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Catalonia vs Spain: A desire for more autonomy has  
led to a surge of independentism and a divided  
Catalan society

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2017-2018

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## 1 Introduction

The current Catalan crisis is of great importance to Spanish and European politics. Its causes are manifold, making it difficult to establish a starting point. Some commentators might point to contemporary problems, such as the economic crisis and discontent with the government in place. Others would argue that historical reasons play an important part, tracing the issue back to the early beginnings of Catalan institutions and the fall of Barcelona to the Bourbon army in 1714. The aim of this paper is to point out the different factors playing a role in the crisis and argue that the region's strive to more autonomy within Spain is the key factor of the resurgence of independentism.

## 2 History

### 2.1 Early History of Catalan Institutions:

To understand the issue at hand, it is of great importance to understand the rich history of Catalan institutions. The first year of relevance is that of 801, when Charlemagne the king of the Franks, liberates parts of the territory known today as Catalonia from Muslim occupation, in an effort to halt its crusade towards Frank territory. The liberated territory was named "Marca Hispánica" (Treccani, 2017) and its control was given to counts indirectly controlled by Charlemagne. Progressively the counties establish relations among each other culminating in the formation of "Usatges" – a collection of customs "recognized from parliaments and kings alike" in all the territory's counties (Kosto, 2016). The "Usatges" main roles were to facilitate taxation across territories. These institutions were maintained for centuries and were key to create a sense of state between the various principalities. Crucial change comes in the year 1283, when the court of Barcelona, which can be compared to a parliament, establishes a set of rules that would limit the powers of the reigning Monarch in matters of Constitutionalism and taxation. The monarch could only decide over the aforementioned matters with the consent of the three estates represented in the court: the military, the clergy and the noble (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2018). A parallel can be drawn between this development and to article 12 of the British Magna Carta of 1215 which stated: "no scutage or aid may be levied in our kingdom unless by common counsel of our kingdom" (British Library, 2014).

### The Generalities

The marriage between the Count of Barcelona and the Queen of Aragon marks the beginning of new tax levying institutions in the merged territories. In Catalonia, Aragon and Valencia, "Generalitats" (Generalities) were established, whose role it was to collect taxes on all its subjects. These Generalities gradually merged

into one, which to this day is located in Barcelona. Apart from coordinating taxation, it acted as a permanent intermediary body between the local tax institutions and the monarch. The Generalitat progressively gained more powers, allowing kings to levy higher taxes only in exchange of increased powers. A notable step in the extension of political powers come with the death of King Martin the Humanist in 1410, which left the Generalitat with the task of finding a successor to the throne (Bisson, 2000). At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century an attempt was made to establish a high court to settle disputes between the Generalitat and the king. However since the newly established institution emancipated by the monarch, the king never condemned any royal official, making the court obsolete. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Union of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, it initially seemed as though the Generalitat would strengthen its position vis a vis the king. He exhibited complete absenteeism in Catalan matters, leaving the Principality in 1564 only to return two decades later (Corteguera, 2002). This changed with the increasing imperialistic and absolutist outlook of the Monarch, which sought to curb the power Catalan institutions had gained. The culmination of this change of policy occurred in 1593, when the king unilaterally suspended parts of the agreements made with the court of Barcelona in 1583. As a consequence, popular discontent grew, escalating to a civil war between the Spanish crown and Catalonia, which allied with France. Catalonia loses the war and was once again under Spanish rule. To appease the Catalans the institutions of the Generality, the Cort of Barcelona and a body deciding over military matters were granted to the principality. Those same institutions played a key role in supporting the Habsburg dynasty in the war of succession in 1702, a decision would mark the end of the Aragon-Catalonia Principality. On September the 11<sup>th</sup> 1714, after 12 years of war, Barcelona was put under siege by the French and Spanish armies of Felipe V of Bourbon. After the fall of Barcelona, the Generalitat and the Corts were abolished with the introduction of a centralized regime, modeled after France (Lewis, 2013).

## 2.2 The rise of “Catalanism”

After the war of succession, the Bourbon monarch acted swiftly to centralize power through the 1716 “nueva planta” decrees. They abolished all particularities of the Aragon principality except for their law codes, which were to be applied by the centralized royal administration (Payne, 1973). Some historians, including Josep M. Torras I Ribé argue that the years following the decree marked the beginning of the oppression of the Catalan people. There was a general feeling among Catalans that a foreign power had taken over control of the territory and had started imposing its laws and culture upon them. This manifested itself most starkly with the introduction of Castellán as the official language, giving Catalan a secondary role in society.

The Catalan language would reveal itself as a key feature of distinction used by Catalan nationalists to distinguish themselves from the rest of Spain. This happened, even though the language was experiencing a phase of decline, gradually being spoken by fewer people and having a low standing in the literary world. With the emergence of Romanticism in Europe, Catalan authors began putting more interest in the region’s medieval past and culture. A recurring figure in novels of that period is that of “the finder”, which would embark on a path of finding his true identity. It is worth mentioning however that all novels were written in

Castellan Language, so as to increase their literary worth. The first noteworthy piece of literature in Catalan is considered to be “La pàtria” of 1833, a collection of poems written with a distinct, nostalgic tone. In it, a provincial Catalan dialect is used with the aim of awaking a sense of belonging to the Catalan homeland (pàtria). A decade later Joaquim Rubió I Ors, a professor of Spanish literature publishes a series of poems entitled “Diario de Barcelona” where he defends Catalan as an independent language with historical validation. Inspired by the Ors’ ideas, the city of Barcelona begins to organize the “Jocs Florals,” a poetic competition in Catalan language. Initially the competition was envisioned as merely a poetic one, but it would rapidly grow to be an important institution in political and social life (Anon., 2018). Changes also happen in the Catalan press, with the spread of publications in Catalan like “Diari Català” and “La Renaixensa”. Both newspapers were active in the promotion of “Catalanism”. The Diari Català would promote the idea of self-government within a federalist Spain and support pro-autonomy movements across Europe (Barcelonès, 2011). La Renaixensa would focus mainly promoting Catalan language in the Literary sphere.

