

The Center

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Editorial / May 15, 2007

The are has been much talk lately about the political centre – that it is positive for a country to have a strong political centre, a strong political party of the centre; that Spain is particularly lacking in such a party and that it seems extremely difficult that any will emerge, which is regarded as negative; and that it would therefore be good idea for someone to start one. Noteworthy on the other hand is the admirable result obtained by the centrist candidate -François Bayrou- in the French presidential elections and his attempt at creating a centrist party in France and Europe, although it seems unlikely that it will come to anything. The question that some people are asking themselves is “why is this the case?”

There is also the question as to why this is difficult in Spain and France when other European countries have centrist parties.

Some observers note that in Spain there are strong political centre parties only in Catalonia and the Basque Country. Specifically CiU and PNV. Why?

This question deserves an in-depth analysis. But we will try to provide a brief answer, pending a more thorough examination. We will centre our response on two points.

First, relatively speaking, Spanish electoral legislation is not favourable to the success of a centre party. The law is balanced enough for the two big parties. There is significant parity between the number of votes and the parliamentary representation of the PSOE and the PP. This is not the case of the smaller Spanish parties, such as IU, for example. And all attempts to create a centrist party anew have failed largely for this reason.

But not only this. It is also difficult to build a loyal centrist electorate.

The PSOE and the PP – like the UMP and the PSF in France – have a significant number of supporters, of voters and ultimately of people who wholly identify themselves with these parties. This is a characteristic of the right and the left in the classic sense of the word. They are the hard-core, who do not shift positions or change –or very little and with great difficulty. The main concern of the big parties is to keep this hard-core strong and loyal. Later the right or the left may formulate some proposals that enable it penetrate the centre, and this frequently happens. They invade and occupy the centre. Alternatively, they position themselves so far to the right or the left such that they leave the middle ground open. The occupation of the centre ground generally facilitates a victory for the right or for the left, not for the centre itself. Why? Because it has no hard-core support. The centrist electorate may tip the balance, and often does. But alone it frequently lacks enough influence and, above all, does not have a sufficiently committed force of people who are able to withstand the

hard times. It is not resilient enough.