

Author: Jordi Pujol
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The process of independence of the new European states

Today I am going to take a long time because the subject calls for it. We are talking about more than twenty new states: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia and, additionally, the six new Muslim states from the former Soviet Union that are not the subject of our discussion today, but which form part of this list.

I am addressing you at a time that is one of great happiness for many of these countries. They have just joined the EU, but until quite recently some of them were in a very precarious situation, nationally, economically, politically and socially.

In order to fully understand what has happened we must analyse it over three periods of time. The first one was very short: it started in the year 1000 and finished in 1918. It's such a short period that we needn't pay too much attention to it. But the other two periods, the one that commenced in 1918 and lasted until 1990, and the one that commenced in 1990 and continues until the present day, are very important ones.

You see, Europe had its Middle Ages. And the Middle Ages means the diversity of peoples. What distinguishes Europe from the United States is that the United States did not have its Middle Ages. This is a very big difference. Europe is based on the diversity of its peoples, languages, cultures and institutions. At times to some degree crowned and controlled, steered and directed by the German Empire, in one part of Europe; or by the Papacy and by Christianity. But leading, whatever the case, to considerable diversity and fragmentation.

Thenceforth, over the following centuries, the tendency was, in contrast, towards the creation of a kind of conglomeration leading to centralisation. There were annexations, incorporations and conquests. This was very often achieved with a military hand. This leads us to the great monarchies of the 16th and 17th centuries, especially in western Europe. Look how—and almost never peacefully—France absorbed and annexed the

whole of Occitania, Burgundy, Brittany, Roussillon, and, something that affects us, Flanders. And, over the course of these centuries, Great Britain absorbed Ireland, Wales, and at the end of the process in 1707, Scotland.

In Spain too there has been this process of centralisation culminating around the same time as in Great Britain, (which is more properly known as the United Kingdom to signify that it is the kingdom of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Here too, in 1714, events culminated with the suppression of all that had gone before and all that had been preserved of the former Crown of Aragon, of the Catalano-Aragonese Confederation. But it didn't only happen to us. Look at the great people of Poland, a country with so many people, forty million inhabitants, yet it disappeared politically. It was carved up between Prussia, Russia and Austria-Hungary. And Bohemia, which had been a major country during the Middle Ages, was incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Poland itself, at a certain time, tried to absorb Lithuania, and to some extent it succeeded. And so on.

This tendency towards centralisation and, insofar as it was possible, assimilation, was carried out very thoroughly by the French, and as for the English, well, Heavens above! And the Spanish too did what they could. And this meant the creation of very compact states in western Europe.

Meanwhile, in central and eastern Europe, more than highly centralised monarchies, there were empires—multiracial and multilingual empires. Spain too was, and is, multilingual, but in central and eastern Europe it was much more of a mosaic with Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Catholics and Muslims living together. There were four such empires: the German Empire—which appeared on the scene relatively late, or relatively soon if you count the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation in the Middle Ages—the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire. And for sure, all four of them lost in World War One. In addition to their common trait of relative disunity, all four of them lost their 20th-century wars. They were far less compact and less consolidated than the great monarchies of western Europe or even of smaller yet stronger, more powerful and unified countries such as Sweden and Holland.

But let's not go into the comparison of things that are basically different such as the creation of the German Empire and the unification of Italy. So, this was the case until

1800. That's when things began to change and what we could call a renaissance started amongst a whole number of peoples, cultures, languages and collective consciousnesses that had been suppressed throughout this long process. There was a reaction against what had been the great 18th-century rationalism and against all these tendencies. There was a renaissance in feelings, a feeling for roots. It was an intellectual renaissance but it was also a renaissance in people's sensibilities. And, as was the case in Catalonia, this renaissance was based on recovering the language, culture and history.

There were only two European countries that had advanced beyond this; namely, Greece and Serbia. Greece, the beneficiary of the great 18th-century intellectual complicity that the Hellenic movement was, became independent in 1827, and Serbia managed to gain its independence from the Ottoman Empire in a really atypical way.

Curiously, the only ones which had kept their independence were the ones that lost it in 1918, and they continued to lose it now, like Montenegro, surrounded by a kind of Ottoman sea, it was the only country to have maintained its independence for centuries and centuries, but in 1918 it lost it, somewhat absurdly.

We are talking here of fairly general processes: language, culture, music. Music was very useful. Think of the great Czech composers like Dvorak, so well-known by music-lovers here, and Smetana. Music played its role. And it played its role in a very different way in the process of Italian unification. Verdi was an important political and artistic instrument in Italian unification. Italian patriots in favour of unity would paint the word "VERDI" on the walls and the police couldn't say anything about that. But "VERDI" stood for, "Viva Vittorio Emmanuele, Re d'Italia!" [Long Live Victor Emmanuel, King of Italy!]. And *Nabucco* is a tool for political agitation, that's obvious, and then we've got Dvorak, Sibelius in Finland and so forth. And the same thing happened in Catalonia too and that applies to all our music, popular music and high culture. Look at Pau Casals, for example.

What they all had in common was the fact that they sprang from a very precarious situation. In 1827, the Czech counterpart to Pompeu Fabra, Dobrowsky, said, "The Czech language is dead". And at that time, he and Palaky—and there was another one too, in all good faith if a little self-importantly—said, more or less, "If the roof fell in and killed us, that would be the end of the Czech people". Well, that's going a bit far, but it indicates how

people felt about the situation; and all the peoples felt this way to some extent, some talking about 'Finnish Catalonia' and others about 'Finnish Poland'. And then there was a renaissance and language played a very important part in that. For example, one of the Czech slogans was "One language, one soul", others were "We need a language, a language and a soul" and, as the Finnish nationalists said, "Language is the backbone of the Finnish people".

Naturally, social factors, the social situation, also played an important part in this renaissance. All these peoples had nobilities, they had the Church, be it Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox. High Church and Low, and from the national point of view they did not always have the same outlook. They had a middle-class, be it greater or smaller, and, on occasions, it was divided. They had peasants. They had a working class. They had an artisan class. Let us consider Bohemia which is what we now call the Czech Republic. Bohemia had a large, and very powerful, industrial and commercial middle class and, together with the city of Vienna, it constituted the industrial heartland of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a distinction it had previously shared with Lombardy that had also formed part of the Empire. These middle classes were very powerful and advanced. They were German and they spoke German. Many *were* German and others *spoke* German. And obviously there were the working classes and a more modest Czech middle class. The cultural world existed, as we were saying, but with a strong German presence which went back a long way. Rilke and Kafka were both German writers, but they were from Prague. And in the same way that in Spain people say the best Spanish spoken is in Valladolid, and just as in France people say the best French spoken is in Touraine, in former times, the Germans used to say that the best German spoken was the German spoken in Prague. And that's the way it was, and perfectly naturally so, because they had been there for centuries.

