

What will remain of the Generalitat?

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For some time a lively debate has been underway surrounding the territorial organisation of Catalonia. Above all surrounding the questions of the *vegueries* and the metropolitan area of Barcelona, but on the rebound the question of the provinces, the provincial councils and *consells comarcals* has also come to the fore. This subject is giving rise to much heated debate and tension across the country, besides coming at a time of deep disquiet, especially economic, in many a local council. On the other hand, it also raises questions of the real reasons behind this or that party's interest in the metropolitan body or in the configuration of the *vegueries*, and so forth. But this editorial does not directly address this issue.

Instead it deals with the title thereof. A very important subject and one that is rarely discussed.

Let us suppose a metropolitan body is accorded the powers that some parties in the government wish it to have. Let us also suppose the *vegueries* are granted, together with the powers envisaged. This elicits the first question: would the *consells comarcals* and the provincial councils also survive? Logic dictates they would be abolished. There is already enough of a bureaucratic jumble. It seems like the advocates of the *Vegueries* Law are aware of the excessive and harmful problems to which this might give rise. Yet we are not so sure, as nothing gives certain sectors as much pleasure as fiddling about with the territory as if it were children's puzzle, playing with the subsequent expectations of medium, small and very small areas.

It remains to be seen what powers the metropolitan body will have and how it will be funded. And who will fund it. Since it might very well be that between the one camp, driven by the passion for administrative divisions of municipalities and *vegueries*, and the other, by a desire to secure to the utmost a large power mechanism, the Generalitat will be left with less power. Especially its executive power, that is, governmental and presidential. And to some extent parliamentary as well. If this happens the real power of the autonomous government will be significantly reduced.

Catalan nationalist policy has always been in favour of small areas and has called for *vegueries*. But above all it has demanded a strong autonomy. And this requires strong government, strong legislative and executive power. This means avoiding divisions. It means having the region in mind, and all its diversity of needs, of interests. But it also requires a strong Generalitat.

Everybody will say they agree on this. We are not so sure they do. The history of years past and the trend we are criticising of drawing maps and dividing up power, protagonism and safe political area is very evident. It would appear that the more regional and sectorial bodies there are, the better. And as tailored made as possible.

Catalanism has also sought to prevent specific areas of the country being left behind. With polices aimed at healthcare, schools, universities and social services, with cultural facilities, with economic development, and so on. It has sought to strengthen the area of Barcelona and at the same time strengthen the rest of the country. It

has sought to combine traditional divisions with the strengthening of a network of cities with a strong personality and with a capacity for initiative. And with a leading role full of possibilities for Barcelona, which would span out over Catalonia. Without a strong Barcelona, Catalonia would lose a good deal of strength and personality. We need an all-embracing sense of country, that is, without excessive particularities or partisan intent.

Without forgetting the key objective of Catalonia's self-government, which requires a strong Generalitat. A Generalitat that means a parliament, a government and a president.

A strong Generalitat that has always underpinned Catalan nationalism. The main demand during the transition to democracy and upon the restoration of the Generalitat. It was a demand of the parties of the entire political spectrum, from the left-wing parties to the most hardened nationalists.

For example, there was a unanimous call either for the abolition of the provincial councils or for the transfer of some of its functions to the Generalitat. Because they were viewed as functions should fall within the jurisdiction of the Catalan government.

At the same time a general agreement was reached whereby in the future the Catalan territorial policy would be structured according to new criteria and with greater proximity to decision centres, without curbing the power of the Generalitat, which was viewed as a key mechanism of self-government and as such should not be reduced with powerful counter-powers or a excessive fragmentation.

The main counter-power of the president and the Catalan government must be the parliament. And evidently the various control bodies such as the Council of Statutory Guarantees, the Public Audit Office, the Catalan Ombudsman, and so forth. And likewise we need a regional organisation closer to the people. But all this must be done in a way that does not beg the somewhat alarmist question that some of us are asking ourselves: will the Generalitat be able to act with all the effectiveness of a true government?