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***DOES EUROPEAN INTEGRATION FAVOUR REGIONAL IDENTITIES AND AUTONOMIST  
INSTANCES?  
The case of Catalonia***

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**Academic Year 2017/2018**

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## Chapter I

### 1. Introduction

In the past, when nation states were not part of a higher institutional order such as the European one, economies tended to be more self-centred. In most unified states, the northern regions were more industrialized than the southern areas, as it was the case of many European nation-states, included Spain. When national territories were unified through long-lasting and often sanguineous processes, the industrialized and more economically advanced regions kept peaceful relations with the rural ones, dedicating attention to the backward regions that were considered important for the well-functioning of the system. This was because the production of the richer industrialised areas needed the consumption of people, that usually came from the less advanced parts of the country.

In Spain, like in Italy, the “north” would produce for the “south” who would buy their products. It could also be the opposite from a geographical point of view, such as in Germany, where the south was more wealthy than the north. When nation states, through European integration, started to gradually lend part of their own authority and powers to an international or supranational body that would reunite several states, the previously consolidated equilibriums radically changed. The industrialised regions of the north would no longer need to sell their products to the south, due to their incorporation into a much bigger market that is able to provide far more opportunities than their single nation state, within its internal economy, could deliver. These advanced regions started to confer less importance to internal competition, in order to begin confronting themselves with a market that overcomes national borders: the European single market, created through the Single European act. The states who signed to be a part to these treaties, would belong to a common area characterized by the free movement of people, persons and capitals. Such rich regions, strong of their prosperous economy and fruitful industry, start looking away from the limitations of their nation states, moving toward an international context in which they are called to compete with a number of other nations. This phenomenon strengthened the already present feelings of independentism in the historically wealthiest and most developed regions, such as Catalonia. From this new perception, an autonomist sentiment may rise among the population, that does not necessarily imply the wish to become a separate nation. The protest arises also from those who simply look for a higher degree of fiscal autonomy from Spain or for more political consideration. Catalonia now demands independence because it feels to be able to self-sustain once freed from its ties to the Iberian Peninsula, but it deeply values the inclusion to the European Union as a new State.

Globalization has raised the incentive of small national economies to open up to international trade. Another aspect that lies behind the pressure for independence is given by the fiscal transfers and the internal redistribution of the tax revenues. The economically more advanced regions see themselves deprived of the fruits of their economic success, as they are obliged to make huge fiscal transfers in favour of the poorer regions. In the case of Catalonia this is vehemently true: according to the data, Barcelona pays to the central government in Madrid between 11.4 and 17.4 billions per year, as net sums (Ministerio de Hacienda y

Función Pública). This region produces every year a GDP close to 230 billions of euros (Idescat. Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2017): solidarity towards Spain costs it between 5 and 7% of its GDP. Catalonia, with seven millions of inhabitants, represents the 16% of Spanish population; around the 20% of Spanish GDP, the 23% of industrial production and the 25% of its exports. It hosts the 46% of foreign companies present in Spain. It is also a commercial, harbour and logistic centre, as well as the central point of several compartments of high added value and high degree of innovation. Its main partners are other Spanish regions, meaning that if Catalan economy suffers, the same happens to the rest of Spain (Dieter, 2017).

### **1.1 Catalan fight for independence: a secular conflict**

Any full present analysis of the rise of independentism in Catalonia has to be accompanied by the study of some historical events. It is necessary to understand the institutional processes and more recent events that culminated in the current crisis. The narrative of the perceived Catalonia's oppression at the hands of Madrid goes back centuries. The origins of Catalan independentism lay back to when Catalonia was considered an independent region, speaking its own language and following its own customs and rules.

The General Council, formed in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, represented the "Generalitat" of Catalonia and its mission was to implement certain basically tax-related decisions. The fiscal jurisdiction of the General Council was a determining factor in establishing the precise boundaries of Catalonia.

## **2. Historical overview**

Catalonia lived the colonisations of Celts, Phoenicians, Etruscans and Greeks. The Greeks exercised an important influence on the territory, especially next to the sea, developing maritime trade until the arrival of the Romans. The Romans built infrastructures and cities and practiced trade and agriculture. The area was an empire's possession until it passed in the hands of the Visigoth. Roman success is reflected in its geographical expansion (Alonso, 2017). Later on, Spain was occupied by the Arabs. Charlemagne, king of the Franks, liberated parts of the territory known today as Catalonia from Muslim occupation. The new territories were assigned to the Carolingian governors and Barcelona became the centre of the Frankish property in Spain. When the power of Frankish empire went on vanishing, the counts of Barcelona, using their estate's advantageous position, took charge of the dominion of the city and disengaged from France. Their successors fought against the Muslims, widened their dominion through marriages in Provence and built alliances between the county of Barcelona and the reign of Aragon (CapCreus, 2018). Ramón Berenguer I, count of Barcelona, brought to Catalonia the basis of a new political structure through the union of the "Counties" and the proclamation of the "Usatges" (habits) through which the rights and habits of the country were controlled. The main role of the "Usatges" was to facilitate taxation across territories. In this sense, Berenguer drastically reduced the power of the king. The count Berenguer IV of Barcelona married Petronilia, Queen of Aragon in 1150 giving birth to a dynasty. From the XII to the XV century Catalonia and Aragón formed a common reign, although each country maintained its own administration. The result was a period of economic prosperity for Catalonia: agricultural production increased proportionally to the population. In this period, factories were built, the mines were multiplied, the market and the banks

prospered. Barcelona became an important commercial port and trade centre. This economic boom brought with it the emergence of a urban bourgeoisie that was responsible for starting to challenge the feudal structures in cities and towns (CapCreus , 2018).

In the 12th century, the county was brought under the same royal rule as the neighbouring kingdom of Aragon, going on to become a major medieval sea power (BBC news, 2018). In 1283, the Court of Barcelona formalised a deal-making system which prohibited the sovereign from levying general taxes without the authorisation of the three estates (military, ecclesiastical and noble) represented in the Courts. This set of rules strongly limited the powers of the reigning Monarch (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Nonetheless, the decline began with the famous Black Plague of 1348. This epidemic ushered in a period of economic and demographic decline, characterised by a series of internal conflicts and costly foreign wars, which required a sustained financial effort by all of the estates (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

A decisive step towards the creation of the Generalitat (Catalan regional government) was when the king had to lend more powers to the courts in exchange for the heavier economic contributions that he asked for the war. In 1362, taxes on trade were established in Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia. These were called “generalitats” because they collected taxes on the entire community of subjects but they also acted as an intermediary body between the local tax institutions and the monarch. As royal requirements continued and taxes had to be raised, a single exclusive General Council was established for Catalonia in order prevent the taxation from falling under the control of the royal tax authorities (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

The exceptional interregnum and the establishment of a new dynasty presented the opportunity to increase the power of the General Council at the expense of the sovereignty of the monarch. With its new political functions, the institution expanded its activities and a series of conflicts ensued, ultimately resulting in a civil war that pitted the General Council against King John II of Aragón (1462-1472). During the war, John II was dethroned by the autonomous institutions. The war wreaked havoc on the economic order of Catalan society and highlighted the shortcomings of the General Council’s operations, as well as its oligarchic nature (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The final triumph of the monarch John II, that consolidated a new royal tax structure on the fringes of the Generalitat, was endorsed when in 1469 Catalonia was returned to the sovereignty of the Catholic kings of Aragón and Castilla. Ferdinand II made major changes to the Catalan institutions, including the introduction of external restraint mechanisms that were controlled by monarchical authorities. Thanks to these adjustments in the early 16th century, the monarchy expanded and captured a diverse range of territories. As a result, the regime depended less on the financial contributions of the General Council (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

The General Council was created to meet the financial needs of the monarchy and became the administrator of a public treasury. In the early 15th century, it was the most important permanent representative institution in the Principality. At the beginning of 1400, there was the desire to expand the Generalitat’s administrative and political organs and regulate the procedures and controls. A series reforms consolidated the institution without really altering its character of representing the privileged classes. The frequent absenteeism of the

new dynasty kings, who used to delegate the local exercising of their power, reinforced the political functions of the Generalitat (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

King Ferdinand II of Aragón pushed through a complex legislation that was designed to reinforce the power of the monarch, with the introduction of new institutions that were subject to royal dependence or by reforming those already existing (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Throughout the 16th century, Spain was under the kingdom of the House of Austria. During this monarchy, Catalonia became an autonomous state, keeping its traditional institutions, and experiencing new impulses in its economic activities (CapCreus, 2018). In this context, there was an important but disordered expansion of social representation within the Generalitat. With regard to fiscal operation, a stable network of local representatives of the Generalitat was gradually built up, with agents and 'warblers' or informer spies. This institutional deployment was a clear indication of what the main function of the Generalitat continued to be: it directly reflected the profitability of the tax system itself, and indirectly the substantial increase in income from the reconstruction of social wealth in Catalonia after the crisis of the end of the 15th century. In 1593, the king unilaterally suspended an important part of the agreements made with Catalonia and this triggered a period of conflicts between the Catalan institutions holding to the agreed regime, and an internationally established monarchy with an imperial outlook, which nursed a tendency towards absolute power and called on Catalonia for help in order to finance its imperial policies. As a consequence, the monarchs of the first half of the 17th century put intense pressure on the Generalitat, in a context of social crisis that would continue to deepen (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The conflict escalated dramatically in 1640 and led to a new Civil War which echoed that of the 15th century: the separation of Catalonia from the Spanish Monarchy, the alliance with France, exhausting of the experience and return to the sovereignty of the King of Spain, and as a final balance, the strengthening of royal power in Catalonia from 1652 onwards. An independent republic was proclaimed under the French protectorate and the Spanish monarchy ended up recognising Catalan constitution. Due to such an armed conflict, Catalonia was submerged in an economic recession, with new epidemics of plague and floods (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The return of Catalonia to the Spanish Monarchy meant that the Generalitat was subordinated to the Crown, while royal taxation continued to expand. The constant risk of financial collapse imposed extraordinary restrictions on the Generalitat: it became a docile instrument in the hands of the King's delegates, although protests and complaints about the continuing infractions could not be suppressed (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

Catalonia's fortunes were sealed by a political occurrence, the accession of Karl of Habsburg to the imperial throne in 1711. Catalonia was set free, but the Bourbon armies were starting to gradually occupy the territory. The Generalitat's irreversible subordination to the power of the monarchy reached the peak with the unfolding of the War of Succession, the subsequent siege of Barcelona and its surrender on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1714, when the Generalitat was abolished. While being part of the Crown of Aragon, Catalonia backed the Habsburg dynasty against the Bourbons, whose capture of Barcelona in 1714 represented the imposition of central control and the loss of Catalan autonomy. The War of the Spanish Succession was an

emblematic event that resulted in the birth of modern-day Spain (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

With the reign of Phillip V (1700-1746), winner of the War of Succession, the Bourbons got access to the Spanish throne. Phillip V abolished all the privileges enjoyed by Catalan region. Despite its loss of autonomy, the region experimented a new economic boom during the XVIII century, as shown by the demographic growth and the creation of industries (CapCreus , 2018).

11<sup>th</sup> September of 1714 is an important day not only for the defeat of Barcelona, but also because king Phillip enacted the Degree of Nueva Planta that abolished the aristocratic privileges, local jurisdictions and institutions of self-government (Alonso, 2017). Phillip V set up a political system that excluded the representation of Catalan society and reinforced the pre-eminence of the military authorities over civil ones, assigning the administration to officers of the king's army. The kings who came after tried to impose Castilian language and laws on the region, but they would abandon their attempts in 1931, when the Generalitat was restored (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Barcelona later demanded the reform of the Nueva Planta system and a partial return to the situation prior to the War of Succession. The absolute monarchy's trends toward centralisation and uniformity continued. The practice of the Spanish Government developed a subordinated hierarchical chain from the head of government in Madrid to the ministers, the provincial leaders and the mayors. These posts were often militarised, helping to reinforce authoritarianism. Even so, the provincial and municipal representative bodies frequently voiced demands on behalf of a society that had its own brand of dynamism, never stopped rebelling and had a model quite distinct from that of Spain. These differences became even more pronounced when the industrial revolution got into full swing in the mid 19th century. Catalonia took on a significant and often central role in manoeuvring the liberal Spanish regime toward the left, in order to decentralise the state or thoroughly re-examine the federalist model (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

## **2.1 XIX century: Towards decentralisation and the First Spanish Republic**

At the beginning of the XIX century, the economic expansion occurring in Catalonia was in strong contrast to the economic and social structures of the rest of the Peninsula. This would allow the development of a collective Catalan awareness and an avenging movement toward a national Catalan political plan. The claiming was strengthened by the crisis of the Bourbon monarchy and Napoleon's occupation in 1808 (CapCreus , 2018), which created a power vacuum at the state level that prompted the self-organisation of the different provinces of Spain. The Principality was directly annexed to the French Empire in 1812 and became a department under a federal system. In 1814, Spain recovered again its independence under the absolute monarchy of Ferdinand VII (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The province of Catalonia modernized at the same rhythm as the Industrial revolution in the 19th century, with the bourgeoisie of the cities proposing a change in the social model. In the Six Democratic Years (1868-1874), the shift toward decentralisation became more pronounced. The Provincial Council of Barcelona became a strategic political scene. The First Spanish Republic was proclaimed in 1873, but it lasted just one year (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Republicanism was divided between those who wanted a Unitary Republic (with a unique



government for the whole country) and those opting for a Federal Republic (where all autonomous states make an agreement to create a State of superior status) (Alonso, 2017). The partnership with Spain started to break down in Catalonia after the so-called Disaster of 1898, when Spain was forced to cede its last overseas colonies to the United States. The Catalan economic elites had gained great benefits from exports to the colonies. After the loss of these colonies, they were overtaken by a rising Catalan professional middle class, impatient with Spain's backwardness relative to Catalonia and keen to establish autonomy, if not independence, for the region (Balfour, 2017). The pronouncement made by Martínez Campos in 1874<sup>1</sup> re-established the Spanish Monarchy and the Bourbon dynasty. The establishment of dynastic succession, fraudulent elections and perpetually centralist government practices created an environment favourable to the emergence of Catalan nationalism. Nationalists not only demanded changes to the operation of existing institutions but also built specific alternatives for political self-organisation in Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

Hopes for reforming the liberal Spanish regime were repeatedly crushed. However, in the early 20th century, the Spanish Government ultimately recognised Catalonia's distinct personality by uniting the four Provincial Councils in a Commonwealth. This experience, which lasted from 1914 to 1925, is the most recent precedent for the Government of Catalonia as we know it today (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

## **2.2 XX century: Spanish Second Republic and the Statute of Autonomy**

The political scene in Catalonia changed substantially after the municipal elections held in 1901, when the dynastic parties found themselves cornered by the Regionalist League and the republicans emerging as the dominant forces. The Provincial Councils became an important platform for reconstructing the political personality of Catalonia. The Regionalist League tried to get to the auto-determination of Catalonia. The masses in the cities rebelled in the attempt to improve their miserable living conditions (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). In 1903, a project for local-government reform was presented that called for "municipal commonwealths", which would provide public services and would give provinces the authority over public works, communications, public welfare and university education and provide them with the tax money needed to carry out these activities. Prat de la Riba presented these conditions to Prime Minister José Canalejas as "the most solid, irresistible proof of a people's ability to aspire to broad self-government functions". Several obstacles delayed and finally thwarted the approval of the law on local-government reform. In 1911, it was decided that the new organisation should be called "Generalitat", a word that connoted a desire for autonomy. In 1913, a decree granting the Spanish Provincial Councils the power to form administrative commonwealths was issued. Only the Catalan provinces seized this opportunity. As a result, Catalonia flourished once again as a political entity within Spain (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The relative weight of the new organisation and the political unity of Catalan nationalists under the strong leadership of Prat de la Riba made it possible to take major steps in public works, welfare services,

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<sup>1</sup> Pronunciamiento de Sagunto o Pronunciamiento de Martínez Campos made by the general Arsenio Martínez Campos in Sagunto on the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1874, which supposed the Bourbon restoration in Spain.

education and culture with long-lasting effects. The second president of the Commonwealth tried to stabilize the institution's positive action in an increasingly strained economic and social context, which ultimately prompted the League to support Primo de Rivera's coup d'état in 1923. The dictator proceeded to abolish the Commonwealth in 1925 (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). In the view of Catalan nationalist politicians, the Commonwealth was a modest but useful first step toward the autonomy of Catalonia. Between 1923 and 1930, the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera was set up in Spain with the support of king Alfonso XIII, the army, the bourgeoisie, the landowners and the Church. Nevertheless, Catalonia became one of the most active sources of opposition to the regime with the rising of Catalan Republicanism, who had as its leader the most committed fighter, Francesc Macià (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

After the 1931 municipal elections, Francesc Macià, leader of Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya', the Republican Left winning party in Catalonia, unilaterally proclaimed "the Catalan Republic as a state of the Iberian Federation"<sup>2</sup>, mere hours before the Second Spanish Republic was declared in Madrid (Fernández, 2010). Therefore, a Government of Catalonia was provisionally established and headed by President Macià, whose main mission was to draw up a statute of autonomy, which was finalized in 1931. The Constitution of the Second Spanish Republic approved on December 1931 did not establish a federal state, but rather a "comprehensive state compatible with the autonomy of municipalities and regions"<sup>3</sup>.

The Autonomous Statute was put into effect in 1932: it defined Catalonia as an autonomous region with its own treasury and established the core autonomous institutions of its Government and the relationships between them (Catalan Autonomous Statute 1931). Because of the major upheavals of 1930s, the expected transfer of powers had not been completed by the time the Government of Catalonia was abolished in 1939. In early 1934, the most important laws regarding the organisation of the new Catalonia came into being, with the creation of new institutions which coordinated the activities of the autonomous region.

From October 1934 to February 1936, with the Statute of Autonomy being suspended, the office of the President of the Government was occupied by individuals appointed by the central government (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

### **2.3 The 1936 Civil war and the dark years of dictatorship**

When the Popular Front emerged victorious in the election of February 1936, the suspension of the Statute was lifted. The event produced an "Alzamiento Nacional"<sup>4</sup> that decided to put an end to revolutionary attempts. In Catalonia, a failed military uprising was immediately followed by a revolutionary outburst against the authority of the Generalitat. A Civil War started which would terminate not before than 1939 and causing one million deaths. During the war, Catalonia was a key Republican stronghold, and the fall of Barcelona to General Francisco Franco's right-wing forces in 1939 marked the end of republican resistance.

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<sup>2</sup> See Francesc Macià's discourse "Interpretando el sentimiento y los anhelos del pueblo que nos acaba de dar su sufragio, proclamo la República Catalana como Estado integrado en la Federación Ibérica"; Barcelona, 14 de abril de 1931.

<sup>3</sup> See the first article of Spanish Constitution of the Second Republic "La republica constituye un Estado integral, compatible con la autonomia de los Municipios y las Regiones". [http://www.congreso.es/docu/constituciones/1931/1931\\_cd.pdf](http://www.congreso.es/docu/constituciones/1931/1931_cd.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> It is a military coup d'état in Spain, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1936; it was directed against the government of the Second Republic that had been formed in February of the same year. This event marked the beginning of the Spanish Civil war, the overthrow of the Second Republic by nationalist forces and the subsequent establishment of Francisco Franco's dictatorship.

Catalonia was forced to allow the central government to operate from its territory, interfering with the powers of the Generalitat. The situation became increasingly abnormal and desperate in the period leading up to the military victory of the rebels (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Between February and June 1936, a series of dramatic events occurred: church fires, bombing attacks, strikes. The economy was paralysed and the political murders multiplied. Starting from this moment, it was a matter of being in favour or against the Republic, the two sides were irremediably facing each other; the monarchists reunited all the anti-republican flows (CapCreus , 2018). On July 1936, General Francisco Franco and Bahamonde sent a message: “the army has decided to establish the order in Spain (...)”<sup>5</sup>. The military coup began as a revolt by right-wing Spanish military officers in Spanish Morocco and spread to mainland Spain. It was driven in part by Francoist desire to restore a unitary state and impose a single national identity through force (Balfour, 2017). Franco disposed of a considerable military advantage with respect to the Republican army, composed mainly of untrained armed guerrilla. In 1938 the outcome of the Spanish Civil War was becoming clear. General Franco signed a decree abolishing the Government of Catalonia and declared that “the state shall regain the powers of legislation and enforcement that correspond to it in the common-law territories and the services that were transferred to the region of Catalonia”<sup>6</sup> (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Francoist troops arrived to Barcelona in 1939 and took control of the region (Graham, 2005). The military occupation of Catalonia was completed in early 1939. The Government of Catalonia was abolished, its assets were seized, giving birth to a period of deprivation of democracy and Catalan national rights, which lasted until the death of the dictator in 1975. Many people were forced into exile, including the top officials of the Government of Catalonia and the Spanish Republic (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The era of Franco (1939-1975) meant for Catalonia the elimination of any democratic liberty, the prohibition and persecution of political parties who were against the regime, the suppression of the Statute of Autonomy and its derived institutions, as well as the persecution of Catalan language and culture (Alonso, 2017).

With General Francisco Franco a new State was installed where all forms of opposition were prohibited. He set out to destroy Catalan autonomy and separatism. The army was the big ally of the regime (CapCreus , 2018). During the early years of his authoritarian rule, the Spanish state inflicted what can be defined as a cultural genocide on Catalonia, dismantling institutions and associations tied to Catalan identity and driving the Catalan language into the private sphere. Madrid’s repression of democracy and protest during this period remains the most important reference point for Catalan nationalism today. For many older Catalans, the brutal behaviour of the Spanish police during the recent referendum evoked powerful memories of Francoist repression (Balfour, 2017). At the end of the 50s, Catalan artists and intellectuals started to reactivate the Catalan nationalist movement that became the main critique to Francoist regime. There was in Catalonia a strong resistance to the central government during these times (CapCreus , 2018). The period of the dictatorship ended when Franco died on the 20th of November 1975.

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<sup>5</sup> From the Canary Islands, General Francisco Franco broadcasts a message calling for all army officers to join the uprising and overthrow Spain’s leftist Republican government.

<sup>6</sup> See Franco’s decree for the abolition of Catalan autonomy in Burgos, 5th of April 1938 <http://www.xtec.cat/~jrovira6/gcivill/estatut.htm>

### 3. From dictatorship to democracy until today

The death of Franco opened a process of transition from the dictatorship to the restoration of democratic institutions, including the Government of Catalonia, in an atmosphere characterised by exhaustion with dictatorship and demands for citizens' rights (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

In a context of major change spurred by the end of the dictatorship, the tensions of the cold war, the entrance of Spain in the European Union and the phenomenon of globalisation, Catalonia recovered the official and civil institutions which had been put away during the times of Franco, witnessing a process of modernisation and opening itself up to foreign markets. Catalan language and culture, repressed for so many years, were also revitalised (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The country went through a process of democratization. Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy in the mid-1970s was initially marked by widespread social protests in which the demand for Catalan social and political rights played an important part. Yet the terms of democratization reflected the fact that at the time, reformists within the dictatorship still controlled the mechanisms of state power. The resulting deal thus fell far short of the aspirations of Catalan and Basque nationalists (Balfour, 2017).

In the first democratic elections held in 1977, the political parties that included in their platforms demands for the re-establishment of the 1932 Statute and the formation of a Government of Catalonia scored overwhelming victories in Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). Shortly thereafter, a decree recognised Josep Tarradellas<sup>7</sup> as President of the Government but the Statute of 1932 was not restored. He formed a government which operated with very few powers and very little room to manoeuvre (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). In 1976, Adolfo Suárez became Prime Minister of Spain, he initiated contact with the democratic opposition forces and managed to pass a bill for political reform. Political parties were legalised and Spain's first democratic legislative elections since 1936 were held in 1977. The main task of the elected legislative bodies was to draft a constitution, which was approved by referendum (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). When democracy was restored in the country, Catalonia was granted once more some degree of autonomy. During the Second Republic, Spain had conceded autonomy to the culturally distinctive regions of the Basque Country, Catalonia, and Galicia. Rather than merely restoring this autonomy, the new democratic constitution of 1978 diluted its significance by awarding different degrees of self-government to all regions (Balfour, 2017). The 1978 Constitution proclaims the "indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation" but goes on to recognise the right of the "nationalities and regions" to self-government<sup>8</sup> (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). This proclamation protected the generalisation of autonomies and changed the context in which the Government of Catalonia would be reborn (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The Constitution recognises the cultural diversity of the nation. The Assembly of Catalan Members of Parliament drafted a

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<sup>7</sup> Tarradellas was the only top republican official to return after forty years of exile to assume an important post in the emerging democracy.

<sup>8</sup> See: Spanish constitution, article 2 "La Constitución se fundamenta en la indisoluble unidad de la Nación española, patria común e indivisible de todos los españoles, y reconoce y garantiza el derecho a la autonomía de las nacionalidades y regiones que la integran y la solidaridad entre todas ellas".

Statute of Autonomy that defined Catalonia as a nationality and recognised Catalan as a proper language<sup>9</sup>. The first Catalan autonomous elections were celebrated in 1980 and Jordi Pujol was elected as President of the Government of Catalonia. Pujol was president until 2003: during his terms of office, Catalan autonomy became politically consolidated through a significant modernisation programme (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018).