### Republicanism and Federalism

Looking at the political situation, one can observe the rise of regionalism. Both the left and right converge on the idea of Federalism and demand the official recognition of the Catalan Language (Cattaneo, 2017). In the power vacuum left in Spain with the exile of Isabella II, a widespread debate arises in Catalan politics over what form of government should ensue. Political parties are radicalized in their positions and opt for a federal Republic. The rest of Spain however looked favorably upon the continuation of the Monarchy under Amadeus of Savoy, the son of Victor Emanuel II. He tried to rule as a constitutional monarch, but his rule was characterized by political and social instability. With the conservative “September coalition” losing support, he invited the pro-republican “Radicals” to form a government (Britannica, 2018). The situation worsened however, when supporters of the Radicals attacked the Spanish army, leading the Savoy monarch to abdicate and return to Italy. Another political void was to follow leading the republican coalition to proclaim the first Spanish Republic in 1873. It would however not take long until political instability returns to the peninsula. In Catalonia, the anarchist and member of the Catalan federalist party Francesc Pi I Margall would present a federalist project to the Republican central government (Enciclopedia.cat, 2018). His proposal is rejected, marking the first time an official attempt to more autonomy is denied to Catalans by the Spanish government. Protests break out in Catalonia, which were met with violence and oppression by the Republicans. It is only with the restoration of the monarchy under the Bourbons in 1874 that the situation would stabilize. In Catalonia however, federalist sentiment spread further, and the first Catalan congress was organized in 1882, which led to the creation of the “Centre Català,” an association for science and arts (Enciclopedia.cat, 2018). One can interpret the creation of this local institution as the reaction to further denials of more autonomy. A year later a second congress was held, which focused on Catalan politics and its strategy towards what they called “Spanish hegemony.” The gathering was attended by the regions political, cultural and economic elite, who gave themselves the objective to jointly send a letter to the reigning monarch to lament the political situation.

Unfortunately for the members of the congress, the letter would yield nothing, since the king would unexpectedly die in 1885. This did not discourage Valentí Almirall, a prominent Barcelonese politician and journalist to publish “Lo catalanisme,” for the Jocs Florals in 1886. The book consists of a collection of essays in which he defends the idea of a federal Spain which would satisfy “Catalan regionalism” (Diario Crítico, 2018). Almirall gives a lot of importance to the question of language and states that Castellan has been imposed to the Catalans “by the victor,” after the fall of Barcelona in 1714. In a famous passage he writes “in the language of the victor we are commanded, we are judged, we are taught” (Almirall, 1886). Interestingly the author makes reference to the case of the United States confederation, linking the sufferings of the former British colony to those of Catalonia within Spain. In the same spirit of federalism as Almirall, the “Unió Catalanista” is born, a conservative and anti-liberal political organization whose aim it was to write a regional Catalan constitution (Tornafoch, 2002). Known under the name of “Bases de Manresa” the document is composed of 17 articles which foresaw the regional control of taxes, legislation, monetary policy and the creation of a supreme court. Furthermore, it calls for the recognition of the Catalan language and an educational system based on Catalan culture. Both language and culture gain more importance for Catalan nationalists in the 1890s, when Spain loses the “Spanish-American war” over Cuba. It is the weakening of Spanish power overseas that leads to a spike in Catalan nationalism and a renewed focus on promoting Catalan language. A prominent exponent of this novel symbiosis between politics and culture is the engineer Pompeu Fabra who in the 1930s would go on to publish the “Diccionari general de la llengua catalana,” the first normative dictionary of Catalan. This was a work of paramount importance and pride to the people of Catalonia. A famous quote by the Spanish renaissance author Antonio de Nebrija reads: “A language is always followed by an empire” (Nebrija, 1492). Even though the promotion of the Catalan was never intended to form an empire, it was and is to this day a key factor in the desire for more autonomy and independence.

## 2.3 The Franco Regime

### Primo De Rivera

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of great political and social turmoil. Spain had recently lost the Spanish-American war in 1898 which caused social unrest among Spaniards. Under the reign of Alfonso XIII, Spain remains neutral during the first world war and gained notoriety for its assistance of prisoners of war from all around Europe. Its neutrality affected the economic situation on the peninsula. Exports soared during the first world war, at the expense scarcity and a loss of purchasing power domestically (Gimenez, 2012). Simultaneously in 1914 Catalonia is granted more autonomy with the establishment of the “Mancomunitat” which translates to “The commonwealth of Catalonia.” The idea for such an institution is born 11 earlier in 1903 when minister Antoni Maura presented a municipal system which would provide services for the common interest. This project would grow to include a variety of economic, educational and trading competences (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2013). Some Catalan politicians felt strongly about using the name

“Generalitat” instead of “Manocomunitat” since it would create a link to past Catalan institutions and give a sense of continuity.

