

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF NATIONS

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numerous group of Catalan intellectuals recently presented in several Catalan towns and cities a **Catalan Declaration on the Sovereignty of Nations**. A declaration of this sort might seem a strange thing at a moment when the concept of sovereignty, especially in Europe, is being increasingly relativized as a result of the economic, cultural and political changes of recent years. It may also seem *unfortunate* in view of the dramatic national confrontation going on in the former Yugoslavia at this same moment. But precisely because of the conflict in Bosnia the discourse amongst European intellectuals in general is one of indiscriminate condemnation of all forms of nationalism and shows two characteristics that are equally useless for a real understanding of the problem: a reduction of nationalism to its aggressive and xenophobic side, forgetting the existence of defensive, democratic and peaceful forms of nationalism; and amnesia or lack of awareness as regards the nationalism of the present European states, which is precisely what is getting in the way of European unity.

In fact, what is in question is the idea of a new territorial organisation of power on the basis of two apparently opposed phenomena: the institutionalization of larger and larger political spaces and demands for sovereignty by nations within the present states which are subjected by other hegemonic nations. The first of these phenomena responds to the needs arising from the transnationalization of the economy and the implantation of new technologies in the media. The second responds to the need to maintain collective identities resting on differentiated languages and cultures which form part of humanity's global heritage. The real problem arises when we see that in order to survive, rather than abstract declarations on rights, what group identities need is to take an active part in economic policy-making and in the territorial treatment of the movement of the mass media. The two



phenomena therefore overlap and need to be dealt with by an appropriate institutionalized power. In this way, they inevitably become a political issue. These two phenomena are clearly observable in Europe. The European regionalist movement aims to provide an answer to some of these problems, but it seems that the institutional structure foreseen in the Maastricht Treaty, for example, is not the most easily adaptable to such varied situations as those to be found in different parts of Europe. Scotland, Flanders, the Basque Country and

Catalonia, to give just a few examples, have different institutional needs to those of other European "regions". In this context, therefore, the **Catalan Declaration on the Sovereignty of Nations** aims to create a climate for reflection and dialogue allowing respect for individual and national liberties and overcoming outdated historical and political prejudices. Catalan intellectuals defend both national sovereignty in a democratic European framework and the creation of an intellectual and moral climate which makes possible the democratic expression of this sovereignty. They want to encourage actions in the civic and cultural sphere directed at:

– Potentiating, on a national and international level, the theoretical reflection needed to make headway, critically, towards the Europe of nations and liberties;
 – influencing public opinion in favour of national projects that successfully link freedom to solidarity;
 – making it possible for the Catalan national context to become a natural reference in the sphere of culture, communication and civic relations."

The intention of the declaration, therefore, is to contribute to a debate free from party or corporate considerations that allows the subject to be treated without the prejudices that get in the way of an adequate analysis of the national issue in Europe. □

JORDI PORTA DIRECTOR OF THE JAUME BOFILL FOUNDATION