I'll give you another example of a country I have got to know a little more about than some others, not through being there—I haven't visited the country very often—but through some of the books I have read. This country is Latvia. What happened there is very important. Let's consider an anecdote told by the widely renowned intellectual, political observer and sociologist, Isaiah Berlin. Isaiah Berlin was born in Riga and so, in theory, he was Latvian. He never, ever, felt Latvian and neither did he ever have any sort of special regard for the Latvian people. He was Jewish, from a family that came from

Belarus and, to cut a long story short, he ended up in Oxford and became British through and through. He used to say that there were 'three strands' in his own personality: Russian, English and Jewish. He never mentioned Latvia. Why's that if he was Latvian? What was going on in Latvia? In Latvia there were Germans. They were in a minority but they were very powerful as landowners and within the economy and they hailed back to the Middle Ages and the times of the Teutonic Knights, a very long time before. That's what there was in Latvia. They were a minority, but a very powerful one. German was very widely used.

And there were the Russians. Russians made up the ranks of the civil service and the military, and without doubt, there was the odd entrepreneur too, as well as a section of the working class concentrated around the port of Riga. Russia's great naval port was Riga because Saint Petersburg was often blocked by ice and Odessa was of limited use because passage through the Dardanelles was usually denied. In Riga, as well as many Russians, there were Jews. As was the case everywhere else, they were in a minority, but a large minority and, furthermore, a rich and powerful one. And as was the case everywhere in these countries, this gave rise to certain anti-Semitic sentiments. Then there were the Latvians who were the majority group but, in many ways, they did not count for much. Little by little, however, they began to count for more and more. They were farmers, artisans, members of the liberal professions, doctors, lawyers, traders, shop-keepers and workers in commerce. They formed part of the middle class. Not the high middle class, but middle class nonetheless, and they constituted the majority of the population. It's funny, you know, that in all these places, people would say there were a lot of shop-keepers. That's what they say about Catalonia too. The Catalan nationalist movement was full of shop-keepers and shop-assistants. The 'Centre Autonomista de Dependents del Comerç i de la Indústria - CADCI' [Autonomous Centre for Shop-Assistants and Clerks in Commerce and Industry], is an exemplary case of support for Catalan nationalism, especially until the war. Once, in *l'Esquella de la Torratxa*, in *Cu-Cut*, in *Bé Negre*, I don't remember in which of these publications, there was a cartoon strip about a demonstration which read, "What do the shop-keepers want?" and the answer was, "They want independence". Well, in Latvia, the shop-keepers wanted independence too.

Berlin tells a story about the war and the revolution. His family had left Riga to go to Saint Petersburg where they stayed for some years. When the revolution broke out in Russia, and above all when the Bolsheviks really started to advance, they returned to Riga because events had not taken quite the same turn there. They took a train from Saint Petersburg—Berlin tells the story in great detail. The journey to Riga was a terrible one for them and although he was a child he remembers it well. They were in a carriage in which all the other passengers were Latvians. In his family, only his mother could speak Latvian. She was a radical Jew and she was antagonistic, very antagonistic, towards the Latvians and the entire journey was spent with his mother quarrelling with the Latvians in the carriage whom Berlin describes as being very ordinary, poorly educated and ill mannered. That was the image such a distinguished person as Berlin had of them, of what Latvia was and what Latvians were like.

Well, I mention this because of the influence the social situation had and because of the way these things evolve. Really these nationalist movements, these emerging countries, began to prosper, some of them starting from a very lowly position, partly because of the influence of their neighbours, it is very clear what Latvia's case was but I have spoken too of what was known as Bohemia and we could also mention the situation the Finns faced with a dominant Swedish minority. At a certain time who *did* defend the Finns were the Russians because the Russians wanted a counterweight to Sweden. They consequently wanted the Swedish minority who had lived there from the 13th to the 19th centuries in a dominant position as rulers to allow the Finns some breathing space, something they had had little experience of previously.

So outside influences have always been very important and that is the case with the Russians, the Finns, and the Swedes, for example. But what about the Austrians, the Hungarians and the Slovaks with the Austrians defending the Slovaks against the Hungarians even though they were all part of the same empire? And then there were the Russians and Slavs in general who were behind the Pan-Slavic movement, and Russia was always behind the idea of a union of the southern Slavs, that is to say, Yugoslavia. The reasons for this were various: Slav national, ethnic and Orthodox religious and they are with us to this day. A further example is Belgium. Its independence as a country can not be understood without the intervention in 1830 of the English and the French. Without that, it most likely would not have seceded from the Netherlands, or would not have been

able to. And then there was the constant Russian interference inside the Ottoman Empire, and so on and, of course, the aftermath of the wars and the defeat suffered by the vast multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-national and multi-lingual empires.

All this is to say that many peoples lived relatively peaceful lives—relatively, not completely—within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. But this is the way events progressed, and above all there was the war and the ensuing defeat and the impositions made from outside as a consequence of the end of empire.

A Spanish politician highly regarded for his intellect once said to me, “Look at it this way, Spain was very prudent because during the years of Spanish decline that lasted from the end of the 17th century to the day before yesterday, it did not get embroiled in continental wars and remained neutral. Now imagine,” he said, “that Spain had allowed itself to be dragged into the First World War on the side of the Germans. Okay, you, the Catalans and the Basques, in 1918 you would have gone off to Paris, to the Paris Peace Conference, and said, ‘And what about us?’”. Just like everyone else. What I mean by that is, from December 1918 until 1922 Paris was full of Lithuanian, Polish, Czech, Kurdish, Armenian and Georgian delegations to name just some. Everyone was there. It has been affirmed, although no-one has been able to demonstrate that this is true, that Cambó tried to go, but Cambó did not have arms—only a few disorganised volunteers participated—and they were not recognised at all. Quite a few of them died, and Cambó was never even received. That’s what some people say, but I doubt whether it is true because Cambó himself never mentions it, so it is perfectly possible that it is not true. There must surely have been someone, especially someone from those groups of Catalan volunteers who went to fight in the war who tried to come to an accommodation. But of course, as that Spanish politician said, if Spain had entered the war in favour of Germany, in favour of the Central Powers, that would have had much further-reaching consequences.

A country I haven’t spoken much about but which is, in fact, the most important one, is Poland. But Poland is such a large country that it was difficult to treat it like Latvia, Lithuania or Slovenia. So large was it that it was divided between three, and the three that had gobbled it up all lost: Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary. Everything we have said is even more applicable to Poland which, furthermore, had a stronger character than any of them both in population and tradition.