Despite staying on the side-lines of conflict during the great war, the monarch leads the country to war in Morocco, where there had been uprisings against Spain’s colonial rule. The war lasts 6 long years and significantly divides public opinion. Society was split between “Africanists” who sought to preserve colonial power, and “abandonistas” who believed the war in Morocco was unnecessary (Perry, 2005). Spain wins the war but suffers heavy losses. The “Battle of Annual” is seen by many historians as a tipping point in the perception of the war. An army of around 20 thousand men with advanced equipment were defeated by 3 thousand Berber troops. Upon hearing the news of the 13 thousand Spanish casualties, the Monarch was reported to have said “Chicken meat is cheap” whilst playing golf in the south of France. The fact that the Monarch seemed detached from the conflict, led many Spaniards to refuse to join the war effort which plunged the country in political instability. Miguel Primo de Rivera, a military officer who served in both the Cuban and Moroccan war seizes power and establishes an authoritarian regime under the motto: “Country, Religion, Monarchy” (Britannica, 2018). Rivera’s would create a new party called “Union Patriótica,” which would be characterized by its apolitical nature. One of his first acts was to appease public opinion and end the Rif war. His later rule would yield mixed results. He was successful in stabilizing the job market, however politically, he was unable to gain broad support of the middle and lower classes. In addition, the mixed system of provincial and national administration would turn out to be unstructured and inefficient (Alonso, 2004). The regime faced stark opposition in Catalonia, where people first embraced the “Pro-regionalist” intentions of the former military general (Barcells, 1996). However soon after the dictatorship’s consolidation, decrees were passed by the minister of the interior banning the use of Catalan language in public. Any display of Catalan flags was prohibited and over 149 nationalist organizations were outlawed. Although the dictatorship was closely tied to Catholicism, as its motto suggests, even catholic youth organizations were banned in Catalonia in fear of opposition to the regime. Interestingly, many bourgeois regionalists still decided to support the dictatorship, putting aside politics in exchange for economic gain.

The regime’s difficulties begin in 1926, when three attempts are made to overthrow it by force. At the root of this was the oppression of opposition which increased over the years. In 1929 the situation worsened for Primo De Rivera, since Spain faced financial problems widespread dissatisfaction with government. The two pillars supporting the regime; the army and the king, signal to the dictator that he has lost their confidence, leading him to leave for Paris where he dies soon thereafter (Britannica, 2018).

### The second Spanish republic

Despite having contributed to the fall of the Dictatorship, the monarch’s name was closely tied to Primo De Rivera. Sensing public opinion was on their side, a group of republicans coming from different, often opposing

political families pushed for the abdication of the king. With the prospect of civil war, Alfonso 13<sup>th</sup> leaves Spain in 1931. A provisional republican government is formed which faced the difficult task of satisfying all the political movements of the time. In Catalonia, the ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) under the guidance of Francesc Macià wins the provincial elections and proclaims the Catalan republic within the “Federation of Iberia.” However according to Spanish historians, it was never Macià’s intention to create an autonomous Catalan state. With the proclamation of the Republic, Macià attempted to strengthen his position at the table with the Spanish republican movement (De la Granja, 2001). The latter considered this declaration a pressing issue and sent representatives to Barcelona in order to dialogue with Macià and his party. They were able to persuade the Catalan President to abandon hopes of independence in exchange for the recognition of “the Catalan government” and the re-introduction of the “Generalitat” which had been abolished under the “nueva planta” decrees in 1714. For independentists in Catalonia, the term “Generalitat” is of great importance, since it shows continuity and highlights the history of Catalan institutions. In Madrid, one of the main aims for the newly formed government was the separation of church and state, the freedom to choose one’s religion and the end of religious education (Payne, 1984). This prompted the Catholic church to openly oppose the republicans. Adding to that, we observe the rise of anarchism, which encourage nationwide strikes, leading to more social unrest. In 1931 a republican-socialist coalition wins the elections and drafts a new constitution which is passed that same year. It was a highly progressive one, perhaps the most liberal one the country has ever had. In its first article it states that Spain is a: “Democratic republic of workers of all classes, organized under the under a regime of freedom and justice” and that “The power of all its organs derive from the people” (Centro de estudios Politicos y Constitucionales, 1931). This is a stark contrast to the monarchic and authoritarian history of the country. A further article of interest, especially for Catalans is article 8 which reads: “The Spanish state within the irreducible limits of its territory, shall be incorporated by joint provincial communities and by religions that are under autonomous law.” Catalonia receives its first statute of autonomy in 1932, which would give rise to a Catalan parliament and government. Its competences include the drafting of civil law, the police, public works and education (Tussell, 1997). The statute is put to a referendum in Catalonia, where it is approved with 99% of the vote. For radical Catalan nationalists, the statute was unsatisfactory. During the negotiations with the central state, specific phrases on Catalan sovereignty were altered. While the text initially referenced an “autonomous Catalan state,” the final document states that Catalonia is an “autonomous region.” Further complaints were made about Catalan language not being the only official one on the territory but merely “co-official.” Despite this, the autonomous law was widely embraced by the Catalan public as the cheerful reception of the Spanish Prime Minister in Barcelona testifies (Jackson, 1976).

