

# ESQUERRA REPUBLICANA DE CATALUNYA

# INTRODUCTION



Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya ('Republican Left of Catalonia') is the oldest Catalan political party.

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939), Esquerra was the most voted political party and leads the Government of Catalonia. But the dramatic period of exile, repression, resistance and clandestinity underwent during almost four decades of Franco's dictatorship, consign Esquerra to a secondary role.

Since the democracy was restored in the Spanish State (1977), Esquerra has been recovering its political power and social niche. Today Esquerra has hundreds of representatives at all levels —local, Catalan, Spanish and European.

Currently, Esquerra is again a decisive organization and is one of the members of the Catalan Government.



**JOAN PUIGCERCÓS** PRESIDENT OF ESQUERRA

## **LEFT=SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Esquerra defends the welfare state, one of the historical struggles of left-wing parties, by supporting a social market economy in which the private sector —driving force of a productive economy— is as important as the state sector, which guarantees equal access to basic services —education, health, culture, social care, transport...— and redistributes wealth to ensure a fairer society and a sustainable development.

## **REPUBLIC = DEMOCRATIC COMMITMENT**

Democracy is the government of the majority, which respects the minority, and is elected periodically by universal suffrage in free elections. But a full democracy requires permanent commitment in supporting state goods and dialogue as a resource to reconcile the different interests in any society.

Esquerra agrees with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, defending no discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, illness, language, culture, ethnic origins, opinion, religion, nationality or any other reason.

## **CATALONIA (CATALAN COUNTRIES) = NATIONAL FREEDOM**

A nation is a community of people linked by territory, history, language, and social, cultural and economic connections. These people are aware of such links and are willing to maintain and respect them, regardless of their origin.

Esquerra defends the national identity of the Catalan Countries and our right to self-determination. We want our nation to become, democratically and peacefully, a new member state of the European Union.



**14 APRIL 1931** FRANCESC MACIÀ PROCLAIMS THE CATALAN REPUBLIC

# HISTORY

## 1931: THE ORIGINS

At the beginning of the 20th century, the attempt of the Spanish monarchy to build a liberal state fails. King Alfonso XIII, in a desperate attempt to maintain the power of the centralist oligarchy, supports in 1923 a military take-over led by general Primo de Rivera, who abolishes the democratic rights of the Spanish State and the limited self-government of Catalonia. The dictatorship, contributing to the erosion of the Spanish Crown and the regrouping of the democratic opposition, ends up failing and the King is forced to call elections for the first time in eight years.

In March 1931 Esquerra is founded in Barcelona, as a result of the fight by the democratic left parties to achieve a Republic that recognizes the national rights of Catalonia.

## 1931–1936: GOVERNMENT OF CATALONIA

One month after its foundation, Esquerra overwhelmingly wins the elections and its leader, Francesc Macià, proclaims the Catalan Republic on 14 April 1931. After negotiating with the recently-legalised Second Spanish Republic, the Catalan Republic becomes the Generalitat de Catalunya, thus recovering the name of the secular institution of the Government of Catalonia abolished in 1714, after the military defeat of the Catalan forces by Philip V, King of Castile.

In 1933, Macià dies and is succeeded at the head of the Government by Lluís Companys, also representing Esquerra. In 1934, right-wing parties try to provoke a new *coup d'état* and thus abolish the democratic rights, the social changes and the Catalan autonomy. For all these reasons, Companys decides to proclaim the Catalan State. The insurrection fails, the Government of Catalonia is abolished and its members are imprisoned. The Government of Catalonia is not restored until 1936, when Esquerra wins the elections in February, leading a unified coalition called Front d'Esquerres ('Left-wing Front'). This movement is the Catalan version of other 'popular fronts', born all over Europe in response to the fascist expansionism.

During the Second Spanish Republic (1931–1939), Esquerra is the most voted party in all the elections, and promotes modernisation, social welfare and progress for Catalonia. Such political programme is certainly ahead of that time.



## 1936–1939: CIVIL WAR

In July 1939, the army leads a fascist coup d'état against the Republic, and the Spanish Civil War starts. Thousands of Catalan young people fight in the war in defence of democracy, Catalonia and the Republic. At the same time, young women begin to work in the factories in order to contribute to the fight against fascism. General Franco's victory over the Republic sends into exile 500.000 Catalan people and means the beginning of a dark period of social and political repression, which lasts almost four decades. Civil, social and economic rights are denied during this period. The Catalan language is persecuted and the Government of Catalonia is abolished, in an attempt of cultural genocide against Catalonia.

Franco's dictatorship aborts a brilliant period of social changes and the Catalan national progress led by Esquerra.