In 2004, with the socialist president Pasqual Maragall, whose term of office was marked by a strong impulse in social policies, the regional Parliament started a process of reform to improve the terms of the 1979 Catalan Statute of Autonomy (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The Parliament of Catalonia passed the reform proposal that was approved by Catalans in a referendum held on June 2006 and entered into effect that year (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). In the reformed Statute, Catalonia was referred to as a “nationality” its privileges in terms of taxation, judicial independence and the official use of the Catalan language were extended. The Statute established a new federal relation with Spain<sup>10</sup>.

Later, starting in 2008, the Government shifted its priorities to fighting the financial crisis, in particular focusing on its effects on Catalan businesses and families (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). The economic crisis in Spain has only contributed to magnify calls for Catalan independence – as the wealthy Catalan region is seen as propping up the poorer rest of Spain. Spain’s current prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, then leader of the center-right Popular Party, opposed the 2006 reformed Statute and referred it to the Constitutional Court. In 2010, the Court’s judgment<sup>11</sup> suppressed fourteen articles of the Statute on the basis that some parts were unconstitutional, such as its expansion of Catalonia’s fiscal powers, judicial powers and its reference to the region as a nation. Therefore, part of the 2006 Autonomy Statute was overruled, claiming that there is no legal basis for recognizing Catalonia as a nation within Spain (Harriet & Badcock, 2017). Catalan nationalists received the judgment with indignation and this event is perceived as having triggered pro-independence protests, which have raised in the last years due to the cutbacks made to the new Statute (Diario Las Americas, 2017).

In 2010, Artur Mas was sworn in as President of the Government of Catalonia. The importance of the change in Catalonia's relationship with Spain implied by a massive social show of support made it necessary in the view of President Mas to call early parliamentary elections to determine real levels of support for the proposal, through direct suffrage. The political parties whose election manifestos included a commitment to further the process of changing Catalonia's relationship with Spain and implement the right of Catalans to decide their future as a country obtained 107 seats out of a total of 135<sup>12</sup> (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). In 2012, Mas proposed to the Spanish president Rajoy a fiscal compact for Catalonia: the creation of its own Treasury with capability to raise and collect taxes in addition to the ones already ceded to the regions and a

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<sup>9</sup> See: 1979 Statute of Autonomy, Preliminary section: General Provisions (Articles 1-8)

[https://web.gencat.cat/en/generalitat/estatut/estatut1979/titol\\_preliminar/](https://web.gencat.cat/en/generalitat/estatut/estatut1979/titol_preliminar/)

<sup>10</sup> See: Text of the Statute approved in 2006 <http://web.gencat.cat/en/generalitat/estatut/estatut2006/preambul/>

<sup>11</sup> See: Constitutional Court Ruling 31/2010, of 28th June 2010 [http://boe.es/diario\\_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2010-11409](http://boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2010-11409)

<sup>12</sup> See: “Catalonia election: Separatists win majority” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-20482719> and Official Results on [https://www.gencat.cat/governacio/resultats-parlament2012/09AU/DAU09999CM\\_L1.htm](https://www.gencat.cat/governacio/resultats-parlament2012/09AU/DAU09999CM_L1.htm)

new funding system similar to that of the País Basco. Rajoy rejected it in the name of stability and considered the requests as being against the constitution (Garea, 2012). These events contributed to strengthen the feeling of independence. Later on, Artur Mas and the leader of the leftist republicans (ERC), Oriol Junqueras, signed an agreement of legislation and fixed a sovereign consultation for 2014 (Barbeta, 2012). In 2013, the autonomic Parliament approved a declaration which gave impulse to the "right to decide" (auto determination) for Catalonia (Roger, 2013a).

Despite the rejection by Spanish Congress and the provisional suspension by the Constitutional Court, the consultation for the "9N" was celebrated. The Generalitat counted 2.305.000 participants, equivalent to some more than 33% of those called to vote, with 80.76% of support for independence (RTVE, 2014).

Early elections to the Parliament of Catalonia were held in 2015 Carles Puigdemont, president of the Association of Municipalities for Independence, was sworn into office in 2016.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. Spain accession to EU: integration and regional autonomy**

In 1986 Spain entered the European Union, it adopted the common currency in 1999 and it is a member of Schengen area since 1995. European integration has had an important influence on the national identities of the countries which became members of the Union. This thesis aims at demonstrating if and how the membership in the European Union has conferred a greater sense of autonomy to Catalonia, changing the way people perceive their ties to the territory.

When Spain entered in the European Union, Jordi Pujol was president of the Catalan government; he has always been a deeply pro-European political figure. In many instances, Pujol has asserted the link between Catalan autonomy and a shared European identity that may overcome the national sense of belonging. He has been a defender of the diversity of European culture and has cultivated an interest in the European dimension of politics (Pujol, 2010). He has taken part to the Assembly of European regions, entertaining contacts with other states in order to promote investment in Catalonia. While not having a federalist view for Europe, he thought that Europe should be more than traditional treaties and agreements between states. It should be an organic body, because it is not only made by old treaties and alliances. He had the idea that languages, institutions, culture, history and collective sentiments which are proper of the "periphery" of Spain, like Catalonia, are sources of tension. But such tension may be creative, more than conflictive, and Catalonia is determinant in this (Pujol, 2010). In Catalonia, since Spain has entered the EU, the European vocation has always been intense. (Pujol, 2010) pointed out that Spain and Catalonia have got different histories and different external influences. Catalonia has got a greater external projection, it extended more towards Europe than towards Spain itself. At the same time, Catalonia has given a big contribution to Spanish economic, cultural and political progress in the last fifty years. He sustained that this region has strengthened the European vocation of Spain, its integration, because there have been moments in which

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<sup>13</sup> The elections to the Parliament of Catalonia held in 2015 were won by the Junts pel Sí coalition, consisting of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* and *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, with Artur Mas standing as the coalition's candidate for the presidency of the Government of Catalonia. After a month of negotiations with CUP, an agreement was reached to fulfil the democratic mandate with a new candidate for the presidency of the Catalan Government, Carles Puigdemont, who was sworn into office in January 2016.

European integration has been seen as suspicious in Spain, but never in Catalonia (Pujol, 2010). Pujol sustained that his party, *Convergència i Unió*, has been asking for a recognition of Catalan identity and for its continuity, as a society and as a nation, in the Spanish framework. He talked about a project for Catalonia which contributes not only to the Spanish general progress, but to the European one. Within Europe, they defended a position that would take into account the existence of several identities, which often are not states, but nations without a state. On one hand there are important regionalist movements in Europe that keep on having some weight and a strong conscience, but on the other hand, states try to reduce the role of regions in Europe (Pujol, 2010). To the question about which has been the role played by Catalonia in the development of a Mediterranean policy in the European Union, Pujol answered that it was an important role. He sustained that Catalonia was born as a European projection, and when Spain entered EU he spoke to Catalans about “going back home”, which was Europe. According to him, Catalonia has a triple influence: European, Mediterranean and Spanish (Pujol, 2010).

The Spanish central state and the autonomous communities (CCAA) reached a comprehensive agreement in 1994 that provides for intrastate participation of the CCAA in the decision-making and implementation of EU policies. The agreement introduced sectorial conferences which served for the mutual exchange of information between the central state administration and the CCAA: these conferences are necessary for an effective participation of regions in the European policy-making. In the decision-making phase of European policies, the CCAA may formulate joint positions on specific issues and coordinate them with the central state; if there is no joint position, the central government considers the different arguments expressed by individual CCAA. This is the first time that the central state agreed to share its decision making powers with the CCAA (Börzel, 2001). The achievement of a formal intergovernmental agreement committed to multilateral cooperation is the result of a change in strategy by which the CCAA responded to the challenges of Europeanization. In 1985, the Catalan government in particular rejected any participation of the CCAA in European policy-making mediated through the central state, because it would challenge their autonomy and result in centralization and harmonization. In 1994, Catalan president Pujol affirmed that intrastate participation of the CCAA in the European policy-making was essential for the preservation of the institutional autonomy of Catalonia, because, as he declared, “it is to be feared that issues relating to the European Union are used to recuperate autonomous competencies” (Senado, 1994). Catalonia accepted the multilateral framework of intergovernmental cooperation. Given the conflicting institutional culture of Spanish territorial institutions, the 1994 agreement has been seen as an attempt to establish mechanisms necessary to solve intergovernmental conflicts in a consensual way (Börzel, 2001).

The members of some of Europe’s stateless nations who assert their national identity not only accept, but in some cases even promote a process of European integration in their respective states. What is perhaps more surprising is that even nationalists are in favour of it. Catalan nationalists have always stressed their “Europeanness” (Nagel, 2004).

*Does the European Union help or hinder the development of the identity of stateless nations, and, in*

*particular, has it encouraged or discouraged the nationalism of stateless nations?* (Nagel, 2004)

For many authors, globalization is undermining nation-states. In Europe, the European Union on the one hand and the regions on the other are said to be its heirs. The state, caught in the middle, will be stripped of its power from above and from below. The realization of this scheme may seem attractive to minority nationalists and it would mean co-operation between the regions and Brussels, to the detriment of the central states (Nagel, 2004). But does the empowerment of regions suit the identity of stateless nations?

Europe's institutional design can open new chances for regional governments, but only if they accept certain rules of the game. The role of regions in Europe has increased since the late 80s and they have won more access points to the EU institutions, but these possibilities are still strictly controlled by the state. The Council of Ministers is still the most important institution of the Union. Since the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), member states can include regional representatives in their delegations. But only a few states allow the regions to play a significant role, forcing them indirectly to work together. The European Commission acts in "partnership" with the regions in the field of regional policy. The Commission has sometimes been seen as a natural ally of the regions, as the Commissioners may have an interest that regional administrations implement their policies. On the other hand, the regions, and especially the poorer ones, are interested in European funds (Nagel, 2004). But even to get structural funds money, they need the backing of the States. It must be remembered that European policies very much affect the political autonomy of some regions and their capacity to help their regional economies (Hooghe, 1996); (Bache & Jones, 2000). The Committee of the Regions (Farrows, 1997); (Jeffery, 1997) was established as a new access point, but it was constituted as a body of representatives of regional and local administrations, with only consultative functions. States chose the delegates in the Committee, and representatives of regions with legislative powers and of stateless nations find themselves heavily outvoted. The elections to the European Parliament are run in any country according to its own state legislation. In some States, for example Spain, parties with a regional base have great difficulty in winning seats, because the State territory is treated as a single constituency (Nagel, 2004). Whether regional governments are able to influence European policies depends on their power in their respective state. In principle, stateless or minority nationalisms can respond to European integration using three different strategies (Nagel, 2004):

1. They can fight against European integration and/or the European Union.
2. They can use the chances the EU offers and play the game according to the established rules, eventually with a more or less credible strategy to change (some of) those rules in the long run. This possibility is especially attractive for nationalist movements which operate in a territory recognised as a region by the corresponding state, and who have the chance to win an electoral majority there.
3. They can aim at "independence in Europe", giving support to the EU but claiming recognition as just another member state. Nationalist argue that stateless nations have the right to self-determination. Once a State, the nation would be entitled to the same rights as other members. "Independence in Europe" can be attractive to the electorate, as it seems less radical than straightforward separatism, and may dissipate fears



of the economic costs of statehood (Nagel, 2004).

#### **4.1 The minority nations of Spain and European integration: A new framework for autonomy?**

Also (Keating, 2000) sustains that the nation-state is currently undergoing substantial changes. It is transformed institutionally from above, by the rise of international regimes such as the EU; and below by territorial assertion. Its functional capacity remains high, but interdependence is limiting its autonomous use of this capacity. Europe provides a new context for national minorities and the management of nationality issues. It diffuses sovereignty by creating a new layer of political authority and irreparably damages the doctrine of absolute sovereignty. This creates an opening for those challenging sovereignty from below. Europe provides a new political space, organized in a complex and asymmetrical manner, in which a variety of state and non-state actors operate, seek expression and exert influence. Although the European Union continues to be dominated by states, there remains a large sphere of politics in which multiple influences can be brought to bear (Keating, 2000).

Specifically, Europe provides two things for national minorities. The first is a series of opportunities to influence policy, using the multiple channels of influence available. The second is that it creates a discursive space in which minority nationality claims can be advanced without necessarily entering into terminal conflict with the host state. So we are in a world where multiple spheres of authority coexist with multiple systems of action. In countries where there are pre-existing cultural fault-lines, or where the state has historically been ineffective in achieving national integration, there are renewed centrifugal tendencies, as competing conceptions of the nation and collective identity are revived as alternative ways of confronting the challenge of globalization and the disintegrative effects of the international market. Notable cases are Canada, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Spain. Here we find renewed minority nationalisms, seeking to use the new global order and, in particular, continental regimes like the European Union and NAFTA, as a framework for new forms of autonomy (Keating, 2000).

#### **4.2 Spain, the nation and Europe**

The Spanish state has historically been conspicuously unsuccessful in building a unitary nation. Madrid remained unable to engage in a programme of modernization and state-building. Industrialization and social modernization were most marked at the periphery, in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where local bourgeoisies took the lead in economic development. In the twentieth century, Francoism brutal repression of the minority nationalities merely served to associate centralization with fascism and to ensure an alliance between democratic forces and the representatives of the periphery. The national minorities question has been one of the main preoccupations of twentieth-century Spanish politics (Keating, 2000). At the same time, Europe was seen during the transition as an external support system for the emerging democracy, a force for democratic stability, economic growth and social modernization. In the minority nations, Europe took on a particular importance as a new framework in which their aspirations to self-government could be realized, without confronting the Spanish state head-on, a strategy which had led to such tragic results in the past. More concretely, for autonomist parties, Europe represents as a source of economic opportunities;

support for their cultural and linguistic promotion policies in the context of a hostile Spanish state; support for their self-government aspirations, with its commitment to subsidiarity and the Europe of the Regions concept, and through the possibilities of alliances with other minority nations and regions. Europe is thus used as a resource for nation- building (Keating, 2000). Catalonia has never been a nation-state in the modern sense and most nationalists are aware of the real limitations of sovereignty in a modern, complex and interdependent world. On the other hand, they are able to draw on their own historic traditions of shared sovereignty, complex authority and multiple spheres of government to forge and sustain strategies for maximizing their opportunities in the new Europe (Keating, 2000).

### **4.3 Catalonia and Europe**

Catalan nationalism has, since the early part of the twentieth century, presented itself as modernizing and European. Europe was seen as a symbol of modernity, an important counterpoint to the reactionary forces in Madrid. Yet at the same time, the Catalan bourgeoisie who led the first ‘regionalist’ movements were fiercely protectionist since, while Catalan industry was the most competitive in Spain, it could not compete with British, German and northern Italian products. So Catalan industrialists needed the Spanish state to deliver tariff protection and a captive market. Politically, too, they looked both ways, alternating between seeking local autonomy and gaining power within the state with a view to ‘catalanizing’ Spain. Thereafter leadership passed to the radical lower middle class and elements of the left, committed to a more progressive social programme and a stronger form of nationalism (Keating, 2000).

After the Second World War, the revived Catalan movement re-emphasized the European theme in the context of the European unity project. Connections with European politicians were important here. Protectionism, now associated with Francoist autarky, was abandoned in favour of free trade and the nationalist project was given a strongly pro-European tinge. The restored Generalitat took a strongly pro-European stance and, even in advance of Spanish accession to the European Community, established a presence in Brussels via the Patronat Català Pro Europa, a public-private agency to represent Catalan interests in the EC (Keating, 2000).

Catalan autonomous government, in its actual form, is the result of the Spanish transition to democracy. There is no doubt that Catalan ex-President Jordi Pujol has exercised a special influence both on government policy and on his party and the European vocation was of special importance for him. The “international presence” (Urgell, 2003) of Catalonia has been his personal reserve. The European dimension has always been one of the distinctive marks of Catalanism. Spanish integration into the European Community was celebrated and Catalans were always among the most positively minded (Nagel, 2004).

The Treaty of Maastricht established that states can be represented in the Council of Ministers by regional ministers. The Partido Popular government only allowed the Spanish regions to participate in Spanish delegations in selected European working groups and committees. Regional policy is the only field where direct contact between regional administrations and the European bureaucracy is mandatory (Nagel, 2004). Catalan ex-president Pujol, had been one of the main lobbyists struggling for an institutional representation

of the regions and their inclusion in the treaties, making Catalonia a leader of European Regionalism. Catalonia embarked upon two initiatives which are struggling to strengthen the role of stronger regions in Europe. In 2001, a group of seven “constitutional” regions signed a declaration claiming more participation in the European institutions and more consideration of the constitutional regions. Catalonia, Bavaria, North Rhine-Westphalia, Salzburg, Scotland, Walloon and Flanders signed this declaration. It is symbolic that Catalonia opened its office in Brussels even before Spain became a member of the Community. The Catalan “Patronat Pro-Europa” has never worked against Spanish government interests in Brussels but looked for close cooperation with the Spanish Permanent Residency at the European Union (Patronat Català Pro Europa, 2002), in order to avoid problems with the monopoly on foreign policy that the Spanish state claims (Nagel, 2004).

Significantly, the Generalitat uses the Brussels office for information purposes and as a channel for Catalan interests to lobby the Commission, but not as a rival to the Spanish delegation (Keating, 2000).

Catalonia is a very active player in the European arena. Between 1983 and 1999, eighty-one “agreements” with foreign governments were concluded<sup>14</sup> (Nagel, 2004). It has also been very active in the Assembly of European Regions and pressed hard for the establishment of the Committee of the Regions. In the preparations for the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, it supported a stronger Committee of the Regions; it also pressed for the operationalization of the principle of subsidiarity, to be enforced by the European Court, but none of these demands was successful (Keating, 2000). Another pillar of Catalan practice is interregional networking: Catalonia is one of the most active European regions in that respect. It participates in several regional associations<sup>15</sup> and some of them are orientated to attract European funds. Another example of regional cooperation is the so-called Euro-region comprising the French regions of Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon, and Spanish Catalonia, forming a Mediterranean arch. All these schemes suffer from the incompatibility of different administrative systems, competencies and strategies of the partners, therefore grandiose plans coexist with limited scope for real co-operation (Nagel, 2004).

Jordi Pujol’s most cherished interregional partnership has been the Four Motors for Europe initiative, with the supposedly economically leading regions of Baden-Württemberg, Lombardy, and Rhône-Alpes, and Wales. This was a consortium of regions each of which is the most advanced technically in its own state. The partnership with “powerful regions” serves an important role in raising the prestige of Catalonia and in allying it with the more dynamic and powerful regions of Europe (Keating, 2000).

The real importance of interregional cooperation was always limited, because competition between regions is fairly strong. This weakens their role as collective actor and limits the significance of their interregional partnerships which, nevertheless, may have a symbolic value for politics at home (Nagel, 2004). In an interview, Pujol sustained that the failure of the powerful regions to cooperate occurred because openness

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<sup>14</sup> Spanish “Comunidades Autonomas” have no treaty-making power.

<sup>15</sup> For example, in the Working Community of Regions with Industrial Tradition (RETI, 1984), in the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions (CPMR, 1986), in the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR, 1987), the Assembly of European Wine Growing Regions (AREV).

was abandoned in Europe due to reactions by the States. They asked for a multi-level Europe, with the European, the national and the regional level, with an internal reinforcement of regions and European organisms while keeping states as a fundamental element of the general European structure. However, the states have felt deprived of their powers and have reacted (Pujol, 2010).

Pujol's European regionalism would not erode, but complement the role of the states in the European Union. He affirmed that his government would assume the role of an international advocate of autonomy as an alternative to secessionist approaches<sup>16</sup> (Nagel, 2004). Pujol was also an early exponent of the Europe of the Regions concept, seeing it as a framework for a revived but not separatist Catalanism (Pujol, 1976). The Europe of the Regions is an ambivalent concept, covering a variety of positions, from support for stronger regional policy measures within the EU, through demands for better representation of regions in Brussels, to recognition of the regions as a third level of government (Keating, 2000).

Catalonia played region - accepting the game, trying to improve its rules, but not to change the game. Only later in time, due to the succession of events, Catalan claims have evolved into independence. In reality, Europe added ambivalences, and the Catalan status in European politics is far from being solved definitely. Catalonia strives (quite successfully) to give itself a European, cooperative and pragmatic image, setting great store by technological and economic cooperation. But collaboration with the Spanish state is still essential for pursuing interests in Europe (Nagel, 2004).

It is clear that Catalonia has been heavily involved in inter-regional networking, forging links with regions across Europe. These contacts serve economic, political and cultural purposes, helping to establish Catalonia as a transnational actor. Catalan strategy in Europe involves a series of small initiatives rather than dramatic demands. It is opportunistic, looking for openings wherever they occur and seeking gradually to broaden the scope for regional interests and minority nations. The strategy, in alliance with other European regions, has had some success and regions now feature as actors in European politics to an extent that was unthought-of a few years ago. Yet there has not been a fundamental shift of power from the states to the regions, as the strategy would require. There is an expansive discourse in which Europe is presented as the ideal outlet for national aspirations, it has certainly given more credibility to the idea of stateless nation building. The move to economic and monetary union, with the single currency, has dramatically reduced the importance of the state economic framework, and the policy of independence within the EU could make more headway (Keating, 2000).

#### **4.4 Nations beyond the state?**

European integration has transformed the old nationalities question in Spain. The *españolista* insistence on the unity and uniformity of the state was always incompatible with the national realities of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia. The *Estado de las Autonomías*, together with European unity and federalism, presents a new framework, imposing the idea of limited sovereignty, territorial accommodation and subsidiarity. A new discourse of stateless nationhood and shared sovereignty is legitimated both by the

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<sup>16</sup> See Avui, 29 April 1999

historic traditions of Spain's minority nations, and by the European project itself. Europe provides allies and resources in the fight against centralizing tendencies within the Spanish state (Keating, 2000).

It has often been remarked that Spain is a laboratory for territorial politics, since it contains such diverse regions with such contrasting experiences. The Catalan strategy, based on diffused sovereignty, asserts Catalan identity strongly while placing this within the context of the new, complex networks of power. It uses Europe as a discursive space within which the Catalan nation can be projected, while seeking every opportunity to exert influence and extract resources from European institutions. Since the entrance in EU, the constitutional evolution has involved greater Catalan autonomy, the recognition of the pluri-nationality of Spain, and a bigger place for regions and stateless nations in Europe. Today the overall drive is more clearly separatist, rejecting the Spanish framework and seeking a separate presence within a reordered Europe (Keating, 2000). In 1998, nationalists in all three Spanish territories issued the Declaration of Barcelona, seeking a common strategy in Spain and in Europe. These demanded a new, pluri-national and confederal state and demanded recognition by Europe of their national reality and of their languages and sought greater participation in the institutions of the EU. They called for a more socially oriented Europe and for the application of the principle of subsidiarity. What is specific about the three Spanish minority nations is their insistence that they should have a special place, and not be relegated to the status of mere autonomous communities (Keating, 2000).

Nationalist advance in Spain has proceeded in step with European integration. Each advance in integration has made the state less relevant and the European arena more so, leading the nationalities to change their focus (Keating, 2000). The 'nation-state' is merely one form of political order, constantly in transition. Nations, whose connection with the state is more contingent than necessary, are also in flux, being invented and reinvented in different epochs. If Europe does evolve into a more fluid political order resembling, at least in some respects, the pre-state order of multiple and complex authority, it will be those who cling most stubbornly to the nineteenth-century form of the sovereign nation-state in places such as France, Spain and England who will find the greatest problems in adaptation. The national minorities of Spain offer merely a glimpse of the possible future (Keating, 2000).

## **5. The current crisis**

Catalan history has been marked by the fight against the centralizer power of Madrid. The conservative Popular Party of Mariano Rajoy, the current Spanish prime minister is strongly opposed to any moves for independence in the region. In September 2017, during a tense session plagued with a number of irregularities, the pro-independence majority in Catalan Parliament approved the holding of a binding referendum on independence (Puente, 2017). Puigdemont convoked the referendum of the 1-O but the Constitutional Court suspended the convocation. Catalan authorities went through with the vote, leading to violence in the polling stations as Spanish security forces seized ballot boxes and attempted to close down the vote (BBC news, 2017). Apparently, 2.28 million votes had been counted, with 90,18 % in favour of independence (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2017). President Puigdemont considered the result as a mandate for

making a unilateral declaration of independence, to which the central government reacted by activating article 155 of the Constitution. With this article, Catalonia has been submitted to a governmental commissioner and the central government has imposed direct rule on the region. The Spanish government has always maintained that Catalonia has no constitutional right to break away (El Confidencial, 2017). Under the order of a Catalan judge who investigated on a denunciation for fraudulent use of personal data, the Civil Guard detained tens of people in order to interrogate them, and between them there were high responsible of the Generalitat. This caused strong social protests in Catalonia (BBC Mundo, 2017). Catalan parliamentary elections in December 2017 returned a majority for pro-independence parties, although a party who is against independence emerged as the single largest group in parliament (El Pais, 2017).

It is difficult to predict what will emerge from the current dispute. Given the political inflexibility of the Spanish government and the preference of many companies based in Catalonia to remain part of Spain, Catalan government may not be able to realize its commitment to establish an independent nation-state. At the same time, however, Madrid's heavy-handed response to the referendum has resulted in the Spanish state losing legitimacy among many Catalans. The fracture within and between Catalan and Spanish societies has widened (Balfour, 2017).