Wars always stir things up and the 1914-1918 war had two consequences for those who had participated in it, Spain was excluded. In many countries it led to revolution, above all, but not only, in Russia. Secondly, it caused the implosion of the Empires. The Empires imploded. And on the rebound many people found their independence. Sometimes this was not foreseen and sometimes it was not even sought. What had happened is that during the war, people had been changing their minds. The clearest example of this is that of the Czechs. There is a book in three volumes by Rovira i Virgili, published in 1912, entitled, *La història dels nacionalismes* [The History of Nationalisms] which is well worth reading if you can find an antiquarian bookshop that stocks it. In it we read, "You might well believe, if you judge only by the frankly aggressive nature of Czech nationalism and the violence of the Czech-German struggle, that the patriots of the countries under the crown of Bohemia are separatists." He uses the present tense because he was writing in 1912, before the War. He continues, "It would be a grave mistake to think such a thing. The Czechs are not separatists. On the contrary, they defend the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and wish to remain within it but by replacing the current Austro-Hungarian dualism with a wide federation of nationalities". That's what Rovira i Virgili said. Or perhaps, instead of being a dual monarchy, an accommodation could have been found as a triple one, that is to say of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia. He goes on to say, "As early as in his letter to the Diet of Frankfurt in 1848, Palaky", (the driving force behind Czech nationalism in the mid-19th century and one of those who said it would all come to an end if the roof fell in) "defended the necessity of Austria-Hungary searching for a continued existence through federalism as a solution to its internal problems".

Why was that? They were advocating the Empire's continued existence from the nationalist stance of Bohemia's own interests. It was fear of what the future might bring for that people that discouraged the urge for political independence and separation from Austria-Hungary. In 1912 it is clear that the Czech people was nationalist, but this is what they said. We could cite many other examples because one thing these peoples had in common was that they did not want to be oppressed, assimilated, absorbed or destroyed, but they were fearful of being left on their own. That's interesting. They were afraid of being left on their own to confront Pan-Germanism, saying, "If the Austro-Hungarian Empire breaks up, we will be conquered by the Kaiser's armies, so let's stay here where we are and preserve the Empire". That was in 1912. The great father of Czech

independence was Masaryk, Tomas G. Masaryk, who was, by the way, partly Catalan. Do you know what the 'G' stands for? It stands for Garrigue. His mother was from Perpignan. So you see, in the end, it's a small world.

Masaryk also advocated the continued existence of Austria-Hungary and did so as a member of the parliament in Vienna amongst other places. He had little political power. His party, the Realist Party, the 'common sense' party if you like, only had two deputies in parliament that had to ally themselves with larger parties to get anywhere. At that time, his demand was quite simple: either a triple monarchy or federalism. It was only with the War, when these people realised that if Austria-Hungary lost there would probably be a clear desire to break the Empire up, that Masaryk said, "I'll go along with that" and when it became clear that they were loosing, he went off to Paris saying, "Yes, yes. The Empire's finished. We want independence", for Bohemia, that is to say. Slovakia came later.

As I was saying, there was this fear. There were countries that failed to take advantage of the War because they were ill prepared. I'll give you two examples of this in a moment. The Czechs had very good patrons. The Poles had very good patrons, the French mainly, but there were others too. They also had considerable adversaries—the Russians obviously, but not the Germans at that time because Germany had been defeated and it was all Germany could do to try and prevent the loss of more of its own territory than necessary. Others were ill prepared, their political class and their national processes were immature. The Kurds, for example, a fashionable cause today whose situation has still not been resolved satisfactorily, were not prepared. The Kurds also went to Paris to see Clemenceau, to see Wilson, to see Lloyd George. They were all in and out of the great hotels of Paris having meetings with this one and that one, presenting their cases and their dossiers. But the Kurds had not yet put their tribal stage behind them.

But now I'll give you two examples of countries that were not prepared at the time to take advantage of the circumstances of the day. Those two countries were Slovakia and Slovenia, countries that now, in contrast, have indeed known how to benefit from circumstances. A Finnish historian has said, "Apart from anything else, little countries like us need to be lucky". There are countries that have good luck and don't know what to do with it and there are countries that are not lucky, and yet, through the force of their own very special efforts, achieve what they want. Circumstances, or luck, often play a part,

however. Finland has been independent since 1917 and the same Finnish historian has written, “For ninety years—that is to say from 1809 when it was annexed by Russia until its independence—the Finns were happy with their union with Russia and they never fuelled the fires of separatist aspirations”. And he goes on to explain, “Then the War broke out and things began to change”. But not right away because to begin with, Marshal Mannerheim, who was the leading light of Finnish independence, fought with Russia for the Tsar until the revolution broke out. And this historian observes, and the same goes for the Baltic countries too, “Well, we were lucky. The revolution helped us in that sense because the facts showed that history does not happen only as a consequence of ideological postulations and that what little countries also need in the passage of history is good luck”.

It's worth saying that the Finns took full advantage of their good luck and later they also defended their independence extremely well during the Winter War of 1939 when Russia attacked Finland and the Finns had to defend themselves all on their own—this time without luck on their side. They lost, and the Russians forced them to cede some territory, but they managed to resist very well.

What I'm trying to draw attention to here is the complexity of some of these countries' recent history—the Baltic Republics and Finland—which were independent before World War One had ended. With the revolution in Russia, and with the separate peace agreement between Germany and Russia, all these territories on the periphery had cut free and it was in the interests of both the Germans and the Allies to avoid, not their recovery by Russia, but the installation of the Bolsheviks in Riga, Helsinki and Vilnius. To that extent, they were protected, a protection they deserved because they knew how to capitalise on it.

Slovenia and Slovakia, however, were paralysed by fear. The Slovaks didn't know where to turn. They were lost. They had a national movement led by a priest called Hlinka. But at the crucial moment they could not come to an accommodation with the Hungarians because it was the Hungarians who had been oppressing them. The Hungarian police even killed seven people on one occasion because they did not want Hlinka, who was the rector of a parish, to open and consecrate a new church alleging that he could not do this because he was the leader of a nationalist party. So it was hard to get on with the

Hungarians. An understanding might have been reached with the Germans, that is to say, with the Austrians, but that was not possible because, under the terms of the peace treaty, Austria was prohibited from incorporating territories and it had lost the War. In the end they turned to the Czechs and it turned out very badly for them. They allowed themselves to be tricked. They were tricked, it's true. There was a meeting between representatives of the Czech and Slovak diasporas and in Pittsburgh the Slovaks were told that they would be granted autonomy, but they didn't get anything at all and did not realise that they had been tricked until later. Hlinka, at the end of a discussion of the peace treaty, as a consequence of which they would end up in the hands of the Czechs, could see that it would turn out badly, that they would be treated badly, and during a meeting, he burst into tears saying, "This is my fault" and in a kind of act of contrition he said, "I have been unable to defend my people".

