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Spain

Serious setback for IU

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The results of the European parliamentary elections in Spain were characterized in the first place by the highest rate of abstention registered in our country since 1977 (55.8%), reflecting thus the tendency, common in the majority of EU countries, towards a growing distance of the public from the Parliament and the European institutions.

The second relevant fact was that, in spite of its desire to turn these elections into a "second round" of the parliamentary elections of March 14, the right wing Partido Popular (PP) narrowed the difference (41.30% as opposed to 43.30%) but did not overtake the PSOE in the number of votes. But undoubtedly the main loser was Izquierda Unida, since, if we add the votes and percentages that it won in 1999 to those it obtained with its present ally, Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds, we see that its total has fallen from 6.51% to 4.16% (in absolute numbers, from 1,377,937 votes to 636,458). The nationalist forces did not register good results either (save in the case of the Partido Nacionalista Vasco), while the banned Herritarren Zerrenda claimed that its calls for a spoilt ballot were supported by 12% in Euskadi and 7% in Navarre.

The general conclusion that it is possible to draw from all this, beyond the claim to attention that the abstention rate has for a coming referendum on the European Constitution, is that the Zapatero government has managed to pass this test and has avoided the PP being able to delegitimise the results of the general election. The PP, however, insists on its conservative identity and on reinforcing an exclusivist Spanish nationalism before the debate that will open on the Ibarretxe Plan and the prospects of reform of the Statutes of Autonomy and the Spanish Constitution. Nonetheless, it should be said that the "votos nulos" in Euskadi confirm, in the midst of an impasse in ETA activity, the capacity of resistance of a significant social sector which continues to identify with Batasuna.

In the case of IU-ICV we have gone from 4 to 2 Euro-deputies, of which one, of the ICV, happens to be a member of the European Green Group. It is an unambiguous failure, as its Coordinador General, Gaspar Llamazares, had to acknowledge; the fall in votes was pretty well common in all the CCAA, although it was smaller in Catalonia. In Catalonia, in addition, the ICV were the beneficiaries of the result, obtaining a deputy, and not the EUiA (the Catalan organization linked to IU, in electoral coalition with the ICV). Also on this occasion one cannot appeal to the justification of the "useful vote" or to a difference in results between those places where the IU participates in autonomous governments and those where it does not. Obviously, the result cannot be attributed to a campaign of "low intensity" (which has not managed to mobilize a significant sector of militants) and, with the slogan "IU, ahora", IU was not able to recover a part of those who voted for the PSOE on March 14, and they do not bear all the responsibility for what happened. Undoubtedly, the crisis of IU started a long time ago, but for that reason we should not underestimate the fact that of late the image that this formation offers to a large sector of the electorate is that of being a left complement to the PSOE, rather than an anti-capitalist and alternative left with an autonomous project. Denying this evidence, the current temptation of the leadership is to attribute an important part of the failure to the media repercussions of internal divisions; it overvalues this factor and evades its own responsibility for the bureaucratic methods employed as much in the agreement with the ICV as with the approval of the electoral list.

In spite of all this, it should be recognised that the programme that was finally approved by the IU - though not by the ICV - introduced a more critical vision of the draft European Constitution and that in the final phase of the campaign there was a greater effort of differentiation from the PSOE. But the programme was not widely disseminated nor was sufficient distance taken from Zapatero government in relation to economic policy and defence, and it did not have the credibility to bring out broad sectors of former voters and young people.

A period of reflection and debate has now opened up inside this formation that will culminate in a special Federal Assembly before the end of this year, according to the decision of the federal leadership. Throughout this process the

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critical sectors that in the last assembly presented a common list around the document “For the refoundation of a democratic, plural, federalist, anti-capitalist and alternative IU” will make an effort to offer a road that takes us out from the deep crisis and the despondency which afflicts most of its members, trying to avoid false polarizations between those who desire a “green refoundation” that would end up including them in the European green area and those who are tempted to fall back on a “Communist identity” associated with the PCE but without a common or clearly defined project.