

A New Crisis Is about to Rock Europe



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Everyone breathed a sigh of relief when the first shock wave from Scotland proved harmless. However, events in the Spanish region of Catalonia have again drawn attention to Europe's separatist movements.

Separation demands of Catalans living in the Northeast of Spain are nothing new. In the wake of the economic crisis, however, demands for a breakaway from Spain have grown far louder.

In fact, with the support of Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the former Spanish prime minister, the demands of the Catalans were almost completely met with a new status given to them in 2006, in which their autonomous rights were expanded significantly.

However, following objections raised by the current ruling party of Spain, Popular Party (PP), the Catalans lost a large part of those expanded rights under a Constitutional Court ruling in 2010. The request by the autonomous administration in Catalonia - which suffered great damage from the economic crisis - for a new financial agreement with the Spanish government was rejected. In the wake of these events, the question of Catalonia seeking independence from Spain started to occupy much of the country's domestic agenda.

The 'Declaration of sovereignty and the right to self-determination by the people of Catalonia' which was ratified in the Catalanian Parliament on January 23rd 2010, was annulled by the Spanish Constitutional Court in March of that same year. The Catalanian Parliament then forwarded a request for a referendum following legal paths to the Spanish Parliament . That request was rejected following votes in the Spanish Parliament and Senate. Yet that did not stop the separatist Catalans. A referendum was held without the support of the state on November 9th. In this referendum, which was purely symbolic, overall voter participation was very low, at around 30%.

More than 80% of the 1.6 million people who took part in this referendum voted 'yes' to Catalanian independence. Since the referendum was not officially binding , these votes had no adverse impact on Spanish unity.

However, just as in Scotland, many political observers are of the opinion that the matter has still not been laid to rest. There is a likelihood that these events, which threaten the unity and harmony of Europe, will grow even stronger.

The Veneto and Aldo-Adige regions of Italy, Greenland in Denmark, Corsica in France, Transnistria in Moldavia and Donetsk and Luhansk in Ukraine are a few of the regions with separatist demands. The situation is far more complex in the Balkans; in the regions in which Macedonians, Serbs and Albanians reside, separatist discourse is commonplace.

Most of these separatist movements are based on ethnic or sectarian differences. However there are also those who are not any different from the countries they wish to break away from in terms of language or religion. These regions wish to sever their ties with the relatively poorer parts of the mother country, out of the belief that they have paid a heavier price during the economic crisis in Europe.

Many of the people living in the regions demanding separation actually have a long shared history with the people from whom they want to separate their streets and lives; indeed, they have more reasons to live together than to live apart. Furthermore, Europe is a place that countries of the world look up to in terms of human rights and democracy. It is almost impossible to say that minorities there are mistreated as in the old times. It seems that the culture of living together despite differences has been sacrificed for the sake of powerful material interests or cast aside in the name of cultural, religious or ethnic differences.

Selfish policies based on being strong at the expense of weakening other countries threaten nations' integrity. They lead to disintegration of the states and even to disintegration of the parts that have already been separated. In this way, countries start hating other countries, regions start hating other regions and people start hating their neighbors. One begins to feel overwhelming enmity about the means enjoyed by another.

In order for Europe to overcome this crisis, 'love,' the most powerful tie binding people together, needs to be reintroduced into the continent. Before local administrations in Europe are strengthened, or before autonomy rights can be debated, people need to discuss how love and affection can quickly be built between them. Selfish policies with ancient roots that feed separatist demands in Europe must be eradicated with the weapons of love and compassion.

Once love has come to reign, there will be no more communities wishing to secede and separate. The way to eliminate separatist movements in Europe is through love, affection, compassion, sympathy, service with no expectation of reward, sensitivity, self-sacrifice, friendship, tolerance and common sense.

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