

NEWS

PSC shifts its ground to flirt with concept of Catalonia as a nation

Catalan socialists could be on course for a showdown with PSOE while occupying the centre ground

CATALONIA TODAY

One question occupying all Catalan parties is what should go into the Statute. The latest proposal from the Catalan socialists (PSC) is that Catalonia should be referred to as "a nation". The proposal, already put forward by the CiU and ICV parties, defines speaking both official languages (Catalan and Spanish) as a right and a duty. Minister of Public Administration Jordi Sevilla claimed that the proposal is not at odds with the Spanish constitution, saying: "the concept of nationality which appears in the Constitution has always been understood as meaning a stateless nation."

This new position taken by PSC is also ideological and profoundly strategic. Firstly, it represents a conviction that has always been the exclusive territory of nationalism. Secondly, because this has come about at a low point for the tripartite members due to the poor performance of the government, which has been prone to both internal and external crises. There has been no shortage of speculation recently about the weakness of PSC when it comes to defending the national aspect of Catalonia in the

face of a PSOE that is beginning to make its critical voice heard on the subject of the new Statute. If on the one hand it is significant that a party such as the PSC, with the power and responsibility to govern, is willing to assume an unambiguous position, it is important for the struggle with CiU over the terrain of moderate nationalism.

The problem with the PSC's new commitment is that it can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the inevitable clash with the position of the PSOE, for whom "nation" means Spain and to whom it is therefore unacceptable that Catalonia chooses how to define itself; and on the other, because we do not know what the PSC means by "nation". Does the party see any difference between the Catalonia that defines itself as a "nation" and Murcia which is defined as a "region"? This proposal may be a way of buying time at a point when no one believes it is possible to stick to the schedule approved for the drawing up of the Statute, but between now and a few months' time another crisis could develop if the party does not now deliver.



PSOE Minister Jordi Sevilla sees no problem with the PSC declaration of nationhood / EFE

High tension in Generalitat over cross-border power line

ALEX LEFF

The Generalitat seemed to have its wires crossed this week, as it sent contradictory signals to Madrid over the plan to build a power line across the border with France. Salvador Milà, the Catalan environment minister, sent a letter to his Spanish counterpart, Cristina Narbona, demanding that she pull the plug on the power-line project. Milà said the future electric line was to run through nature reserves and government-protected territory. A Catalan Green party leader, Milà clearly went against the wishes of both the Socialist Catalan and Spanish premiers.

A day later, it emerged that the tripartite Generalitat, of which the Catalan Greens (ICV) are members, announced it had agreed to endorse the 400,000-volt power line, which is planned to connect France and Girona. Catalan government spokesman Joaquim Nadal said the tripartite had reached a "full agreement" to go ahead with the plan, adding that it would help fuel the TGV European railway programme.

The electricity connection is being pushed by Spanish power company Red Eléctrica and the ministry of industry, and is meant to provide electricity to the future high-speed train, the AVE, as well as to residences and businesses in the Girona area, according to Spanish Industrial Minis-

Catalonia Today makes it to New York for Sant Jordi/World Book Day celebrations of the ex-patriate community in the Big Apple

CATALONIA TODAY

Catalonia Today will be distributed in New York city as part of the St. Jordi celebrations. Thanks to an initiative by the Catalan Institute of America / Friends of Catalonia New York, with the support of the Secretaria de Cooperació Exterior de la Generalitat, New Yorkers who attend the Sant Jordi event will be provided with a copy of this edition of our newspaper.

This year the Catalan Institute of

America / Friends of Catalonia New York will honour Sant Jordi with their first-ever book drive. In addition to a traditional celebration, guests will be invited to exchange a secondhand book for a rose. The books will go to Housing Works Used Book Cafe in Soho, whose profits provide housing, health care, advocacy and other services for homeless New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS. "In this way, we can celebrate

the tradition of the Day of the Book and the Rose by also making an impact in our community," said Joan Salavedra, the Institute's president. The "Catalunya Oberta" foundation has worked closely with the Catalan Institute on different tasks for the event. There will be books donated by Pfizer. The night will be completed with readings, music, traditional Catalan food and a pre-party for the little ones and their families.

The Catalan Institute of America is an association of nearly 500 members dedicated to the celebration and sharing of Catalan culture. As of last March 30 it is also a non-profit organisation under New York State jurisdiction. The Institute is devoted to celebrating Catalan traditions such as Sant Jordi.

More information can be found online: www.friendsofcatalonia.com.

Global Look BCN returns to Montjuïc's Fira de Barcelona

MARTA WENDLINGER

Although only in its fourth year, Global Look BCN is hailed as the "exclusive" fashion accessories fair for professionals in Spain. This year features collections for the Autumn-Winter 2005-2006 season at the Fira de Barcelona from April 23 to 25.

Organisers expect a large turnout of over 4,000. More than 200 of the most prestigious firms in Spain, France, and Italy will exhibit their newest collections and some of the most influential buyers from all over Europe and beyond. Organisers also hope this increase in numbers will result in a considerable boost in sales.

One reason for the fair's success is

the fact that it takes place in Barcelona, which is considered a "two season" market, where sales typically occur as a result of traditional seasonal campaigns, but are prolonged by the influx of tourism. According to the organisers, sales in the tourist areas of Catalonia, Valencia, and the Balearic Islands account for 43 per cent of the total yearly volume of all local sales.

Organiser Joan Puig feels that the most significant change in Global Look BCN has been the expansion into different markets. Having gone from exhibiting only bags, the fair has now expanded into a wide variety of fashion areas: jewellery, gloves, umbrellas and hats.

Generalitat steps up enforcement of laws requiring use of Catalan

AGENCIES

The Catalan government levied fines totalling more than 50,000 euros against 28 Catalan businesses in 2004 for failing to use Catalan as stipulated in the Linguistic Policy Law. The minister for Commerce, Consumption and Tourism, Josep Hugué (ERC), said his agency quadrupled the number of inspections and sanctions carried out in 2004 compared to 2003. A total of 1,401 businesses were inspected and 156 received citations, 28 having been required to pay a cumulative total of 52,800 euros in fines.

The kind of practices that resulted in fines included not having Cat-

alan-speaking staff and displaying signs in shops and markets only in Spanish. The languages used to print menus and business cards also fell under scrutiny.

The Spanish postal service has received the largest fine to date for violations of language laws. The Generalitat fined Correos 30,000 euros for failing to have a sufficient number of signs and forms printed in Catalan. Many Catalan business leaders have come out in favour of strict enforcement of linguistic laws, while others, have said that such regulations make Catalonia a less attractive place for non-Catalans and Spaniards to do business.

Society should be encouraged by the government to conserve and recycle energy

ter José Montilla.

However, environmentalist groups such as Greenpeace, Ecologistes en Acció de Catalunya and Eurosolar have pressed the Generalitat not to authorise the construction of any new power lines.

"The Generalitat has a very important opportunity to promote an energy culture in society," the co-ordinator of Greenpeace's Catalonia branch, Anna Rosa Martínez, told reporters. The government should encourage people to conserve energy and to use reusable energy, Martínez said.

During a recent assembly of Girona's provincial council (La Diputació), members of the ICV party, the nationalist left ERC and centre-right CiU all spoke out against the inclusion of the power line in the government's new energy plan. Groups opposing the project are planning a demonstration in La Jonquera on May 22, according to a report in *La Vanguardia* newspaper. The Socialists will have to fend off fierce opposition if they are to go ahead with construction of the cross-border power line.