Catalonia as a region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, firstly because of its maritime power and trade in goods such as textiles, but in the last decades also for finance, services and hi-tech companies. It is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain, accounting for the 19 per cent of national GDP. An eventual Catalan secession would therefore cost Spain around 20 per cent of its economic output, and trigger a row about how Catalonia would return 52.5 billion euros of debt it owes to the country's central administration (Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2017). It is manufacturing, traditionally textiles, but more recently overtaken by the chemical industry, food-processing, metalworking, that make the region Spain's economic powerhouse, along with a growing service sector (Generalitat de Catalunya. Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya, 2014). As in many countries in central, eastern, and southern Europe, the process of economic and social modernization in Spain was slow and deeply asymmetric. The first parts of Spain to modernize in the early nineteenth century were the Basque Country and Catalonia, two peripheral regions whose cultures and identities were markedly different from those of the rest of the country. Unlike France, where a powerful central state was able to use war and education to sublimate ethnic and linguistic diversity into a common national identity, the weak Spanish state was not able to easily assert legitimacy or ensure cohesion across its society. On the contrary, rulers in Madrid relied on the alliance with peripheral elites to exert their authority (Balfour, 2017).

More important than any other event, the 2010 Constitutional Court's ruling was a turning point in the strategy of Catalan liberal nationalists. Their policy of seeking greater autonomy under the auspices of the Spanish state gave way to explicit support for independence. Driven by rank-and-file organizers and nationalist institutions, this new nationalism has been able to rally hundreds of thousands of Catalans through the creative use of social media and mass demonstrations (Balfour, 2017). It has also managed to

channel a number of popular grievances, ranging from socioeconomic problems such as austerity and unemployment to moral issues such as corruption, into a narrative of victimhood at the hands of the Spanish establishment in Madrid that, according to them, can be resolved only through independence. The project of Catalan independence offers the hope or illusion of a new nation unencumbered by austerity, corruption, and what Catalan nationalists perceive as Catalonia's excessive contribution to the rest of Spain in the form of taxes and transfers to less wealthy regions (Balfour, 2017).

There are several problems with the project of independence. One is that polls have consistently revealed a deep division among Catalans over the prospect of independence (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2017). The majority of people in Catalonia does not want separation from Spain, although many of them demand the right to decide. The reasons for opposing independence range from concerns about economic security to the strength of Spanish-Catalan dual identity in Catalonia. A further challenge is that there is no clear road map to independence, due to the ideological differences within the region's ruling coalition, which embraces the pro-independence centre-right and centre-left. Spain's painful economic crunch also fuelled enthusiasm for sovereignty (Balfour, 2017). Finally, European leaders have made it clear that an independent Catalonia would be outside the EU and would need to apply for membership, which would depend on the consent of all member states, including Spain (European Commission, 2017). Being European has always played an important role in Catalan identity. Yet European states, wary of sub-state nationalisms throughout the continent, have not supported Catalan independence (Balfour, 2017). This does not present any solution on the horizon, the only certain thing is that there are several million citizens in Catalonia who are unhappy with their relationship with Spain and would like to change the terms of such relations (Balfour, 2017).

The contentious between Madrid and Barcelona goes back to centuries. Since the Secession War (1701-15), there never was a good relationship between the centralizer Bourbons Reign and Catalan people. But in the view of Catalans, the worst mistake made by the current dynastic house is that they have received sovereign legitimation by Franco (Gaiser, 2017). In 1978, Spain, by taking into account the historical diversity of its regions, adopted a constitution that was considered innovative by the time, based on asymmetrical regionalism, giving to each community a different degree of self-government (Gaiser, 2017). Catalan issues seemed to be settled with the approval of this constitution, which recognised the autonomic rights of nationalities and regions as well as Catalan autonomic statute of 1979 (Ysàs Solanes, 2017). In fact, Spanish fundamental law got a very high consensus in Catalonia, more than the 90% (Gobierno de España, Ministerio del Interior, 2013). In the following 25 years, notwithstanding the frequent tensions and conflicts on the reparation of competences and fiscal matters, the relations between Spanish and Catalan government have been fluid. In the first decade of XXI century, the situation started to be unstable (Ysàs Solanes, 2017). There has been a relevant increase in the preference for an independent state between 2005 and 2012 (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2012). During the years, without any constructive dialogue, the mistrust of Catalans toward Madrid has kept on rising, generating autonomist feelings in a population that was already exasperated by high taxation, high financing by the Community in favour of governmental balance, bad

management of migration crisis and a lack of agreement with the central authorities. Catalonia considers itself the motor of Spanish economy and wants to recover its own independence through pacific means (Gaiser, 2017). In the fighting between Madrid and Barcelona, king Phillip VI was worried by the independentism movement and did not welcome the requests of Catalan independentism. The monarchy was incapable of taking up a mediating role<sup>17</sup>, and this has exacerbated autonomist sentiments, spreading the problem to the whole world (Gaiser, 2017).

The factors that have alimented the rapid rising of independentism are a matter of debate. Some scholars point to the 2010 ruling of the constitutional tribunal that was preceded by a series of maneuvers organized by the Popular Party. But the cause-effect relationship between the ruling and the emergence of independent moves is not given (Ysàs Solanes, 2017). Another reason for the success of independentism was that in a context of economic crisis and strong social discontent, independentism groups articulated a persuasive speech that was appealing for the nationalist middle classes. Such narrative was supported by three pillars: strategic use of history; condemnation of the oppression of the Spanish government; promise of a brilliant future, targeting sentiments more than rationality. This essentialist nationalism put emphasis on the end of the 1714 war, presented as the moment of the loss of an existing Catalan independence, the suppression of Catalan institutions of medieval origin and the imposition of Bourbon's absolutism. A "millennial nation" that lost its own state, Catalonia now has the opportunity to recover its freedom through self-determination. The historical narrative was accompanied by the denunciation of the continuous vexations made by the Spanish state and the fiscal plunder that Madrid has imposed to Catalonia through taxes. There is the idea among the population that an independent Catalonia would become a much more efficient region, with a new kind of resource allocation destined to better public service and investments. Moreover, what are perceived as typical Catalan values (inclination to dialogue, social integration, peace, tolerance) have played an important role, as opposed to the image of Spain on the edge of bankruptcy and failure (Ysàs Solanes, 2017).

All these elements have fomented the urge to independence, although surveys in 2018 showed that the majority of Catalans was still in favour of staying within Spain (Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió, 2018). Catalonia is an example of divergence between a well-organized and mobilized sector and an effective social majority. The rejection on the part of Europe of a Catalan independence is clear, as the fragmentation of member states is perceived a threat to the project of European unity. This is why the calls made by the secessionists to a European mediation have remained unheard (Ysàs Solanes, 2017).

From the 1980s, Catalonia, as an autonomous region, has been governed by independent nationalists who managed to have a decentralization status reached through bilateral agreements between the central power

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<sup>17</sup> See the message of King Felipe on the Catalan situation, at Palacio de La Zarzuela, 3rd October 2017  
<http://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20171003/431777708705/texto-integro-mensaje-rey-catalunya-1o.html>



and autonomous institutions (Loyer, 2017).

Until a few years ago, independence moves enjoyed only a minor consensus. Then, the repeated and frequent mistakes made by the central government during the years have exacerbated the claims and have contributed to provoke the anger of Catalans that resulted in inflamed protests (Ros, 2017). The central government has ignored the clear signals of a social discontent that was increasingly directed toward separatism. A strong warning of the rising adhesion to independentism came from the regional electoral results that saw pro-independence parties growing up in their consensus (Toscano, 2017).

It is important to point out that most citizens asked to be democratically consulted through a referendum that would give them voice. They claim the freedom to decide about the sorts of Catalonia with respect to its relations with Spain. The change has not been guided by political parties, on the contrary, it has been the popular mobilization that triggered a change in political landscape (Ros, 2017). These citizens - who are mostly peaceful and moderate in nature - belong to an economically advanced territory which is demographically heterogeneous and culturally open, and is characterized by an affluent society that includes a wide middle class. Recently hit by the economic crisis, these groups have mutated their view of the future. Catalonia has got a Europeanised economic-industrial structure and services. Its past was permeated by fights against the systematic intents of Spanish assimilation. Since the beginnings of the XXI century, political “catalanism” has sought to get recognition within the Spanish state in order to exercise enough influence to transform Spain into a pluri-national state (Ros, 2017).

Some determinant factors have been identified that can explain the transformation of perspectives and political aspirations (Ros, 2017). Firstly, the long-run changes. The return to democracy in 1980 has implied for Catalonia the revival of its political institutions with the (limited) power of developing policies in many fields such as economics, social, sanitary, educative, cultural, security. The main limitation has been the lack of fiscal sovereignty, always subordinated to the resources conceded by the central government. This local political activity has given rise to a stronger sense of belonging to Catalonia. Secondly, although controversies have always existed between the central and regional authority on the division of competences, since 1980s the divergences had been solved through negotiations. However, with the political rise of the Spanish right-wing, the idea was diffused that Catalan political autonomy had gone too far and an intervention was needed to limit its competences and to restore national unity. Faced with such a threat and with rising restrictions to its regional powers, Catalan parliament in 2004 started drafting a new regional statute, to replace that of 1979 which was unsuitable to grant self-government. The opposition to the project in the parliament in Madrid was strong enough to revise the draft and create a new version. In a tensioned climate, the statute was approved in 2006, but in the meanwhile, the Popular Party brought the statute to the Constitutional Tribunal in order to further limit its effects. These events fuelled sentiments for self-determination. The third factor is that during the years an anti-Catalan rhetoric has developed. This has had negative effects on the Catalans’ stand with respect to Spain. The fourth cause is the perception of a bad economic treatment. Finally, since the first mobilizations, the key issue was the scarce democratic character

of Spain. There is strong diffidence with respect to Spanish democratic apparatus and the crisis has created a general context of instability (Ros, 2017).

A new paradigm of political action emerged: the fight between a state structure of the XIX century and a new political logic proper of the XXI century. All of this has given birth to a mass mobilization and social uprising that has been able to reach a lot of people (Ros, 2017).

In the whole turmoil of events, actions and reactions, the substantial motivations behind Catalan crisis can be the historical, linguistic and cultural differences with the rest of Spain that are translated into reciprocal resentment related to the memories of military victories and defeats. But the pro-independence aspiration that transformed itself from a marginal phenomenon into a mass movement is a political issue (Toscano, 2017). Catalan independentism during the years has always successfully used the possibilities allowed by the Spanish constitution on the autonomies' system. An example can be found in the field of education, in which, as a result of the policies of autonomist governments, there exists a Catalan monolingual teaching. Another factor is Catalan hegemony in the field of history, that contributes to creating a culture based on the rejection of the Spanish "centralist oppression" (Toscano, 2017). In the fight for independence the right-wing groups have assimilated the left wing groups, finding a common basis in the separatism from the rest of the peninsula. Acknowledging the pushes, trying to deal with them, elaborating answers, identifying possible compromises: the government in Madrid has failed in its actions, placing itself in a position of exemplary legalism but political emptiness. Within the governing Popular Party there exist an authoritative-centralist faction that prevents it to face the autonomic pushes in an open and flexible way (Toscano, 2017).

## Chapter II

### 1. Regionalism in Europe

The Catalan crisis is an important phenomenon especially if analysed in the light of its consequences for the entire European asset. The conflict between Spain and Catalonia poses interrogatives on a more general challenge about the relations between richer and economically weaker regions in a territory. *To what extent can solidarity hold within the borders of a state? At what point should the richer regions stop sustaining backward regions?*

There are several regions in Europe that aspire to reach a broader degree of autonomy, if not independence. Already beginning from the XX century, the widespread desire for national sovereignty and political independence led to the multiplication of the number of existing states. This growth was also due the decolonization processes, the fall of Soviet Union and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia that brought to the emergence of new national entities. Behind the calls for independence there were and there still are important economic motivations. In the XIX century, the idea prevailed that the geopolitical fragmentation of States would be an impediment to economic growth and wealth. Also after the second world war, the paradigm of big integrated markets dominated: with the assimilation into a wider regional market, small national entities had the opportunity to enjoy economies of scale. These were the considerations behind the creation of the European Economic Community. The XXI century's globalization boom of the last decades has revolutionised ideas that seemed to be consolidated: several small open economies have been able to reach a considerable level of wealth – one can think of Switzerland, Norway, South Korea, Honk Hong that are examples of successful small but open economies (Dieter, 2017). Another fundamental aspect behind separatist moves is represented by the transfers and internal redistribution of the fiscal revenues. The weight of regional GDP on the national average is determinant: a regional GDP which is considerably superior to the national average represents a strong motivation for separation. This is true for Flanders, Bavaria, Northern Italy, Scotland, Basque region, and confirmed by the lower tendency for independence moves in regions like Sicily. The economically advanced regions feel deprived of their economic success and suffer the burden of fiscal transfers dictated by principles of equalisation and solidarity toward weaker regions. The lack of a political response by European institutions to the conflicts in Catalonia can be explained by the perceived threat that this region poses to other European regions that may be willing to separate from their own central State. Countries that may feel threatened by eventual secessions could be Italy or Germany, in which the most economically advanced regions may be interested in a separation from the central state. Bavaria makes considerable fiscal transfer to the other German Länders, which motivates the claim for secession. From an economic point of view, an independent Bavaria would be able to self-sustain. Bavaria has got 12,6 million inhabitants, a GDP of 568 billions of euro and in 2016 they reached the 18,1% of German GDP<sup>18</sup>. Such percentage depends also on the fact that this region hosts some industrial giants. From a political point of view, an autonomous Bavaria would imply for Germany a loss of political and economic

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<sup>18</sup> Bavarian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Media, Energy and Technology – 2015 Bavaria's economy facts and figures

power. Further transfers within EU that go beyond those already in place would only bring new risks. For example, asking Germany for more transfers may lead German Länders to move away from the Federal republic. During the last decades, Germany has had to justify and legitimate in its internal affairs the heavy fiscal transfers that the West has made to the East in the Eurozone. However, it is not sure that this may happen again in the case of requests for fiscal compensation at an inter-European level. Without the political support by citizens, the pretension for fiscal solidarity within European Union can be highly risky for European cohesion (Dieter, 2017).

In a European framework which swings between “anarchic regionalisms and autistic nationalisms”, European institutions answer with legalism (Press Release, 2017). They do not celebrate the “unity in the diversity”, the latter is set aside in the name of a Westphalian principle of order that safeguards the cornerstone of European mechanism: the nation-state (Maronta, 2017).

Romano Prodi<sup>19</sup> sustained in an interview that “the contraposition is not between a Europe of States and a Europe of Regions, but between a Europe that is guided by a strong supranational authority (a federal Europe), and a Europe of Nations”. In view of a European super state, the nation-state becomes an increasingly marginal entity that is destined to vanish in the direct relationship between regional subjects and the supranational entity. Therefore, pro-independence Scottish, Catalans, Bavarian, Flemish, Venetians or Lombard people want to repudiate their states in favour of a European incorporation (Letta, 2017).

European discourse is permeated by the issue of regionalism: “Regions, Commission and people to win the resistance of nation states”, incited Roberto Formigoni<sup>20</sup>. And Jose Barroso<sup>21</sup> echoed: after all, “Europe cannot be imposed from above. It has to be build and strengthened from the bottom, from the regions and the cities. Building strong communities and regions: this is the only way to build a strong Europe”. The natural haven of this vision is a “*glocal*” Europe that would be ideally a-hierarchical and able to survive without the States. The latter, already rendered small by the challenges of globalization, today are perceived as an intolerable cage that bridles the dynamic local communities (Maronta, 2017).

Letta sustained that the case of Catalonia is an *unicum* that can only be confronted with Brexit (Letta, 2017). Firstly, they can be compared for the identity aspect, which is a political factor where emotions play an important role. It is not a case that the two events have occurred in the same phase of European and global history. Western democracies appear to be paying, although with different intensities, for the disorientation of their societies, which is mainly explained by the widespread globalization and interconnectivity of these times. The acceleration of globalization sharpens the dread of the erosion of identities, and these fears produce a need for proximity. This explains the tendency to looking for a refuge in a narrow circle to preserve one’s roots. For the British, United Kingdom; for Catalans, Catalonia (Letta, 2017). In this view, the search for proximity and identity implies some responsibilities for Europe too, because Europeans have

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<sup>19</sup> Former president of the European Commission and former president of Italian government.

<sup>20</sup> An Italian politician, ex-president of Lombardy region at the meeting L’Europa delle Regioni, interview transcription: <https://www.meetingrimini.org/detail.asp?c=1&p=6&id=5041&key=3&prefix>

<sup>21</sup> Portuguese politician and scholar; ex-president of European Commission at the meeting L’Europa delle Regioni, interview transcription: <https://www.meetingrimini.org/detail.asp?c=1&p=6&id=5041&key=3&prefix>

not been able to build a common conscience that would be enough to replace, complete or strengthen local identities by delivering to citizens a strong and authoritative presence. The disorientation in society is part of a collective psychology enhanced by fear, that culminates with the escape towards primordial identities. Although founded by nation-states, European Union has impaired them. In fact, the EU got a regionalist dimension, it has pretended to give geopolitical subjectivity to regions but without a proper change of identity. EU's programmes provide for territorial structural funds, and this has de-powered the national authority and strengthened the territorial dimension all over Europe. Southern Europe has enjoyed a period of great vivacity thanks to the European projects for development and cohesion (Letta, 2017).

In Europe there exist various regions that have claims for independence, in Belgium with Flanders, in United Kingdom with Scotland, in Germany with Bavaria, in Italy with Veneto and Sardinia, in France with Corsica.

### **1.1 “Scoxit” can wait**

Unlike Catalan independentism, the leaders of Scottish National Party (SNP) have postponed the issue of a new possible referendum, until the conditions of Brexit become clear<sup>22</sup>. Obviously, Scotland and Catalonia are quite distant from each other, for their political and economic realities (Moreno, 1988). Scotland had its own referendum in September 2014, and the pro-independence side lost it. In the referendum for Europe, Scotland pre-eminently voted to remain in the EU. In Scotland there has been a public show of support for independence of Catalonia: the common position is that the central government in Spain should give Catalans the right to express their preference (BBC, 2017). There are some parallels and similarities between Scotland and Catalan independentism. Both nations are located at the peripheries of their State. In the pre-industrial period, both nations enjoyed political independence in the territories where the ethnic majoritarian groups represented the strongest majority. Both the Scottish and Catalans have had independence aspirations for centuries. In both countries there exist historical pro-independence parties, in which the cause for secession has never been accompanied by political violence. Both Scottish and Catalan are civic nationalisms, not ethnical ones, and pro-European. There are evident differences as well: the 2014 Scottish referendum was declared constitutional with the 2012 Edinburgh Agreement. The support for the independence cause is much bigger in Catalonia than in Scotland. The claim for Scottish independence took shape in 1853, a century and a half after the Union Act which ratified the fusion between England and Scotland. It is only from the 1960s that a political movement for independence of Scotland was born: the Scottish National Party which demanded secession from the UK. In the first decade of the 21st century the Scottish independence movement grew stronger. In the last decade, the SNP has enjoyed a crescent series of successes that brought it to be a hegemon political actor in Scotland<sup>23</sup>. The 2014 referendum has been an historical event, mainly because it was organized and managed in full agreement between London and Edinburgh. Participation was extremely high (85%), with the 55% in favour of staying within United

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<sup>22</sup> In a speech in Glasgow, Sturgeon (SNP leader) claimed that “Scotland will choose its own future when the time is right and Brexit terms are made clear”.

<sup>23</sup> <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7529>

Kingdom, and 45% in favour of secession<sup>24</sup>. Even if Scotland remained within the UK, the referendum has made its effect felt. For other separatist movements within the EU, the Scottish process can be a model to be emulated, since the referendum was held by arrangement with the national government and its outcome was legally binding. Today Scotland has more competences with respect to 2014, also in fiscal matters, which has placated the desire for independence. This shows how further autonomy given to regions appeases the claims for independence.

## **1.2 Northern Italy and its autonomist desires**

In Italy there exist some forms of autonomism and local independentism which partly explain the anti-Catalan stance adopted by the Italian government. The most macroscopic cases are represented by Veneto and Lombardy. In Italy there exists some support for the theory of “domino”, according to which the success of a secession would feed the general reinforcement of separatism, with the consequence of accelerating the processes of fragmentation. Italian government has shown support to Spanish central government also to prevent the escalation of pushes for disaggregation that are present in its own state (Dottori, 2017).

However, the various secessionist movements that exist in Europe do not appear to be articulations of a unique sequential and coherent process; they seem instead to derive from a series of geopolitical conditions that are peculiar to the current period, in which the expected benefits derived from being part of a bigger state are lower than the obligations which have to be taken in order to maintain such states. The threat of a military aggression in case of occupation or annexation from a foreign power, which was a factor leading to the formation of the main nation states in Europe, is much weaker today. The question rises about the advantageous reasons for staying together, in the presence of costs which are not proportional to the poor-quality services offered by national governments (Dottori, 2017).

In this view, being geopolitically “big” is no longer appealing as it used to be. This explains the crisis of the process of European integration, in front of the possibility to pursue ambitions of national identity. These sentiments cannot be entirely ignored. Italy, like Spain, needs to make a national project that is able to offer a shared identity and an efficient decision-making process, as these are the main antidotes to the crisis of national institutions. The nationalism of small regions is not a new phenomenon, but a re-emergent instance that can only be managed through the rising of another type of nationalism, that should be not aggressive or antagonist, but inclusive (Dottori, 2017).

In the north-eastern region of Veneto, autonomism is quite relevant. The results of the referendum in October, in which voters in Veneto and Lombardy have expressed in favour of a wider autonomy, is relevant not only for the object of that consultation, but for the numbers of the mobilization. The 98% of “yes” to secession, expressed by the 57.2% of the electorate (Regione Veneto, Osservatorio elettorale, 2017), shows the desire of self-government in Veneto, which has been constant in the history of the region. The meaning of the political discourse before the referendum was charged by a sense of “nation-building”. The

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<sup>24</sup> House of Common Library, Scottish independence referendum 2014, Analysis of results, Research paper 14/50, 30/09/2014; Pope, Addy. (2017). Scottish Independence Referendum 2014, [Dataset]. University of Edinburgh.

referendum mainly focused on a bureaucratic question that asked electors to express their opinion on the achievement of additional forms of autonomy. The aim of the consultation was to give the regions a stronger mandate in order to negotiate with the central government for a new division of competences. The events that have accompanied the Catalan referendum in October have some way influenced the perception of Venetian case. However, the referendum in Veneto was approved by the constitutional court. The fascination for Catalonian cause has permitted to move the autonomist consultation at a higher level, creating a narrative of people united in the fight for self-determination against the oppression of national states (Zaia, 2017). Veneto has a peculiar nationalism which rises from people not feeling entirely Italian and from the attempt to define a-posteriori the coordinates of such diversity. Venetian nationalism hasn't got a codified national grammar, the pro-independence side of society represents only a minority. However, data about the economic situation of Veneto can explain its desire for further autonomy. Veneto produces 10% of national GDP; in last year has experienced economic growth due to the exports, with a growth rate of 5.3% that makes Veneto the first Italian region for orientation to export, with the 42.7% of manufacturer firms oriented to foreign markets (Unioncamere del Veneto , 2016); (Micelli & Oliva, 2017).

### **1.3 Belgium: Flanders**

The Belgian state has been drifting apart since 1970. The societies and political classes of the two main language groups have now largely become separated from each other. The recent years have been marked by a surge of support for the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA) and its idea of a con-federalization and creeping dissolution of Belgium. Since 2007, forming a national government has been difficult: the Flemish nationalists and their demands of further regionalization meet with strong resistance on the part of the Walloon parties. The issue of who should get the capital region of Brussels is seen as the main reason for why the country has not yet been divided yet.

## **2. Does European integration stimulate or hinder regionalism?**

In the analysis of the relationships between “sub-national” regionalism and the European Union, the questions that emerge are whether European integration and the European Union itself stimulate or hinder regionalism, which instruments are used by the EU influencing regionalism, and the expectations of regions and regionalist movements from the European Union (Szul, 2015) .

Szul classifies three forms that regionalism can take: political, cultural and economic regionalism. Political regionalism consists of “activities aimed at establishing a region as a sub-national territorial administrative unit or at strengthening its power in relation to the central government and/or other regions. In other words, this kind of regionalism is applicable to territorial government institutions”. Cultural regionalism is an “activity aimed at preserving or promoting the cultural characteristics of the inhabitants living in a given area, irrespective of its territorial-administrative status”. Examples of cultural regionalism are Low German regionalism in Germany or Occitan regionalism in France, both aiming to preserve local linguistic variations and their cultures in several political-territorial or territorial-administrative units (*Länder, régions*). Political regionalism can also have a cultural aspect. Economic regionalism “aims at gaining economic advantages in

its relations with central government and/or other regions". Examples include the reduction of the region's contribution to the common budget (in the case of wealthy regions) or demands for a greater influx of funds from the central government to the region (in poorer regions) or greater autonomy in the region's internal economic policy (Szul, 2015). A distinction is made between the analysis of Western Europe regionalism and that of Eastern Europe regionalism.