The liberal development of Spanish politics caused widespread outrage among conservative parties around the country who favored the centralization of power in Madrid. From 1933-1936 the more conservative Spanish radical party rises to power and reverses the policies introduced in previous years. Simultaneously Francesc



Macià dies and his successor Lluís Companys takes charge of the Generalitat's presidency. A convinced independentist, he was the first to proclaim the Catalan Republic to the masses outside the regional government in 1931 (*La Vanguardia*, 1931). He clashes with the central government over the adoption of a new law on cultivation contracts, which was part of a wider effort of agrarian reform. The court of constitutional guarantees (comparable to today's constitutional court) deemed the law to be unconstitutional (Jackson, 1965). This act by the court led to a strong worsening of Catalan-Spanish relations, with strikes breaking out across the region. Simultaneously, a new political party is formed called CEDA ; "The Spanish confederation of autonomous right wing groups." Strictly religious and close to the German and Italian fascist parties, they were considered a great threat by the socialists. The latter promised an uprising should members of CEDA enter government. In 1934 that is what happened with the entry of 4 CEDA members into the conservative government presided by Alejandro Lerroux (*Britannica*, 2018). As promised the left organised an uprising against the government which failed due to its poor planning. The only successful revolt happened in Asturias, where miners were able to withstand the national army for two weeks (*Libcom*, 2007). In Barcelona, Lluís Companys holds a speech in which he proclaims the Catalan state within the Spanish Federal Republic. He justifies this by stating that "monarchist and fascist forces" are attempting to betray the Spanish republic.

#### The civil war

In Madrid, general Francisco Franco observed the growing instability and anarchy that spread throughout the country. He appealed to the government to declare a state of emergency but was met by opposition (*Britannica*, 2018). Franco was then removed from the general staff and sent to the Canary Islands in order to avoid him taking up arms against the government. This however didn't prevent him from writing a manifesto in 1936 which calls for the nationwide uprising against the government. One day after its publication, he flies to Morocco where he gains control of the Spanish protectorate. With the help of Benito Mussolini's air force, the General and his army is airlifted over the strait of Gibraltar. The civil war between republicans and conservatives that followed mirrored the increasing polarization of Spanish politics in past years. Supporters of Franco's were mainly better-off business men, Catholics and military personnel. The Republicans opposing them came from the lower social strata, composed of mainly urban and agricultural laborers. Catalonia was a stronghold for the latter group. The region was controlled by a number of communist, anarchist and socialist trade unions. Large parts of the economy were controlled by them. In 1936, the Generalitat of Catalonia approves a decree "For the Collectivization and worker's control," in an attempt to support the war effort and put an end to selfishness in the economy (*Bolton*, 1991). In "Homage to Catalonia," George Orwell describes the situation he found in Barcelona, writing that "Practically every building had been seized by either anarchists or communists... and that churches were systematically destroyed." In Catalonia and the rest of Spain, the Soviet Union was the only major ally supporting the Republic. The British and French refused to get involved in the conflict. Unlike the Nationalists, who were heavily supported by Hitler and Mussolini. After taking hold of Madrid, Franco and his army led an offensive on Barcelona which was one of the last

strongholds of the republic. Again, his Italian ally Mussolini was key in the conquest of the city. By systematically bombing civilian targets from the air, the Duce tried to “weaken the morale of the reds” through terror (Beevor, 2006). The tactic worked since it led large parts of the Catalan population, including Lluís Companys to lose faith in the Republic and flee to nearby France (Graham, 2006). The civil war ends with the capitulation of Madrid on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March of 1939, which the Republicans were able to defend for the entirety of the war.

### Franco’s Dictatorship

During the war, Franco emerged as inevitable future leader of the country due to his blank political record. He was able to unite the fascist “Falange” party with the more moderate and traditionalist “Carlist party” under their common idea of “defending the Spanish homeland” (Payne, 2008). After the war Franco moved swiftly to establish an authoritarian system of government under his leadership. But unlike its Italian counterpart, Spanish fascism was strictly religious, reinstating the rule of the Roman Catholic church, which was losing influence during the republic. Facing stark opposition throughout the country, Franco used systematic terror to oppress everyone who disagreed with him. Republicans of all political backgrounds were tracked down and publicly executed. Though there are many estimates on the number of assassinations, it is estimated that around 20 thousand republicans were killed in the aftermath of the war, adding to the 200 thousand which were executed during the conflict (Hochschild, 2012).

In Catalonia, Franco abolished the statute of autonomy the region had enjoyed under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic and as in the whole of Spain prohibited any political party other than the Falange. Catalan culture and language were oppressed strongly, in an effort to create a uniform, castellan nation. An example for this is the regime’s policy on names. Catalan parents were no longer allowed to give their children Catalan names and were themselves forced to find a castellan alternative to theirs. Movies and books in any language other than castellan had to be translated if they were to be shown on the peninsula (Balfour, 2000). As mentioned previously, the President of the Generalitat fled to France, where he led the Generalitat in exile.

One of his first acts in France creating a foundation for the preservation of Catalan language, in a Spanish state that was becoming ever more monolingual. (Barcelonas, 2018). Named the “Ramon Llull foundation” it had linguist Pompeu Fabra and Pablo Picasso at its head. To intimidate Catalan nationalists, Franco had Companys captured in France with the help of Nazi Germany. He is then sent back to Barcelona where a military court sentences him to death for military rebellion. Companys is executed the next day by a firing squad. To this day, he is the only democratically elected president in Europe to have been executed (Eude, 2008). Company’s story is one of great relevance to this day. This execution was never condemned by the Spanish state and its verdict was not annulled, causing outrage to Catalan nationalists to this day.

