

Origins of *The Sentinel Gazette*

By John News

These pages and columns grew out of a foolish little incident—the only time in my life I have ever been called a fascist.

It happened at a public lecture in Llançà, the coastal town in the Empordà region at the northernmost edge of Catalonia, where I have lived since my retirement. The speaker belonged to a local left-wing party, and his talk focused on the migration crisis that had unfolded in Ceuta in late July 2026. In an extraordinary surge, roughly 70,000 people crossed into Spanish territory from Morocco. While the vast majority voluntarily returned, an estimated 10,000 remained on Spanish soil, among them a significant number of unaccompanied minors. During those crossings, particularly for those who reached Ceuta by sea, around a hundred lives were lost.

At one point, the speaker drew a direct line between this crisis and the retreat across the nearby French border in January 1939, when nearly 400,000 refugees fled the Spanish Civil War. "We must welcome them," he declared, "just as the French welcomed us."

Faced with this broadside of sentimentality—which blithely conflated two entirely different historical eras of human movement, and perversely confused the right to asylum from war with immigration laws governing economic migration—I raised my voice during the Q&A. My reward for pointing out these distinctions was to be branded a fascist.

I protested, of course, but looking around the room, I sensed an unexpected and disturbing divide. I stood up and walked out as someone jeered behind my back—I was later told he was a fellow member of the speaker's party.

A fleeting, dark thought crossed my mind as I left: *These people would turn me into a fascist*. In that single instant, I grasped the raw origin and depth of the political polarization that has swept Europe in recent years—the very phenomenon I had spent my entire career trying to analyze and prevent.

It was a sobering moment for a man who had spent decades as a foreign correspondent reporting on European affairs for publications I broadly aligned with, such as *The Guardian*. Yet sometimes, unexpected and emotionally charged events open a window in your mind that had remained firmly shut.

That evening was my window. From it emerged these short essays, written in collaboration with an AI that assists me in drafting and translating them into Catalan. They represent two sides of the very same coin—a coin I now carry in my pocket wherever I go.