## **2.1 Regionalism in Western Europe**

In Western Europe the post-second world war European integration that strengthened the interrelations between member states, was accompanied by a growing role of the regions. To some extent the two phenomena of European integration and rising regionalism arose for the same reason: to overcome or abandon the mentality of nationalism which had led to detrimental rivalry between European nations in the past and to the two world wars. Abandoning or weakening hostile nationalism enabled Western European nation states to cooperate, giving up a part of their powers in favour of common European institutions. At the same time, the weakening of the idea of nation-building through centralized power and unification of the population, created more room for decentralization of state power (political regionalism), as an expression of several cultures other than the "standard national" culture (cultural regionalism) (Szul, 2015).

Mutual trust between integrating nation states removed the threat of any change in borders and the possibility of one state undermining another state's integrity by supporting irredentist or separatist movements. This way, regionalism was not regarded as a danger to territorial integrity or political stability. In addition to these common characteristics of the relations between European integration and regionalism, country-specific relations between the two processes also existed. To mention a few examples, Germany was intensely interested in European integration to overcome its political and economic isolation after it had initiated and lost the war, and the occupying powers encouraged Germany to adopt a federal system of government to weaken German nationalism and thus to decentralise national power. In Spain, democratisation after the end of Franco's regime in the 1970s on the one hand opened up the way for Spain's integration with Europe (European Economic Community) and on the other, loosened the grip over regionalist movements suppressed after the civil war. In the UK the loss of the empire and the prospect of being left totally outside Europe motivated its government to join the CEE. The weakening of the British identity created room for expression of Scottish and Welsh identities (Judge, 2007).

Apart from political motivations there were also pragmatic or economic reasons in favour of regionalisation and regionalism: there was a belief that according powers to regions could improve public administration. It has to be noted that in the 1970s states in Western Europe found themselves in economic hardship and were looking for new ways of governing. One of these was decentralisation of competences to sub-national levels which gave rise to regionalism (Applegate, 1999). This was the reasoning behind the wave of decentralisation processes in Western Europe in the 1980s (Mathias, 2006) that fuelled the creation of regional entities. Regionalism was also a self-reinforcing process: successes in some regions encouraged and inspired others. Of specific importance were the Spanish regions (especially Catalonia) and the Spanish



notion of “estado regional” (“regional state”, a supposedly third form of organization of state, somewhere between a unitary state and federation) and the British devolution. For instance, Italian reforms in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century made explicit reference to the “estado regional” and “devolution”. It can be said that regionalism became fashionable in Western Europe, to the extent that it appeared even in a centralistic state like France, where there was the introduction of regions as territorial-administrative units, favouring the re-emergence of ethno-cultural regionalisms. European integration and regionalism are two phenomena which not only happened to manifest themselves at the same time and in the same place, but also as two “allies” (Szul, 2015). Supporters of further integration of Europe, to make the “United States of Europe”, believed that regions would become an “antidote” to the main obstacle in this transformation: nation states and nationalism. On the other hand, some regional leaders and regionalist movements regarded the European Union as both their protector against national governments and as a platform on which to present their interests, opinions and their very existence (Biscoe, 2001). Every significant regionalist movement, be it Scottish, Welsh, Bask or Catalan, declared that its goal was a presence in Europe, as an “equal among equals in Europe” (Keating, 1996). None of them declared an intention to abandon the EU after possible secession from its nation state. The would-be alliance between the EU and regions appeared to be confirmed by a certain degree of presence of the regions in the EU, firstly in the Committee of the Regions (Cabada, 2009). A symbolic link between regions and the EU were, and still are, the representations offices of regions in Brussels, where they played a dual role, by taking care of regional economic interests and as quasi-embassies showing aspirations of their respective regions to be visible at an international level and their economic and political ability to sustain such an office in Brussels. In such an atmosphere the notion of a “Europe of regions” was born. Followers of this idea hoped to create a second chamber in the EU parliament composed of representatives of regions. This idea was also combined with the concept of the European Union as a three-level federation containing the federation level itself, nation-states and regions<sup>25</sup>. However, the notion of a “Europe of regions” and the reality behind it (the alliance between the EU and regions) has its weaknesses (Szul, 2015). The first is the vagueness of this idea: the role which regions should play in Europe was ambiguous, apart from the failed project of the second chamber of the European Parliament. The second weakness is the limited role of the regions in European institutions (both in the EEC/EC/EU and in the Council of Europe). These institutions were established by states, not by regions, and it is states which decide on their functioning. Even the smallest states in the EU have more formal power than larger regions in terms of population, area, GDP. Regions are able to influence the EU only indirectly via their national governments. Members of the European parliament are elected by inhabitants of their constituencies, and not by regions (Szul, 2015). The Committee of the Regions, introduced in 1994 by the Maastricht Treaty, is far

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<sup>25</sup> “The third level can become that of the regions. (...) it is important not to underestimate the role of the region in an integrated Europe. Europe is a distant notion, the state is anonymous, and the region is becoming increasingly the identification-point for citizens. In many areas in Europe, positive feelings towards regionalism still persist, but an appearance of regionalism seems likely? And is in fact already perceptible. (...) If regionalism will get its own place within the process that leads to the E.C. [European Community – R. Sz.], then regionalism need not be seen as a threat to the integration process. On the contrary, the E.C. could specifically promote regionalism, so that this process wouldn’t be too dangerous. (Kalkwiek 1994, p 94, 96).

from being representative of the regions for various reasons. Firstly, it is a committee of regional and *local* authorities rather than of regions. Secondly, their members are not elected directly by regions but are accepted by national governments, and national governments have full control on the Committee's activities (Szul, 2015). The CoR has been set up to give regions and cities a formal voice in EU law-making ensuring that the position and needs of regional and local authorities are respected (European Union, 2018). It must be consulted by the Commission, the Council of EU and the European Parliament when drawing up legislation on matters that concern local and regional government such as health, education, employment, social policy, economic and social cohesion, transport, energy and climate change. Once the CoR receives a legislative proposal, it prepares and adopts an opinion and circulates it. The CoR members are elected representatives serving in local or regional authorities. This institution should encourage participation at all levels, from regional and local authorities to individual citizens. The CoR has set up a number of networks to enable all European Union's regions and cities to exchange information, work together and contribute to the EU debates. This in theory should ensure a multilevel European governance in which local and regional authorities can contribute to publicising the legitimacy and responsibility of cities and regions in the implementation of EU public policies (European Union, 2018). However, in an analysis of the workings of the Committee of Regions of Europe, it is possible to observe that this organism has not shaped an alternative model that is qualitatively different from that of States, no contraposition is made among sub-state entities and states, but there is instead a relationship of cooperation (Jaume, 2001). The Committee of Regions is a consultative organ, aimed at reaching some degree of co-decision with the communitarian organs that have got executive powers in specific fields. In practice, it is quite distant from the ordinary local problems of some territories and does not exercise a strong representation of regional territories. It has suffered an evident decline due to the effective loss of relevance of the regions within the institutional framework. This has allowed nation states to re-gain the upper hand: the various leaderships have got national constituency and legitimation at domestic level. The communitarian level is fading. There is a deep disequilibrium between national leaders, voted and acknowledged by the electorate, and European leaders, non-elected politicians who speak a language filtered by the media. A structural asymmetry, in which the excessive weight of States creates problems such as the Catalan crisis (Letta, 2017). The fact that State and national reality do not coincide implies that the Committee of Regions is simply a forum for debate and discussions about the future of nations and States. This institution, with its current configuration, does not offer a solution to regional problems in Europe (Jaume, 2001).

Another channel of representation for regions in Europe is the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CLRA), the pan-European political assembly representing local and regional authorities from the member states of the Council of Europe. Its role is to promote local and regional democracy, improve local and regional governance and strengthen authorities' self-government, according to the principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Council of Europe, 2018).

The presence of regional representatives in other EU bodies, such as the Council of Ministers, is only

sporadic and conditional, as some national delegations sometimes invite regional representatives when a matter under regional competence is discussed. Moreover, no regional language, including Catalan, which millions of people speak and which has an official status, is an official EU language (Szul, 2015).

## **2.2 EU accession and regionalism in central-eastern Europe**

After the change of the political system in 1989-1990 and the disintegration of three federations (USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) eleven countries of central-eastern Europe decided to join the EU and NATO. Out of those eleven countries seven were indeed parts, “regions”, of former states – these were Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (former USSR), the Czech Republic and Slovakia (former Czechoslovakia) and Slovenia and Croatia (former Yugoslavia). The other four were Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. The phenomenon of regionalism in those eleven countries considerably differed from that in Western Europe. There were some areas of large populations of national or linguistic minorities in the East (e.g. Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and Romania, Russian or Russian speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, the Polish minority in Lithuania, the Turkish and Muslim minority in Bulgaria, etc.) demanding rights as national minorities, but their activities can hardly be classified as regionalism. In fact, some areas and communities may fit the definition of ethno-cultural regionalism (Szul, 2015). They, however, do not have a territorial-administrative units’ system and their respective regional movements are rather weak in comparison to regionalist movements in western Europe<sup>26</sup>. There may be a possibility that in the future some of them, such as the Silesian movement, will gain in strength. For some of them, the example and inspiration of west European regionalism and the idea of “Europe of regions” was evident. During the preparatory procedures for EU accession, central-eastern European countries were confronted with suggestions by the EU concerning their territorial organisation (Szul, 2015). There was a belief that introducing sub-national level units, such as regions, that would be large enough to manage EU structural funds, would facilitate their accession and consequently the efficient management of the funds. It can be said that accession to the EU encouraged regionalisation and regionalist tendencies in central-eastern Europe<sup>27</sup> (Szul, 2015).

In the eastern part of Europe, a noteworthy case is Poland, an example of instrumental regionalism in which an extensive territorial reform was carried out after its accession to EU. Because of the popularity of the notion of a “Europe of regions” amongst the new ruling elite, the conviction that Poland had to adapt to “European standards” and that introducing fully-fledged regions would both improve the functioning of the state and economy, and facilitate accession negotiations, the government initiated a territorial reform in the 1990s. One of the aims of the reform was to mobilize regionalism, in the belief that regionalism was a constructive force, that it would release social energy. It should be noted that there was no demand for the self-governed regions by the population. Nowadays, the general opinion is that the regions failed to create

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<sup>26</sup> This opinion by Szul is shared by other authors also, see e.g. the opinion of a Czech specialist in regionalism in Europe, Ladislav Cabada: After twenty years of democracy or democratisation in this area East European regionalism is not nearly as strong as is the case with the most visible regional, autonomist or separatists movements in Western Europe (Cabada 2009, p. 20)

<sup>27</sup> W. Downs (Downs 2002, p. 2002, Cabada 2009 p. 16), already came to such a conclusion before these countries became EU members . According to him the influence of the EU through its regional policy on regionalist tendencies was especially relevant in Poland and the Czech Republic.

regionalism, regional pride and identity (Kleina, 2009); (Zarycki, 2009). The main activity of regions now is cooperation with national and European authorities in managing regional development funds. Applying for national and EU funds and then managing them is an important, if not main, activity at all levels of territorial administration. Creating or strengthening regional identity as a positive force mobilising the development of a region, however, has not been excluded from the objectives of regional authorities (Szul, 2015).

### **2.3 What explains separatist movements in Europe?**

Matthias Bieri<sup>28</sup> in a research paper talked about independence movements and the fact that they have gained momentum within the European Union in recent years. He noted that crucial to these developments have been the economic crisis and the lack of confidence that has gripped the continent. Nevertheless, a redrawing of borders appears unlikely in the near future (Bieri, 2014). Autonomy rights are sought after by an increasing number of people in the various regions, whereas the prospect of independence only belongs to a few. The achievements of European integration have reduced the importance of internal borders, but this evolution has brought about some problematic consequences for centralizing nation-states. Obviously, the idea of realizing one's own State is increasingly appealing for regions that are economically advanced with respect to others in their national territory. Higher civic participation and a federal settlement are regarded as remedies for mollifying regional secessionist claims (Bieri, 2014).

The European economic crisis of the last decade has fuelled the desire for autonomy in regions that are economic powerhouses and feel able to survive on their own, once freed from the burdens of their central government and the weaker regions. In this context, demands for independence also serve as leverage for applying pressure on central authorities. It is not always easy to determine whether movements are indeed pursuing independent statehood or whether they are actually striving for more autonomy rights: the dividing line is thin. Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque regions and the Flanders have important parties that seek independent statehood. In addition to existing sources of legitimacy, it is notable that they regard themselves as European movements, believing that independence will bring them advantages in the global competition of economic regions (Bieri, 2014). In the framework of an open European market, regions feel economically strong enough to be able to compete at an international level. Thus, parties and movements that seek independence perceive as crucial the membership to European Union. In the absence of the ties with their nation sovereign state, they will be free to join the single and prosperous European market (Bieri, 2014). The process of internationalization and globalization of markets favours the realization of a global system in which a movement of resources occur which is not limited to national borders, but operates in a continuous evolution. This results in an increasingly important phenomenon in which liberalization and competition are destined to remain fundamental characteristics at an international economic level and will determine an expansion of international trade which is able to generate a further acceleration of the world integration (Bieri, 2014). Common regional features such as a shared language, culture and history, promote distinct identities and serve to legitimize claims for self-determination. In Scotland, the separate civil society is

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<sup>28</sup> Researcher belonging to Think Tank team "Swiss and Euro-Atlantic Security" at the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich.

invoked as a central pillar of identity. In Catalonia and the Basque Country, preservation of the language and culture is a substantial argument in favour of autonomy. The advocates of independence do not feel that the central government takes their concerns seriously, and often appeal to European intervention. History is also invoked as a source of legitimacy. In the Spanish regions, the memory of the Franco regime and its suppression of minority languages and traditions is still fresh. In Flanders, too, the earlier dominance of the Walloon part of the country serves to legitimize pro-autonomy claims (Bieri, 2014).

In the course of the economic crisis, separatist demands have increased in popularity. Regions complain that their interests are ignored by the national government in question. This discontent with the status quo is enhanced by political constellations. Very often, the ruling parties, with their policies and conduct, alienate the central government from the regions and create a distance that further motivates pro-independence claims. Reforms instigated by the central government to address the crisis are often contrary to regional interests, as they tend to bind the regions even closer to the central state, but they produce the opposite effect. Frequently, they lead to curtailment of special fiscal rights, as the separatist regions are usually better off and are in an advantageous financial situation compared to other parts of the country. There are exceptions, like Scotland, whose GDP is below the national average. However, here, too, the separatists argue that an independent state would be economically better off due to its exclusive access to the oil and gas off the Scottish coast (Bieri, 2014). In Belgium, hundreds of thousands of commuters, mainly from Flanders, contribute to Belgian GDP (European Commission, 2018). The same is for Bavaria and Catalonia which support the rest of the regions in their national territory.

At the same time, these regions cultivate a vision of a better and more equitable society, this is why they usually appeal to progressive and democratic principles. For an independent Scotland, they envisage a system government that is more in line with what the voters desire, as an alternative model to the Westminster system. The SNP advocates a future for Scotland as a Scandinavian-type welfare state with an egalitarian society. In this way, the prospect of independence carries the promise of political reform. The hope is that the state's efficiency can be enhanced by reducing the number of actors (Bieri, 2014).

In the regions of Spain, the smaller nations of Europe are frequently referenced, as they were able to weather the crisis more successfully than Spain was. Also, in Spain particularly, the notion of "civic participation", an often-heard buzzword in current European discourse, is currently very popular. Independence referenda and expanded autonomy rights are demanded as democratic rights. There are clear majorities for the expansion of autonomy rights but secessionist tendencies are less popular than one might expect. Even when the pro-autonomy and the pro-independence side are balanced, in the case where expanded autonomy is posited as an alternative to independence, support for an independent states plummet (Bieri, 2014).

The core question of whether a part of a country has the right to secede is rooted in the contradiction between the self-determination right of nations and the territorial integrity of states. In the context of independence claims, these two rights hardly coincide. Both of these principles are part of the UN Charter; however, interpretations differ. Usually, in dealing with secessionist movements, amicable, peaceful

separations are respected as a matter of principle. On the other hand, unilateral declarations of independence without the consent of the central state are only considered legitimate in exceptional situations, in particular, in cases where a colonial status is ended. Beyond this, though, there is no right to secede. If a majority in one part of a country demands more rights by using democratic means, however, the government in question may have an obligation to deal with the matter politically. Taking this into account, the type of response that central governments can adopt toward secessionist moves is more or less left open (Bieri, 2014).

## **2.4 The Role of the EU**

The role of the Union has to be taken into account when talking about independence movements in Europe, as their aim is to create an independent state within the European framework. In the eyes of many regionalists, the principle of subsidiarity,<sup>29</sup> as stated in the Maastricht Treaty, makes the EU a guarantor of far-reaching regional and local competences. Aspirations to self-determination have further been fuelled by the vision of overcoming the nation-state in a unified and integrated Europe. However, the further development of European integration is currently in question, which has in turn fostered support for the realization of independent nation-states. The existence of the European Union enhances the economic prospects of separatist regions. The common market is especially important for small national economies which see in the single market an opportunity for their prosperity as small countries. Moreover, small states in the EU enjoy a certain degree of over-representation, which is an additional incentive. For advocates of independence, a seamless continuation of EU membership after secession would be desirable. Thus, independence would bring continuity in this sense (Bieri, 2014).

The EU, generally speaking, regards secessionist movements as a domestic matter of the countries in question<sup>30</sup>. In the cases of Scotland and Catalan independence path, European institutions have made clear that, in case of the formation of a new state, these regions would have to apply for membership in the EU through the regular procedures. Anyway, in all scenarios, the consent of the EU member states would be crucial (Bieri, 2014).

## **2.5 The Role of the Central Governments**

Central governments also have a decisive influence on the trajectory of independence movements. There is no generally approved recipe for dealing with secessionist demands, apart from the fact that good governance weakens independence movements. Governments should handle the challenge of meeting autonomy demands without jeopardizing the overall functioning of the state (Bieri, 2014).

The Spanish government has proven itself to be quite restrictive and not prone to dialogue so far. The

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<sup>29</sup> The principle of subsidiarity (Article 5 of the TEU) seeks to safeguard the ability of Member States to take decisions and action and authorises intervention by the Union when the objectives of an action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, but can be better achieved at Union level, 'by reason of the scale and effects of the proposed action'. The general aim of this principle is to guarantee a degree of independence for a lower authority in relation to a higher body or for a local authority in relation to central government. It therefore involves the sharing of powers between several levels of authority. When applied in the context of the European Union, subsidiarity rules out Union intervention when an issue can be dealt with effectively by Member States at central, regional or local level and means that the Union can exercise its powers when added value can be provided if the action is carried out at Union level.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Antonio Tajani in an interview, on the 28th October 2017, defined Catalan crisis as a "Spanish internal issue". Also about Catalan issue, Juncker claimed that any EU intervention on the issue now would only cause "a lot more chaos".

emphatic refusal of the central government to grant further autonomy rights has increased support for the independence movements. The fear in Madrid is that granting further rights would weaken the already-enfeebled central state even further, which in turn would create even more incentives for regions to split off. In Scotland, too, the creation of a regional parliament has substantially strengthened the independence movement. The question is therefore whether granting autonomy rights will not lead to demands for independence down the road. On the other hand, conceding autonomy rights diminishes the support for independence. If regional governments receive wider concessions from central authorities, the claims for independence become weaker, because most people are generally willing to accept new conditions that give them further autonomy instead of recurring to independence. Independence movements will not vanish, on the contrary, they will strengthen their protest the more they feel ignored. Should individual European Union's states fail to reach a *modus vivendi* with their regions over time, the volatility of this issue will increase further (Bieri, 2014).

### **3. European integration and euro-regions**

All the institutional path made in the European Union since 1957, with the Treaty of Rome which has given rise to the European Economic Community (EEC), passing through the Single European Act of 1987, which strengthened the role of political direction through the creation of the European Council. With the entry into force, in 1993, of the Treaty of Maastricht, there was the passage from the EEC to the European Union, in which communitarian institutions received a progressive transfer of competences. There was also an increment in the level of democratic participation to decision-making processes.

This series of actions converge in the objective of creating a European space without internal frontiers that would grant the free circulation of goods, people, capital and services. In the meanwhile, when the Eastern bloc was gradually dismantled in 1990s, the reaction by the West was to reinforce the role of states within European organisms. The lack of political reforms for the European unity, the weak cohesion of pluri-national states with serious internal problems like Belgium, Italy, UK, Spain and France were the basic reasons for the national reactions that denied the origin of the problem: the existence inside the union of nations or national minorities that were not recognised (Jaume, 2001).

Against this background, the Treaty of Maastricht was signed, representing the origin of the recognition of the regional phenomenon existing in Europe. In order to secure the stability of states, the governing principle behind communitarian policies was the territorial integrity of member states and the unilateral non-recognition of new independent nations by any member of the European Union. They put in place a dogmatic defence national unity and the non-intervention in internal problems of each state. The principle co-decision is not contemplated in the relationship between states and sub-state entities, or between the Committee of European regions and communitarian organisms (Jaume, 2001).

Member states have worked to consolidate their role of political direction, arguing that they would be the only owners of sovereignty, although they had to leave the exercise of some competences in the hands of communitarian institutions. This puts light on the particular interpretation that is given to the principle of

subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is claimed by states at their advantage toward European commission, but they avoid using it towards their sub-state administration. The single currency, convergent economic policies and security policy set up a system in which not only states, but also regions, increasingly come to form part of the institutional framework, becoming main actors in the economic and social policies at European level. They fit well into the idea of cohesion and development that is pursued at a continental level (Jaume, 2001). The markets, which previously adjusted to the limits of national borders, now have widened. What used to be economic regions, in European terms, euro-regions, do not coincide with national frameworks, so a contrast of interests emerges between regions and nation-states. The opposition made by states to issues of regional trans-state structuration provokes a primacy of political decisions over economic ones. In the dilemma between the political dogma of national unity and the economic considerations, those states which lay on a system of political domination over national minorities, like the Spanish case, always opt for their own national survival, even when it is anti-economic (Jaume, 2001).

### **3.1 Regionalism in a new European framework**

Regional groups such as the ones challenging Spain's political foundations have recently undergone a change in their options. Previously, any of these regional groups, though it may have wished for independence, would have been left weak, unstable, and essentially indefensible due to its small size and little economic and population base. Europe within the European Union is progressing toward an open economic market and provides what appears to be a standing peace between its member states, which results in the fact that regional groups are striving to achieve their goals of independence (Smith, 2000). At the same time, the notion of statehood is fading in importance with regard to the increasingly powerful Union. The latter, at the close of the twentieth century, is facing one of its most difficult challenges ever. In the aftermath of the two world wars, Europe has been strongly committed to becoming a unified, peaceful continent supporting democracy and the rights of the individual. An interesting and unintended outcome of this process has been the growing strength of regionalist activities, especially within the post-authoritarian states found in Eastern Europe, Italy, and Spain (Smith, 2000). Regionalist groups which previously would have not survived militarily or economically as independent states now have protection provided by the EU, and enjoy the benefits of free trade established by the European Economic Community (EC). The basic nature of European nationalist movements has changed from the pre-1914 pattern of expansionism and internal consolidation to the modern-day breakdown of states into regional communities defined by ethnicity, language, and cultural history. In the past, people would determine their civic nationality solely according to the state or government of which they were citizens. At that time, the usage of minority languages was not seen as such a divisive factor. After the World Wars, European nations began to lose their overseas empires and became citizens of nation-states in which almost all citizens or subjects were similar in ethnicity, culture, and language. Now, many Europeans are progressing toward regional identification by considering themselves Catalan, Castilian or Basque rather than Spanish for example (Smith, 2000).

(Beer, 1980) created a definition of an ethnic group which has two defining points: 1) ethnic groups are a



relatively large groups of people who are socially defined as belonging together because of a belief in their being descended from common ancestors, and 2) because of this belief they have a sense of identity and share sentiments of solidarity. This creates the argument that actual ethnic identity is not as important as a *perceived* common ethnic background. For example, the Catalan may not be ethnically distinct from the Spanish, but the subjective belief that they are is strong enough to have created a group of people that functions as an ethnic group, whether or not they would be considered a group by virtue of their actual ethnicity. This is an argument which can apply to present day actions, because beliefs and principles are strong drivers of people actions.

Two crucial moments were the fall of the Eastern bloc dictatorial governments in 1989 and the death of General Franco in 1975, when these nations began to allow regionalist feelings to resurge. Democratic states emerged, and with them the freedoms of speech, the press, and the right to use minority languages. The regions which had been ruled by repressive governments exploded with national feelings. Only in a few cases were the people able to settle their differences peacefully, as in the case of Czechoslovakia splitting into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. More often, there resulted aggressive political factions and, in the most extreme cases, terrorist groups within these countries (Smith, 2000).

It is important to have definition of what makes up a regionalist or a nationalist group. Smith defined nationalists as “people who seek political independence and statehood based on claims of a linguistic, cultural, and ethnic background which differs substantially from the larger states to which they belong. They usually were an autonomous state in the past, strengthening the legitimacy of their contemporary claims to independence”. Regionalists are “people who define themselves based on a common linguistic and cultural past. They usually speak a dialect of the predominant language of their state, and are also ethnically similar to the majority. Often, they have no history of self-rule, or if they do, it lies in the distant past”. They possess strong cultural ties, though it is these regionalist groups that are recently accused, by Hobsbawm and others, of "inventing tradition" for the sake of uniting their people (Smith, 2000).