The same thing happened to the Slovenes. To begin with, like the Slovaks, they had never existed as a State. They did not have a history like, for example, Lithuania with its glorious Middle Ages, or like Catalonia. The Slovenes, in common with the Finns, had never had anything like that. The Slovenes were Slovenes, that's true, but they had no institutions and were heavily influenced by the Italians and even more so by the Austrians. So when the moment of truth came, they were afraid that if they were independent, assuming such independence were possible, they would be gobbled up by the Italians or by the Austrians. So they let themselves be seduced by an idea that turned out very badly for them, the federation of southern Slavs, in other words, Yugoslavia. They embraced the idea of Yugoslavia to protect themselves from the Germans, the Austrians and the Italians and probably because they didn't have a clear idea of what it was that they wanted. They did not have clear ideas, nor did they have the good luck of Finland and the Baltic countries to be in a place that it was in the interests of a third power to defend, I am referring to the Russian revolution.

In such matters, if you do not prepare the ground well, you end up paying the price. That's not the subject of our talk today so I'm just mentioning it in passing. A question we Catalans need always to ask ourselves is if, during the transition to democracy, Catalan exiles, and even the Catalans living in Catalonia, acted in such a way as to take full advantage of those historic times. Either we did not act well during the transition to democracy or we did not act sufficiently well. Now, if I were to describe the virtues of the

transition to democracy, what was achieved and what was done, and if we were to compare our situation with the one we were in twenty years ago or thirty years ago, then our present position is immensely better. The outcome may well be a positive one but sometimes one thinks that, with a little more vision of the future, and with better preparation, perhaps things could have been done differently.

For example, the Baltic countries. Except for Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, they had never amounted to much. The rulers were Germans, Russians and Swedes. Then, for twenty years they were independent before falling into the hands of the Soviet Union at which point there seemed to be no prospect for the future at all. There was a Latvian exile living here in Catalonia. He was a bishop. He lived in the monastery in Montserrat for a long time, I don't recall just how long. The poor man, I felt very sorry for him living as he was in Montserrat, an exile and always with the same look of total despondency about him. Well, despite all this, the Baltic countries did something interesting, they maintained two Embassies in countries that would allow them to do so: the Vatican and the United States. The US and the Vatican were saying, "We continue to recognise the Baltic Republics. The three Baltic Republics" at the request of those republics. In other words, they were providing things with continuity even though there was no hope, no hope at all. The poor Latvian bishop died in desperation. Father Escarré talked to me about him saying, "I go to see him from time to time, to give him the chance for some conversation". He lived there with his assistant, another priest, and, poor men, they were crestfallen because they couldn't do anything.

The maintenance of continuity is a fact in the history of Catalan exile too. Keeping two Embassies open is a way of maintaining continuity by saying, "We were a State and we are a State. They might not recognise the fact, but we are a State". This has nothing to do with luck. This is will power to maintain continuity. When president Tarradellas kept the Generalitat, the government of Catalonia, alive in exile, that is what he was doing, maintaining continuity. The problem is that afterwards, this continuity was left with very little content and lacked a significant political force that was absolutely at the service of that Generalitat.

And so it was for all the newly-independent countries at the time. It seemed as if the thesis of the Catalan writer, Alexandre Deulofeu, was being confirmed. In his book, *La*

matemàtica de la història [The mathematics of history], he claimed that there were mathematical cycles in history, mathematical cycles that were, in a certain sense, fatal ones. He said that there had been a cycle that commenced during the Lower Middle Ages, rose with the centralisation of the 14th and 15th centuries, and came full-circle now with liberation and disintegration. He explained all this with tables and every kind of mathematical argument, and partly, he was right. But not in the case of Catalonia which is what interested Deulofeu and what interests me too. And it seemed as if this is what was going on, especially this tendency towards fragmentation, a word many people find difficult to digest, but it means, simply, liberty.

That's what happened between 1918 and 1939 culminating with a very strong nationalist climax accompanied by some very negative things: a deep economic depression followed by Nazism, Fascism and Communism. All these things together: economic depression, Nazism, Fascism, Communism, numerous tensions between different countries, a badly-drafted treaty of Versailles that paid little respect to minorities, growing anti-Semitism even in some of the countries in central and eastern Europe where there had always been the largest Jewish communities, but, strange to say, anti-Semitism was much stronger in some of these countries—Poland, the Ukraine and Russia—than in Germany. Much stronger. Then events took an absolutely tragic turn, but that's the way it was. It is not as if anti-Semitism didn't exist in Germany, it's just that there was a lot less of it there than in some of these other countries.

Some countries had internal problems arising from the nationalities question. One of them was Yugoslavia. The southern Slavs. Great Serbian centralisation. The Croats, Macedonians and Slovenes soon thought they had been tricked or had made a mistake. This brings us back to what we were saying about the fears of the Slovenes, for example. Tensions were running high as can be demonstrated by a couple of things that happened. One fine day some Serbian militants entered Parliament, went up to the seats occupied by three Croatian deputies, and killed them. Then they left the building, and that was that, nothing happened to them. Then, in 1934, the King of Yugoslavia was assassinated while he was on an official visit to Marseilles by a Croat Ustachi commando unit which was receiving logistic support from a Macedonian commando unit. This gives us an idea of what was going on in Yugoslavia.

And this explains something that seemed like a miracle at that time, that some people thought was a marvellous invention. Everyone observed it with interest, even the Catalan nationalists. What happened is that Tito, who was a Croat and a Communist—he was not a Serb, he was a Croat—said, “We’ve got to sort this thing out. We’ve got to let confidence blossom once more between us and the way we are going to do it is by devolving wide-ranging powers to each republic: the Republic of Croatia, the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Serbia and so forth and, what’s more, we’ll have the Party be the guarantor”. Of course, the same thing happened in the Soviet Union where the uniting force was the Party, who ruled was the Party and what counted was the Party, not the State administration. That’s why the State fell apart in these countries, in Russia for example, when the Party fell apart. You can change parties, or a party might go badly wrong, another one might go well—in fact, anything can happen, even in a dictatorship. But if the administration has maintained its autonomy, the party can come to an end but the administration will be left working. In Russia, the day the Party disappeared, the day the Communist Party was practically dissolved, everything was finished, the administration, the country, and absolutely nothing worked anymore.

Things were somewhat different in Yugoslavia because there was self-government and everyone had greater possibilities to act on their own account, but when it came to the crunch, something similar happened.

This happened in Czechoslovakia too. The people living there were mainly Czechs but there was a large minority, a very large one—some four million—of Slovaks. There were also some Hungarians, some hundreds of them; some Poles, but only a few of them; and then there were the Sudeten Germans and that was another problem that was highly dramatic and deeply tragic for both sides. And things went badly wrong. Czechoslovakia—when we talk of Czechoslovakia we are in fact talking about the Czechs—Czechoslovakia has always received a good press in the West. In Paris, in London, everywhere in the western democracies, amongst the left and amongst the right, possibly more amongst the left than the right, but amongst the right too. Everyone thought the Czechs were wonderful. And they are. They are well-educated, what is called ‘progressive’ and whatever else you fancy. And the Czechs have abused this a lot. First, they believe this about themselves—there’s a certain petulance about them—and then they have always gone around with certain airs and graces but treating the Slovaks really

badly, tricking them because they never applied the Pittsburgh protocol, and treating them badly because they despised them.

