



Dear Members of the European Parliament

My name is Toni Strubell. I am a University Lecturer and Coordinator of an organization called the Dignity Commission which seeks to recover archives, private libraries and documents confiscated by Franco in 1939 and return them to their rightful owners in Catalonia and elsewhere. My father was English and my mother is Catalan. I have lived almost all my life in one or other country. During my life I have not been able to help noticing the very different ways in which fate has treated the two small European nations to which I belong and their cultures. While it has made of one a fully emancipated nation playing a major role in current Europe and boasting a language that is fully universal, the other is a country that lacks basic democratic rights that other Europeans have enjoyed for years.

Catalans are here today because they have always been present where the cause of Freedom has been an issue. They were amongst the first nations to oppose feudalism. They opposed absolute monarchy in the War of Spanish Succession. They were amongst the first to face Fascism in the mid-19 thirties. There were more Catalan victims at and Mauthausen than there were of many other European Union countries and it was a Catalan photographer, Francesc Boix, who made known to the world the horrors of the latter camp. Catalans have always seen humanitarian causes and their national freedom as one cause.

Last Monday, popular Catalan journalist Joan Barril wrote in his El Periódico column: “We are happy that the (Berlín) wall fell, but the Valle de los Caídos –the State tomb of Franco– still stands” with all its honours. “We are emoted by the heroic stories of fugitive German escaping from East Berlin” wrote Barril “but Spanish judges still fail to do justice to the Historic Memory. We love to proclaim our hate for Hitler, but in many Spanish cities there continue to be avenues bearing the name of Francisco Franco, a dictator who had no qualms about sending his troops to fight on the Russian front”. Some even have the doubtful distinction of having street names dedicated to military units that fought against the Allies in World War II.

Some may say this is accidental and anecdotic. They may point to a Law has just been passed, allegedly to correct this. But this is no accident. The Law they are referring to fails to make any real enforcement for democratic regeneration as was conducted in Germany, Argentina or South Africa once democracy returned. To start with, this Law does not annul, albeit symbolically, the death and prison penalties applied against hundreds of thousands of Republicans after the end of the Spanish Civil War. Incredible though it may seem to any democrat, the State Attorney in whose hands the decision to annul these laws was put, is actually the grandson of one of the most cruel Military Attorneys of Franco’s bloodiest reprisal period. Even more worrying is the fact that Spanish president Zapatero should have publicly stated that to annul these sentences would be tantamount to questioning the foundation on which Constitutional Spain is now built. Amongst the thousands of death sentences that are still in force - sixty-nine years later- is that of Catalan

President Lluís Companys. For him and others, the afore-mentioned Law foresees that his “rehabilitation” must be based on the issue of a humiliating good conduct certificate for those presenting “exonerating proof” for their relatives. Can anyone imagine Angela Merkel stooping to such connivance with the heirs of Hitler and Mussolini in enacting the pseudo-rehabilitation of their German or Italian democratic opponents today? This is only possible in Spain where Franco’s granddaughter appears on TV chat shows and where negationism is not a crime but a regular media practice as has recently been reported by Alex Rietman on Holand’s Radio1.

No. This is no accident. This is the very stuff Spain’s democratic deficit is made of. The world should know that the only individual facing charges associated with the mass graves of Franco - the vast majority of which, including Valencia’s, with over 26,000 known victims, are still uninvestigated - is the one judge who took steps to enable their possible investigation. Europe should know this. Why is Spain so absolutely unable to overcome its authoritarian past? And why does Europe turn a blind eye to this in contrast with the recommendations of the Committee for Human Rights of the United Nations, which in October 2008 brought out a document urging Spain to do justice to Franco’s victims, denouncing the fact that a law of 1977 should have granted amnesty for all crimes committed during the Dictatorship?

Catalonia is at present forced to live in a State where democratic standards are quite unacceptable. Cultural genocide was practiced against us for forty years and yet, still today, no credible official acknowledgement of this has been made, nor indeed any serious attempt to make up for it. Like the Jews, at particular moments of history, or like the Kurds, Tibetans and Armenians, we are game for the practice of racism and racial discrimination. The current State’s major endorser, King Juan Carlos, even went as far as to claim, in 2001, that the Castilian language had never been imposed on anyone in the world much to the offence of many South and Central American native-tongue speakers, Basques and Catalans. Even today, Catalan is banned from the Spanish Parliament despite being spoken by almost one in five Spanish citizens. At this very moment, the only fully Catalan TV channel is being dismantled by the Guardia Civil in Valencia despite EU recommendations to the contrary. For forty years, Franco banned Catalan from all walks of public life

The sense of defencelessness that Catalans now feel is no light issue. Even the Catalan president has been twice to Madrid to speak of the growing disaffection many Catalans feel for Spain. I think it is well justified. Catalans cannot exert basic rights such as their right to decide their future. A popular poll held in one town last September 13th gave a 96,7% vote in favour of independence. This must surely be a warning sign for all to see. Catalans are not happy, and believe me, they have every reason for not being so. I know Europe looks with suspicion on nationalist movements. What raises most suspicions for me, however, is that the gross democratic deficit Catalans have to put up with raises so little suspicion. Tibet and Kosovo seem to have been much luckier on this score. I very much hope that the coming polls, on December 13th, like the massive demonstrations held in Barcelona on February 18th 2006 and December 1st 2007, will offer the world a new opportunity to see that something is very much amiss in Catalonia as regards her unmitigated exposure to Spanish misrule, undisguised xenophobia, and cultural and economic abuse. The Berlin Wall was not Europe’s last obstacle to freedom. There is still one very formidable wall standing in Spain against the Catalan people. I am sure that solving this problem will help to further the cause of basic democracy and human rights in the Union.

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