology was put down in black and white. From then on, this would become, if not the only goal, then certainly a priority for the Catalan administration as a whole.

This strategic plan had already begun equating Catalonia to the ‘Catalan Lands,’ for it referred to the area of influence of the Catalan, Balearic, and Valencian communities, and even part of southern France. Moreover, it maintained that Catalonia is an “emerging European nation”—in other words, a “nation under discrimination

that is unable to freely develop its cultural and economic potential.”

To build that nation, the plan advocated a meticulous and obsessive process of ethno-linguistic and social engineering that even included shamelessly racist practices, such as “fostering the family model to guarantee biological substitution,” or the reminder that “our people must be made aware of the need to have more children in order to guarantee our collective personality.”

Alongside these curious proposals

for ‘biological’ intervention, the 2000 Program—which was to inspire Catalan politics for decades—defended the instilling of a nationalistic sentiment in Catalan society, seeking the infiltration of nationalism everywhere from political authority to civil society.

Catalan schools, with their revised account of history and their commitment to promulgating the ‘national mythology,’ were viewed as a key instrument in disconnecting Catalan pupils from the Spanish reality.

The nationalization plan left no area uncontrolled. In its section on the media, the engineering was

just as sweeping. Taking for granted that the public media dependent on the *Generalitat* should continue to be “efficacious transmitters of the Catalan national model,” it sought to go further still by coercing the private media into “clearly portraying concepts relative to the Catalan national identity.”

To achieve this, the plan detailed such instructions as “appointing nationalist people [...] to all key positions in the media,” “influencing the initial and permanent education of media reporters and crew members to guar-

antee training in the Catalan national conscience,” and “the creation of a Catalan code of communication and a new agency, of nationalistic and greatly solvent spirit.”

This engineering of nation-building covered everything: “the Catalanization of the guilds,” “the creation of Catalan business, finance, and trade union organizations,” “a strategy for appointments to senior management positions in financial organizations,” influence “of national criteria on the administration of justice and public order,” and “in-depth revision of the mechanisms for access to civil servant positions and internal

How can it be possible for a segment of Catalan society—which consists of some of the most privileged people in the West—to embark upon an unilateral, illegal, and deeply damaging separatist process?

promotion thereof.” In the world of business, administration, research, foreign policy, infrastructure, culture, and leisure, nothing in Catalonia was left beyond the reach of the nationalistic big brother.

These peculiarly Orwellian measures were implemented for political motives by the Catalan government

and were assigned priority resources. Moreover, they had been given *carte blanche* by different governments. Such an achievement of the Catalan government came gradually, term after term, thanks

to the lack of agreement between the main parties of Spain, which then produced parliamentary arrangements that benefited nationalist minorities. Cunningly, these nationalists traded their support for various Spanish central governments in exchange for total restraint from interfering in what was happening in Catalonia.

The strategic upsurge of Catalan nationalism, which has been brewing for decades, also unveils another lie (among a series of others)—one that is being spread by the promoters of the independence process. It is, namely, the claim that the portion of the Catalan population that jumped on the trackless train of independence

has done so freely and autonomously. In fact, however, it is the precise opposite: the *procés* did not occur in a ‘bottom-up’ fashion, and it was not born of the Catalan people before it gained momentum among its leadership. Instead, it was meticulously conceived, planned, and executed from the *Generalitat* itself.

What happened in Catalonia was a nation-building process in broad daylight, the inner workings of which were made manifest in plain sight.

POWER HEGEMONY

What happened in Catalonia was a nation-building process in broad daylight, the inner workings of which were made manifest in plain sight. Not one ingredi-

ent was missing: aggression towards ‘the other’ disguised as victimhood, the invention of history, supremacy, and populist lie-spreading. Of course, one should not overlook the exploitation of the three tools that guarantee hegemony: an education system, the media, and a network of politicized institutions designed to serve a specific cause.

I use the term ‘hegemony’ in the sense in which Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci did, when he distinguished between this concept and that of ‘power.’ While power is based on the monopoly of ‘violence,’ the strategy for achieving hegemony is command over the ‘consensus.’

This distinction is very useful for understanding what has been happening in Catalonia. In response to the nation-building program that had been maintained for decades, Spanish state governments have always been inactive; they have not proposed alternative narratives to the exclusionary discourse of the nationalists—and all of this based on the assumption that the ultimate safeguard of the state authorities' legality would be sufficient.

In response to nationalism, successive Spanish state governments felt that, as long as they still held onto power, the transfer of hegemony over to the nationalists was no big deal.

unilaterally declaring independence—and called upon the Catalan populace to support them—the Spanish state, exhausted and lacking a narrative, was left in a very tight predicament.