In the end, this contempt has been the Slovaks' salvation. You can see how they scorned them when the Slovaks said, "We must implement the Pittsburgh protocol. You must give us autonomy" and the Czechs replied, "We don't have to give you autonomy because you haven't got enough competent people to run your own self-government. You're a bunch of ignorant peasants! Get out!". And this idea was shared by others. I once spoke with Dubcek who had been the prime minister of Czechoslovakia in Communist times, he was a more or less reforming Communist and a Slovak, and he said, "No way, this Slovak thing doesn't exist". He was a Slovak, but he didn't even want to talk about this. "They're a backward lot."

I have an article here by Rovira i Virgili—I will not read it to you—that was published in the Republican Left journal *Humanitat* on 18 August 1938. "Hlinka dies", it reads, (he died in August 1938) and it goes on to eulogise the period before 1918. It says, "Now all this has degenerated, they are right-wing", and so forth. I am referring to this kind of reaction by men who think they represent the hopes of the world because they are left-wing and call themselves 'progressive'. And Rovira i Virgili himself must have fallen into this error to some extent sometimes because he speaks very badly of Hlinka when, in fact, who had been swindled was Hlinka himself and the Slovaks, but of course, prestige went elsewhere. The story was complicated by the fact that the Slovaks were always protesting. They went around showing people the Pittsburgh protocol, but nobody took any notice of them.

In 1938 came Munich. Czechoslovakia had still not been dismantled but it was controlled by Hitler. Then the Slovaks were given autonomy—I don't know whether because Hitler insisted or because the Czechs gave it to them in the heat of the moment. They had a new leader, also a priest by the way, called Jozef Tiso. They were given autonomy, and in 1939, when Czechoslovakia definitively ceased to exist because Hitler carved it up, taking the Sudetenland and turning the rest into the protectorate of Bohemia, they became independent.

Naturally this means that the poor opinion of the Slovaks that the Czechs have always conveyed to the rest of the world became even worse. Because, evidently, they were given independence with Hitler's blessing. A Slovak politician, a friend of mine, said, "Listen, we had to do it like that under Tiso because otherwise we would have disappeared. The Czechs would have taken another slice of us, the Hungarians, with a Hungarian minority within Slovakia, would have taken another slice, and Bratislava—Bratislava (Presburg for German speakers) had been capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for a few years and Empress Maria Teresa had held court there—we don't know what would have happened. So that's what we had to do".

I don't know if he was right or not, but when things started to progress towards democracy all Czechs, including Havel himself—who was a man who always behaved positively in his dealings with the Slovaks—believed that the Slovaks repudiated Tiso's memory. Tiso was executed for high treason in 1946, after the war. Slovak independence came to an end, of course. And they went to Bratislava to give the good news to the Slovaks, and allowed Tiso to be criticised. Then everyone whistled and booed and there was a very negative reaction on the part of everyone, absolutely everyone. Most Czechs were completely taken aback. And then, in the end, something curious happened: the Czechs (particularly the man who is now president of the Czech Republic, Klaus—a very self-important man but a fine man too—said, "We Czechs are very good. We're very good. We could integrate in Europe, quickly. And in a market economy, and so on, we do everything very well. We only have one problem: those Slovaks who are holding us back. Know what? Slovaks out... we don't want them!". Then some Slovaks said, "We should have a referendum!". "No, no, forget the referendum... out!" And they threw them out. Singapore was thrown out by Malaysia. "This lot, first of all we don't like them and secondly they're Chinese. So out!" At first they were impoverished, but today Singapore is one of the richest countries in the world. "Out, we don't want you. Out, you're poor... out!" And they're independent. They didn't understand at first, they were very surprised, as you might expect.

There were more problems in that period, for example, between Lithuania and Poland, but I won't go into all that now. The war didn't cause the implosion. I have said that the wars were the cause of the implosion, and that is true. But more than wars, it is defeat that causes implosion. Nothing usually happens to the winning empire. To the losing empire it

does, however. And evidently, by then four Empires had lost: the German, the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman. And there was one that lost not the military war but the political war, the economic war, the social, ideological war, the war for prestige; the Soviet Union lost completely. And as a result of this a lot of places became independent.

I'll tell you a couple of stories to illustrate what I mean. Here's one.

When I was in Davos once a man gave me his card, saying, "I'm the prime minister of Lithuania". He was forty-seven or forty-eight years old, and prime minister, from the Socialist Party, which was the old Communist Party reformed. "I'm the prime minister of Lithuania". "Oh really? I'm the president of Catalonia". And he told me about himself. I don't know why, but he told me about himself.

He said, "You see, I'm an engineer, I studied engineering in Kaunas, and when I studied engineering, twenty-five years ago, since I wanted to make a career for myself, I went to Moscow to extend my studies, and because I wanted to make a career for myself I joined the Communist party. There are three things that twenty-five years ago it would have been impossible to imagine. First, that Communism would come to an end. Secondly, that the Soviet Union would cease to exist. And thirdly, that Lithuania would be independent. That was unthinkable. Nobody considered it, and nor did I". Well in fact, there *were* people thinking about it, Landsberg was thinking about it, the members of the League of Liberty for Lithuania were thinking about it, but in fact they didn't amount to many people. In Lithuania—more than in Estonia and Latvia, in part due to the strength of Catholicism—there were protests, but they didn't amount to much. People didn't think such a turn-around could happen and that in 1991 Lithuania would be independent. It is true that in the late eighties there was the *sąjūdis* (which means Movement in Lithuanian), but nobody expected things to turn out the way they did. But that prime minister, who was not just anybody, said, "You see, how would I ever be able to think all that would happen? Impossible, isn't it?"

But then, once I was in Riga and I met a Latvian minister whom I asked, "At what point did you begin to think that Latvia would become independent again?". But I didn't ask her like that; I asked "In 1970, did you think that Latvia would become independent again?". "No,

we didn't dream of it." "And in 1980?" "We didn't dream of it then either." "And in '85?" "Nor then." "And in '86 and '87?" "She said, "Not in '86 or '87 either. The only difference was that Gorbachev had arrived by then, and there was perestroika. We started to breathe more easily, but independence, no way". "When did you think you all might become independent?" That is, I'm referring to the majority, surely there were people thinking about independence, particularly those who were outside the country, those who had gone into exile, who are those who always most maintain the idea of continuity. But the minister told me, "In 1989, we started to notice things changing and we started to do a few things, such as organizing poetry and song festivals. So it was in the universities that we started. In '89, no sooner, no sooner. And even in '89 we daredn't think of independence".

In summer 1989, the Assembly of the Regions of Europe decided to organise a big gathering in Vienna. The Berlin wall was still up, and the Iron Curtain. We decided, "Since things are on the move there, let's go", because then they started to let people come from those countries, from regions that hardly existed in reality. It was a daring initiative we had embarked on, and in October the meeting was held, but it was overshadowed two months later. Completely overshadowed.