However not all Catalans resisted the regime and the centralization of power in Madrid. Large parts of the bourgeoisie embraced Falangism as a means to advance their business interests. One of the most famous cases of this phenomena is Francesc Cambò. He was the founder of the regionalist league, whose aim it was to gain more autonomy for Catalonia within the Spanish state. During the war however, he sides with Franco and is key in funding the civil war (Torrús, 2013). It is reported that he was a key figure in rallying the Catalan bourgeoisie behind the would-be dictator. His controversial legacy has raised many questions over his statue, which is located on one of Barcelona's busiest streets. Another, lesser known case is that of the Catalan artist Salvador Dalí. One of the most prominent exponents of surrealism, he was known for being close to the regime. He painted the portrait for Franco's daughter and reportedly congratulated him over his death sentences on various occasions (Minder, 2017). When he died, many were surprised to learn he had donated many of his works to the Spanish state, rather than his Catalan hometown of Figueres. Jose Alvarez Junco argues that the Catalan bourgeoisie was sympathetic towards the regime because it had suffered under from left wing militias operating in the region.

Resistance to his regime was shown mainly through the use of the banned Catalan language. One of the only places to do so publicly was in the stadium of FC Barcelona, since the police were overwhelmed by the number of people violating the regime's laws simultaneously. It is during that period that the club's slogan "more than a club" was born. Fc Barcelona prides itself in that it has been an advocate for Catalan language and identity since its founding in 1899. Another important institution for the preservation of Catalan culture was "Omnium Cultural". It was created in 1961 but closed down by the regime two years later. In order to avoid censorship, Omnium cultural created literary contests and awards, in which works with subtle criticism against the regime were celebrated (Omnium Cultural, 2018). After existing as a clandestine organization for 5 years, it surprisingly wins a legal case in a Francoist court and is given the right to exist. Both FC Barcelona and Omnium cultural are testaments to Catalan resistance against Spanish oppression through the use of culture and language. One of the figures in Catalan resistance of the regime is Jordi Pujol. Born in Barcelona, he was an activist against Franco during his university years. In 1960 he was a key figure in organizing the "events of the musical palace," where he rallied together students his age to defiantly sing the Catalan national anthem during a performance (Enric, 2014). Named "Els segadors" translated: "the reapers," it references a war between Spain, France and Austria after which parts of Catalonia were given to France. Its lyrics are a cry to arms to defend the Catalan, which has made it a popular song among Catalan nationalists. The fact that a group of young students would sing it in publicly in a theatre led to be arrested by the Spanish police. Pujol was quickly identified as the leader of the group and sentenced to seven years in prison of which he served 3 (Barcells, 1991). This event would make him a recognized person among Catalan nationalists and lay the basis for his later career in politics.

## Spain after Franco

With Franco's death in 1975, political instability returns to Spain. Six years previously in 1969, the dictator had selected Juan Carlos of Bourbon to be his successor after his death. Franco chose him to maintain the regime he had put into place after the second world war. Initially it appeared as if little would change with the transition of power, since the soon to be monarch expressed in a speech in 1936: "My hand will not tremble to do all that is necessary to defend the principles and laws that I have just sworn" (Tremlett, 2006). Therefore, when Franco died, Catalan and Basque nationalists had little hope in the Monarch bringing about change. However shortly after being crowned king, he spoke of "a dynamic movement of change" and about "different and desirable options" being evaluated. The options being: "a violent break with the past" or "an agreement with the past". The former would mean the expulsion of Franco supporters from roles in politics and the persecution of former members of government. Alternatively, Francoists themselves, led by Juan Carlos, would carry out the changes. Since many Francoists were willing to leave aside their extremist views, the king opted for the second option, also considering the fact that nationalists had widespread support in the army and the general population. One of Juan Carlo's first acts as head of state was the release of over 15 thousand political prisoners who were jailed by Franco, among them many Catalan nationalists (The Economist, 2014). At the same time protests broke out across Catalonia under the slogan "Freedom, Amnesty and Autonomy" (Santacana, 2017). Catalan journalism is re-established for the first time since the civil war, with the creation of "Avui" and "Radio 4". Politically, the "Consell de Forces Polítiques" is born, which grouped together people from different political families in order to negotiate the restoration of Catalan institutions with the Spanish state. The left-leaning members of the Cosell argued for a referendum in Catalonia over the abolition of the monarchy and the trial of Franco-supporters (Harris, 2014). Historians such as Simon Harris argue that the movements for more autonomy in Catalonia were pivotal for the election of Adolfo Suárez, a former Falangist turned moderate centrist politician. He defeated Carlos Arias Navarro, a key figure in the civil war and Franco Regime. Known under the name of "the butcher of Malaga" (Hugh, 1976) for his role in the assassination of 4300 republican loyalists, he was against any democratic change during his Prime ministership from 1973-1976. Suarez's election was therefore an important step, since he would become pivotal to the transition to democracy and the drafting of a new Spanish constitution.