Nationalist and regionalist groups in fact have similar goals, although they are grounded in different motivations. They both seek independence and freedom for their own cultural, linguistic, and religious practices. Nationalists, however, believe that they should be in charge as a central power and promote the interests of their nation, with the aim of gaining and maintaining full sovereignty. Regionalists, on the other hand, often want only cultural and political freedom, which is possible to achieve within the bounds of a lenient greater state. Many times this is impossible within a repressive state, and regionalist groups become separatists in an attempt to gain the freedoms which they desire. Therefore, both regionalists and nationalists can be separatist in nature, but for essentially different reasons. Obviously, these definitions rarely apply perfectly to anyone group (Smith, 2000).

Regional movements are generally driven by a certain set of circumstances which motivate them to fight for their cultural and economic rights. There exist several groups of people in Europe who meet linguistic, cultural, and historical requirements that justify regional awareness. In fact, a lot of Europeans speak a

language different from their national one<sup>31</sup>. However, only a small percentage of them actually develops an awareness of their regional identity and seeks independence. Some regional groups want to form a new state based upon a particular strength found in their resources or their natural endowments. This could be industrial power, possession of a major seaport or waterway, natural resource availability, etc. In such cases, the wealth produced in this area is eventually redistributed, by taxation or capital outflow, throughout the rest of the nation (Smith, 2000). The regional group which produced this wealth differentiates itself from the nation because it perceives the nation as a dependent entity which is drawing off their wealth. In this case, regional activism is a response to a community perceiving its resources as threatened rather than to their cultural heritage being threatened. As already noted, most of the regional groups which seek independence try to take on characteristics of the oppressed, or play up the oppression which they do encounter in their attempts to gain independence. This is not only to rally support from the outside, but also to convince more reluctant members of their own populations to join in the struggle. This method of attempting to attract wider public sympathy was frequently used by both the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA) in the Basque Region and by Catalans (Smith, 2000).

An element that has historically been stressed by both European regionalists and nationalists is the importance of linguistic differences. Language and dialect can be both the dividing and unifying factors among smaller cultural groups. With the increase in regional consciousness, linguistic awareness further defines the group and widens the gap between them and their ruling states. The European Union has always committed to encourage the use of minority languages taking into account the large percentages of Europeans that speak a language different from their state's official language (European Commission). Many European ethnic groups desire independence regardless of the fact that this could leave them relatively defenceless due to their small size and with a heavy dependence upon foreign trade because of the limited resources available within their small territory. However, the possibility of independent small states is also encouraged by the existence of international institutions such as European Union, European Commission and NATO (Smith, 2000). The EU creates a common framework, while the EC makes it possible for small states to compete economically by eliminating all trade barriers between its nations. Despite its fluctuating policies, NATO also protects some small states. This furthers the process of weakening national boundaries with the increase of centralized power in Brussels. Within the EU, the idea of regionalism takes on a new meaning. Before the EU, cultural freedom was the only realistic goal of relatively small groups of people. Independence was an unrealistic aim, as proved by the cases of Belgium and the Netherlands who were overrun so easily during the World Wars. The present situation, however, has transformed regional separatists' goals of secession into feasible scenarios (Smith, 2000). The economic problems of crisis, recessions, slump which began in 2008 and the way these are being coped with in and by the European

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<sup>31</sup> The Language Diversity Project funded by the European Commission within its Lifelong Learning Programme has created an interactive map of regional and minority languages in Europe. It shows their geographical distribution and provides information on the language and the number of people speaking it. It shows that Catalan (spoken in Spain, France, Italy and Andorra) and Occitan (spoken in France, Spain and Italy) are languages used by about 6 million people each. More than 1.5 million people in Spain speak Galician, and 1.27 million speak Sardinian in Italy. Basque has 670 000 speakers in France and Spain, Friulian – 526 000 in Italy, Welsh – 543 000 in the UK, Breton – 450 000 in France.

Union (fiscal austerity in the debtor countries in exchange for help from the EU or creditor countries) have an impact on regionalism (Szul, 2015). There exist three ways in which the economic situation and policy has an influence on regionalism. Firstly, it reduces the scope in which regions (understood as administrative-political units) are able to act in the economic sphere and creates critical analysis of the efficiency of regional governments which quite often reveals corruption and waste of money. This has a negative effect on the general attitude towards regionalism<sup>32</sup>. Secondly, it increases dissatisfaction with interregional distribution of funds in regions that feel exploited by poorer and less productive regions. This can lead to the concept of independence as a means to stop this exploitation. Thirdly, the European Union implicitly and explicitly warns that secession of regions from the EU member states would cause them serious problems, as they cannot expect to be automatically admitted to the EU (Szul, 2015).

Spain is the most evident example of the impact of the economic crisis and policy on regionalism. A critical analysis of economic performance of regional governments has revealed many instances of what their critics see as a waste of money and detriment to economic efficiency. These include, among other things, actions in support of what regionalists consider to be a defence or building of regional identity – for instance financing and promoting education in regional languages. At the same time economic austerity has radicalised centrifugal tendencies in Catalonia that are supported by a vast sector of society (Szul, 2015).

The problem of the EU's reaction applies all countries contemplating independence. Newly-created states would have to go through lengthy accession negotiations, which have never taken place before. In cases of secessions, the geopolitical interests of third parties are involved, and those with most interests would not welcome such developments (Szul, 2015). In Germany, which is the biggest net payer into the EU budget and the main “rescuer” of the debtor countries, the situation of interregional money transfers is similar to that in Spain. There are net “givers” and net “takers” of money, the biggest payer being Bavaria. Therefore, Bavaria is under a double burden: it must allocate funds to some German regions and, as part of Germany, to some EU countries. Some discontent has been voiced in Bavaria in view of this (Szul, 2015).

Poland also has got a mechanism for redistribution of money from richer regions and cities to poorer ones, which frustrate the richer ones. Although Poland has avoided recession and does not need to operate a drastic fiscal austerity policy, the slump has reduced revenues at all levels. In addition, the mechanism of redistribution of money is evidently disadvantageous for the richer regions and cities: the amount of money they must allocate is calculated with a two-year delay, so that in a given year they must pay a certain percentage of their revenues from amounts received two years before. For this reason, two main contributors to the redistribution system – the cities of Warsaw and Krakow, and the Mazovia Region (the region which includes Warsaw, the biggest contributor to the interregional fund) and others, appealed for a change in the system. The complaints of Mazovia and Warsaw seem to have had a broader social repercussion and created a sense of regional Mazovian identity, typical for richer regions that have to allocate some of their money to

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Mir S., Cruz G. 2012, a long list of the “transgressions” of regional governments in Spain.

regions in a less fortunate position (Szul, 2015).

The relations between regionalism and European integration are quite complicated. Firstly, for most of the post-war period the two phenomena were parallel, determined by some diminishing of the traditional role of the nation state and redefinition of interstate relations which created more space for European integration and regionalism. It created a conviction that regionalism and the EU were “natural allies” as a concept of a “Europe composed of regions”. Secondly, the practical activities of the EU, especially its funds for regional development, prompted or encouraged some countries, especially new member states, to create regions and stimulate regionalism. Thirdly, the recent austerity policy prescribed by the EU in some countries, especially in Spain, stimulates the radicalism of regionalist movements (as in the case of Catalonia). Fourthly, the very existence of the EU and the necessity to negotiate EU membership discourages those regionalist-nationalist movements which want to cut themselves off from the existing EU member states while remaining in the EU (Szul, 2015).

#### **4. The notion of “region” and “regional identity” in Europe**

New regionalism’, ‘region’, ‘city-region’, ‘cross-border region’, ‘border’ and ‘identity’ have become important catchphrases on the global geo-economic and geopolitical scene. The resurgence of these terms is linked to the transformation of political economy and governance at supra-state, state and sub-state levels. Regions are significant in the European Union’s framework, as both the making of the Union itself and the ‘Europe of regions’ are concrete manifestations of the re-scaling of state spaces and the assignment of new meanings to territory. Such re-scaling has also led to increased competition between regions; such tendency results from both the neo-liberalisation of the global economy and from a regionalist response from regional actors. Regional identity, an idea which in some way refers to cohesiveness or social integration in a region, has driven regional development in the EU’s cohesion policy. Emotion plays a role in accentuating the meanings of identities. Regions can be conceptualised as “processes that gain their boundaries, symbolisms and institutions in the process of *institutionalisation*” (Paasi, 2009). Institutionalisation is the process whereby a region consolidates, gains its status in a broader structure and may become a significant element for regional identification. The concept of “region”, contrary to what was thought to be the case, has persisted through time and also gained new meanings. There are several debates on the meanings of regions and regional identities, but they can be seen as the results of processes taking place at and across various scales. In the European Union the idea of the ‘Europe of regions’ has become very significant. This framework has developed a duality in the concept of nation-states, which are regarded as too small for global economic competition but too large and remote for cultural identification and participatory and active citizenship (Anderson, 2000). Different is the ‘regionality’ of supra-state units and all supra-state region such as the EU itself, NAFTA and other economic formations (Paasi, 2009).

##### **4.1 Territoriality in a globalising world**

In spite of accelerating globalisation and the consequent rise of networks, integration, internet, the borderless world thesis, that have challenged the idea of nation-state, the contemporary world is still a complex

constellation of more or less bounded spaces that exist at various spatial scales. These spaces are 'regions' or 'territories'. International border conflicts have decreased markedly since the 1990s and state borders are in many cases more open than before, but boundaries and territory still matter, simply because they are typically instruments of territoriality. This can be seen not only in how immigration is managed in various states, but also in how many ethno-nationalist groups struggle to create separate territories and maintain their identities. This takes place even inside the EU which has struggled to lower the internal borders of the EU territory by creating new institutional solutions, such as cross-border regions (Schain & M. Berezin, 2003). Territoriality matters at various spatial scales, and the questions of autonomy, pluralism, democracy or the unity of the state are perpetually topical (Paasi, 2003); (Safran & Maiz, 2000); (Albert, Jacobson, & Lapid, 2001); (Kahler & Walter, 2006). Territory has four experiential dimensions: it is social because people inhabit it collectively, it is political because groups fight to preserve or enlarge their space, it is cultural because it contains collective memories and it is cognitive, and hence its capacity to subjectify cultural, political and social boundaries makes territory the core of both public and private identity projects (Berezin & Schain, 2003). While territorial spaces are more or less clearly defined and borders are a key element of territoriality, such borders are not definitely fixed. Globalisation and internationalisation create open or 'porous' regions. According to contingent needs, regions may choose to have their borders open, in fields that involve specific interests like the economy, and close in some policies like the control of migration flux. Due to the movements of people and the sharing of information and ideas, social relations do not stop themselves within regional spaces, but are fluid across borders. State-centric spatiality and conceptions have been challenged worldwide not so much by elitist cosmopolitan ideas as by neo-liberal globalisation and increasing economic competition (Katzenstein, 2005). Many states have rescaled their governance so that regionally based processes of economic and political integration, security co-operation and social integration have become significant elements of the international system (Beeson, 2005). In many cases states have combined forces by establishing regional alliances while simultaneously decentralising or devolving some of their power and traditional responsibilities for regional development to regional and local institutions (N. Brenner, B. Jessop, & G. MacLeod, 2003); (Jessop, 2002).

Thanks to the new possibilities offered by an increasingly globalised world, regions and also cities have developed international networks and have acquired a global dimension on their own.

One feature of the current regional dynamics has been the resurgence of the 'region'. This has been somewhat paradoxical since the demise of the region that should follow from the deepening modernity and the consolidating state-centric spatiality, has been predicted since the nineteenth century (Keating, 1998); (Keating, 2004). The rise of regions has occurred around the world. For many scholars, sub-state regions are key players of the world economy and this will be true as long as there will be people who tend to identify themselves with local and regional scales, rather than national ones. Regional identity enhances economic competition and the promotion of regions. In EU, which contains a mosaic of regions, also with a long history, it has been noted that rise of regional identity or consciousness has been a parallel tendency with the

integration process (Gren, 2002). Confidence in the power of regional identities has become an important part of the emerging cohesion policy in the EU (Faludi, 2007).

The resurgence of sub-state regions in the framework of European Union can be explained by various factors, such as uneven development; threats to regional languages and cultures; and devolution, regionalisation or federalisation as a means of reducing the power of central states or as a means of managing separatist aspirations and conflicts (Anderson, 2000). The nation-state still retains an important power in the management of state economy, citizens' well-being and social cohesion. However, the changes in the structures of regional governance and regional policy have been important developments. More competences have been loaded in sub-state regions, and this is shown also by the fact that while the number of states has quadrupled since the end of World War II, the number of sub-national regional units has multiplied even more (Lovering, 2007). There is presently a double tendency to both distinguish regions from each other (identity) and to bring them together (integration) (Paasi, 2009).

Scale is an important element to be considered when discussing regionalism. For regional activists and social movements, it is mostly the units between local scale and the state that are significant, and this is most obvious in the case of 'ethno-regionalism', in which regional movements are represented by minority nationalist groups in Europe and elsewhere (such as in Britain, Canada and Spain). At times regions and their identities have a cultural dimension, at times they are accentuated in the name of the search for a more democratic governance. The demand to concentrate more powers at a regional level may weaken the links between national identities and citizenship, resulting in the lack of ties between the nation and its peoples. The regionalisation of Spain in 1981, for instance, and the respective introduction of regional autonomies has strengthened regional identities in many regions and also lead to new forms of regional activism (Paasi, 2009). Such spatial ideas are doubtless attractive to politicians and planners who see the region and regional identity as new magic words for developing the economy through the culture and as important cohesive elements for social life. European politics and planning have respectively witnessed a shift to economic 'entrepreneurialism' on the sub-state regional level in pursuit of global competitiveness, which has enabled the 'recruitment of locally defined identities to strategies for competitiveness' (Lovering, 2007). Statistical NUTS regions<sup>33</sup> are crucial in creating the vision of 'the Europe of regions' and location of regional boundaries can prove of huge economic importance in regional policy (Paasi, 2009).

One more example of the search for a new regional dynamic in the EU is the 'unusual' or 'non-standard' regions. These units are local or regional cross-border regions located between two states but some larger-scale regional constructions encompass several states. They aim at lowering state borders and are fitting examples of new regions that often lack regional historical basis but are rather 'projects' of planners and politicians. They are steps towards a 'mono-topic Europe', a 'seamless and integrated space within the context of the European project', as Ole Jensen and Tim Richardson label it. Cross-border regions were also

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<sup>33</sup> The NUTS classification (Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics) is a hierarchical system for dividing up the economic territory of the EU for the purpose of a socio-economic analysis of regions.

central to Ohmae's 'borderless world' thesis. He argued that nation-states will be, at least economically, superseded by 'regional states', such as Northern Italy, Baden-Württemberg, which he suggested that in a 'borderless world' would be 'the natural economic zones' (Ohmae, 1995). What is paradoxical in at least some of these regions is that economic development and new forms of regionalisation have created strong regionalist and nationalist movements. The rise of the 'Padanian nationalism' in Northern Italy is the case in point. The Lega Nord (the Northern League) has attempted to invent an ethnicity for Northern Italy (Padania) and thereby justify its political claims for the protection of the economic interests of the region. These examples show that a number of competing regional frames shape the daily worlds of the EU citizens (Paasi, 2009). Whereas the region has been a major category of analysis for geographers, also the representatives of such fields as history, IR or political science have come more recently, to scrutinise the dimensions of regions and ideas regarding their identities. Region is a complicated category since it brings together both material and 'virtual' elements, as well as very diverging social practices and discourses. Administrative regions are assumed to be relatively cohesive, and indeed this is one of the implicit assumptions in the EU's policy on regions. This is further implied by authors such as Michael Keating who suggests that a region is a construction of diverging elements with greater or lesser cohesion. He further contends that where 'geographical' elements such as nature or landscape, economic cohesion, cultural identity, administrative apparatus, popular identity and territorial mobilisation coincide in space, strong regionalism results (Keating, 1998).

The idea of region as a cohesive unit has been challenged recently by so-called relational thinkers who argue that globalisation and the rise of a society characterized by transnational flows and networks now prevents a conceptualisation of regions in terms of spatially bound processes and institutions (Allen, Massey, & Cochrane, 1998). As the rise of regionalism at various scales shows, region and regionalism matter, and territoriality plays an important role in social life. That they matter does not mean that regions are inevitably bounded, unique units. Contemporary regions are increasingly based on social practices, processes and discourses that may have their origins both in regions and outside of them (Paasi, 2009).

Different regions emerge for different purposes. Keating has usefully summarised this complexity: "A region may have a historic resonance or provide a focus for the identity of its inhabitants. It may represent a landscape, an architecture or a style of cooking. There is often a cultural element, perhaps represented by a distinct language or dialect. Beyond this, a region may sustain a distinct civil society, a range of social institutions. It can be an economic unit, based either on a single type of production or an integrated production system. It may be, and increasingly is, a unit of government and administration. Finally, all these meanings may or may not coincide, to a greater or lesser degree" (Keating, 2004).

Regions are here better seen as social constructions. Such approaches challenge traditional ideas of regions as bounded, ahistorical entities that have a specific essence and a permanent identity. Regions are institutional structures and processes that are perpetually 'becoming' instead of just 'being'. Their material basis consists of economic and political relations. Social institutions create structures that are the basis for

the narratives of identity, mobilisation of collective memory, and they also constitute the visible and invisible social 'gel' based on values, norms and ideologies (Paasi, 1991).

An *analytical* distinction between 'old' and 'new' regions helps to understand the nature of the 'region-building' process in the European context. European Union conceives regions as having normally emerged along with the history, have gradually become established parts of governance, may be meaningful entities for citizens and may therefore be important sources of regional identity and even emotions. Such historical regions exist in most European states (many Swiss Cantons, Dutch or Italian historical provinces or British regions, for example). In contrast, 'new regions' are typically created as ad hoc projects that aim at developing or increasing the competitiveness of the spatial unit in question (Paasi, 2009).

A way used to conceptualise the dimensions such region-building processes provided by the theory of the *institutionalisation of regions* (Paasi, 2013); (Paasi, 1991) which has been used in the analysis of the emergence of regions and regional identities in such diverse contexts as Finland, Denmark, the UK, USA, Germany, Spain or Italy (Harrison, 2006); (Donaldson, 2006); (Painter, 2008). This general approach suggests that regions should be conceptualised as historically contingent processes. Such a claim is particularly crucial in the EU. The discourses around the 'Europe of regions', for example, are modifying the conception of regions in Europe (Paasi, 2009). The process of institutionalisation of regions would consist of four stages which can have a variant order. For the first, the existence of a region always draws on a certain territorial shape that emerges along with history (old regions) or is simply decided ad hoc (new regions). Such distinction is normally based on a combination of functional, political, economic, cultural and administrative practices. Making and deciding regional boundaries is usually a contested process and may be crucial, for example, for the economic success of regional economies. In the EU, for example, the location of the boundaries of a region can be decisive for the degree of economic support that the region can receive from the EU funds. Symbolic shaping refers to the creation of symbols that normally both express and strengthen the idea of the existence of a specific region and regional collective identity. Institutional shaping refers to the development of informal and formal institutions that are needed to produce and reproduce other shapes. Some institutions can thus be habits or dialects, while some other institutions can be formal social or political organisations (Paasi, 2009). The establishment of the region means that it is accepted as part of the system and broader social consciousness. This stage has different meanings at various spatial scales. At sub-national level such establishment is normally based on gaining an administrative status in the broader regional system. The institutionalisation perspective puts stress on the historical process, the division of labour and power relations in the production and reproduction of regions. And this complex matrix of power relations is subject to a perpetual change that normally results from both internal and external transformations. Regions are constructed and reconstructed in uneven ways, they are not a fixed 'scale'; rather it is a perpetual and dynamic process of scaling practices and discourses (Paasi, 2009).

#### **4.2 Rescaling the state system and the shapes of regions**

That human beings, ideas and capital increasingly cross borders and regions are constituted in an interaction



between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ factors is undeniable. However, Paasi argues that “rather than borders, it is the transformation of the institutional sphere that ‘draws’ the region as part of broader economic, political, cultural practice and power relations” (Paasi, 2009). Part of such institutions draw on emotional and historical attachments to the region, some others are part of an efforts to benefit from such elements in economic terms. Regions and their identities may hence be crucial in mobilising economic interests. In many cases new forms of regionalisation of state spaces has led to the revival and emergence of regionalism but regionalisation may as well be a reaction to manage regionalist claims and may even strengthen regionalism. The devolution in the UK in 1997 has similarly fed regionalist thinking. Regions thus provide a context for certain spaces of dependence through which actors can conduct their engagements (Jones & Macleod, 2004). The degree to which regions are regarded as closed and bounded or open and permeable is ultimately context-dependent, and not a purely theoretical or political-normative choice. Regions may be crucial in social identification which is often based on distinctions and active mobilisation of history, memory and emotions (Ashworth, Graham , & Tunbridge, 2007).

### **4.3 The invention of regional identity**

Like the region, regional identity has been recognised as an important element in the making of regions as social and political spaces. It is nevertheless difficult to elucidate what this identity consists of and how it affects collective action and politics. It is obvious in many countries that the rescaling of the regional system and devolution of power to regional scale has made such identities topical. On a more general level it has been suggested that people’s awareness of the processes of globalisation generates a search for new orientation points, and both affirm old boundaries and create new ones that is regional identity and a search for roots would be a reaction to being in the ‘wider world’, not merely an inwards looking state of affairs (Geschiere & B. Meyer, 1999). Whether or not regional ties motivate people into conflict with their respective state, a phenomenon occurring in many regions around the world, from Catalonia to Sri Lanka, belonging to a region may raise a sense of identity that challenges the existing hegemonic national identity narratives in cultural or economic terms (Westwood, 1996). In spite of its abstract character, the idea of regional identity has been exploited in such institutional contexts as the EU’s cohesion policies for a just distribution of opportunities in space, that are developed to motivate ‘regions’ to exploit their cultural characteristics, special skills and social capital in order to develop their economy (Faludi, 2007).

### **4.4 The institutionalisation of Finnish provinces and their regional identities**

As an example of the ongoing rescaling of state spaces in the EU is the institutionalisation processes of Finnish provinces and how regional identities manifest themselves at both individual and institutional level. The Provinces gained prominence in 1994 when the Finnish regional system was reshaped as part of the national strategy to fulfil the EU’s regional system and to the accelerating global economic competition. When Finland entered the EU in 1995, new Regional Councils became a major medium in managing and implementing EU-based planning and development strategies. Provinces became part of state-led policy but were simultaneously forced to partake in ‘scale-jumping’, in that they had to create new links to the supra-

national program of regional policy within the EU. Regions became dependent on supra-national decision making, since Regional Councils have their representatives in the EU's Committee of Regions (Paasi, 2009). The international role of the Regional Councils expanded and international relations and interaction between the actors in different regions have become frequent. Both a vertical and horizontal rescaling has consequently occurred. Similarly, the Councils are involved in developing Union's regional policy and are forced to draw up the programmes required for the granting of support from EU structural funds for their own provinces/regions and in part they also implement them (Paasi, 2009).

## **5. Conclusions**

The observations made so far about the pattern of regional autonomy and secessions in Europe show that there are a number of elements which are common to all cases. The literature analysed in this chapter shows different views about the relationship between European integration and autonomist instances. It is interesting to note how the types of narrative adopted are similar across regions. The features that appear to be relevant in explaining and promoting pro-independence claims are: the role played by imbalances in the internal redistribution of the fiscal revenues and fiscal transfers made by wealthy regions in favour of the rest of the country; the phenomenon of globalisation that allows small countries to enjoy economies of scale and also motivates the search for new orientation points; the fading in the importance of the notion of statehood due to further European integration and the increasing relevance of regions; the importance of local identities and common regional features in explaining regionalism; the economic aid provided by European Union's structural funds that strengthens the territorial dimensions all over Europe and motivates regionalism; the existence of various types of regionalisms which can have a political, cultural and economic nature; the still limited presence of regions in the EU institutions that enhances the search for a wider representation of regions at a European level; the effect of the economic crisis in Europe that has fuelled claims for independence; the belief that the creation of a new state will bring about reforms and will increase civic participation; the role played by the European common market in encouraging secession and the integration into a wider framework in which internal frontiers are eliminated; the stance taken by central governments in dealing with secessionist claim is an important factor which makes the difference; the re-scaling of state spaces and the assignment of new meanings to territory; the changes in the structures of regional governance and regional policy as important developments which have weakened the ties between regions and central authorities; the acquisition by cities and regions of a new, global dimension. Understanding these dynamics will be useful in order to analyse the more specific case of Catalan independence in the next chapter.