After that everything unravelled spectacularly, to an extent beyond anything that had been predicted. For example, on 5 September 1991 I happened to be in Moscow. In the morning of that day, the Supreme Soviet—Yeltsin was already there—decreed the independence of the Baltic republics. As I mentioned in connection with Lithuania, a few things had started to move in the Baltic republics, and even—in Lithuania—some incidents that left ten or twelve dead. Ten lives are ten lives, but in the context of a process of independence that is nothing. And suddenly, in the most unexpected way, Yeltsin decreed independence. It is worth mentioning that the Russians had always thought of the Baltic republics as a special case. The independence issue never became desperate for the Baltic republics, as it did for the people of the Ukraine. I met the president of Estonia at an official lunch that day. Of course, he had been the president of the Soviet Republic of Estonia until that morning, but by midday he was president of Estonia. A big change in a few hours. He was a classic figure from the Stalinist *nomenklatura* but now he was president of Estonia. "Congratulations, you're

independent”, I said, and he replied, “We weren’t expecting this. But now that we’re independent, we’ll do what we can”.

This reminded me of the president of a Spanish Autonomous Community who told me, “You see, I don’t believe in this autonomy business”. “But aren’t you the president of the Community?” He replied, “Yes, but you see, this is what happened. My party, the PSOE, told me to come out against autonomy. I was the secretary-general, of the party for that region, and I was against autonomy. But then suddenly they said, ‘Ah, no... now we’ve decided we should be in favour of autonomy.’ Then there were elections, my party won and now I’m president. I don’t believe in it, but now that I’m president I’ll do it as well as I know how”. No, no, no don’t laugh, that’s what he said.

I could tell you about the same process in Slovakia, which was not expecting to be thrown out of Czechoslovakia. I remember how I was at the Assembly of European Regions when their representative said to me, “Listen, Pujol, how far do you think we can get?”. “I don’t know, but you should demand a confederation,” I replied. “Because I can see,” he said, “that there’s no chance of independence”. But then Klaus said, “Out!”, and there they were, independent. At first they didn’t even realise. Soon after this, I came across the Slovak minister of foreign affairs at a meeting of the ARE and I said, “What are you doing here? This isn’t the place for you. You should go to the United Nations”. “The fact is that we”—obsessed with their bad reputation—“are interested...” “Listen, that’s enough. You have to go. You have to go to New York and raise the flag there, in the UN, and that’s that. I don’t want to see you here again”. And he went. Of course, it was quite difficult for them to understand this.

Look what’s happened in these different cases. It hasn’t been the same everywhere, because if we look at Yugoslavia, the implosion there cost blood and gore. But elsewhere, nothing at all, or next to nothing; in Slovakia, not a single death. Not one. No referendum, nothing. Or indeed Slovenia. I’m telling you about too many things because they’re things I’ve lived through, as Folch i Torres did with his *Pàgines viscudes*. So, this is what I have seen. I had known Slovenia for a long time, since the Communist period, and I have always felt a particular liking for Slovenia, a country that has been somewhat Germanised, and Italianised too—though not now, of course. I met the prime minister in that gathering in Vienna that I told you about, in October 1989, and he said, “Pujol, I’m going to give you

some news that will make you happy: the Slovenian government has decided to do something that has never been done before in a Communist country. We'll be the first and only ones, and I wanted you to know because I know you're a believer: we're going to celebrate Christmas". That was in October 1989. On 11 November '89 the Berlin wall fell and that year, two months after that conversation in Vienna, many Catalans travelled to Prague as tourists to celebrate Christmas. Midnight mass in Prague. It was really stunning how things changed.

But then in Slovenia, they were rather taken aback because they thought I-don't-know-what about this Christmas business, and there were a dozen dead—which in the context of Yugoslavia is something to be thankful for. At that time the president was Kucan—who was president until recently, in fact—quite a fine man, who had been a Communist, and must then I suppose have been in the Socialists, the reformed Communists. One day he called me and said, "I'd like to spend three days in Barcelona because I want to be out of the country". Like someone who says, "I'd like to go to Montserrat to spend a few days". I said, "Come, come!". "What's more," he said, "I want to have a long chat with you." I replied, "So come to the Casa dels Canonges, you can be there for three days, the whole of the Casa dels Canonges at your disposal, the car, the escort, whatever you want". "Yes, but I want to have a long chat with you."

The long chat he wanted to have with me went as follows. He said, "Listen, what would you do?". "I don't know what there is you *can* do, I don't know the situation well enough. I know Slovenia, I know something about its history, I know it has never amounted to anything at the government level, that it has never been independent, that even its name is not very definitive—Napoleon called it the Republic of Illyria—but the Slovenes are very fine people and they have shown it". But they did not have a history stretching back in time. We have such as history, so do the Lithuanians, but the Slovaks do not and neither do the Slovenes. I said, "I don't know. You have to take advantage of the circumstances to see if you might be able to...". The Serbs were already on the point of recreating a centralist, totalitarian state, and the tragedy of Yugoslavia and Serbia—who came out of it worst—was brought about by them. They recovered the centralist, totalitarian spirit of 1918 to 1940. "I'll just tell you one thing," I went on, "if you have to do something, whatever you have to do, do it now because otherwise it will be too late. Now that it

seems the Germans are looking kindly on you, if the Germans continue to do so, I don't know what it is you have to do, but whatever it is you have to do it right away”.

I don't suppose my conversation had any influence, but he went back to Ljubljana and did it. I didn't know he would do it, but he declared independence. He said, “Well, the Serbs are far away and we have Croatia in between”. He made his calculations and declared independence. And it turned out very well. Because afterwards the rest of Yugoslavia disintegrated too, but in a very bloody way.

There's still something I really have to tell you. What causes implosions, let me say this again, is defeat, not just war. Look how throughout the 1914–18 War the Croats, the Slovenes, the Slovaks, the Ukrainians—who were fighting because there was a bit of the Ukraine, Galitzia, in Austria—and the Italians were fighting and didn't desert the Imperial army, they hung on. The war came to an end, and yes, then they did break up and went their separate ways. Defeat, which in the case we are looking at, the 1990 case, was not a military defeat but the defeat of a system. The defeat of a country, Russia, but also of a system. And the system was important because it ensured unity. A unity not guaranteed by the administration, as is normal, but by the Party and the system.

I have already spoken about the Baltic countries, but with respect to these countries it has to be said that the Soviets always saw them as somewhat on the fringe, as the English say—as in the “Celtic fringe”. Well in the USSR there was a “Baltic fringe”. So it was not very difficult for Yeltsin to say, “So you want to leave? OK, you're out!”. And this caught even the president on the wrong foot, as I have already described.

There's another great implosion, in this case we could speak even of the self-dissolution, of what had been the Soviet Union. That is, at a very advanced point in the process, with some countries, the three Baltic countries—who had always seen the Soviets as foreigners, as outsiders.