The Spanish state had permitted the onset of the disconnect that the Catalan government had sought between the Catalan people and other Spaniards. This includes the millions of Catalans who had no wish to renounce their Spanishness, and

who have long felt disregarded by one side and neglected by the other—and rightfully so.

To put it differently: in response to nationalism, successive Spanish state governments felt that, as long as they still held onto power, the transfer of hegemony over to the nationalists was no big deal. When the pro-independence process entered its final stage, in which the state had to tackle the September-October 2017 uprising in Catalonia (which fortunately did not result in bloodshed), it could utilize no other tools than the threat of legitimate violence in order to maintain peace and order.

The truth is that power without hegemony is a very weak form of power. Thus, when the Catalan authorities breached the Spanish constitution, as well as Catalan law itself, by

The Catalan elites turned regional institutions into what they deemed parallel 'state structures', with the aim of placing them in the service of secession. In Catalonia, where identity-based laicism had never existed as an intellectual thought, matters escalated even further with the disappearance of the fundamental democratic principle of administrative neutrality. Discrimination against all those Catalans who did not fall in line with Catalan nationalism shifted from a nationalist trait to nationalist right: it became law.

This final phase of the nation-building process included pressure



A crowd of Catalan protesters confront the police in a pro-independence rally

Photo: Guliver Image/Getty Images

on judges, lawyers, journalists, and university professors, notwithstanding the very dangerous pressure put on the regional police—a 17,000-strong force mostly managed by officers promoted on the back of their sympathies for the nationalist cause. The proponents of Catalan nationalism sought to create a political police force, and have spied on politicians, business owners, and associations—such as the *Societat Civil Catalana*, which was awarded the European Citizen's Prize in 2014—that might represent obstacles to the goal of achieving secession from the rest of Spain. If the irresponsibility of the Catalan governors has not had more

serious consequences, this is only because the vast majority of the police force have remained loyal to the law.

A NEW STATE IN EUROPE?

When I speak of phases, the paths that all processes which end up in totalitarianism follow, in the words of Hannah Arendt, come to mind. It is worth remembering those words for the sake of demonstrating how fitting they are in the case of the long Catalan process.

The first of these phases is the closing off of a community by strengthening its ties to a group identity—be it

ethnicity, language, culture, or religion. This phase took place some time ago in Catalonia, when the bonds to identity were attached to the Catalan language. In this respect, the hegemonic 'consensus' has been categorical and transversal in Catalonia. All political authorities, including those that were supposedly not nationalist (or at least not explicitly so), were convinced that "Catalan was the DNA of the Catalan people," as socialist president Pasqual Maragall put it in 2004.

What he had forgotten was that if one had to speak of DNA, one should have recognized the extent to which Catalonia was a *mestizo*—the result of a secular fusion between Catalan and Spanish. The two languages are as inseparable from the Catalan identity today as the two sides of a leaf. Overlooking history in such a manner also meant mistakenly disregarding cultural and economic heritage—some of Catalonia's most treasured assets.

In the second phase, a community is bound by its identity, but that starts being linked to a territory over which it is assumed to hold preferential or exclusive rights. The second phase of the cultural nation was also

reached in Catalonia a long time ago. The Catalan language and the culture of its speakers were the foundations of the nation, therefore rendering any discrimination in its favor legitimate.

The proponents of Catalan nationalism sought to create a political police force, and have spied on politicians, business owners, and associations that might represent obstacles to the goal of achieving secession from the rest of Spain.

When, for example, Catalonia was a guest country at the Frankfurt Book Fair, the hegemonic 'consensus' dictated that a Catalan author who writes in Spanish could not even be considered for participation in the event. Behind this philosophy of 'our own language,' which is what the nationalists call Catalan, lies the

message that Catalan was the language of the 'owners' of the territory. Spanish, as a majority language in Catalonia on the other hand—and interestingly enough the only language that all Catalans share—was to be considered an 'outsider language.' Anyone who dared not refrain from its use and spoke the country's official language instead would have to accept his or her role as a second-rate citizen.

Since the transition, Catalanism, understood to mean a political movement focused on exalting the inherent and distinctive values of the historic personality of Catalonia—its traditions, culture, and the Catalan

language—has been transversal in Catalonia. The profession of Catalan faith was a precondition for doing politics in Catalonia, and this *conditio sine qua non* caused a kind of theft of passive suffrage. It was not possible to be elected, or even take part in politics, without passing through that particular filter, irrespective of one's position in other fields.

Even the left accepted such a 'consensus' in favor of constructing social cohesion. Conclusive evidence that Catalans with family origins in other parts of Spain spoke Spanish as their main language only made these people face the greatest risks and be at the worst kind of disadvantage at school. The prohibition of the right to study in one's mother tongue as the vehicular language led to an enormous deficit in terms of academic failure relative to children who could study in their mother tongue. Needless to say, all of this has reflected badly on these people's degraded neighborhoods, job opportunities, and their ability to access any kind of public benefit.