## Chapter III

### 1. Autonomous communities in EU

The process of European integration has modified the political, administrative and territorial structure of the Spanish state. Europeanisation can be intended as the diffusion and institutionalisation of laws, policies and processes that include in their internal framework the “European variable”. Among its positive aspects, there may be the revitalizing effects that European integration had on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of intergovernmental relations and on the modernization of state and autonomic public administrations. The formal procedures for the indirect participation of the CCAA into EU policy-making has contributed to strengthen the administrative capabilities of the autonomic representatives and has also obliged to create an internal multilateral cooperation. Secondly, the adaptation to the EU laws and policies has required an important process of institutionalization, which has involved the centre and the periphery in the creation of departments that are specialised in European issues (Noferini, 2016). One definition of Europeanisation refers to the formal changes brought about by the European integration process and that modify the institutional design and the territorial structure of member states (Kassim, 2001); (Molina, 2016); (Olmeda, Colino, & Parrado, 2017). In comparative terms, all the member states have transformed their institutional and organizational structures to face the management of European issues (Ragone, 2014). Starting from the entry of Spain in the EU in 1986, the CCAA started to modify their organigrams in two directions. Firstly, all the governments developed specific unities dedicated to the impulse and coordination of European matters. Secondly, the CCAA opened themselves to the practices of external informal mobilization through the creation of delegations or offices in Brussels. The Spanish communities perceived that European institutions as strategic interlocutors for their nationalist demands, so they conducted the process of institutional change. The CCAA bet on the autonomic presence in Brussels, although its real impact seems to be less than expected. Finally, the promises of structural funds that were to be awarded to Spain, represented another important incentive for the modernization of the autonomic public administration. The main elements of the relation between the CCAA and the European Union are: the participation in the revision and elaboration of the EU treaties; the direct and indirect participation in the institutions and organs of the UE, particularly when they affect Catalan competences or interest; the participation in the control of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; the development and application of European law; the management of European funds; the actions before the EU Court of Justice of the EU (Noferini, 2016). The degrees of legitimacy, peacefulness and efficiency of modern states have been largely dependent on the extent to which they have succeeded in creating a sense of national identity among their citizens. The European Union [EU] has deployed considerable resources to measure and instil a sense of Europeanness in the populations of the member states. One example of this effort is the development of the concept of a European citizenship by the Maastricht Treaty (Gutiérrez & Díez Medrano, 2001). The world-wide tendency towards globalization, to which contemporary Europe is also connected, is not incompatible with the recognition of cultural and national diversity. Globalization and diversity are two

movements which can walk together. Instead, what is not compatible, is mundialization with statalism. Globalization does not necessarily imply that processes and people have to be uniformed (Jaume, 2001).

### **1.1 Catalonia and the quest for independence**

There have been relevant historical developments in modern Spain. There has been a traditional lack of congruence between political and economic powers. Not only Catalonia but also the Basque Country, the two Northern peripheral Spanish communities with a powerful ethno-territorial characterisation, have remained as two of the three economically most dynamic territories of Spain, the third being the region of Madrid. This non-congruence has traditionally nourished centrifugal tendencies that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century from strong independent movements in both the Basque Country and Catalonia (Moreno, 2017). During the nineteenth century economic modernisation intensified internal divergences in Spain. As elsewhere in Europe, processes of industrialisation and ideologies of progress served to destabilise existing forms of order and promoted the achievement of new institutional formations (Buzan & Lawson, 2013). Catalonia's industrial take-off speaks for itself. In 1862, 41 per cent of the power produced in Spain for industrial use was located in Catalan territory<sup>34</sup>. The disparity between Catalonia's social structure and that of an impoverished rural Spain was an important factor in the rise of Catalan nationalism (Giner, 1980). These elements fuelled a sense of hopelessness amongst members of the Catalan elite, who put their influence and electoral support behind home-rule parties (Moreno, 2017). The context of the economic crisis initiated in 2007–08 provided the PP Spanish Government with new arguments for policy recentralisation, something which accentuated the climate of acrimony in Catalonia (Moreno, 2017).

## **2. Conflict and Cooperation in EU Policy-Making: The Case of Catalonia**

The participation in the EU's policy process has had an impact on politics in Catalonia, in which the demands for greater representation and participation in the EU's institutions have become an increasingly politically salient issue (Roller, 2008). There are numerous factors which could explain the way in which policy-making process and political structures at the sub-national level in Spain have changed over the last few decades. These factors include the process of rapid economic and social modernisation that Spain has undergone in recent decades, that led to significant changes in the structure and operation of its institutions (Roller, 2008). Other factors include the impact of the democratic transition and subsequent establishment of the State of Autonomies; changes in administrative culture and organisation; and the need to respond to new challenges such as administrative 'openness', with institutions increasingly being subject to public discussion and debate. Yet in many ways, European integration has also affected numerous aspects of Catalonia's political landscape including its domestic politics. European integration has affected relations between the central and Catalan regional governments as well as Catalan party politics (Roller, 2008).

### **2.1 European Integration as a Domestic Issue**

Of all EU member states, Spain has arguably provided one of the most important examples of regional

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<sup>34</sup> The manufacturing industries fuelled the Catalan economy and the sizeable number of immigrants from other neighbouring Spanish regions (Moreno 2001)

decentralisation during the last thirty years (Borrá, Font, & Gomez, 1997); (Heywood, 1999); (Moreno, 2001). In Spain, the multi-track autonomy process envisaged by the 1978 Constitution replaced the highly centralised Franco regime and has ensured that decentralisation has been of an asymmetric nature (Roller, 2008). Undoubtedly, over time devolution has gradually transformed Spain's system of governance including the institutional framework, the nature of policy networks and decision-making processes. Moreover, the complex asymmetrical administrative structure continues to evolve and adjust to changing circumstances as focus has moved away from central government down to the regions and local authorities (Roller, 2008). In terms of external activity, the 1978 Constitution makes it clear that Spain's autonomous communities are excluded from entering into any international obligations, with the state-level enjoying full prerogatives. Even the Statutes of Autonomy of each autonomous community contain little information about the participation of sub-state governments in the formation of central government positions on international matters (Roller, 2008).

Nevertheless, Spain's membership of the EU since 1986 has blurred the distinction between domestic and foreign matters and has challenged the domestic distribution of powers. Areas which previously had been of domestic concern have now been transferred to the supranational level. One example would be EU regional policy (Roller, 2008). Despite the fact that regional economic development is largely a competence exclusively held by the autonomous communities, the central government continues to represent its regions at the supranational level, thereby restricting the ability of the latter to influence the decision-making process directly. In addition, many of the areas transferred to the supranational level have been policy areas reserved to sub-national authorities. This supra-nationalisation of policy-making has meant that sub-national legislative capacities have become more restricted, limited to implementing and applying EU legislation. In this respect, EU policy has had domestic consequences with sub-national authorities limited in their ability to influence EU legislation (Roller, 2008).

Another way in which European integration has become a domestic issue is the inclusion of Article 146 in the Maastricht Treaty (now Article 203) which allows for the participation of sub-state authorities in the Council of Ministers, specifically with regard to competencies directly affecting these entities. This change has encouraged regional elites to mobilize their efforts to both secure the economic and political rewards of European integration and greater participation in EU matters (Hooghe, 1995). For many nationalist Catalans, the very nature of Article 146 (now Article 203) implies institutional and constitutional reform at the state level, including provision for the formal participation of sub-state entities in EU decision-making processes and institutions. Unlike their Austrian, Belgian and German counterparts, the Spanish autonomous communities have no direct representatives or formal incorporation into the Spanish delegation in the EU's Council of Ministers. The consultation principle is constitutionally guaranteed (through the Statutes of Autonomy) by established practice but the issue of direct representation remains vague. Thus, the lack of clear participatory mechanisms within the constitutional framework for regions with high levels of self-government such as Catalonia, continue to aggravate ill-feelings harboured between central and sub-state

authorities on competency allocation and jurisdiction (Roller, 2008). In a survey commissioned by the *Generalitat* in 2002, 61.4 percent of those surveyed agreed with the statement that Catalonia should have direct representation in the EU's Council of Ministers. Furthermore, over half (50.4 percent) expressed their distrust of the central government's willingness or ability to defend Catalonia's institutions and society within the EU (Roller, 2008).

## 2.2 Participation in the EU policy process

Catalan nationalists look at the Belgian model of regional representation in EU institutions as the model to follow. Spanish autonomous communities' participation in the EU decision-making process is limited to a series of policy-specific Sectoral Conferences<sup>35</sup> as well as the *Conferencia para Asuntos Relacionados con la Comunidad Europea* (CARCE<sup>36</sup>), which are Sectoral Conference Relating to EU Affairs. In theory, participation in the Sectoral Conferences should allow regional representatives to decide on the internal negotiating strategy of the Spanish delegation in the Council of Ministers. Furthermore, the CARCE's function is to allow regional representatives to participate in the Spanish government's EU strategy. In practice however, Sectoral Conferences are held when decisions have already been taken or about to be taken in the Council of Ministers, and meetings tend to be of a more informative nature (Roller, 1999). The Sectoral Conference is not limited to EU matters but extends to all areas where the autonomous communities have exclusive or shared competencies. While the CARCE discusses general EU affairs, other areas of competency where all three (EU, national and sub-national) levels of government are involved are allocated to specific Sectoral Conferences for individual policy areas (Roller, 2008). The CARCE was established as a consultative organ between the central government and autonomous communities. Its main consultative tasks lie in the area of information dissemination and the formulation of common autonomous community positions on EU matters. It also agrees co-operative measures to enhance regional participation in the implementation, management and monitoring of EU policies (Roller, 2008). However, the Sectoral Conference primarily serves as a forum where the autonomous communities can adopt common positions on EU matters and where co-operation among the various representatives is crucial (Roller, 2008). Most importantly however, the Sectoral Conference allows for the establishment of bilateral co-operative mechanisms for autonomous community participation in EU matters directly affecting one particular autonomous community. It is this clause of the 1997 legislation which has provided Catalonia with the opportunity to establish an institutionalised bilateral relationship with the central government as an alternative to the standard Sectoral Conference format that groups these two communities with the remainder of Spain's autonomous communities. Another final concession made in 1997 was that Spain's permanent representation in Brussels would include an "autonomous community delegate", whose primary function

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<sup>35</sup> Sectoral conferences constitute a forum of interchange between the CCAAs and the central government on the respective sectorial in European themes. However, in a territorial model characterized for its "verticality without horizontality", these conferences have shown serious political and functional limitations (A. Noferini 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Surged informally at the end of the 80's, the CARCE is the second pillar of the intergovernmental relations in European matters. Although the CARCE is an organ of cooperation between the central state and the CCAA, it is formally tied to the central administration, thus its vertical nature predominates on the horizontal one (A. Noferini 2016).

involves the dissemination of any information relating to Spain's position on EU matters to the different autonomous communities. In general, however, this was seen as another step in consolidating the system of indirect participation already in practice (Roller, 1999).

The only real area where progress has been made is the participation of representatives of the autonomous communities in Council working groups (Albertí & Roig, 2001). In 1997, following pressure from both Catalan and Basque nationalists, the central government agreed to allow the participation of regional representatives, alongside central government representatives, in different EU working groups. The regional representative would not represent the Spanish state but accompany a civil servant from the central government and would support the position agreed on by all seventeen autonomous communities in the relevant Sectoral Conference (Roller, 2008).

In sum, formal representation of the autonomous communities in the process of European integration was only approved after repeated demands by many of the autonomous communities, particularly Catalonia and the Basque Country. Rather than battling out potential conflicts with the central government either through the Senate, bilateral negotiations, the Sectoral Conferences or even the Constitutional Tribunal, many autonomous communities have preferred to compensate this loss by establishing an official or unofficial presence in Brussels. Nevertheless, the real influence of these measures has been questioned (C. Jeffery, 2000) and there is growing widespread concern that Spain's autonomous communities are losing out in the process of European integration (Sloat, 2002). Thus, the issue of regional participation in EU institutions has become increasingly divisive (Roller, 2008). Furthermore, the consolidation of Spain's State of Autonomies, with its unique model of decentralization, has been accompanied by a growing number of politically divisive issues such as reform of Statutes of Autonomy, regional financing, and more recently, regional participation in EU affairs. This has arguably led to a new 'third' phase in centre-periphery relations (Roller, 2008).

If the transition to democracy can be described as the 'first phase' and consolidation of the new constitutional structures as the 'second phase' in Spain's on-going process of devolution, then the more recent period of political discord over the issue of the participation of Spain's autonomous communities in the EU can be described as the 'third phase' (Roller, 2008). The distinct presence of nationalist tensions within Catalonia demonstrate that centre-periphery relations remain a difficult issue within the Spanish state, with no less importance attached to the debate over regional participation in the EU. For most Catalan nationalists, the EU has increasingly become a forum where their interests are not being represented. Demands like the creation of a single electoral constituency for European Parliament elections, the official recognition of representative offices in Brussels or direct access of regional authorities to the European Court of Justice have been ignored, much to the nationalists' frustration (Roller, 2008).

In some ways, the dual processes of regionalisation and European integration have arguably led to a 'symmetrical squeeze on the nation-state' (The Economist, 2003) with politically-inharmonious consequences. Although the process of devolution in Spain has led some to argue that competencies and authority are both shared and re-allocated giving 'rise to joint decision-making rather than the domination of

one level over the other' (Börzel, 1997), the fact that the debate on regional participation in the EU has become an increasingly important domestic issue shows otherwise (Roller, 2008). European integration along with political and administrative devolution has intensified the interdependent interaction of national, sub-national and supranational actors in Spain. As such, Spain's political structure has complicated the efforts of regional elites to influence negotiating stances of central government in EU matters. First, regional desires for greater involvement in European policy-making reflect the asymmetry of the Spanish system as those with more devolved powers (e.g., Catalonia) tend to be more vociferous in their demands. Any negotiated solution to institutionalise regional participation in EU matters will have to reflect these asymmetries. Attempts to institutionalise regional participation have been complicated by a weak Senate, which is in theory the 'Chamber of Territorial Representation' (Roller, 2011). The system of Sectoral Conferences and bilateral negotiations has taken over the functions theoretically belonging to the Senate. (Roller, 2008). The shortcomings of the formalised institutional arrangements have been addressed by the pursuit of informal channels of co-operation. Autonomous communities like Catalonia have opted for bilateral agreements. Because the institutionalisation of intergovernmental relations has been predominantly informal, it is unclear whether they are sufficient to regulate conflict between the centre and regions, especially when the establishment of similar arrangements at EU level have been hindered. The inharmonious dialogue between the central and regional governments reflects the lack of more institutionalised means of co-operation (Roller, 2008).

The so-called 'third phase' also includes increasing calls for independence and for reform of the different Statutes of Autonomy. The Spanish constitutional arrangement provides a model of political decentralisation in which there is no identical model of autonomy for any of the regions. Each of the autonomous regions has chosen its own model with the inclusion or exclusion of competencies that it wishes to control. The process of the decentralisation of the Spanish state has been one of evolution, in which the regions have negotiated and re-negotiated their statutes and competencies with the central government (Roller, 2008). Herein lies the problem, however, as the ongoing process of devolution, the continuing strength of Catalan nationalism, and the more recent dilemma of a collective *versus* individual recognition solution have all collided and have aggravated the problem of regional participation in EU affairs. Thus, the participation of the autonomous communities in EU matters has become an interesting case study for observing how the dual processes of regionalisation or devolution on the one hand and Europeanisation on the other have coincided to impact on political structures and policy-making processes (Roller, 2008).

The Catalan case demonstrates the importance that regional elites have placed on formulating party strategies 'on Europe' as they link the achievement of constitutional change to both domestic devolution and greater EU involvement. In Catalonia, this strategy has been articulated by demands for a 'direct route' to Europe and for greater participation in EU institutions, as well as by the development of an extensive lobbying network in Brussels. However, the Catalan case also demonstrates that greater European integration has not been accompanied by any substantial increase in representation or participatory rights



being given to Spain's autonomous communities. Spanish governments have been reluctant to empower the autonomous communities with resources and more effective institutionalised channels of participation in the EU policy process (Roller, 2008). Although Catalonia, like other European regions, has gradually been able to secure greater informal agenda-setting powers through electoral influence, political leadership, and more focused EU strategies, formal participatory rights have still not been established and this issue has increasingly become a political concern for non-nationalist political parties (Roller, 2008).

One of the key themes of debates on regionalism, minority nationalism and European integration is how the EU affects devolution settlements. Another equally important issue is how European integration has altered territorial relations and domestic practices for the accommodation of national diversity. The case of Catalonia is a clear example of the importance of these issues. Several other, more specific, conclusions can also be drawn from this discussion. First, the devolution process in Spain has now reached a crucial turning point. In the coming years, key decisions will have to be made about the extent to which the process of homogenising competencies among the autonomous communities should continue and about how the political claims of the 'historic nationalities' can be reflected in the asymmetries of the system (Roller, 2008). Added to this is the impact of EU membership, which has also affected the distribution of powers between central and regional governments. Powers shared between central and autonomous community authorities in areas such as agriculture, the environment or transport have been transferred upwards to the EU's policy remit and have generated demands from the autonomous communities for the preservation of their decision-making capacities in transferred areas (Roller, 2008). Furthermore, the Catalan case demonstrates how regional participation in EU affairs has become an important political issue amongst Catalan political parties. Although solutions to the problem vary across parties, the debate around the issue has intensified in recent years. Finally, the issue of direct representation of the autonomous communities in EU institutions has increasingly become a divisive issue amongst Spanish and Catalan political parties (Roller, 2008).

### **3. Catalonia and the 'idea of Europe'**

These are times of major economic and institutional transformation in Europe. It is argued that within the EU there is an emerging system of governance in which there are overlapping spheres of political control at several spatial scales (local, regional, national and European) (Amin & Thrift, 1994); (Anderson, 1996); (Hallin & Malmberg, 1996). Therefore, in recent years there has been an increased emphasis upon the subnational tier. An important landmark in this context was the creation, in March 1994, of the Committee of European Regions (COR). Although the COR has few real powers, it represents a significant theoretical shift of power within the EU because it gives subnational authorities within member states a direct link to EU decision making and policy formulation (Giordano & Roller, 2002). Another important point is that within and between member states of the EU, the strength of sub-nationalism varies considerably, which means that the impact of trends towards greater regionalization is very uneven across the EU (Keating, 1996). Consequently, Keating argues that the principle of a 'Europe of the Regions' is not to be the basis for a new European political order. Instead, he argues that what is emerging within Europe is a complex

political order in which European politics is becoming more regionalized; regional politics is increasingly Europeanized; and national politics is both Europeanized and regionalized (Keating & Hooghe, 1995). However, such concepts as the 'Europe of the Regions' are particularly important because they have helped to give legitimacy to the demands and claims of several regionalist political parties, which have risen in importance in recent years. Indeed, it seems likely that the trend will be for such self-sustaining regions to pursue even more vehemently the 'Europe of the regions' ideal in the context of further European integration (Giordano, 2001).

Therefore, exploring the strategies and ways in which such regionalist political parties aim to develop linkages with key economic, political, and civic institutions at the European level is vital in order to understand the power of contemporary regionalism within Europe (Giordano, 2001); (Keating, 1996); The process of European integration is seen by regionalist/nationalist movements as a means of undermining the structure and functions of the national state. In essence, as functions are transferred to the European level and as the national state undergoes a fundamental transformation as a result of Europeanization and regionalization, nationalist movements and parties increasingly support the process of European integration. Accordingly, they seek to enhance their roles and position within its institutional framework. Moreover, in recent years, subnational entities as well as nationalist political parties have increasingly been able to further their demands within the international arena and to attract support for their causes both at home and abroad (Keating, 1997a); (Keating, 1997b).

In Catalonia, for Catalan nationalist parties the process of 'Europeanization' has been transformed into a multiple strategy incorporating an intense process of nation building together with a political approach aimed at reforming policy-making mechanisms at both the Spanish and European levels (Roller, 1999). This strategy also includes the pursuit of the legal/constitutional recognition of the pluri-national and multilingual composition of both the Spanish state and the European Union. The Catalan parties' strategies reflect both a concerted effort to adapt to the challenges posed by the process of European integration and, for nationalist parties in particular, a desire to pursue a non-territorial form of public recognition in a new political arena in an attempt to circumvent national state governments. In addition, for Catalan parties this has been a relatively painless adaptation as Catalonia's historic economic and cultural ties with the rest of Europe have provided a familiar context within which they can promote Catalan political and economic interests (Giordano & Roller, 2002). For Catalan nationalist parties, therefore, their pro-Europeanism is a present-day ideological substitute for the traditional objectives of modernizing and transforming the Spanish state inherent in Catalan nationalist discourse. In traditional Catalan nationalist discourse, from the 19th century onwards, this progressive vision of Europe was in sharp contrast to the backwardness and inefficiency of the Spanish state. The 'idea of Europe' is employed differently, often in competing ways, in the strategies and discourses of the major Catalan political parties (Giordano & Roller, 2002). Until the mid-1990s, most Catalan parties agreed that Europe was a 'good thing' for Catalonia but were unable to go beyond rhetorical discourse. Today's Catalan parties have concrete proposals for Catalan

participation in the process of European integration. Although there is generalized consensus as to the importance of Europe to the consolidation of the State of the Autonomies and the economic and political future of Spain and Catalonia, the strategies among Catalan parties vary extensively. The main difference lies in the extent to which Europe is employed to further nationalist objectives. Parties such as ERC view Europe as the place where Catalonia can secure its independence. CiU, however, prefers to view Europe as a place where state sovereignty can be bypassed in favour of the subnational and supranational levels. For parties such as the PSC and the PP, Europe is seen as offering various challenges and opportunities for both Spain and Catalonia to benefit politically and economically. Whatever the varying motivations, it is clear that although pro-Europeanism remains a unifying element among Catalonia's political parties, the individual strategies and motivations differ quite notably (Giordano & Roller, 2002).

The positive view of Europe, however, has shifted considerably in recent years. Many nationalists argue that the process of European integration has not advanced enough to benefit Catalonia. It is clear that the mechanisms established during the 1990s to promote greater Catalan participation in the process of European integration – i.e. participation in the Committee of the Regions, representation in Brussels, and a more concerted EU strategy on behalf of the Generalitat – have had mixed results (Roller, 1999).

Undoubtedly, the processes of European integration have had, and continue to have, an important influence upon the changing nature of the national state as well as sub-nationalism within the EU. The emergence of the much-heralded 'Europe of the Regions' is yet to fully materialize, and indeed it remains doubtful if it ever will. Already, however, it is apparent that the shift towards a greater degree of sub-nationalism in the EU has had a significant impact upon the nature of politics at the regional level (Giordano & Roller, 2002).

### **3.1 Europeanisation and Catalonia's in(ter)dependence**

Interdependence on the Old Continent goes beyond internal boundary-building and the establishment of self-centred compartments of governance. Europeanisation relates to the economic, political and social domains in countries sharing a common heritage and embracing egalitarian values of democracy and human rights (Moreno, 2017). Nevertheless, the concept is polysemic and subject to various degrees of understanding and interpretation. Europeanisation is rather a dynamic idea expressed in the erosion of state sovereignty and the gradual development of common institutions in Europe (for example, the Schengen Agreement, the Court of Justice and the euro) on the one hand, and the dissemination of policy paradigms, enhancement of social learning and collective mobilisation on the other. Europeanisation can also be regarded as a process which aims at making territorial subsidiarity consistent with democratic home rule within European framework legislation and continental institutions (Moreno, 2017). The two main areas of analysis posed in this issue are: the constitutional dimensions of independence and partnership, given the intersecting legal regimes involved; and the power dimensions of independence given entanglement in a set of external relationships. Moreno analyses how the global nature of political life forces a reconsideration of core constitutional concepts, by taking into account the top-down and bottom-up implications of the observable trends of supranationalisation and decentralisation in Europe. In particular, the case study of Catalonia's in(ter)dependence

serves the purpose of highlighting the apparent contradiction of these two dichotomous political processes, which are to have long-term effects on the restructuring of European politics. After the financial crisis which was unleashed in 2007/08, serious questions have been raised about the capacity of formally independent states to carry out sovereign economic policies in the context of globalisation. In parallel to these developments, the process of Europeanisation brought to the fore the interdependence of EU economies and the need to work together in order to preserve the European social model (Moreno, 2017).

Moreno focuses on the challenges of interdependence that European subsidiarity, multi-level governance and the preservation of the European Social Model (ESM) imply for stateless nations like Catalonia. Despite the diversity of institutional forms and manifestations, the ESM is an 'umbrella' conception based upon a project of collective solidarity and resulting from contemporary patterns of social conflict and cooperation on the Old Continent (Moreno, 2017). There is a widespread belief that a distinct European social model provides a collective unity and identity for most EU countries. As a common strategic goal, the European social model aims at securing sustainable economic growth together with the preservation of social cohesion (Scharpf, 2002); (Adnett & Hardy, 2005); (Jepsen & Amparo Serrano, 2005); (Giddens, 2006).

Moreno analyses both the EU and Spanish frameworks. By reviewing concepts such as Europeanisation and decentralisation, his article aims at elaborating on one of the central problems raised of this issue: the meaning of independence in the context of intersecting legal regimes, or what it means to be 'independent' in a deeply entangled global economy and its political implications, focusing on the case observed in Catalonia (Moreno, 2017). His concluding remarks reflect on how 'cosmopolitan localism' can optimise both independence and interdependence in a global context. The idea of 'cosmopolitan localism' mainly concerns medium-sized polities. It can be detected in minority nations (e.g. Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland), in small nation-states, as well as in regions and metropolitan areas (e.g. Brussels, Berlin, London, Milan) (Moreno, 2017). There is a common institutional tie inherent in the process of Europeanisation. The majority of EU peoples have internalised European institutions, albeit rather loosely and gradually. The European Court of Justice or the Schengen Agreement can be regarded as institutional steps advancing towards the idea of European supra-nationalisation. Even areas such as those concerning social policy and welfare development – the traditional domain of national intervention – are viewed from a supranational perspective in accordance with the European Social Model (Moreno, 2000). Thus, 'cosmopolitan localism' can be regarded as a combination that is reflected in societal interests aimed at developing a sense of local community and in participating simultaneously in the international context. It further relates to power relations and competing legitimacies at the various local, national, regional and international levels, and can be regarded as a facilitator in the construction of 'independence' in practice. Along these lines, Catalonia can be seen as a stateless nation and a meso-community, which encapsulates the communion between the particular and the general based upon a strong collective identity (Moreno, 2017).

