

# REPORT

## Building Europe through Democratic Processes

Monday 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, 17:00-19:00  
Schebek Palace, Politických vězňů 936/7, Prague

- **On the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, EUROPEUM in cooperation with the Delegation of the Government of Catalonia in Prague organised a panel discussion on the topic of "Building Europe through Democratic Processes" in the Schebek Palace in Prague. Our researcher, Christian Lassen, took on the role of the moderator of the debate in which we had the pleasure of welcoming Mr. Raül Romeva Rueda, Minister of Foreign Relations of the self-declared government of Catalonia, Mrs. Helena Válková, MP and former Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic, and Dr. Benjamin Tallis, Senior Researcher at the Institute of International Relations in Prague.**

The debate was started by **Mr. Romeva Rueda** whose main argument revolved around the idea that all the political complexities and challenges that we are facing in today's **Europe can be overcome through the expansion of the democratic process**—through empowerment of people. He argued that this was the best way to reconnect people with institutions. Letting people be inactive in the construction, Mr. Romeva Rueda believed, is what led to the disaffection with the European project, and with disaffection came negative scenarios, such as Brexit. He continued on to equate democracy with the presence of a debate, applying this equation to Catalonia, where he made a case for perceiving the Catalan referendum as the populace's need for a political debate in Spain and in Catalonia. Neglecting the people who have asked to have this debate was, in his eyes, threatening the

very essence of democracy and he warned Europe against it. ***"Europe needs to decide whether they want to remain a part of the problem, or become a part of the solution."***

**Mrs. Válková** welcomed this discussion in the Czech Republic, and drew parallels between a hypothetical split of Catalonia from Spain and the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1993. She offered a practical treatment of the current situation not only in Catalonia, but all throughout Europe, with a simple formula: ***"First, you have to recognise problems; then, open a debate about them; and finally, solve them."*** Mrs. Válková continued with her analysis of the Catalan case, arguing that the Spanish government had gone through the first step of her formula, but that it had stopped before the second. She then generalised and rescaled the

issue to the European level, saying that in all member states of the Union problems with the disaffection had to be recognised and a discussion about them opened.

**Dr. Tallis** addressed some of the statements that had been made, and congratulated the Minister on a great definition of democracy; however, he said that during his trip to Catalonia not too long ago, a debate is exactly what was *not* present, as he remembered encountering only pro-secession discourse. He then continued to trace problems facing democracy not to any specific event in the recent past but all the way to the Roman republic, and provided a historical walk through some of democracy's tensest moments. From there, he argued that **rather than putting so much importance on the democratic process, we should really look at democratic outcomes**, and he presented a few examples of democratic processes paradoxically leading to less democratic outcomes. He then focused on the lack of grand visions for Europe and politics in general.

Following was the discussion section of the event. First, Mr. Romeva Rueda answered some of the statements and questions from his co-panelists. He gave a passionate speech advocating for holding the referendum on Catalan independence and, answering a question from Mrs. Válková, provided a plan for what would happen in case of a pro-independence outcome. Then he connected the lack

of Spanish support for his cause to demophobia—politicians' fear of the *demos* and of being misunderstood by the people. Dr. Tallis congratulated Mr. Romeva Rueda on a "tremendous response" and used it as an example of his previous theme of 'grand vision' and took the idea of demophobia and applied to the case of the US Presidential election and Brexit, arguing that **it was the lack of courageous ideologist vision in the Clinton and Remain campaigns**, respectively, that was really at the core of the results.

The public had a few questions for the panelists as well. Some of the questions that warranted lengthier answers concerned the idea of rule of law as another key norm of the institution of democracy, and also more practical questions for the Catalan representative, such as what leverage the Catalans have in order to persuade member states of the Union to support the independence of Catalonia and go directly against the interest of Spain. Mr. Romeva Rueda brought the conversation back to the overarching theme of "Building Europe through Democratic Processes" by framing the referendum as way to solve the democratic deficit in the Union, and he argued that *that* was in the interest of all. He finished with another plea for action from the member states saying that a "*non-solution is no one's interest, as it creates uncertainty, and that is never desirable.*"



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