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Self-Determination Conference “Unlocking our Potential: Our Right to Independence”

As a final act of EFA’s campaign on Multilevel Governance and Self-Determination, we organised an international Conference on Self-Determination in Barcelona celebrating the occasion of Catalonia’s National Day, 11th of September.

In a remarkable display of international solidarity and shared democratic values, speakers from different independence movements and stateless nations came together to discuss the challenges and aspirations of regions seeking independence.

EFA Group President Jordi Sole opened the conference by talking about democracy and fundamental rights, and the process of building a Europe of All Peoples:

“The subtitle of today's event is "Our right to independence" because for us and for the political forces that will take the floor today it's not just about getting the right to express ourselves democratically on the ballot boxes on our future and respect the result, that is to say, our right to self-determination, which is the basis of everything; it is also about working so that the option of independence emerges victorious from the ballot boxes and it is also about the right to build an independent state based on a free decision of the citizens.”

“Only with independence will we be able to develop our full potential; we will be able to put into practice the tools and resources that will allow us to develop fully as free societies and on equal terms with the rest of the states. Independence is the key to unlocking a better future.”

On the first panel, we had speakers from all over the world, we had the pleasure of welcoming Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois, Hervør Pálssdóttir MP in the Faroe Islands, Liz Saville Roberts, MP in Westminster and Idurre Bideguren Gabantxo, Basque Senator. Who were able to share their first-hand experiences of each of their territories, as well as discuss amongst themselves their good practices, their movement’s objectives and their goals for the future.

Yves-François Blanchet, Member of the House of Commons of Canada and Leader of the Bloc Québécois said:

“Our countries need to develop their proper relations, with cultural, scientific, and diplomatic exchanges. The people in the streets of Catalonia, Ireland, Welsh and Quebec need to feel that they will be better in an independent country.”

Hervør Pálsdóttir Member of Parliament of the Faroe Islands for Tjóðveldi party said:

"We are taking weight off of our citizen's shoulders when it comes to welfare, human rights, transport... So they find freedom for themselves and they can fight with us for the freedom of our land.

Liz Saville Roberts - Member of Parliament of Westminster for Plaid Cymru said:

"Plaid Cymru are more determined than ever to work with others in nations in Europe and further afield who strive to deliver fairer, more prosperous and greener societies through independence. A future independent Wales must have strong ties with our European friends and neighbours."

"The people of Wales are waking up to the idea that there is another way, another future, another choice. And that choice firmly resides with the people of Wales."

Idurre Bideguren Gabantxo - Basque Member of the Spanish Senate for Euskal Herria Bildu party said:

"Independentist parties have a historic opportunity to prove their decisive strength, to find a way out of political conflicts and to take steps towards the right of self-determination.

"We need voices in Europe who fight for diversity, we need to guarantee that Basque voices are striving for our rights".

Closing the event we had the privilege of listening to Oriol Junqueras and Michael Russell, who discussed them the similarities of the independence movements in Catalonia and Scotland, the historical context of their regions as well as their personal experience in the world of politics, they both looked at the future with optimism and highlighted the importance of the nations working together. One of the key takeaways was the need for open, transparent, and peaceful dialogue between regions seeking greater autonomy and their respective national governments.

During the conference, Junqueras emphasized the importance of peaceful and democratic means in achieving self-determination goals. He highlighted the Catalan independence movement's commitment to non-violence and the rule of law, emphasizing that their cause was firmly rooted in the principles of democracy and human rights, citing the 2017 independence referendum and subsequent political developments as a testament to the resilience of the Catalan people's desire for self-governance.

Michael Russell, drew parallels between the Catalan and Scottish independence movements, highlighting the importance of unity, persistence, and respect for democratic processes. He shared insights from Scotland's own journey towards independence and emphasized the importance of seeking peaceful and legal avenues to achieve self-determination. He pointed to the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 Brexit vote as events that have reignited discussions surrounding Scotland's constitutional future.

Oriol Junqueras President of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya said:

"We are convinced that coordination with other international pro-independence parties is the best tool the future and to defend our national and democratic rights everywhere".

Michael Russell, President of the Scottish National Party said:

"The idea that those from a variety of nations across Europe and beyond can learn from each other as they pursue democratic constitutional change has been given a new impetus by the EFA conference in Barcelona. We face many common problems, as well as many common opportunities and discussing them

formally and informally can help us all to chart new courses, seek new initiatives and develop a positive and popular programme wherever we campaign. Doing so whilst also taking part in the exciting and invigorating La Daida events was a wonderful opportunity and I am sure all those who attended will wish to meet again before too long”.

The conference also addressed broader themes related to self-determination, such as the role of international law, the challenges of negotiation, and the impact of globalization on regional identity. Attendees engaged in spirited discussions and exchanged ideas on how to navigate the complex landscape of self-determination in a globalized world.

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