In the case of the rest of the Soviet republics it might have seemed things would be more complicated. But they weren't much more complicated, as I'll describe later.

Anyway, a few more words about the Baltic countries. In 1970 or 1975 a French historian, H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, published a book called *L'Empire  clat * in which she wrote, "The Soviet empire will come to an end. And it will do so because of nationalisms. Because they think they have created a completely united people, on the basis of '*homo sovieticus*'. Curiously, H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse was somewhat wrong, although the result was similar. She set out from the basis that the Soviet Empire would implode because of the Muslim countries—Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, etc... and for politico-religious reasons. On the other hand she saw no future for the Baltic countries. "They are small, they have no capacity to resist and they will be consumed, they will be assimilated, they are being assimilated". In the case of Lithuania this was not so true, because Lithuania is larger and has fewer Russian immigrants. But in the case of Latvia, above all, and to some extent in that of Estonia, even with independence there is a long way for them to go.

In the city of Riga only 37% of the population are Letts; the remainder are Russian. In the city of Daugapils, which is an important place—I have never been there, but I am told that 80 to 85% of the people are Russian. And they have very serious problems. This is not so much the case in Estonia, things are much better there, but they too have problems. In the city of Narva, just on the Russian border, and therefore close to Saint Petersburg, 95% of the population are Russians. These countries were very seriously oppressed. Tens of thousands of people were taken away and sent to Siberia. An illustrious and well-known Pole, general Jaruzelski (not originally a Communist), when Poland was occupied by the Germans and the Russians, went to Lithuania to some property his family had there—since Poland had dominated Lithuania for a long period there were rich people who had properties there, as in the case of the Jaruzelski family. After a year the Russians entered Lithuania, and the whole of the Jaruzelski family was sent to work as labourers in the cotton fields by the Aral sea—on foot, by the way. From Lithuania to the Aral sea, which is Asia. Tens of thousands of people, all the intellectuals, everyone who stood out a bit, they were all either physically eliminated or sent to Siberia. He himself and his wife told me about this when they were here.

But then later there was a great deal of Russian immigration, because they wanted to industrialise the country and so they sent Russian workers. This was much more so with Latvia than it was with Lithuania. And also in Estonia, not quite to the extent of Lithuania,

but quite a lot. Hélène Carrère d'Encausse said, "These people cannot survive". Well, they have survived. As I have said, modern Latvia has serious problems and an attitude that is understandable if you consider history, despite some criticism in western Europe. If one day you go to Riga, you should visit the Latvian Holocaust Museum. Jews were also killed there, but this was a specifically Latvian holocaust. While here there are people who think it's stupid to turn the Born market into a Catalan National memorial instead of turning it into a mall of perfume shops and designer boutiques, this is something the Letts are very decided about. They have their memorial. And it explains everything. Many people died in Siberia. But quite a few thousand died—this is something that is not widely known—when they were left with nothing on an island in a river in Siberia, on an island in a river. They left them there without bringing them food, and they died of hunger. I mention this because some of the things that happened were very dreadful. Terrible things happened with the Nazis and the Jews, but there were other things too.

The French historian said, "That's the end of it, these people cannot survive". But yes, they have survived. Because things have happened she didn't expect, namely the implosion of the Soviet Union, and Russia. What is more, it imploded in a very strange way, because Yeltsin did something extremely strange: he dissolved the Soviet Union and said, "Ukraine and Belarus, independent". I don't know what was behind this. I don't know whether he had done his calculations on the basis of later reuniting with them in what was called the Commonwealth of Independent States. But that has not worked.

Solzhenitzyn, who was a Russian nationalist of an almost mystical sort, said that Russia could cast off many things. For example, the Baltic states, and perhaps Georgia and Armenia, which were also present at the Paris Peace Conference in 1918. A lot of places became independent from Russia at that time, but that independence lasted only three or four years. That was the case in the Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia. They were reabsorbed when the Communists won the civil war. The Baltic countries, Armenia, Georgia, are not Russian. But there are three places that cannot be separated, according to Solzhenitzyn: Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus. That is, in Russian terms, Greater Russia, which means Moscow, Little Russia, which means Kiev, and White Russia, which means Minsk. That was sacred.

Bear in mind that to some extent that's what Russia was. Ambassador Bragulat said to me, "You see, if Ukraine separates from Moscow, that would be like León separating from Castile. It's not as if Catalonia separated from Castile and Spain, or as if the Basque Country separated from Castile, or as if the Canary Islands separated from Castile; no, it's as though León separated from Castile. There was something of a nationalist movement in the Ukraine, as there had always been, because in fact Ukraine was not fully incorporated into Russia until the 18th century, but there was nothing to suggest that it might secede, not by any stretch of the imagination. Russia is a powerful country, not just because of its military or economic strength, much greater than the Ukraine's, and the Ukraine was much more dependent than Russia. But no. Yeltsin gave them independence, which most people in the Ukraine had not asked for. It really was very surprising. Independence that had been demanded by some, but obviously not demanded—at least so it seemed at first—by the majority of the Ukrainian people. It is likely there are now many more people who are saying, "Now things are fine, don't spoil it for us". It's very possible, and I believe it would be positive for the Ukraine.

At all events, it remains to be seen what will happen with the Ukraine in the end. This is very important for Europe, which furthermore now has to decide where its borders are. Are they the existing ones? Does the border run between Poland and the Ukraine? Or between the Ukraine and Russia? I am starting out from the premise that the European borders do not extend to Vladivostok, and hence that the European Union ought not to incorporate Russia. And the Ukraine is an important country because it has a population of 50 million. It is a country with certain weaknesses, including internal ones (many of the people are Russians), but it is an important country. If the Ukraine joins up with Russia again, that is one thing. And if it does not, Russia, which is a country with the will and the need to get on with Europe, will have to come to an accommodation from the outside.

I shall tell you one last story. One day, at a reception in Berlin, I met the ambassador of one of the new Muslim states that are former Soviet republics. I greeted him and asked, "Tell me, how long have you been demanding independence from Russia?". "Never, we've never asked for it," he replied, "and furthermore I'm Russian". "And is an independent Kazakhstan viable?" "O yes. It's viable. We have cotton. We have oil. And the fact is we're very pleased to be independent, but we never asked for it. But one day they said to us, 'You're independent' and I was made ambassador."

