

Barcelona, 27 September, 2017

Dear XXX,

I am writing to you as Mayor of Barcelona to convey my concerns over the seriousness of the situation we are facing in Catalonia, where fundamental rights and freedoms are now at risk. Serious events are currently going on, unprecedented in Spanish democracy, which include threatened arrests of 700 mayors, the closing down of government websites and civil society organisations, the arrests of high-level Catalan regional government officials, interrogations and intimidation of school directors and massive deployments of police forces solely for the purpose of preventing Catalonia's citizens from being able to vote this Sunday at the referendum convened by their regional government. None of these measures will help to solve the Catalan conflict, a political dispute that can only be resolved through political channels; on the contrary, their implementation is only heightening social tensions, as well as blocking any possibility for finding a negotiated solution to the conflict. While I am no separatist and have even criticised the unilateral course taken by the Catalan regional government, I am alarmed by the repressive measures the Spanish government has been using to prevent the referendum of 1 October, a response that represents a "qualitative leap" within its own strategy for judicialising the Catalan conflict.

Given the refusal by Prime Minister Rajoy's government to find an agreed solution to the conflict, the Catalan question can no longer be considered merely an internal Spanish matter; it now needs to be approached from its proper European perspective. We live in an interconnected global reality, so what is happening in Barcelona is having direct effects on Madrid, Paris, London and Brussels. At a time when the European project is being threatened by an upsurge of xenophobic populism, terrorism and various forms of isolationism from national states, Europe cannot wash its hands of this threat to fundamental rights and freedoms, whose safeguarding and defence do after all constitute the European project's main *raison d'être*. I wish to inform you then that I shall be calling on the European Commission to open a mediation space for the Spanish government and the Catalan regional government to take part in and I would like you to convey this call for dialogue, as far as possible, to every authority you consider appropriate.

Barcelona is a city of peace, proud of its diversity and with a strong cosmopolitan and pro-European vocation. While the overwhelming majority of our population wish to vote in an agreed referendum with guarantees, they do not want to be involved in a collision with unforeseeable consequences. Hence my wish, as Mayor of Barcelona, to inform you of the present situation, fully aware that Europe is being built and defended day to day by cities and municipalities.

Yours sincerely,

Ada Colau Ballano  
Mayor of Barcelona