### 3.2 Processes of Europeanisation and decentralisation

In a broad sense, Europeanisation refers to the process of institutional system-building among EU Member States as well as the practice of framing shared problems and assumptions, and the diffusion of procedures and policy paradigms. As a supra-state political community, the European Union is a compound of policy processes, and Europeanisation implies that national, regional and local policies are to be partly shaped by considerations that go beyond the centrality of the Member States (Moreno, 2017). Developments around the turn of the millennium, have dramatically exposed the limitations of the nation state as a sovereign actor in global economics. Within the EU, the ongoing rescaling of nation-state structures and political organisation is in line with Europe's principle of territorial subsidiarity<sup>37</sup>. Processes concerning the 'unbundling of territoriality' are having a direct impact on citizens' living standards and expectations (Hooghe & Marks, 2001); (Kazepov, 2008). This crucial tenet of Europeanisation establishes that policy decision-making should be democratically located at the level closest to the citizen. In other words, the purpose of subsidiarity is to limit the power of central authorities by assuming the criteria of 'proximity' and 'proportionality' (Moreno, 2017). Furthermore, subsidiarity encourages co-ordination to manage growing interdependencies. Political communities are constituted by individuals ruled and represented by the structures of a political system, whether supranational, national or sub-national (sub-state) (Easton, 1965). Political interdependence concords with the notion of multi-level citizenship, which can be conceptualised as a compound of collective attachments favouring both supranational legitimacy and sub-state democratic accountability in the implementation of public policies (Berg, 2007). Autonomy, devolution, and subsidiarity seek to accommodate institutional responses to the *stimuli* of the diversity or plurality of the polities involved. In plural Spain, political communities, despite their differences in institutional arrangements and policy preferences for autonomy, they all embraced interdependencies and expressed a common aspiration to enhance 'bottom up' Europeanisation (Moreno, 2017).

In Catalonia, claims to 'top down' territorial subsidiarisation of public policies have been put forward not only by nationalists, but also by federalists and other autonomists. There has been a long-term tradition in Catalan politics of requesting further home rule while participating actively in international trade and relations, according to the idea of 'cosmopolitan localism'. Catalan meso-level entrepreneurs, social leaders and local intelligentsias have often adopted many of the initiatives and roles once reserved for 'enlightened' central elites who in the past held the reins of state power (Moreno, 2017). Sub-state autonomous political communities in the EU enjoy economic and political security offered by supranational EU institutions, in a post-sovereignty era of progressive trans-nationalisation and increasing interdependence (Keating, 2001); (Moreno & McEwen, 2005). Territorial subsidiarity goes hand in hand with the second guiding principle of Europeanisation: democratic accountability. Democratic participation and citizens' involvement in public life is quintessential to the very preservation of the European Social Model (ESM). Multi-level citizenship is

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<sup>37</sup> Albeit in a rather piecemeal manner, the Lisbon Treaty came to recognise that subsidiarity cannot be exhausted by reflecting merely on relations between Members' state and union institutions and that democratic accountability must operate at many levels in the EU (MacCormick 1997; Edward and Bengoetxea 2011).

set to incorporate not only multiple memberships to European nations (state or stateless) and regions and localities, but also to integrate a common baseline that conforms to the axiological pattern of the ESM. Above other considerations, the ESM appears to be a common value-system, which makes transnational solidarity possible (Gould, 2007). Convergence and political interdependence within the EU is not an incentive for internal boundary-building and the establishment of self-centred compartments of governance (Moreno, 2017). Following on the subsidiarity rationale, it is counterproductive to impede or curtail self-government in political communities such as Catalonia. But it is also unrealistic not to envisage an interdependent Europe without redistribution of income transfers between territories and multi-level citizenship (Ferrera, 2008). There are no consistent empirical findings that lend support to the proposed 'positive sum' arrangement by which the allocation of the functions of redistribution should be allocated to the macro levels (European, state) and those concerning the policy provision to the micro levels (regional, local) (Moreno, 2017). For meso-communities in decentralised countries, such as Catalonia, the form of devolution is an important area of analysis in assessing policy outcomes. Allegations by Catalan nationalists that 'Spain robs us' channelled the complaint that Catalonia contributes 'disproportionately' to the general tax revenue and receives much less from the central treasury. It also claims that both tax collection and expenditure should be comprehensively decentralised as happens in the Basque Country and Navarre (Moreno, 2017). The fact that the Basque Country and Navarre (the autonomous regions) do not contribute to the vertical equalisation scheme to provide equal public services all over Spain creates comparative grievance, particularly in Catalonia (Colino, 2012).

In Spain, autonomy in public expenditure is viewed as part and parcel of political autonomy by both richer and poorer meso-communities. Autonomy is also a sensitive political issue in the articulation of the redistribution and transfer of funds from the former to the latter. As a constitutional principle, the ultimate goal of equalisation concerns the attainment of a common level of basic services, the procurement of citizenship rights, and an adequate distribution of the financial burdens. Most equalisation systems seek to redistribute fairly the available general financial resources, something which in the case of Catalonia and Spain has created no small amount of antagonism and confrontation (Moreno, 2017). As elsewhere, Europeanisation and decentralisation interact with each other in Spain on matters involving variables degrees of independence and interdependence in political decision-making. Policy choices are increasingly shaped by externalities generated globally. Concerning Catalonia, most questions at stake regarding in(ter)dependence relate to the degree of self-rule and shared rule. Late political mobilisation by Catalan nationalists has challenged processes of territorial rescaling, claiming the right of Catalonia to secede from the rest of Spain. Future developments will have consequences for territorial politics, particularly as regards the level of Catalonia's self-government and co-decision with Spanish and European institutions to implement policies and political arrangements. The meaning of independence has developed in the context of Catalonia and it is related to the challenges of Europeanisation and decentralisation (Moreno, 2017).

### **3.3 Consolidating ‘cosmopolitan localism’?**

Independence and interdependence align themselves with the notions of self-rule and shared rule which combine in the various types of federal-like systems around the world (Moreno & Colino, 2010). Far from being coherent and uniform, societies not only exhibit diversity but also develop mutually interdependent and interacting structures and cleavages. Parties have major impacts on intergovernmental relations and on the representation of territories in the state-wide and EU institutions. In Spain, state-wide parties co-exist with Catalonia-based parties at the sub-state level, and they also participate actively at EU levels. As could not be otherwise, inter-party competition is an important factor shaping political outcomes and policy decisions at the various intergovernmental instances where decisions are negotiated (Moreno, 2017). Spain and Europe face a variety of challenges regarding how to integrate, rather than to assimilate, existing political communities with collective identities forged at the various levels of political legitimacy. If achieved by degrees of independence and interdependence, integration would avoid being seen as a superimposition upon the democratic interaction of communities with long-standing historical trajectories. As a European sub-state ‘partner region,’ or region with legislative powers, Catalonia furnishes inputs for the articulation of territorial subsidiarity and democratic accountability, the two principles upon which further Europeanisation rests. It also supports actively the preservation of the European Social Model with an active concern for the maintenance of welfare state institutions (Moreno, 2017). The supra-state institutional framework provided by the European Union has certainly reinforced sub-state identities. Decentralisation has become a major embedding factor in contemporary political life in Europe. The quest of meso-communities, such as Catalonia, to run their own affairs and to maximise their potentialities outside the *dirigiste* control of central state institutions is an observable trend on the Old Continent. The intensification of sub-state territorial identities is deeply associated with powerful material and symbolic referents to the past. In fact, the processes of bottom-up Europeanisation and top-down decentralisation have allowed a considerable extension of a type of European ‘cosmopolitan localism’, which is reflected in two societal interests: one aimed at developing a sense of local community, and the other one geared at participating simultaneously in the international context. There is, thus, a growing adjustment between the particular and the general (Moreno, 2017).

### **4. Europeanization and Secession**

The break-up of states has international implications and it represents concern for the European Union (EU), which has sought to influence secession outcomes in various instances. It has exerted pressure through measures ranging from diplomacy, enlargement conditionality, targeted sanctions, arms embargos and peacekeeping missions (Coppieters, 2010).

In European member states, independence advocates may need to convincingly argue that their new state will easily join international organizations, something that fundamentally affects economic prosperity and security (Tierney, 2013). Indeed, many have observed that the prospect that a new state could continue to be part of the EU’s common market and seek protection under its latent security umbrella appeared to reduce

the costs and risks of separation (Keating, 1998); (McGarry, 2001); (Hepburn, 2010). Minority nationalists have long used European integration as a political resource ‘grafted onto their political discourse’ to bolster demands for autonomy (Lynch, 1996); (Hepburn, 2010). The EU may also affect secession processes in less direct ways. The European sovereign debt crisis, for instance, bolstered economic arguments for secession in Catalonia and thereby helped turn the predominantly autonomist Catalan nationalist movement into a secessionist one (Guibernau, 2013); (Blas, 2013); (Serrano, 2013). Others expect ‘contagion effects’, or independence for one stateless nation in Europe to encourage other highly mobilized movements to also pursue independence (Tierney, 2013).

Together, these arguments suggest that the EU, either as an actor or as a politico-institutional context, may play a role in the politics of secession in Europe. As such, these arguments can be considered to be about “Europeanization”, or the ways in which European integration affects politics, policies and institutions within European states (Bourne, 2014). Spain is a case, as Guibernau puts it, where a form of ‘emancipatory nationalism’ has emerged, which is a ‘democratic type of nationalism [...] defending the nation’s right to decide upon its political future by democratic means’ (Guibernau, 2013). An advantage of focusing on discourse and political and argumentative strategies is that it acknowledges the importance of public deliberation for secession processes within the EU. Within EU member states, impetus for the most significant contemporary independence movements is channelled through democratic processes, especially the electoral success of minority nationalist parties and campaigns for independence referenda.

Consequently, the public sphere, and democratic process of deliberation therein, have become important fora in which secession outcomes are negotiated (Bourne, 2014). Analysis of secessionist discourse, understood as ‘ways of representing aspects of the world which can generally be identified with different positions or perspectives of different groups of social actors’ can contribute to causal explanations of political outcomes insofar as discourse provides reasons for action (Bourne, 2014).

EU treaties do not regulate the formation of new states, even if they may affect what happens after a new state is born (Tierney, 2013); (Caplan, 2005). As such, research strategies associated with a bottom-up (rather than a top-down) Europeanization approach are more appropriate (Lynggaard, 2011). A bottom-up approach focuses on changes that may occur without “misfit” or “pressure to adapt” to Europe, such as how domestic agents may influence EU institutions or policies, or use EU discourse strategically to bring about preferred domestic changes (Lynggaard, 2011).

During empirical research on discourses and strategies employed by pro and anti-independence movements in Spain, four key concepts linked to Europeanization research—opportunity structures, vertical and horizontal Europeanization, and “usages of Europe”—emerged as relevant for addressing the question of how the EU affects contemporary secessionist politics within member states. The most fundamental of these concepts is that of “opportunity structure” (Gamson & Meyer, 1996); (Kriesi, 2007). It focuses on the effect of exogenous factors—i.e. the social, political or institutional environment in which groups operate—on the activities and organization of collective actors. Change in the external environment can alter the



“structure of opportunity” for political action by enhancing or inhibiting prospects for mobilization, affecting the types of claims advanced or strategies pursued and the likely influence of collective actors (Bourne, 2014). In order to understand how European integration affects secessionist politics within EU member states the following research question can be posed: “to what extent is European integration an opportunity or a constraint for contemporary secessionist movements and their opponents?”. EU, like other phenomena external to political movements, may provide opportunities and constraints which influence the conduct and success of these movements (Bourne, 2014).

The concept of “vertical Europeanization” focuses on institutional opportunity structures and the implications of the EU’s multi-level polity for mobilization and alliance building between domestic and extra-state actors. Vertical Europeanization involves ‘communicative linkages between the national and the European level’ (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003). In top-down vertical Europeanization, ‘European actors intervene in national public debates in the name of European regulations and common interests’. In the bottom-up variant, ‘national actors address European actors and/or make claims on European issues’ (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003).

A role for the EU as an actor in domestic secession processes—and thus a rationale for ‘top-down’ vertical Europeanization—is bolstered by new states’ need to be recognized by existing states to obtain the privileges the international community accords with statehood. In theory, EU co-ordination on recognition gives it a chance to influence the terms of secession (Caplan, 2005). Institutional rules empowering a variety of European actors in decisions about the enlargement of the EU—especially the European Commission and the European Parliament, and national governments—make these actors authoritative arbiters in efforts to determine whether or not the EU will, in fact, facilitate independence. Where EU membership is raised as an issue in independence debates, as occurred in Catalonia, the views of actors likely to have a say in future accession processes may have significant implications also on the choice of voters (Bourne, 2014).

In secession processes, domestic actors may thus have incentives to develop such “bottom up” vertical Europeanization strategies to try to influence the views of European actors. Furthermore, domestic actors on either side of secession debates may have an incentive to try to reinforce or reconstruct what (Coppieters, 2010) refers to as a developing EU “strategic culture” on secession. He argues that, despite the continuing importance of an individual state’s experiences and priorities in its decisions on whether to recognize new states, and despite the many differences that emerge among member states when new states ask for recognition, the EU has developed a “strategic culture” on secession. This is characterized by preferences for regional self- government models respecting territorial integrity, for reformist and democratic secessionist movements (Coppieters, 2010). Arguments focusing on the impact of discursive opportunity structures can be developed further with reference to theoretical work on “usages of Europe” (Woll & Jacquot, 2010) and horizontal Europeanization (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003); (Koopmans & Statham, 2010). The concept of “usages of Europe” asserts that the ‘EU can become a vector of change by providing new resources, references and policy frames, which national actors use strategically’ (Koopmans & Statham, 2010). For

instance, is helpful for understanding forms of strategic usage of Europe which took the form of what (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003) and (Koopmans & Statham, 2010) define as horizontal Europeanization, which involves ‘communicative linkages between different European countries’ (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003). The authors also describe a ‘strong variant’ of horizontal Europeanization which occurs when ‘actors from one country explicitly address or refer to actors or policies in another European country’ (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

#### **4.1 Lobbying on independence in Europe**

Longstanding experience of mobilization in the EU’s multi-level polity and the existence of organizational infrastructure and expertise in Catalonia permitted pro-independence movements to develop bottom-up lobbying strategies, principally focusing on European actors, to respond to difficulties in their domestic campaigns. This extensive externalization strategies, used by government and civil society actors, included mobilization of transnational networks and attempts to exploit EU treaty provisions permitting civil society actors to petition EU authorities (Bourne, 2014). The Catalan government mobilized dozens of its commercial and diplomatic offices abroad and its secretariat for foreign and European affairs to implement such strategy (Bourne, 2014). Before the 2013 independence referendum, Catalan ex-President Artur Mas exploited the symbolic potential of various visits to EU institutions (Ríos, 2013); (Noguer, 2013a) and foreign states, to allude to the goal of statehood, if not to directly search for supporters. In addition to a media campaign, the Catalan government created an “amateur” diplomatic service, involving various municipal governments and private organizations, to make the case for Catalan independence abroad (Noguer, 2013b). During the last secession crisis in Catalonia, Catalan ex-President Puidgemont escaped to Brussels asking for protection by Europe, because, according to him, Brussels is the capital of Europe, and Catalan issue is a European issue (BBC news, 2017). Pro-independence civil society organizations, especially the high profile *Assemblea Nacional Catalana* (Catalan National Assembly, ANC), also pursued externalization strategies. The ANC organized mass pro-independence demonstrations which explicitly pursued the goal of attracting wide international press attention. The Spanish government used a broad strategy to counter Catalan efforts to externalize independence debates (Roger, 2013b).

#### **4.2 The European dimension in in domestic secession debates**

Catalan nationalist parties unambiguously sought to ‘construct Catalonia as a new state within the European framework’ (Parliament, 2013). In an appeal to the “democratic principles” of the EU, Catalan pro-independence campaigners argued that the EU could not deny Catalans their status as EU citizens because they already formed part of the EU, and the EU would not hesitate to accept Catalonia as a member given its economic strength. EU institutional representatives nevertheless contradicted the assumption that states seceding from existing members would automatically become EU members (Bourne, 2014).

As an indication of the complexity of Europeanization effects on the politics of secession within EU member states, analysis of independence debates in Spain suggest that two of the most prominent arguments employed in political discourses drew on “images of Europe” and involved “lesson drawing” from other

European states. Both pro-independence and anti-independence advocates used negative experiences of the economic crisis in Europe to bolster arguments for their cause. Pro-independence advocates linked the depth of economic problems in their territory to central government handling of the crisis and argued that an independent Catalan state would have responded better. Oriol Junqueras, leader of the Catalan nationalist party Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia) claimed ‘the only way out of the economic situation for Catalonia is for the community to have a state’ (Roger, 2013a). Anti-independence advocates also appealed to the crisis context. Leaders of the anti-independence Partido Popular emphasized the inappropriateness of launching an independence process during such a severe economic crisis (Garea, 2012) while expressing the fear that political instability and tensions created by independence debates could deepen the crisis (Manetto, 2013); (Noguer, 2012).

The analysis of statements by pro-independence campaigners in Catalonia referring to actors or policies in other countries (horizontal Europeanization) suggests that Europe can be used discursively to perform at least six different functions: portray opponents in a negative light by comparing them with an exemplary other (for example, pro-Catalan independence campaigners frequently contrasted what they saw as the UK government’s willingness to negotiate, to tolerate political projects it disagreed with, and its pragmatic constitutional approach with the purportedly undemocratic “obstructionism” of the Spanish government); portray the speaker’s movement in a positive light by comparing themselves with an exemplary other; mobilize participants in the speaker’s movement by relating successes of similar movements to their own experiences; warn opponents of undesirable but possible future scenarios (like Puidgemont did by pre-announcing a unilateral declaration of independence that he later actually made); underline the viability of Catalan independent state; undermine the validity of opponent’s arguments (Bourne, 2014).

Efforts by pro-independence campaigners to find allies that could help them to contest the construction of EU rules on enlargement as an obstacle to immediate EU membership, or in favour of the Catalan “democratic choice” rationales for secession, produced meagre results. Leading statesmen emphasized the internal nature of independence issues the anti-independence campaign led by the central government, was able to mobilize the diplomatic machinery of the state to apply pressure on states indicating support for Catalan independence (Bourne, 2014). In practice, possibilities for lobbying and alliance formation beyond the state provided by the EU’s multi-level polity did not alter the structure of opportunity for pro-independence campaigners. Similarly, intervention by European actors in secession debates ‘in the name of European regulations and common interests’ (Koopmans & Erbe, 2003) became a considerable constraint for secession movements because European leaders refused to reassure voters that membership of the EU, an organization posited by pro-independence campaigners as central to future prosperity, would be timely and favourable (Bourne, 2014).

## **5. What about future prospects?**

The possibility that new states might face several years of limbo between independence and EU accession led to the identification of additional problems. Catalonia’s euro membership might be compromised (El

País, 2012); (Abellán, 2013). Problems raised in debates included the possibility that Catalonia might have to reintroduce customs posts when forced to leave the Schengen Area and lose access to EU cohesion funding, while its citizens might lose the automatic right to move freely to other EU countries (Abellán, 2013); (Roger & Pérez, 2013). Pardos-Prado claims that Catalonia now faces three potential ways to redefine its relationship with Spain, and to find a long-term solution to the conflict (Pardos-Prado, 2017).

*- Scenario 1: Spain centralizes power*

When Spanish Partido Popular announced it would take back control of the regional government, police, bureaucracy and public broadcasters, we learned that recentralization would be a serious option for the first time in decades. Will Spain's legalistic approach succeed? That depends on why secessionism has increased so much in Catalonia. Spanish political elites believe that support is temporary and volatile. Yet 48 percent of the region voted for secessionist parties in the last regional election in December. Madrid believes that sentiment doesn't go deep. Rather, this theory asserts, that opportunistic Catalan elites mobilized popular discontent that was simmering because of the 2008 global economic crisis and corruption scandals affecting politicians linked to the central government and even the monarchy. If that's the situation, the best response would be to wait for sentiment to calm down and to crack down on the parties and associations that started the trouble by taking back control of their finances, imprisoning secessionist leaders and tying up elected officials in court. In fact, officials in Madrid think that this strategy proved successful in containing Basque nationalism two decades ago (rather than negotiating a political agreement, Madrid decided to illegalize Basque political parties) allegedly linked with terrorism and to prosecute their leaders. Despite the fact that Catalans have shown no violent behaviour, the cost of physically repressing peaceful secessionist voters and incarcerating politicians and civic leaders seems to be minimal for the central government. Spanish public opinion agrees to a large extent with this strategy, and European Commission support for the Spanish government has been unequivocal.

But this approach could be dangerously misguided. Support for independence is high across the socioeconomic continuum, which makes it more difficult to contain or co-opt. There are also signs of generational replacement in favour of stable support for independence among young and middle-aged voters. A legal crackdown could make the situation worse. Political science research has found that when a repressive state takes away citizens' ability to choose their own government, those citizens' sense of humiliation and grievance can entrench the conflict and even degenerate into violence (Pardos-Prado, 2017).

*- Scenario 2: Further decentralization*

A second option would be for Spain to decentralize even further. But that's unlikely for two reasons: Catalan distrust and lack of Spanish political support for real decentralization. Research shows that decentralization does not necessarily appease secessionist tendencies if regional parties are already strong. Moreover, once a federal conflict has escalated to this point, secessionists tend to see decentralization as "too little, too late". Nor are many Catalans likely to trust such promises. In 2005, 89 percent of Catalonia's parliament voted for a decentralisation proposal that enabled Catalonia to collect taxes directly, and recognized Catalonia as a

nation. Despite promises to the contrary, the Spanish socialist government at the time watered down the proposal in the Spanish Parliament. Once the less ambitious new statute on Catalan autonomy was signed off and ratified in a popular referendum in 2006, Spain's Conservative Party challenged the deal, leading the Constitutional Court to declare some principles of the law unconstitutional in 2010. Those betrayals led many Catalans to believe that Spain couldn't be relied upon to decentralize — and many turned their hopes instead toward full independence. Such distrust means that Catalonia's independence movement doesn't consider decentralization proposals credible. The most important step — and one that Catalans have been demanding for years — would require serious reforms in Spain's system of fiscal management. While each region has a great deal of responsibility for managing public services, regions have limited powers to raise and handle tax revenue. Comparative research shows that this mismatch is correlated with deficits, inflation and poor economic performance. While other countries see this mismatch, the Spanish one is more extreme. The imbalance between the services that Spanish regions have to manage and the tax revenue that they can actually handle on their own is 30 percent higher than states and regions in other decentralized countries such as Germany, Switzerland, the United States and Canada. This mismatch is one of Catalonia's grievances, giving regional elites credible reasons to blame the central government for failing to allocate resources better across regions. But Spain is unlikely to propose such reforms. Only very deep political decentralization, in which regions can shape national policy, is effective to improve governance. Unfortunately, Spain scores relatively low in that kind of power, due to a powerless Senate and an electoral system that favours national majorities. A more decentralized fiscal federal arrangement, a reform of the Senate and the electoral system are not in the agenda of any national party. The only decentralization formulas that are known to be effective for this kind of conflict are perhaps too deep to be realistic (Pardos-Prado, 2017).

### *- Scenario 3: Legal referendum*

The imposition of direct rule and the lack of international recognition make unilateral independence an unrealistic scenario. But Catalonia might continue to seek another option: a legally binding referendum, like Scotland in 2014 and Quebec in 1995. In a survey this year, 72% of Catalans supported this option. Would Spain agree to recognize such a referendum? Doing so would require a radical change of attitude within the central government and constitutional reform. A majority of Spanish citizens reject the idea of a referendum. Holding an independence referendum would be extremely complicated and may only be possible with international mediation. All parties would have to debate and agree what would establish a valid outcome. Requiring only that the independence faction achieve a 60 percent majority — meaning that if 57 percent voted for independence, Catalonia would remain part of Spain — could exacerbate the feelings of grievance that led to the current crisis (Pardos-Prado, 2017).

If none of the previous scenarios generates enough support in the upcoming regional elections, the last option for Catalonia will unfortunately be deadlock and social chaos. Allowing bloodshed in one of the wealthiest regions in 21st-century Europe would mean a dramatic political failure. To avoid that result,

discussion of realistic ways forward needs to start before it is too late (Pardos-Prado, 2017).

Immediately after the Catalan unilateral declaration of independence, thousands of companies moved their corporate bases out of Catalonia amid uncertainty over the region's political future and to the lack of knowledge about fiscal consequences, legal framework, possible new laws, economic impact, currency, European Union implications. The full impact on the Spanish economic is far from determined. The referendum for independence in October triggered doubt over the future of Catalonia. "The relevant aspect of the registered office's change is not so much the direct impact (which does not happen if production is not transferred), but it is an indicator of the extreme uncertainty in the region, says María Jesús Fernández<sup>38</sup>. He sustains that this uncertainty could be having an effect on productive investment too. Fernandez says "it's not dramatic, nor it was expected, but it is a change" (Garijo, 2017).