If these independence processes had gone otherwise it might have been very useful for us. But it was not so. While I think it is a very good thing for the Slovenes to be independent, for the Lithuanians to be independent, if all those states had not become independent, today in Europe the issue of autonomous regions and plurinational states would be impossible to dodge. But now it is being dodged. Because, of course, in western Europe there are only ourselves and the Basques and the Galicians, Scotland, Flanders... and in fact those are all. Over there, in central and eastern Europe, they are all independent. They will not recognise any autonomous regions because a country that becomes independent is very jealous of its sovereignty and tends to be centralist and statist. This is also the case with the Slovenes, so now we are left largely alone with our demands on the international scene. The Slovak prime minister said to me, "We're very pleased". I used to be his mentor in some ways, but that's all over. "What do you advise me to do?", he would ask, but no longer. A politician from Esquerra Republicana told me one day, "I went there before they became independent, and everyone was bowing and scraping to me. Recently I asked for a meeting and they asked, 'Who is the gentleman asking for this?' Nobody remembered me any more. 'He should channel the request through our consul in Barcelona'". Evidently, that's the way things are.

Coming now towards the conclusions. I have spoken before about the consolidation of western Europe and its nation-states, and of the lack of consolidation that existed in central and eastern Europe.

There are however some singular cases in western Europe. Above all, Ireland. Ireland had no need of an implosion of Great Britain, nor even of a war, even though the World War did have its influence, but in fact they had their own war, the terrorist war of the 1920s. And they took advantage of the great influence of the American diaspora. I have not had time today to speak about how important it has been for various countries that they have had a diaspora, but this is a different and very exceptional case within western Europe. We will not go into the case of Norway either. We ought perhaps rather to focus our attention on countries such as Flanders or Scotland. That is the league we're in. Some of these countries have got far ahead. Flanders has got far, far ahead. It is almost a sovereign country. We do not know how far Scotland will go. At the moment things are not going very well, because although there are certain things we here are dissatisfied with

and we are calling for a new Statute, we do believe that we have made progress under the existing Statute of Autonomy, while the Scots are disappointed with their devolution.

Therefore, it is still true, as I have said, that Catalonia is like Lithuania. I take the case of Lithuania because it is a country with a glorious history. Lithuania, when it was united with Poland, came to rule from the Baltic to the Black Sea, in the Middle Ages, of course. However, now there are fewer Lithuanians than Catalans, there are many more people who speak Catalan than Lithuanian, and we have a much stronger economy. The difference is that the Soviet Union imploded and Spain did not. People prefer not to understand this, and think it's some play on words of mine. But it is so. And we could say the same of Catalonia and Slovenia. Slovenia does not have a consistent history, they had scarcely any national institutions, they were at the half-way stage. The Germans always contended that the Slovenes were Germans who had been made Slav, while the Serbians claimed they had always been Slavs, which is how they considered themselves. At all events, however, German and Italian influences have been enormous, as I have seen for myself. I was there for just three days while they were still not independent, while the former Yugoslavia still existed, and the German influence was present everywhere.

And Scotland is like Croatia. It has as much personality as Croatia has. But Great Britain is not Yugoslavia, evidently. So we have to bear this in mind when we act. Catalonia too must achieve assurances similar to those that provide security to Slovenia or Latvia—whose security is relative and might have many internal problems—within the framework history has bequeathed us. It is clear that we have to achieve these assurances.

As we were saying, some historic moments are turned to good advantage and others are not. According to how one looks at things, we have taken quite good advantage of historic moments. Let me say it again, our performance over the last twenty-five years has been good, and in some respects, very good. There are those who are looking in from the outside who would say very good. We who are seeing things from the inside would say not so very good, but still good. But now that we're going to have, perhaps, on the rebound, another historic moment—not such a radically spectacular one as 1975, or the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, or the destruction of the Soviet Empire—we must try hard to take the best advantage of it.

You will all draw your own conclusions from this; what I have described to you is history, merely history to which I have added nothing. I only know my own conclusions, my own.

I conclude that peoples have a right to recognition. I conclude that nationalism is a great driving force for a people. I conclude that liberty has beneficial effects. And I conclude that a people has to persist in its endeavours. We must never lose contact with what we are or where we are from. And we have to want to go forward. Because, what is more, history has its miracles and its unexpected turns of events. And even if no miracles happen, there is always one miracle: that persistence pays off. When I was a youth, there were so many people who today are Catalanist, but who at that time gave everything up for lost... to the extent that they became disheartened, gave up and became bitter. Since then things have changed. And they have changed in a way that is not so surprising as the independence of Latvia or Lithuania, but *is* surprising when you consider the collective effort our country has made and is making.

Today, in spite of the fact that they are independent and we are not, we are still an example for Slovenia. The other day someone said, "Now the Slovenes want to come and see what we are doing in Catalonia". I was on the point of saying, "Tell them what I told the Slovak prime minister. Don't come". But I said, "Yes, tell them to come". Very likely there are things we can tell the Slovenes, in the field of ideas, in the field of international projection, in the economic sphere. And the same is true for the Slovaks. Because they want to come too.

But we are also an example to people who don't form part of this story. To the Scots, for instance, who as I said are now rather disappointed. Because they had felt that this "devolution" thing would amount to far more than it did. There are those who criticize the Scots for the way they have handled things, but at all events the result has not been what they expected. Now they are saying to us, "You have handled things better". So we are an example. For the Scots and for many countries.

Since I have ceased to be president, I have been on two long journeys, to places where there is nothing for us to tell them because they are too different: to Peru and to Guatemala. "What do you want us to do in Peru?" "Well, we'd like you to tell us about a couple of things we're interested in." If a country such as ours, which has limited power

and is restricted in so many ways, not only exists but is held up as an example, that means that we have done some things well and there is some good that we are capable of doing.

I wouldn't like the history I've been telling you about to discourage you, because, fortunately, we are not expecting any major wars, at least round here. There are a lot of wars, but not here. I don't have to tell you about the significance of the Iraq war from the nationalist point of view. Nor what happened between 1918 and 1922 to Iraq in Paris, when there was the peace treaty. The current war will have consequences there. The dangers we are now facing are others: the danger is that we form alliances with certain decadent elements that are not Catalonia's, but Europe's. But we have to be able to react and we Catalans are more sensitive about that than anyone, so in some respects we are able to react better. With all this we can build a country which, whatever it becomes, will be our country, a Catalan country, and what is more no ordinary country.

Today I was speaking to a French politician—the French typically pay no attention to anywhere except France, but this one knows that we exist and sees us in a positive light—who referred to our great capacity for integration. And the other day I was speaking with an American about an article by [Samuel] Huntington which declared that the great danger for the United States is Hispanic immigration, which will have had an enormous effect in fifty or sixty years; he said to me, “Of course, I am amazed how you, who have had so much immigration and have no political power or anything, still manage to be in there and keep your head up, still do worthwhile things and are still an example to others. We're scared”. Be ready, because in fifty or sixty years time Huntington will be right. And perhaps it is true that our experience in this area, which has been positive, could be useful.

There are those who say, “We could have been independent too if Spain had entered the 1914 war”. But Spain did not enter the war and it is better that it did not do so. So people should forget about this; the fact is that we are what we are today and we can continue to move forward if we do our jobs well.

That's all. I did warn you it was going to be very long, so you can't complain. I was just thinking if there was anything else I should say. But I think that would be abusing your patience.

Thank you very much.