## Franco's legacy

It is important to mention that unlike fascist leaders in Germany and Italy, the Spanish dictator died of what were reported to be "natural causes." While in Germany efforts were made to confront the Nazi era with the process of "Vergangenheitsbewältigung," Spain chose to settle on a "pact of forgetting" (Birnbau, 2017). The Falangist leader was given a state funeral and buried in the cathedral of the "Valle de los Caídos" a large mausoleum built with prisoners of war in the province of Madrid. Finished in 1958 it was intended by Franco

to commemorate the fallen soldiers of “his crusade” and the dictator’s own resting place (El Periódico , 2017). Every year on the anniversary of Franco’s death, the cathedral becomes a place of pilgrimage for Franco supporters from across Spain. This has repeatedly caused outrage among politicians. One of the most outspoken critics is Jaume Bosch, a member of the “Initiative for Catalan Greens” and member of the Spanish parliament. In 2005 he was part of an initiative to convert the Valle de los Caídos from a Franco memorial to a “center of interpretation of the civil war” (Libertad Digital, 2005). The proposal was supported by José Luis Zapatero, the socialist Prime Minister from 2004-2011. While no changes were made to the mausoleum, a bill was passed in 2007 known as “Historical memory law.” For the first time the law recognizes the victims of both sides of the civil war and the court rulings under Franco illegitimate. In addition, the Spanish state vowed to allocate funds to the excavation of mass graves and the identification of the dead (Gobierno de España, 2007). The law sparked a widespread debate on the civil war. Interestingly, both the conservative party “PP” and the left wing “Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya” voted against it. The former did so because of its Francoist roots (explained at a later point in the paper) while the latter believed the law did not condemn Franco’s deeds harshly enough.

Monuments of Franco and his rule continue to cause outrage and controversy in Catalonia. An example for this can be found in the city of Tortosa, where a 16-meter-tall monument stands in the river Ebro, commemorating the entry of Franco’s troops into the city (Generalitat de Catalunya, -). Following the “Historical memory law” the citizens put forth a motion for the abolition of the monument. When it was put to a referendum, the motion was rejected. In an interview with Raphael Minder, the mayor of Tortosa argued that while he did not condone any of Franco’s actions, he believed the monument to have become “part of the skyline” (Minder, 2017). More recently in 2016, a statue of Franco was placed temporarily in front of a center for Catalan history in Barcelona. The purpose was to promote an exhibition named: “Franco, Victory, Republic and Impunity in Urban Spaces.” The presence of the statue was interpreted as a provocation by the neighbors of the center. In a matter of hours, the statue decapitated, and Franco’s head was reportedly replaced with that of a swine. Among the more moderate acts of vandalism was a note left on the statue by an elderly woman which read: “the inhabitants of this district want a pedagogic and creative exposition. This merely hurts and causes discomfort to everyone” (Congostrina, 2016).

The cases mentioned above demonstrate how the lack of a strong condemnation of Franco’s crimes has led to the fact that Spaniards have not come to terms with its history. Especially in regions with strong national identities such as Catalonia and the Basque country, a stark condemnation of the dictatorial past would have helped coexistence within the Spanish state.

## 2.4 Spanish Democracy

### The Constitution of 1978

After long negotiations between the leading political groups, the constitutional text was approved by both houses of the Spanish parliament in 1978 (Britannica, 2018). It foresaw the separation of powers, the rule of law and political pluralism. The king is given a neutral “super partes” role and represents “national unity”. The constitutional text is put to a referendum, in which it is accepted with 91.81% of the votes (Dieter Nohlen, 2010). The statistics of the referendum show how Catalonia vote in favor of the constitution was significantly higher than in other regions, with 95.15% of the votes. Such was the support for the “yes” vote in Catalonia, that many newspapers named it the “constitution of the Catalans” (C. Molinero, 2014). This is largely due to article 2 of the constitution which concerns regional government. It allows for the formation of “autonomous communities.” In order to qualify as such a community, the province must have a “common historic, cultural [...] and historic identity” (Congreso de España, 1978). In addition, the constitution created two classes of autonomous communities, making it easier for regions who had previously voted in favor of more autonomy to become such communities. Catalonia, the Basque provinces and Galicia qualified as for this procedure and were given the status of autonomy between in 1979 and 1981. The case of Andalusia however constitutes an exception to the aforementioned criteria. Despite not being recognized as a “historical nationality,” the Spanish state initiated the procedure to become an autonomous region after one and a half million Andalusians took to the streets demanding it in 1983 (Congreso de España, 2003). This exception would lay the foundation for the whole Spanish territory to be divided in autonomous regions. By May 1983, 17 autonomous regions existed, including two autonomous cities in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. It is important to mention the other part of article 2 concerning territorial integrity. It reads: “The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards.” This passage shows that while the central state may grant powers to autonomous regions, it is impossible for them to become independent states without changing the constitution. In order to amend the preliminary title of which article 2 is part, a special procedure, described in article 166 is needed. The amendment to the constitution needs to pass with a 2/3 majority in both houses of parliament before new elections are called. Again, the amendment is put to a vote where it needs to be accepted by 2/3 majority. A referendum is then called fifteen days after the passage of both houses (Boletín oficial del Estado, 1978).

### Regional government

The institutional framework of the autonomies mirror those of the central government. Each autonomy is granted a unicameral legislature, which is elected by universal suffrage on a regional level. The executive is composed of a president and a council of government responsible for to the legislature. Each community

receives competences in the fields of public works, housing, cultural affairs, healthcare and the cultivation of regional language. (Britannica, 2018). However, any further competences granted from the central government are the result of bargaining between the state and the region. This has led to varying degrees of autonomy across the regions. The fiscal pact of the Basque province evidences this aspect. Its “convenio económico,” meaning its fiscal settlement with the central state goes back to the year 1876. After its removal during the Franco regime, it was re-instated in 1981, renewed in 2002 and broadened in 2014 (Botti, 2017). It allows the region to be fully autonomous in how it collects and spends taxes. Catalonia is not granted this level of autonomy regarding taxation. The central state levies taxes in the region after signing a pact with Catalan authorities on how much it will pay back.

