

CATALAN ELECTIONS: NATIONALIST CONTINUITY

The autonomous elections held in Catalonia on 15 March 1992 produced results which essentially, and leaving aside the logical movement of voters, showed a strong desire for political continuity on the part of the electorate as a whole. In other words, the changes in the make-up of the Catalan parliament have been so small that they did not and will not involve substantial changes either in the present government's nationalist policies or even, so it seems, in the composition of this government. It is, of course a coalition, *Convergència i Unió*, with a liberal, Christian-democrat, moderate nationalist leaning, that raises no doubts as to Catalonia's relationship with Spain in the future, while at the same time permanently demanding a higher degree of self-government and sovereignty in such basic aspects as the economy, infrastructures, public order, culture and language, etc. The victory by an absolute majority of the CiU coalition also shows the great personal and political attraction of the country's president, Jordi Pujol, who heads this project –moderate in method but profoundly innovatory– with its new conception of what the structure of the Spanish state should be.



The fourth consecutive victory of Jordi Pujol's nationalism was accompanied by a slight fall in the traditional left (socialists and ex-communists) and by a slight increase on the part of the conservatives of the *Partit Popular*. The only element that visibly breaks with this continuist outlook was a substantial increase (from six to eleven deputies) of the only party to propound the independence of Catalonia, *Esquerra Republicana*. The Catalan parliament is made up of 135 deputies. The increase of the republicans seems to have been due to a certain measure of support from young voters. Politically, the case of Catalonia shows differences that make it almost unique amongst nationalist phenomena in Europe and the rest of the world. The case of Catalonia consciously avoids all violent phenomena (ETA, IRA, etc.); it also avoids crises like that in the Balkans, where the disappearance of a state has led to armed confrontation between two nationalities; it is also a long way from the independence processes of the former USSR (the Baltic countries, Ukraine, etc.); and it bears no resemblance either to movements of a culturalist or folkloric nature (Provence, Brittany, etc.). The elections of 15 March once again showed overwhelmingly that the issue is not to break away from the present Spanish state, but to find Catalonia's rightful place in it through what Jordi Pujol himself has called the refounding of the state, a refounding that

does not mean bringing about a crisis, so much as modifying the state so that the Catalans feel comfortable in it and have full economic and cultural guarantees. All this is what the nationalist coalition CiU wants to continue doing, from a totally European and Europeanist standpoint, in the hope that the community institutions in Brussels will gradually transform the role

of the traditional states, and, indirectly, reinforcing the role of the regions in questions that are essential for their future. As you can see, it is a project that is assumed by the majority, and is moderate and radical at the same time.

This continuity in the election results means that in the immediate future questions will be raised that are already traditional in relations between the Spanish and Catalan administrations. A tough negotiation over economic financing will have to be concluded before June; aspects of public order are also pending, as well as financial and cultural powers, etc. But the heart of the matter is that the *Generalitat*, the Catalan self-government institution Pujol presides, should come fully to be the Spanish state in Catalonia.

Over the next few months, the results of 15 March will also make for improvements in the relations between the socialist government in Madrid and the nationalist government in Barcelona. Jordi Pujol's and CiU's electoral strength demonstrate that Catalan nationalist feeling does not have clay feet and that the so-called "Catalan problem" persists. At the same time, Spanish social-democracy (the *PSOE*) is going through a severe crisis as a result both of the general problems of the left in Europe and the internal problems of Mr González's party, which in the last few months has been surrounded by constant scandals of financial corruption. In the future, the Socialist Party could therefore lose the absolute majority it has enjoyed since 1982. It could find a possible parliamentary and government ally in the Catalan nationalists, because, in spite of their deep-rooted discrepancies as regards the state model, they coincide substantially in the need to keep up neo-liberal economic policies, in the need to modernize Spain's structures and, in short, in their views on European integration and on the problems facing the West.

To sum up, the elections of 15 March have confirmed the policy of gradually advancing in the national reconstruction led by Jordi Pujol and, at the same time, have left the issue of the collaboration of the Catalan institutions in the governability of Spain as wide open as ever. □