

# THE NEED FOR CLOSER EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

OPEN LETTER TO  
EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENT JUNCKER, EUROPEAN COUNCIL PRESIDENT TUSK AND  
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PRESIDENT TAJANI

Dear Sirs,

In the open letter “Upholding the Rule of Law in the European Union” [final draft 3<sup>rd</sup> November], the Spanish government was accused of “a [systematic violation](#) of the Rule of Law in Spain”; but Josu de Miguel and Francesc de Carreras proved conclusively that it was the [Catalan authorities](#) who violated it, not the central government. It would seem that Europe has yet to understand the ‘*what*’ and the ‘*why*’ of this crisis, if it is to prevent it from spreading to other rich regions in the EU.

**What has happened?** The Catalan elites turned the regional institutions into political, social and media-related parallel ‘[structures of State](#)’ at the service of secession, thus breaching **administrative neutrality**, a pillar of democracy. They have brought pressure to bear upon [professors](#), [journalists](#) and [judges](#), used the autonomous police (*Mossos*) as a [political police](#) to spy on politicians, businessmen and civil organisations such as [SCC](#) [European Citizen Award 2014], and encouraged a social climate of [harassment](#) and symbolic violence that went *hand-in-hand with* [institutional violence](#). In this way they set out to [impose their arbitrary will on us](#), supplanting the legitimate coercion of the state and the force of democratic law. This, together with recurring campaigns [to discredit Spanish democracy](#), the [official lies](#), [manipulation of history](#) and indoctrination of children more akin to totalitarian regimes, has meant the **violation** of the [democratic rights](#) of many Catalans and the [Constitution](#) itself.

They also mismanaged the economy of a thus far thriving region. Catalan debt is now unserviceable [other than by central government FLA loans of [€52.5bn](#) so far] and, following the September/October [attempted coup d’état](#), more than [4,000 firms](#) left the region, while foreign investment fell.

Having evolved into an [oligarchy-led](#), class and identity-driven, emotional movement for secession, Catalan nationalism has split Catalan society down the middle, with dire political and economic consequences for the region and for Spain as a whole. A democratic and progressive European project cannot be ambiguous with nationalism, lest it betray the principle of solidarity which underpins it.

**Why has it happened?** This social, political and economic crisis cannot be due to centralism, as Spain is one of the world’s most decentralised countries. The regions have control over education, health and social services, while Catalonia and the Basque Country also have their own police force. Navarre and the Basque Country, two of the richest regions, enjoy unique [fiscal privileges](#) as well as further, [unconstitutional](#) funding that national governments often surrender in order to stay in power.

Indeed, it can be argued that self-government has gone ‘*too far*’, as the high level of fiscal autonomy enjoyed by the regions, 1) ‘*sets them against each other*’, and 2) flouts ‘*the very idea of solidarity*’. There are two main reasons behind these transfers of [power and public resources](#): (a) the [ill-defined](#) limits to autonomy set in the Spanish Constitution; and (b) the [mobilisation strategies](#) of the socialist parties PSOE and PSC in particular, allowing the *nationalist elites* [in exchange for support in power when needed] to engineer *ethno-linguistic* ‘nation-building processes’ which have enlarged their local power bases through patronage and, often, systemic corruption, as in the [Palau](#) and [Pujol clan](#) cases. Unleashing nationalism also helped them to cover up most of their corruption, as did their [deal with the radical separatists](#) in 2012 and engaging the masses in the pursuit of a selfish [tax agreement](#).

Nevertheless, the EU also bears a great deal of responsibility for the situation on at least six counts:

1. The EU Parliament facilitated the violation of linguistic rights by passing a [Motion](#) in 2009 rejecting its own Culture Commission’s report on the right to choose the language of teaching. The nationalists used Art. #22 as a pretext to continue treating Spanish-speaking children as foreigners and thus uproot Spanish from the curriculum in pursuit of a pre-modern, totalitarian, unidimensional (linguistic) idea of identity. Their denial of Catalonia’s [cultural diversity](#) is at the source of the current social breach.
2. A European **budget** made up of just 1% of its member states’ GDP encourages secession in the richer regions, as it offers them the benefits of market and currency integration without the need to extend solidarity beyond their borders. Thus the citizens of wealthy [Veneto and Lombardy](#) have voted for more autonomy, but ‘*nation building*’ is the next logical step: if they believe that they could rejoin

the EU, as the Catalan separatists believed, they would also attempt to secede. And, in an EU currently devoid of fiscal solidarity, they could even join several of their fellow member nations in practising **fiscal dumping** against the rest by becoming some of the world's worst [tax havens](#).

3. In spite of its success, **the euro** is widening, rather than closing, the inter-regional [economic gap](#). Its [predicament](#) is well known: it cannot be saved in its present form, given that there is the same **lack of political coordination** today as there was two decades ago when it was first created, because of the persistence of '*national self-interests*', perhaps exacerbated by the economic crisis.

4. The IMF and other experts have shown that '*austerity*' actually delays economic recovery. But the creditor countries (Holland, Germany, etc.) insisted yet again on demanding it from the poorer ones at last December's European Summit. This strategy has already punished Portugal, Italy, Greece & Spain (the so-called 'PIGS') **unfairly** and is '*nothing less than collective suicide and irrationality*'.

5. 'Brexit' exemplifies the EU's **political failure** and the dangers lurking behind the politics of identity and victimhood; the UK's above average rise in GDP since joining the EU could not prevent it. Subsidy policies and market integration have not been sufficient there to foster a sense of belonging in a symbolic, 'European demos', **a space with responsibilities** as well as rights.

6. The [Puigdemont affair](#) illustrates both the current limitations of that **space** (e.g. the EAW) and the threat posed by *techno-populism*. In a ruling '*riddled with procedural flaws*', regional magistrates equated a protest against a managerial decision in the 80s with recurring acts against the sovereignty of the State [the Catalan Statute, etc.], i.e. a bloodless [coup d'état](#). Destroying '*the foundations of mutual recognition and judicial cooperation*' is the surest way to [unravel](#) the European Union.

As European citizens, we are proud of what we have achieved in common, from the freedom of movement or the common currency to truly sharing initiatives like Erasmus; and we cannot allow nationalism and populism to shatter our dream of **a closer and fairer future together**, or to peddle self-interest, social division and supremacy as a way out of the crisis. But the only way to deny demagogues their divisive narrative is to offer European citizens a better one.

***We therefore request a closer integration of all the European institutions.*** Pan-European political parties with a programme of **fiscal solidarity, social justice and transfer of national sovereignty** to Europe, would foster the concept of European citizenship. So we trust that you will recover this initiative, which was already put forward by the European Parliament 25 years ago, in line with the political legacy of [Ventotene](#), Schuman and Monnet and the principles of solidarity and **progress for all** that underpin the EU. The EU should also facilitate the transition towards a 'United States of Europe' to those countries within the euro zone that wish to do so.

We must bear in mind that economic integration was never the end, but the means to build a shared, sovereign space of peace, liberty and solidarity for the European peoples – and the rest of the world.

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