By building a society on such grounds of identity, even common attitudes against the 'outsider' identity (particularly Spanish) had become normal. The media in Catalonia, subsidized as ever to ensure its obedience to

the directives of the 2000 Program, has mirrored a widespread acceptance of the attitude of disrespect.

Expressed towards the traits of Spanishness, the disrespect aimed at an identity with which a very large part of the Catalan population associates itself in one way or another.

The Catalan 'consensus,' for example, endorsed a systematic insulting of Spanishness in newspaper vignettes or comedy shows on Catalan public television—something that would have been totally unacceptable had it been targeted against any other identity.

All these cases of symbolic violence have generated a climate of harassment that naturally sees a rise in cases of physical violence that are isolated, but increasingly frequent.

This third stage of the pro-independence process officially commenced with the demonstrations of September 11th, 2012, which were referred to under the slogan of "Catalonia: A New State in Europe." Having surpassed the phase of creating a nation on the basis of identity, and having achieved the construction of a cultural nation with preferential or exclusive rights to a territory, the next step was

The profession of Catalan faith was a precondition for doing politics in Catalonia, and this conditio sine qua non caused a kind of theft of passive suffrage.

to advance from a cultural nation toward becoming a political nation—calling for an independent state.

In this final phase of the process, the Catalan nationalist authorities, acting outside of the legal framework, have sought to impose their arbitrary will, supplanting the legitimate coercion of the state and the applicability of democratic law. This move has been accompanied by a highly orchestrated and heavily financed international campaign to discredit the democracy of Spain.

The lie that had reigned across schools and the media in the earlier phases of the process—afflicted by such vices as manipulation of history, indoctrination, and a shameless lack of impartiality—has finally crossed the region's and nation's borders to intoxicate international public option.

FEARING FOR DEMOCRACY

All this propaganda, orchestrated by generations of Catalan officials, has managed to bring international attention to Catalonia, and has sadly accomplished its intoxicating mission in some cases. But following some initial moments of confusion, such a course of action has generally proven counterproductive to nationalist interests.

First of all, it has created an opportunity for these interests to be internationally denounced. Moreover, it has raised awareness of the means by which nationalism infiltrated Catalan society during this nation-building process.

Finally, it made many realize how unprecedented these methods are in liberal democracies, and how fitting they are in totalitarian regimes.

At this stage of the process, few doubts remain regarding

its perverse causes and negative effects. There is very little doubt that the events orchestrated by the autonomous government of Catalonia between September and October 2017 can be classed as a *coup d'état*, with Kelsen's Doctrine in hand, as they violated the Spanish legal system radically.

There is also very little doubt that Catalan secessionism is about class and identity, with disturbingly racist connotations. Equally, there is little doubt that it has violated the rights of millions of Catalans, whilst dividing Catalan society. Lastly, there is little doubt that it has pushed the society to the brink of confrontation, with serious political and economic consequences for Catalonia and the rest of Spain. In the two months that followed the attempted *coup d'état*, more than 4,000 companies

fled Catalonia, including some of the region's most emblematic names.

At this point, it is time to go back to the original idea informing the title of this article: What is at stake in Catalonia? What is being debated in Catalonia is the most important political debate of our time. It is the debate between democracy and demagoguery, citizenship and tribalism, democratic politics and populism, and an open and closed society.

That's why the people of Europe should be told what is really going on in Catalonia and its capital, Barcelona. They ought to realize that, should the Catalan secessionist side emerge triumphant, it would place a heavy burden on everything that a democratic and progressive Europe represents.

Barcelona is a key part of this debate, and a battle that—for the time being—is only being fought in the realm of ideas. There is no doubt that, if Orwell were still alive, he would once again use this great city as the scene for his chronicle, collecting impressions on the ground. There is no doubt that he would once again feel the irresistible urge to become embroiled in one of the two sides of the debate. For if Barcelona were to be

seized by separatism, the consequences of its fall would be felt far and wide.

As a result of this city's grand reputation, its potential and situation, and everything that it represents, what is decided in Barcelona could set a precedent for Europe. Barcelona could contribute to its disintegration, or could pave the way toward hope.

Catalonia's secession is an oligarchical and supremacist project, and this process can be perfectly equated with the most corrosive political movements that are tearing Europe apart.

We can never take democracy for granted. We must defend it day after day. And today the combination of nationalism and populism poses a serious threat. The European Union cannot be ambiguous toward them, and neither should it take an equidistant stance.

No, the European Union must not sit on the fence between those who defend liberal and democratic rule and those who seek to destroy it with illiberal ideas and divisiveness. It should not do so if it wishes to stand by its own principles of solidarity, citizenship, and progress for everyone—nor if it wishes to stand by the founding principles that legitimize the European agenda. ●