

Civil society and political society

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There is a negative feeling towards politics and politicians. Especially in Catalonia. The country is extremely confused and disorientated. And it is discouraged. Not about the economic situation, which is healthy, even though if certain measures are not taken soon, we will experience problems in the next couple of years. All manner of initiatives are being taken. See my editorial aptly titled “[Our assets](#)” (2 May 2007), which is a call for confidence. However, despite everything we are experiencing a critical moment owing to recent developments in terms of our collective enthusiasm and ambition, and the definition of a project for a country and self-respect. And the crisis of confidence concerning politics and politicians is profound.

It is customary in such circumstances to say, “Since the politicians can’t do their job properly we will take action through the civil society”. This is a positive reaction. And recently this has been happening in Catalonia. Faced with the general political impasse, civil society, together with the business community, organised the IESE protest, which called for Barcelona airport to be managed by Catalonia with the resolve to make it a strong instrument for the development of Barcelona and all Catalonia. The event was a success and it brought to mind that of the early twentieth century organised by the Catalan economic sector, which called for the [creation of the Zona Franca in Barcelona](#). That demonstration took place at one of the defining moments in Catalan economic and business activity.

The demonstration of 22 March was a success. But what continuity will it have? What is the next step? And who should undertake this next step?

The merit and success of the 22 March demonstration are indisputable. But now one has the impression that no follow-up has been planned. Moreover, the statement issued at the end of the demonstration should have been more incisive and shown greater commitment.

Notwithstanding, it is entirely necessary for this civil mobilisation to continue. And this requires will, a definition of objectives and leadership. There should be more involvement with the inclusion of the political institutions as well.

The organisers of the IESE demonstration sought to organise and carry out the action independently from the political arena. Hence, not a single politician was present. I think they did the right thing. The issue had become highly politicised, and the elections were on the horizon. And Catalan civil society should rightly go on taking its own initiatives. However, we have to remember that all initiatives that affect society sooner or later and to a greater or lesser extent must inevitably involve politics.

A country without a civil society cannot advance, regardless of its politicians' merits. Or in the worst case it takes time. Carried out from the top, namely, from the circles of political power, it takes a long time to create a social base of people and of social mechanisms. This is what the enlightened despotism of the eighteenth-century, or more recently countries with a desire to modernise and often with a firm hand, sought to achieve. Although there are examples where this has been successful, this is not Catalonia's case, nor overall that of other western countries. Catalonia has a middle class, a bourgeoisie, a working class, and an intellectual elite – it has a social fabric. Rich and diverse. We have democratic customs. We need to count on people, and fortunately, people there are. We have a society. It was present at IESE. But we cannot escape the fact, as we said in our Editorial of 21 February 2006, that "[but no country can move forward without politics](#)". There can be no progress without a strong and active civil society, and one that has a sense of the public interest, yet the country will not advance without a strong political base. Without the right synergy between civil society and the political establishment. Without strong leadership in both sectors.

Is there enough synergy in Catalonia? Probably not.

It has to be said that the political institutions often distrust civil initiatives. This was already apparent during the IESE demonstration. Civil society took action from the political sidelines while the political institutions – albeit a good part of it - looked on with mistrust. And right now something has happened that is reminiscent of Italy, where the president of the business community, Montemezolo, gave a speech that has had significant repercussions – and widespread approval – in which he called for the Government to act more in line with the country's economy interests. Rather than the typical employers' association speech, it was more inclusive. It was a challenge to the politicians. And, as I said, it was greeted with universal approval.

But the Italian president Prodi's reaction was rather cool. There appears to be a split, which is not good.

The political crisis in Catalonia is so acute that it seems we could do without politicians for the present. Or that we should disregard them. Perhaps now, as things stand, there will be a lack of political reaction. That is to say, that in the absence of encouraging political proposals, of a renewed leadership, the political struggle will act as a heavy mist. Worse still: we may reach a state where we believe it would be good to keep the country politically tamed and lethargic. This would extremely counterproductive, because it would imply a loss of ambition, enthusiasm and willingness.

It is urgent to overcome this state of paralysis, disinterest, disorientation and frustration, above all in political terms. However, at the same time it is positive, highly positive and extremely necessary for society to take the initiative. Not behind the political establishment's back, but seeking out its involvement.

What are the people who were so successful at planning the IESE initiative now?

One last consideration. Catalanism was the great driving force of twentieth century. A Catalanism that was not solely political, but that was understood as a project for a country with its own identity, with a desire to draw together social classes and a wide range of people who are forward-looking and receptive to Europe and to the world. Capable even of contributing to the progress and modernisation of the entire State. Catalan civil society, from the whole spectrum of political leanings, made this approach its own.

This lent it consistency and continuity. A consistency and a continuity that we continue to need.