## 1939-1975: EXILE, REPRESSION, RESISTANCE AND CLANDESTINITY

Esquerra had more than 70.000 members before the war. After the war, a fourth of them have died in the front, have been executed or imprisoned, and half of them have had to go into exile. President Companys, a refugee in France, is handed over by the Gestapo to the fascist Spanish Government and is vilely shot in Barcelona in October 1940. Josep Irla, another member of Esquerra, succeeds him as president of the Government of Catalonia in exile. In 1945, Esquerra holds its National Congress in France and elects Josep Tarradellas as its new leader. In 1954 Tarradellas replaces Irla as leader of the Government of Catalonia in exile.

In 1939, Esquerra begins organizing itself in the Spanish State as a resistance group against Franco. After German and Italian fascism is defeated in the Second World War, no help to defeat Franco is brought by Western democracies, already immersed in the Cold War and the policy of blocs. In 1952, Heribert Barrera comes back to Catalonia from exile in order to lead Esquerra in clandestinity. On 11 September 1964, National Day of Catalonia, Esquerra and other groups organize in Barcelona the first demonstration against Franco since the end of the Civil War.

During the period when Franco is in charge, Esquerra takes part in many political initiatives, always aiming at the restoration of democracy and national freedom for Catalonia.



independència

## 1975–1987: DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

In the first democratic elections following the death of Franco, held in June 1977, Esquerra cannot stand for them with its name since it is not legalized: because it is a republican political party and because it defends self-determination. Esquerra is not legalized until August. Spanish Constitution is approved in 1978, under the supervision of some pre-democratic armed forces. Esquerra is against that Constitution because it does not recognize that the Spanish State is plurinational, nor the right to self-determination, and because it confirms the monarchy and the army as symbols and guardians of «Spanish national unity».

In October 1977, president Tarradellas comes back from exile and the Government of Catalonia is restored. In 1979, a new Statute of Catalonia is approved. Esquerra is very critical about it because it is financially insufficient and offers few self-government. In addition, such low level of self-government is eroded by the successive Spanish governments. In 1980, the first elections of the restored Catalan Parliament are held and Esquerra receives 240,000 votes (8.9%). However, in the next elections Esquerra loses popular support because of its non-updated political programme and elderly members.

## 1987–1996: PRO-INDEPENDENCE LEFT

In 1987, about a hundred Catalan public figures, headed by Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira and Àngel Colom, lead the Crida Nacional a Esquerra ('National Call to Esquerra'), a call to join the historic political party in order to rejuvenate and relaunch it, by gathering new pro-independence generations born as a result of the deceiving Spanish transition.

This initiative crystallises in 1989, when Esquerra assumes the independence of the Catalan Countries as its political objective and makes the Parliament of Catalonia approve that «Catalonia does not renounce the right to self-determination». As a consequence of this situation, various organizations of the pro-independence left join Esquerra. The results obtained in the Catalan Parliament elections of 1992 (210.000 votes – 7,9%) prove the success of this strategy. This is the first time that a political party explicitly in favour of independence obtains a significant support.

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## 1996–2007: TOWARDS A SOCIAL MAJORITY IN FAVOUR OF SELF-DETERMINATION

In 1996, Esquerra's leadership emphasizes its social and economic discourse seeking a social majority in favour of self-determination. This renewed strategy works out in 2003. Esquerra obtains extraordinary results in the Catalan Parliament elections (544.000 votes – 16,4%), and thus becomes the driving force of the left-wing change within the Government, led for more than two decades by the center-right.


In 2004, Esquerra increases its representation within the Spanish Parliament from 1 to 8 MPs, who support the progressive social policies of socialist president José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero. In the European Parliament elections, Esquerra obtains one seat leading the coalition Europa dels Pobles ('Europe of the People'). The coalition is also made up of Eusko Alkartasuna (Basque Country) and Chunta Aragonesista (Aragon), both members of European Free Alliance, an international organization of political parties from nations with no state.

In 2005, the Parliament of Catalonia approves with 90% of the votes a project for a new Statute of Autonomy, promoted by Esquerra. The project of the new Statute proclaims the national status of Catalonia, introduces a fair financial system that ends up with the current fiscal plundering, and strengthens self-government in order for Catalonia to face the social and economic challenges of our country.

The Statute is cut out in the Spanish Parliament with regards to all political, economic, social and national issues. Esquerra is against such reduction and thus rejects the text when subjected to referendum in 2006. The new Statute is approved by a meager participation of 49% and 26% votes against and blank.


These results prove the weakening of the statutory model applied in Catalonia. Esquerra is working to overcome this situation and call, when social majority supports so, a self-determination referendum.



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