#### Jordi Pujol and Catalan autonomy

As mentioned previously in this paper, Jordi Pujol was one of the most famous Catalan activists against the Franco regime. After the transition to democracy, he played a key role in Catalan politics. His career begins with the publication of a paper, in which he argues for the merging of two political parties; *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* and *Unió*. The new party was to be called “*Convergència i unió*” and be based on the “values of Christianity” and the “principles of Swedish democracy” (*Convergència i unió*, 2018). The party is ultimately born on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1975 on the occasion of FC Barcelona’s anniversary, showing the close ties between politics and football. CIU would go on to become Catalonia’s first political party, enjoying electoral success both in regional government as on a national level in the Cortes. Because of the seats it held in parliament, the party would often find itself in a powerful position when it came to give the confidence to a Spanish government. Jordi Pujol would use this position in order to receive more autonomy from the government he promised to support. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the convergence party supported the social democrats: *Partido Socialista Obrero Español - PSOE* on a national level. In return, Catalonia was given generous tax returns under the system mentioned previously. Though the Spanish prime minister González was admired by Pujol for having brought Spain into the European Union in 1986, the CIU president became increasingly worried about the domestic scandals the socialists were facing (Minder, 2015). The prime minister had organized a paramilitary organization to fight ETA, the Basque terrorist group which fought in the name of Basque independence. Pujol initially supported the PSOE party, but sensing that the scandals were damaging the image of his own party, as became evident with the regional elections of 1995, where CIU lost its absolute majority and relied on the Popular Party (PP) to form a government (González, 1999). Pujol in 1996, Pujol would return the favor to the PP, by giving them a narrow majority in parliament, after the elections were inconclusive. This change of alliances and unlikely pact reached by the convergence and popular party came to be known as “the Majestic pact.”

To understand the implications of the majestic pact, one needs to consider the history of the Partido Popular. It is the successor to the “Popular Alliance,” a union of seven parties founded in the 1977 by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, a prominent member of Franco’s cabinet. While the Popular Alliance embraced the transition to democracy, it opposed many aspects of the draft, including the abolition of capital punishment (El País, 1979). The Francoist past of Fraga shed an extremist light on the party, which is why in 1989 the party changed its name to “Popular Party (PP)” to present itself as a more moderate, centrist party. The change was complete with the nomination of Jose Maria Aznar as president of the party. Under his leadership, the party distanced itself from far-right politicians and its nationalist roots. The general elections of 1996 didn’t give the PP a majority to govern. Therefore, Aznar sought support from the 16 CIU deputies which had been elected to parliament. In an attempt to gain the support of the Catalan party, Aznar travels to Barcelona to meet Pujol in the “Majestic” hotel. Over dinner the two politicians negotiated over the terms of their alliance. As he had done with the PSOE, Pujol sought to secure more autonomy in exchange of his support. The agreement reached would give Catalonia more autonomy to its local police force, abolish the obligatory military service and reform the regional taxation scheme (Minder, 2017). Some historians such as Josep Fontana criticize Pujol for thinking that a party like the PP could truly help the cause of an autonomous Catalonia. Furthermore, he believes that CIU’s shift from PSOE to PP is evidence of the pursue of its own interest trying to “keep power in Catalonia at all costs.” Others view this “transformist” approach more favorably, seeing in Pujol a skillful politician who was able to gradually receive concessions from the central government. Josep Maria Castellà is among them, saying that “you achieve more step-by-step, then if you ask for formal change, which sets the alarm bells ringing” (Minder, 2017). The unlikely partnership between Aznar and Pujol ends in 2000 as the Popular Party gradually gained support in Catalonia, challenging the CIU by receiving ¼ of the Catalan vote. Both sides accuse the other of being disloyal to the partnership that started in the Hotel Majestic. What is clear however is that the breaking of the pact initiated a period of distrust between Catalan parties pushing for autonomy and its counterparts in Madrid.

### 3 Resurgence of Independentism

#### 3.1 Key factors in the resurgence

A new “Estatut” for Catalonia

One of the main causes for the resurgence of Catalan nationalism concerns the process by which Catalonia gained a new Statute of Autonomy in 2006. Counter intuitively the process began with Jordi Pujol’s rejection of an offer by the ERC (Left Republicans of Catalonia) to form a separatist coalition (Company, 2006). After



Pujol was unable to form a majority for the formation of a government, he backs Pasqual Margall of the Catalan socialist party for President. Before the elections, all political parties presented their ideas on the new statute of autonomy. In Margall's version, there is a mention of a "Catalan nation that forms part of a pluralist, pluricultural and pluri-linguistic Spanish state." (Company, 2003). CIU's position was more radical, arguing to use the constitution's mention of Catalonia's historical rights to form an own state, which would be "associated with" the Spanish state. In Madrid, the secretary of the PSOE José Luis Zapatero, openly declared he would support any statute of autonomy which the Catalan parliament passes whilst he was still in the opposition. Yet quickly after coming to power, the socialist government set limits and conditions to the statute. The Catalan government is instructed it shall not reform any laws which change the role of the judiciary. Furthermore, the Spanish state will not accept that the regional authority takes over any competences which are not explicitly mentioned to be competences of the central state, as mentioned in article 150.2 of the constitution (Aizpeolea, 2005). These conditions were seen too lenient from right wing parties like the PP. In a famous article for the ABC newspaper Mariano Rajoy, then president of the PP, harshly criticizes Zapatero for believing in "universal fraternity" and not seeing the difference between "sovereignty and autonomy". In Rajoy's view, the Spanish constitution laid "a solid ground" for the most stable period in the History of Spain. According to him, the socialists used left wing "government propaganda," to portray a different image of the transition to democracy of which "every Spaniard is proud of" (Rajoy, 2005).

