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Cámara de Comercio de EE. UU. en España

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The Lie as seen from Magic Mountain

By Jaime Malet, published in the *La Vanguardia* March 17th, 2018

As with any politically-fraught collective process which eventually comes to naught after a reckless acceleration, at some point many will deny that they ever supported those who are responsible for having divided a society, scared off investors and tainted institutions, which took so long to build.

In his famous novel, Thomas Mann stated that any measurement compared with the infinite is equal to zero. When what you want is everything, nothing can compare.

We know now that the Catalan process was a sham. Some may think so much incendiary nationalist sentiment, which reflected an iron will, is now being denied due process out of a fear of justice. But, what exactly has resulted from it? With the support of two million people, much less than half of the Catalan population, riled up by a colossal propaganda campaign funded with taxpayers money, secessionist leaders attempted to impose the will of a minority against the West, against the rest of Spain and against at least half of Catalonia. In the end, as could be expected, Western nations do not recognize any breach of the principle of territorial integrity as ratified at the Peace of Westphalian in 1648. Spain has turned out neither to be so weak nor so anti-democratic as to allow for its dismantling just because 7% of its constituents want it. The Catalan population is now so strained and divided, after such a long period of political upheaval which has led to such disastrous results, that there is even talk of promoting the division of Catalonia itself.



It is understandable that there are people of good faith in Catalonia who are unhappy with the legal response of the Spanish Courts. Nobody has explained to them that there is no country in the world in which an attempt to destroy a state, any state, doesn't end badly for the perpetrators. Furthermore, democratic countries also have the principle of separation of powers and rule of law, which means that breaking the law, even by those who have come into office by democratic means, always has consequences.

A few weeks ago, I attended the World Economic Forum in Davos, home of Mann's Magic Mountain. The Catalan issue wasn't discussed during any of the official debates, but the world's elite, including intellectual, political and economic leaders, were talking about it in the hallways. Until recently, most of them didn't know much about Catalonia beyond our cultural heritage, beautiful landscape and economic strength. However, an intense international marketing campaign, also paid for with taxpayers money, has made the world temporarily take notice of us...and what they've seen has not been good.

So many of the questions posed by well-informed foreigners are difficult to answer. How could a political class that had it all throw everything away like that? Where do so many grievances come from in a place where people live so well? Many now know we have free healthcare and education systems, as well as exceptional security and basic services. During their travels to Barcelona, they have also seen that our infrastructure is of the highest quality (it turns out that commuter trains also don't work so well in other places...). Many are aware of the high level of Catalan representation in the Spanish Parliament (47 members out of 350) and that Catalan self-government has a higher budget and



greater regulatory power than any other European region, with the highest paid politicians in Spain. They also know that we have our own language which is used in public schools 22 hours per week as compared to 3 hours of Spanish, and that thorough knowledge of Catalan is a requirement to work in the Public Administration. It's also difficult to explain where this desire to be so different comes from when the 25 most common surnames in Catalonia are the same as those in the rest of Spain. Another thing they find mystifying are complaints about a lack of elections, when Catalans are called to the polls practically every year.

Abroad they also wonder why there has been no institutionalized movement to commemorate the victims of the worst Jihadist terrorist attack in Catalonia that took place just months ago. And, they are bewildered by the fact that the demonstration, that was held on August 27, which was intended to be anti-terrorist, ten days after the attack, turned into a protest against the Spanish Monarchy. Many foreigners ask what kind of leaders make use of a terrorist attack to reach political aims in this way. What's more, what would happen in other countries, including those with long democratic traditions, to duly elected political leaders who dare to rile up the masses with bullhorns from atop police cars?

There is one last question to reflect on. Has all this political morass come about due to privation or to excess? Would this have been prevented by more concessions for self-governance from Madrid or would Catalonia have gone down this path, sooner or later, regardless of what was offered by the Central Government? In other words, given that each and every one of the instruments of self-government, from the Catalanian police to the public schools, the local public media or the Catalan *embassies* have



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been illegally used to support the cause, can the problem really be rooted in a lack of self-governance or instead in an excess of it?

We hope that Catalonia can recapture the energy of its people and use it to overcome this collective tragedy, that which has befallen a peaceful population manipulated and strained to its limits. Personally, I would like to see a Catalonia focused on the future, one that attracts talent and investment and can lead Southern Europe in this changing landscape marked by the Fourth Industrial Revolution. I would like to see a more ethical and prosperous Catalonia with high-quality employment, where it won't ever be possible to divide the society again. And above all, we need a Catalonia where politics no longer contaminates everything and where the citizens insist that the political class, before pushing them over board again, display a minimum standard of intellectual honesty, which is an essential ingredient in any healthy political debate.