

July 18th

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Many comments can be made on the occasion of 18 July. Many have been made already, in hundreds and thousands of articles, conferences and books, but it still gives food for thought. For example, one could ask which events and attitudes made things so difficult for the Republic and finally led to civil war. Or, alternatively, which events and attitudes made it possible to reestablish democracy and, especially, to consolidate it from the end of the 1970s until the present day.

There are many possible answers, but it is worth emphasising three inter-dependent ones: political stability, continuity and governability (by which I mean the capacity of government bodies to work efficaciously). These have not existed all the time all or in all areas. For example, they have not always existed in educational policy, one of the less brilliant areas that appears in any evaluation of the Transition. Also, at present Spain is going through uncertain times. Nonetheless, with hindsight, under different governments the basic conditions of overall stability, continuity and governability have been fulfilled. This is essential if a country is to make economic and social progress, improve its status and gain influence and prestige.

All of which requires not letting oneself be carried away by radical ideas that divide the country in a destructive and excluding way, (rather than through healthy and necessary democratic confrontation) and not allowing oneself to indulge in uncontrolled demagoguery and deceit. Also each time there is a democratic change of government it is essential to avoid a catastrophic about- turn in politics, economics, education or justice, and excessive changes in staff. The expression “now it’s our turn to be the winners” does much harm to democracy, and even more damage to the country.

Ensuring stability also requires a good dose of realism. Without idealism or ambition there is no progress, but there have been moments in the history of Spain, and of Catalonia, when there was a great lack of realism. And we have had to pay the consequences. During the Transition, Spain had both the luck and the good judgment to avoid most of these dangers. Although this may not seem to be the case when following political events from day to day, a more historical perspective shows that it was so. This is one of reasons for the success of the Transition. There are other reasons. For example, whatever is said today on the subject, another cause of its success was knowing how to handle the horrors of the Civil War compassionately and wisely.

It is a good thing to remember all that on a day like July 18.

It is also worth bearing in mind that nothing is ever gained permanently. And that there are often external factors that help bring success, but which may cease to exist. Europe has not fully understood that the enormous economic progress made from 1945 to 1975 (*les trente glorieuses*) is at the root of much of its political and social success during those years, along with US help at first and US protection later. Europe has also been slow to realise that circumstances are changing, and that things will no longer be so easy in the future.

What about Spain? In Spain perhaps people are not aware that although its achievements from 1977 to 2006 are largely due to its own efforts, the period it was living through helped a lot. Joining the European Union was a great advantage politically and especially in economic terms. These have been years of growth, very good years, but they will not last for ever. What is more, it is possible that things will become more difficult quite soon. Not as difficult as to endanger the progress that has already been made. But more difficult than at present.

There is a trace of excessive euphoria in Spanish society and a hint of smugness in government circles. Also the opposition have shown themselves to be very bad losers, which is extremely irresponsible, and could favour sectarianism, a serious threat to democracy and, ultimately, to progress. It is worth repeating that at certain times in the past there has been excessive euphoria and smugness and we have had to pay the consequences.

How does all this apply to and affect Catalonia? In the first place it should be said that the military uprising of 1936 was largely directed against Catalonia. On the other hand destructive radicalism also appeared there. But what is also worth emphasising in this context is that during the Transition and right up to the present day, Catalonia has probably contributed more than any other region to Spain's stability, governability and continuity. It has played a leading role, and a positive one, sometimes even sacrificing its own stability or interests. It is very hurtful that this has hardly been acknowledged outside Catalonia. It is a failing of Spanish society that this has not been recognised.

Catalonia also needs sustained political, economic and social progress, without abrupt stops and starts. This is only possible if, as well as having reliable governments, people have a sense of belonging to a country and share a feeling of enthusiasm that is strong enough to become a driving force behind society as a whole.

In Catalonia, people do not have the same rather excessive feeling of euphoria that exists in the rest of Spain. They are beginning to realise that there is no time to lose. Catalonia cannot afford to rest on its laurels; it is facing enormous challenges of competitiveness, and of social cohesion and identity. Perhaps until recently time was on our side, but that is no longer the case. Now everything is urgent. Fortunately, looking back on this 18 July, we can confirm that we have made great progress and that, in spite of current uncertainties, Catalonia has potential and its people have good reason to be hopeful.