The latest political event in Spain, the election of the new socialist president, Pedro Sánchez, poses interrogatives on a possible change of attitude by the central government toward Catalonia. He is explicitly against an eventual secession of this region from Spain (García De Blas, 2017), but he also claimed that Catalonia is a nation, like Spain is a nation. And he declared to feel really identified with the federalist proposal made by the PSC<sup>39</sup> in Catalonia (Ríos, 2017a). He is compromised with the Spanish pluri-nationality. His party, the PSOE, is in favour of a constitutional reform, which is one of the measures of the Declaration of Barcelona which includes several proposals in order to de-block the Catalan situation and face independentism (Ríos, 2017b). Commenting on the events occurred in Catalonia of the imprisonment of some Catalan political exponents, he asserted that the solution should be political, not penal (Vilaseró, 2017). Immediately after the election, Sánchez has compromised himself to "re-establish the broken bridges" in his program of stability, and also to lay the foundations for a dialogue between the central government and Catalonia, without alimending "excluding rhetoric". He offered dialogue and distension to tackle the territorial crisis (Merino, 2018).

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<sup>38</sup> A senior economist at Funcas, a Spanish think tank dedicated to economic research

<sup>39</sup> "Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya", Catalan socialist

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## Sommario

### Capitolo I

In passato, quando gli stati non appartenevano ad un ordine istituzionale superiore come quello europeo, le economie nazionali tendevano ad essere più auto-centrate. In uno stesso territorio, le regioni industrializzate tenevano relazioni pacifiche con quelle meno avanzate, perché le consideravano importanti bacini di mercato. Quando gli stati, attraverso l'integrazione europea, si sono gradualmente decentralizzati a favore delle istituzioni sovranazionali, gli equilibri reggenti sono cambiati. La globalizzazione economica ha creato maggiori opportunità anche per entità minori come le regioni, le quali iniziano a confrontarsi con un mercato che supera i confini nazionali e sono chiamate a competere col resto del mondo. Tale fenomeno ha contribuito a rafforzare le già presenti istanze autonomistiche in Catalogna e non solo. Le regioni economicamente forti si vedono deprivate dei frutti del proprio lavoro, a causa dei trasferimenti fiscali che sono obbligate a compiere in nome di principi di eguaglianza e solidarietà, e si vedono propense a sfruttare gli incentivi delle piccole economie che si aprono ai mercati internazionali. La Catalogna, con un PIL di 230 miliardi di euro, trasferisce a Madrid dal 5% al 7% di ciò che produce.

Un'analisi dell'attuale conflitto catalano è imprescindibile dalla comprensione di alcuni passaggi storici e processi istituzionali che sono culminati negli eventi attuali. La storia catalana è segnata dal perenne conflitto tra una monarchia centralista e una regione in lotta per una maggiore autonomia. La storia ha visto alternarsi periodi di predominazione monarchica ad altri di maggior libertà per le istituzioni regionali, accompagnati da espansione economica per la regione. Una data considerata cruciale nella storia catalana è il 1714, anno della Guerra di Successione culminata nella sconfitta di Barcellona e l'abolizione delle istituzioni regionali. Questo momento segnava l'irreversibile subordinazione della Catalogna al potere della monarchia, l'imposizione del controllo centrale e la perdita di autonomia. La predominanza dinastica di Madrid creò un ambiente favorevole all'emergenza del nazionalismo catalano, che auspicava una riforma delle istituzioni autonomiste e un cambio politico in direzione di una più ampia auto-organizzazione per la Catalogna. La scena politica cambiò con le elezioni municipali del 1901, in cui i partiti dinastici si videro messi all'angolo dalla "Liga Regionalista" e dai Repubblicani che emergevano come forze dominanti. Questi tentarono di ricostruire la personalità politica catalana e di recuperare l'autodeterminazione, creando nuove organizzazioni che resero possibili considerevoli progressi nella pubblica amministrazione regionale. Uno Statuto di Autonomia per la Catalogna fu approvato nel 1931: definiva la Catalogna una regione autonoma. La guerra civile del 1936, culminata con l'istaurazione della dittatura di Francisco Franco rappresentò un periodo buio per le istituzioni catalane, caratterizzato dall'eliminazione delle libertà democratiche, la persecuzione dei partiti politici contrari al regime, la soppressione dello Statuto di Autonomia e la persecuzione di lingua e cultura catalana. Il popolo catalano non ha mai smesso di protestare contro le tendenze centraliste dei regimi spagnoli. La fine della dittatura segnò una nuova era di modernizzazione, accompagnata da eventi come l'entrata della Spagna nell'Unione Europea, il recupero delle istituzioni catalane e di una maggiore autonomia. La costituzione del 1978 riconosceva il diritto di autogoverno per

nazionalità e regioni presenti sul territorio nazionale. Un Statuto di Autonomia fu approvato nel 2006 per rimpiazzare quello del 1979, ma fu impugnato dinanzi alla Corte Costituzionale che nel 2010 ne dichiarò incostituzionali alcune parti fondamentali. Questa sentenza è vista come il momento di rafforzamento del nazionalismo e di un cambio di direzione verso l'indipendentismo, più che l'autonomismo, per la Catalogna. L'integrazione nell'Unione Europea e nel mercato unico hanno avuto una forte influenza sulle identità regionali presenti negli stati membri. Questa tesi ambisce a dimostrare se e come l'appartenenza all'Unione abbia conferito un più forte senso di autonomia alla Catalogna. Jordi Pujol, presidente catalano quando la Spagna entrò nella UE, è stato un paladino dell'identità europea. In Catalogna la vocazione europea è stata sempre molto intensa, la regione ha un'ampia proiezione verso l'esterno e si è battuta negli anni per consolidare il ruolo delle regioni e delle "nazioni senza stato" in ambito europeo. L'accordo del 1994 tra la Spagna e le comunità autonome (tra cui la Catalogna) promuove la partecipazione delle regioni nell'approvazione ed implementazione delle politiche europee e crea una base di cooperazione intra-governamentale e multilaterale. Questo è il risultato di un cambio di strategia attraverso cui le comunità autonome rispondono alle sfide dell'Europeizzazione.

Esistono diverse opinioni riguardo al nesso tra integrazione europea e sviluppo di identità subnazionali o nazionalismo. Secondo alcuni, la globalizzazione riesce a sovvertire lo stato-nazione, il quale si vede sottrarre i propri poteri sia dall'alto (da regimi sopranazionali) che dal basso (dalle asserzioni territoriali). L'Unione Europea conferisce nuove opportunità alle regioni, ma il ruolo e la capacità decisionale degli stati membri nelle istituzioni comunitarie rimangono forti. I veicoli a disposizione delle regioni per poter influenzare la politica europea sono la rappresentanza in alcuni organi (come il Comitato delle Regioni), l'assegnazione di fondi strutturali e la partecipazione in alcune decisioni che li concernono direttamente. Gli aiuti economici forniti dall'Unione tramite i fondi possono fortificare la dimensione territoriale e motivare i regionalismi. Nel caso spagnolo, in cui l'identità e l'unità nazionale sono alquanto deboli, esiste un divario tra il conservatorismo di Madrid e l'industrializzazione e modernizzazione sociale presente nelle periferie come la Catalogna. L'Europa ha rappresentato per queste regioni un supporto esterno per la consolidazione della democrazia, una forza di stabilità democratica, crescita economica e sviluppo sociale, attraverso i quali si potevano realizzare le loro aspirazioni di auto-governo. L'UE, in cui vige il principio di sussidiarietà, è percepita come una fonte di opportunità economiche, culturali, politiche e di alleanza con altre minoranze nazionaliste presenti nel territorio, nonché come alternativa alla tendenza conservatrice di Madrid. La Catalogna negli anni ha attribuito importanza alla presenza internazionale attraverso gli uffici di rappresentanza regionale a Bruxelles (ad esempio il Patronato Pro-Europa) che conferiscono visibilità alle regioni a livello europeo, ed ha guidato il regionalismo europeo in maniera molto attiva, partecipando in varie iniziative regionaliste ed associazioni regionali e promovendo la cooperazione intra-regionale. La crisi politica e sociale degli ultimi mesi in Catalogna ha alla base visioni contrastanti sulla struttura politica del paese, e si è trasformata in un "botta e risposta" tra il governo centrale e il governo regionale. Il referendum convocato ad ottobre del 2017, seguito da una dichiarazione unilaterale di indipendenza da parte

del presidente catalano, hanno esacerbato la già compromessa relazione tra Madrid e Barcellona. Il governo spagnolo ha risposto attivando l'articolo 155 della costituzione che prevede il commissariamento della regione, e si è chiuso ad ogni tipo di dialogo. Le istituzioni europee hanno invece asserito l'incostituzionalità del referendum catalano, relegando la faccenda a "questioni interne alla Spagna". Un'eventuale secessione catalana costerebbe alla Spagna quasi il 20% del suo PIL, con rischi seri per le industrie presenti sul territorio regionale. Il processo di modernizzazione della Spagna è stato asimmetricamente inclinato verso la "periferia" del paese; la crisi del 2008 ha contribuito ad aggravare i desideri autonomistici dei catalani, che hanno utilizzato una narrativa di vittimismo nelle mani dell'*establishment* spagnolo, fatta di varie lamentele sociali che oscillano tra problemi socioeconomici e questioni morali. Il progetto di indipendenza offre la visione di una nuova nazione libera dai vincoli dello stato di appartenenza. Nonostante ciò, la società catalana continua a essere profondamente divisa tra chi cerca una maggiore autonomia, chi aspira all'indipendenza e chi invece preferisce restare in Spagna. C'è un dibattito circa i vari fattori che hanno alimentato le spinte independentiste, tra cui emergono la sentenza del 2010, la crisi economica e il discorso persuasivo dei nazionalisti supportato da uno strategico uso della storia, la condanna dell'oppressione spagnola e la promessa di un futuro radioso. Il malcontento sociale negli anni è aumentato ed ha alimentato il consenso all'indipendentismo. Sono stati individuati alcuni fattori determinanti che potrebbero spiegare la trasformazione delle prospettive politiche catalane, quali il potere limitato del governo regionale in materia di politiche pubbliche, la mancanza di negoziazione tra il governo centrale e quello catalano, la retorica anti-catalana presente in Spagna, il percepito maltrattamento economico da parte dello stato centrale. Tutto ciò ha mobilitato il popolo a mettere in discussione l'autorità dello Stato centrale. Le differenze storiche, linguistiche, economiche e culturali tra la Catalogna e la Spagna sono tra le cause sostanziali della crisi.

## **Capitolo II**

Il fenomeno catalano acquisisce importanza soprattutto se analizzato alla luce delle conseguenze che potrebbe avere sul sistema europeo. Il conflitto Spagna-Catalogna pone interrogativi su una sfida più generale che riguarda le relazioni tra regioni più e meno avanzate in un territorio. Fino a dove può arrivare la solidarietà nei confini di uno stato?

Esistono varie regioni in Europa che aspirano ad una maggiore autonomia, se non indipendenza. Nel dopoguerra, il paradigma dei grandi mercati integrati dominava: con l'assimilazione in un mercato più ampio, le piccole entità nazionali avevano l'opportunità di godere di economie di scala. La redistribuzione interna del gettito fiscale è un aspetto fondamentale per spiegare i movimenti separatisti: il peso del PIL regionale sulla media nazionale è determinante.

La mancata risposta politica al conflitto catalano da parte delle istituzioni europee può essere motivata dalla percezione della minaccia che questa regione rappresenta per altre regioni che intendono separarsi dal proprio stato, come la Baviera dalla Germania, la Padania dall'Italia, i Fiamminghi dal Belgio, gli Scozzesi dal Regno Unito. Il discorso europeo è permeato dal dibattito sui regionalismi, e varie idee coesistono circa la struttura che l'Unione Europea dovrebbe avere. Un pensiero però generalmente condiviso è che lo stato-

nazione va progressivamente diventando un'entità marginale destinata a dileguarsi nella relazione diretta tra regioni ed organismi sovranazionali. Alla questione centrale circa il rapporto tra regionalismo ed integrazione europea, se quest'ultima stimoli o ostacoli i regionalismi, diversi studiosi hanno tentato di dare una risposta analizzando il fenomeno da diverse prospettive. Secondo *Szul*, il regionalismo può assumere tre diverse forme: politica, culturale ed economica. La sua analisi del regionalismo è divisa tra quello dell'Europa occidentale e quello dell'Europa Orientale, perché caratterizzati da percorsi diversi. In occidente, il regionalismo e l'integrazione regionale nascevano per superare la mentalità nazionalista che aveva portato ad una deleteria rivalità tra gli stati europei. La cooperazione internazionale e la progressiva devoluzione dei poteri a favore di istituzioni sovranazionali hanno creato più spazio per la decentralizzazione del potere statale come espressione delle numerose culture esistenti sui vari territori nazionali. In questo senso, la regionalizzazione non era vista come un pericolo per l'integrità territoriale. L'integrazione europea e il regionalismo apparirebbero come fenomeni alleati: l'Europa diventa un foro di rappresentazione per gli interessi regionali, per questo motivo i separatisti spesso dichiarano l'intenzione di restare nell'UE in caso di secessione dal proprio stato. L'accesso all'UE da parte degli stati dell'Europa centro-orientale presenta caratteristiche diverse da quelle degli altri membri. In alcuni stati dell'Est, l'organizzazione territoriale è cambiata in conseguenza all'accesso all'UE al fine di gestire meglio i fondi strutturali europei, incoraggiando così le tendenze regionaliste e di regionalizzazione in questi stati. Anche *Bieri*, in una ricerca, ha notato come i movimenti indipendentisti siano cresciuti in numero ed importanza negli ultimi anni, per varie ragioni. Non è sempre facile determinare se tali movimenti cerchino indipendenza vera e propria come Stati nuovi o semplicemente più autonomia. *Bieri* individua diverse motivazioni che potrebbero spiegare tali spinte secessioniste, quali la crisi economica, l'effetto della globalizzazione e dei mercati internazionali, l'importanza di caratteristiche comuni regionali come lingua, storia e cultura che promuovono un'identità distinta e rendono legittimo il diritto all'autodeterminazione, la visione futura di una società più equa che fa appello a principi di progresso, democrazia e partecipazione civica. Il tema della secessione è radicato nella contraddizione tra il diritto delle nazioni all'autodeterminazione e il rispetto dell'integrità territoriale degli stati. L'UE assume un ruolo importante nel contesto dell'indipendentismo perché rappresenta una via d'uscita per i secessionisti, i quali fanno appello al principio europeo di sussidiarietà, che rende l'UE garante di competenze regionali e locali più vaste. L'UE diventa il punto d'arrivo per superare lo stato nazione ed integrarsi in un'Europa unita. La posizione che i governi centrali decidono di assumere e l'apertura o chiusura al confronto con i movimenti secessionisti, è anch'essa un aspetto determinante della traiettoria che i movimenti indipendentisti seguono. Il processo di creazione dell'Unione Europea, insieme alla debole coesione di stati pluri-nazionali con problemi interni, hanno alimentato l'esistenza di minoranze nazionali all'interno dell'Unione, secondo *Jaume*. Il Trattato di Maastricht rappresenta un passo verso il riconoscimento del fenomeno regionale esistente in Europa, ma la stabilità e l'unità degli stati è stata sempre anteposta ai desideri indipendentisti subnazionali. *Smith* mette in luce il fatto che in passato, gruppi regionalisti in lotta per l'indipendenza, non

sarebbero sopravvissuti come Stati a causa della loro dimensione ridotta e della debole base economica. Oggi, l'Europa nell'UE fa progressi verso un mercato aperto e assicura la pace tra gli stati membri, e come conseguenza involontaria, i gruppi indipendentisti acquisiscono un'importanza sempre maggiore nell'arena internazionale e godono di maggiore protezione. *Smith* sostiene che i nazionalisti ed i regionalisti abbiano, di fatto, scopi simili, sebbene fondati su motivazioni divergenti. I nazionalisti aspirano al potere centrale e promuovono l'interesse nazionale; i regionalisti spesso cercano libertà politica e culturale che sarebbe possibile ottenere nei confini di uno stato più permissivo.

*Paasi* sostiene che, sia la costruzione dell'Unione Europea che l'Europa delle Regioni, siano manifestazioni concrete del "re-scaling" della spazialità statale e dell'assegnazione di nuovi significati al concetto di territorio, in cui le regioni acquisiscono sempre più rilevanza. Il re-scaling inteso come mutamento delle gerarchie fra le scale spaziali del potere politico ha portato ad una maggiore competizione tra regioni, più che tra stati. Questa tendenza risulta dalla neo-liberalizzazione dell'economica globale e dalla risposta regionalista da parte di attori subnazionali. L'identificazione regionale favorisce processi in cui le regioni acquisiscono i propri confini, simboli ed istituzioni nel processo di istituzionalizzazione, secondo il quale la regione si consolida e acquisisce un suo *status* proprio all'interno di una struttura più ampia. Il concetto di regione persiste ed acquisisce nuovi significati. La territorialità regionale è ancora importante, ma i confini non sono fissi, perché l'internazionalizzazione ha creato territori aperti e "porosi". La nuova organizzazione della statualità è il risultato di una ri-territorializzazione delle istituzioni statali alle diverse scale spaziali che fanno crescere poteri di livello locale, regionale e trans-nazionale. Grazie alle nuove possibilità offerte da un mondo sempre più globalizzato, anche le città e le regioni hanno sviluppato network transnazionali ed hanno acquisito una propria dimensione globale, giocando un ruolo chiave nell'economia mondiale. Il risorgere delle regioni nel contesto europeo può avere diverse spiegazioni secondo *Anderson*, tra cui: sviluppo asimmetrico, minaccia a lingue e culture regionali, devolution, regionalizzazione e federalizzazione come strumenti per ridurre il potere dello stato centrale o per gestire conflitti ed aspirazioni separatiste. I cambiamenti nella struttura della *governance* regionale hanno rappresentato sviluppi importanti in cui le regioni hanno acquisito maggiori competenze. Ad esempio, la regionalizzazione avvenuta in Spagna negli anni '80 e la conseguente introduzione di regioni autonome ha rafforzato le identità territoriali esistenti e l'ha trasformata in nuove fonti di attivismo regionale, sviluppando così elementi coesivi per la vita sociale. *Keating* pone l'accento sul fatto che regioni diverse emergono per scopi culturali, sociali, linguistici o economici diversi, perché le regioni sono costruzioni sociali, strutture istituzionali e processi in perpetuo "divenire". *Paasi* sostiene che il loro fondamento materiale siano le relazioni economiche e politiche, ma che le istituzioni sociali creino strutture che formano la base per narrative di identità, mobilitazione di memoria collettiva, valori, norme ed ideologie della società. Esistono regioni vecchie e nuove, in cui le prime sono emerse come parti di *governance* e si sono consolidate come fonti di identità regionale, mentre le seconde sono progetti creati *ad hoc* al fine di sviluppare o incrementare la competitività dell'unità spaziale in questione. Regioni ed identità possono essere cruciali nel mobilitare interessi economici. Allo stesso



tempo, alcuni suggeriscono che la coscienza ed i processi di globalizzazione generino una ricerca di nuovi punti di riferimento, delle proprie radici come reazione ad un mondo più “grande”.

### **Capitolo III**

Nel caso specifico della Spagna e della Catalogna, l'integrazione nell'Unione Europea ha modificato la strutturale territoriale, politica, istituzionale ed amministrativa dello Stato. L'Europeizzazione può essere intesa come la diffusione ed istituzionalizzazione di leggi, politiche e processi che includono una variabile europea al loro interno. L'integrazione europea, tra i suoi aspetti positivi, ha dinamizzato le relazioni inter-governamentali e modernizzato le pubbliche amministrazioni. Le procedure per la partecipazione indiretta delle comunità autonome spagnole nella legislazione europea hanno rafforzato le capacità amministrative dei rappresentanti delle Autonomie e hanno obbligato alla creazione di una cooperazione interna multilaterale. Tutti gli stati membri hanno modificato la propria struttura organizzativa per poter gestire le questioni di natura europea, creando dipartimenti dedicati all'impulso e alla coordinazione delle tematiche europee; le comunità autonome si sono aperte a pratiche di mobilitazione esterna attraverso la creazione di uffici e delegazioni a Bruxelles. Le regioni percepiscono le istituzioni europee come interlocutori strategici per le loro pretese nazionaliste. Nel rapporto tra regioni ed UE ci sono diverse forme di partecipazione, come revisione ed elaborazione dei trattati, rappresentanza negli organi europei (specialmente in materie di interessi o competenze regionali), applicazione del diritto comunitario, gestione dei fondi. In Spagna, nota *Moreno*, c'è stata una tradizionale incongruenza tra i poteri economici e politici. La Catalogna, regione periferica con una potente caratterizzazione etno-territoriale, è tra le tre regioni spagnole economicamente più dinamiche rispetto al resto del paese. Ciò ha alimentato delle tendenze centrifughe che sono sfociate in movimenti indipendentisti. In Catalogna, le richieste di maggior partecipazione in ambito europeo sono un saliente argomento di dibattito politico. Degli stati membri europei, la Spagna è uno dei più importanti esempi di decentralizzazione che ha trasformato il sistema di *governance*, la natura delle reti politiche e i processi decisionali. Inoltre, la struttura amministrativa asimmetrica evolve adattandosi alle circostanze mutanti, spostando il *focus* dallo stato centrale alle regioni ed autorità locali. L'appartenenza all'UE ha sfumato la distinzione tra materia interna ed estera. Lo stato centrale continua a rappresentare le regioni a livello sovranazionale, limitando l'abilità di queste ultime ed influenzare i processi decisionali in maniera diretta; molte competenze devolute verso l'alto erano riservate alle autorità subnazionali, e ciò ha ristretto le capacità legislative delle comunità autonome che si limitano ad implementare ed applicare la legislazione europea. Ugualmente, le regioni autonome spagnole non hanno rappresentanza diretta nella delegazione spagnola del Consiglio europeo dei Ministri. Tutto ciò crea conflitto tra stato e regioni sull'allocazione di competenze e la giurisdizione. La partecipazione politica delle comunità autonome all'interno del contesto europeo si limita a delle Conferenze Settoriali, che dovrebbero garantire alle regioni la partecipazione alle negoziazioni della delegazione spagnola. Di fatto però, le conferenze si tengono a decisioni già prese e acquisiscono una natura meramente informativa e di formulazione di posizioni comuni tra le comunità autonome. L'unica area in cui c'è stato un reale progresso è la partecipazione delle regioni autonome nei

gruppi di lavoro del Consiglio Europeo. Il caso catalano è emblematico dell'importanza che le élite regionali hanno posto nella formulazione di strategie sull'Europa, perché questi relazionano il cambiamento costituzionale sia con la devoluzione domestica che con un maggiore coinvolgimento europeo, ed hanno creato anche delle reti di lobby a Bruxelles. Secondo *Keating*, la politica europea sta diventando sempre più regionalizzata e la politica regionale sempre più europeizzata. Esplorare le strategie ed i modi in cui i partiti politici regionalisti ambiscono a sviluppare delle connessioni con le istituzioni chiave a livello europeo, è importante per capire il potere del regionalismo contemporaneo. I partiti hanno mostrato il desiderio di conseguire una forma non territoriale di riconoscimento pubblico in una nuova arena politica, quella internazionale. Il pro-europeismo dei partiti indipendentisti catalani è un sostituto ideologico ai tradizionali obiettivi di trasformare lo stato spagnolo. La partecipazione democratica e l'inclusione dei cittadini è quintessenziale alla preservazione del modello sociale europeo di cittadinanza multi-level, un sistema di valori comuni che rendono possibile la solidarietà transnazionale, in un contesto di convergenza ed interdipendenza politica. *Moreno* sostiene che i processi di europeizzazione (dall'alto verso il basso) e decentralizzazione (dal basso verso l'alto), abbiano permesso l'estensione di un tipo di localismo cosmopolita europeo che riflette due interessi sociali: uno finalizzato a sviluppare un senso di comunità locale e l'altro orientato verso la simultanea partecipazione al contesto internazionale. L'Europa gioca un ruolo importante nei processi secessionisti, sia come attore che come contesto politico-istituzionale, perché da essa dipende il futuro di tali movimenti. La possibilità che un nuovo stato possa continuare a far parte del mercato unico sembra ridurre i costi e rischi della separazione. I nazionalisti hanno sempre usato l'integrazione europea come una risorsa politica nei loro discorsi per supportare le richieste di autonomia. La sfera pubblica e i processi di deliberazione democratica sono diventati importanti fori in cui vengono negoziati i risultati dei processi di secessione. Nella ricerca empirica di discorsi e strategie adottati da movimenti catalani pro e anti indipendenza, quattro concetti sono emersi come rilevanti per capire il modo in cui l'UE influenza le politiche secessioniste negli stati membri: struttura di opportunità, europeizzazione verticale ed orizzontale ed usanze europee.

Per quanto riguarda le prospettive future, ci sono varie opzioni e scenari che la situazione attuale potrebbe attraversare. *Pardos-Prado* teorizza tre possibilità: (1) che la Spagna centralizzi il potere; (2) che lo decentralizzi; (3) che si approvi un referendum legale. Con l'elezione del nuovo presidente Sánchez si potrebbero aprire nuove opportunità di dialogo tra Barcellona e Madrid, sebbene il politico socialista abbia già chiarito in precedenza di non essere a favore di una secessione catalana.