**Ska Keller,** *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group***.** – Mr President, last Sunday will be remembered as a sad day and, I think, not just in Spain but all over Europe. We saw peaceful citizens confronted with a huge police force ready to use all the force they had. Families, pensioners, people of all backgrounds, were confronted with a state that was willing to use almost all means to stop the referendum from taking place.

The world was watching while this was happening, while the riot police met people with brutality, charging with batons and even firing rubber bullets. Polling stations and hotels, schools and city halls and streets were turned into front lines between national police and their own citizens. What happened in Spain is unacceptable. I think it will unfortunately also set the image that we all have of the situation for the future. This was massive police violence against peaceful people, and that was beyond any proportionality. Violence so disproportionate cannot be justified, no buts and no excuses. Whatever you think about the referendum, whatever you think of independence, I think that has to be clear: that violence is not a mean for solving political conflict.

And whatever the views about the referendum and everything, it is also clear that the strategy of Prime Minister Rajoy has clearly failed. He has refused the dialogue that was offered and he has used and reverted more to judicial means, to police means. But the judges cannot solve a political problem, police cannot solve a political problem. Criminal prosecution cannot work that way. It is inappropriate. What we need is a political solution, but rather than doing that Rajoy has worsened the problem. He has escalated the situation. The massive mobilisation we saw yesterday: it is not just independentists who are appalled by what happened last Sunday. I really think that Rajoy has not really been helpful in this situation.

In the future, I believe the Spanish Government must refrain from using police violence against peaceful people. It must aim to find a political solution, because the Catalan crisis is a political crisis, a political problem and therefore it needs to be solved politically, not by police force. The political solution must always mean that people talk to each other, that all sides talk to each other.

I believe the European Union has a role to play in that because the whole affair is not just an internal matter for Spain. Spain and Catalonia are inside the European Union. President Juncker cannot sit on the fence and just watch from Berlaymont what is happening and how the conflict escalates. The Catalan crisis is a European affair. It goes to the heart of the European Union’s fundamental values because the European Union is built on the conscious decision to live together on this continent, settling our differences, however great they might be, through dialogue, through negotiation and through compromise rather than through violence. It is wrong, I believe, that the Commission shies away. It is its duty as the guardian of the Treaty to get involved and help in solving this problem, to offer mediation, to offer its help. I think this is something I would really expect of the European Union. Citizens all over Europe are looking at us, looking at what we are doing in the European Union. I think it is important that we offer our help, that we promote dialogue, that we tell both sides to stop escalations. The Commission can be an honest broker here.

Colleagues and Commissioner, I think it is very important that all of us understand how grave the situation is and how easily and how quickly can escalate even further. No one knows what tomorrow will bring. I think if we have any chance at all to do something, to do our small bit, then we should do it. I believe, Mr Timmermans, that you have a chance to do something and I hope that we will use it all together.

The Spanish and the Catalan Government, of course, also have their responsibility. They have to agree to negotiate, to sit together, to accept mediation and to prevent further escalation. The whole crisis is a breakdown of the rules and the democratic consensus that so far ensured a peaceful and non-violent relationship between Spain and Catalonia. The right to self-determination is firmly anchored in international law, and both sides, both the Spanish Government as well as the Catalan Government, have to take the responsibility to find a common solution for how to put it into place in a peaceful and in a democratic way.

Further police violence and intimidation will not solve the problem. Many actors have called for dialogue, including all over Catalonia, such as the Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, many people have called for dialogue. Colleagues here have said that this is the way forward. I think this is something we all have to agree on. The European Union is built on dialogue. We have to solve political problems by political means and dialogue is the only way forward.

*(Applause)*