The Catalan parliament hosted long debates over every aspect of the new autonomous status. Among the points of disaccord was an economic pact with Spain, modelled after the Basque "concierto economico" which CIU gave a lot of weight to. It is only after the new leader of the Convergence party met Zapatero in Madrid that their position on it becomes more moderate. It was not until the last day before the vote that the Socialists and CIU came to an agreement over the economic pact and secularism in education (El País, 2005). With the support of the CIU, the new "Estatut" was approved with 120 of 135 votes in favor. The 15 votes against were unsurprisingly cast by the deputies of the PP, who argued that the Status radically changed the "nature of the Spanish state" and "distances Catalonia from Spain."

A regional referendum on the Estatut was approved by the Spanish Senate and held on the 18 of June of 2006. The referendum saw a relatively low turnout of 48,85% meaning less than half of the Catalan population voted. This low participation in political life demonstrates that in that period, the general population was not particularly concerned with questions of autonomy and Spanish politics. Of the 2.594.167 votes cast, 73,90% were in favor, 20,76% against and 5,34% were blank ballots (Congreso de España, 2006). It is worth mentioning that at that point in time the support for independence was still of little importance. The Catalan center of opinion studies noted that only 13,6% of Catalans supported the region's independence. More than twice as many people were in favor of a federalist Spain at 31,3% and the majority at 40,8% hoped for greater autonomy from the central government (La sexta noticias, 2015). Therefore, the approval of the new statute

satisfied public opinion in that it was based on the extension of the region's autonomy. The new statute comes into force on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August of 2006 with Catalan president Maragall stating that "This day will go down as a day of celebration."

#### Supreme court sentence 2010

The popular party, opposing the new statute of autonomy since its inception, brought a case to the supreme court claiming the unconstitutionality of 128 of the 223 articles in the document. In its ruling in 2010, the court struck down 14 articles and lessened the extent of another 27 (Lazaro, 2010). Most prominently the court rejected the notion of a "Catalan nationality," arguing that such a notion would entail a competition with the Spanish nationality. Furthermore, the preferential treatment of Catalan language was struck down, whilst not hindering the regional government to nourish and promote the language. Importantly to the convergence party, the court annulled article 206.3 which concerned the "Balance of fiscal policy." It was included in the Statute in order for the region to adjust its fiscal payments to the Spanish state so that other regions would not lower their contributions at the expense of more prosperous regions such as Catalonia. Concerning the judiciary, the constitutional court declared that all judicial competences are exclusive to the central state. This includes the "council of Catalonia and any notion of "Catalan judges" (Belaza, 2010). The court ruling makes a further statement judicial in Spain stating that: "all decentralizations of judicial power undermine the supreme court and are therefore invalid." During and after the ruling, members of the supreme court were vocal in their opposition to the Estatut. José Rodríguez-Zapata for instance declared that the Statute demonstrates the "gross incompetence of Catalan politicians to understand the principles of division of powers within a state" (Otalora, 2013). In another occasion he criticized the preferential treatment of Catalan language in the region, stating it constitutes a violation "of the human rights of Spaniards, who would no longer be able to speak their language in their own country." Another member of the supreme court, Javier Delgado Barrio publicly voiced his opinion over the pre-amble of the statute concerning Catalan Nationality saying that "with all due respect to the Catalans, there is no other nationality other than the Spanish" (Martín, 2010).

#### Protests and rise of independentism

The court ruling led to outrage in Catalonia. Large parts of the population who were previously not engaged in political life took to the streets to protest what they deemed to be an attack on Catalan identity and dignity. This case is best analyzed through the lens of Evelin Linder's theory of humiliation and conflict. In her book she takes a psychological approach to explain the conditions under which conflict arises between communities. In the case of Catalonia her model of "vertical scale" (Lindner, 2006) can be applied, by which the central government in Madrid is perceived as an entity which attempts to be superior and dominate Catalonia. The author goes on to point out how in various different languages terms associated with humiliation point to a "downward spatial orientation." This is precisely the sensation more than 1.1 million people had when they

took to the streets of Barcelona to protest the court's decision on the 10<sup>th</sup> of July 2010. The non-political organization *Omnium Cultural* was key in the preparation of the event. It was able to provide a platform for over 1600 Catalan organizations of all types to promote the event (*El Periódico*, 2010). The entry into politics of a cultural organization such as *Omnium Cultural* demonstrates the importance of the ruling in the deterioration of Catalan-Spanish relations. The protest brought together representatives of the major political parties in Catalonia including the socialist PSC, the independentist *Esquerra Republicana* and the conservative CiU. It is worth pointing out the symbolic importance of the image of senior politicians with different, sometimes opposing political ideas, walking behind the same banner of “som una nació, nosaltres decidim (we are a nation we decide)” (*Virgili*, 2010). Importantly, the Popular Party and the newly formed conservative *Ciutadanos* did not attend the event.

The question arises as to why Catalans felt humiliated by the court decision, when never before in history the region had enjoyed as much autonomy as under the constitution of 1978. *Salvador Cadús i Ros* points to the common cultural identity that was strengthened with the statute of autonomy of Catalonia. He points out the ample competences given to the region in terms of culture, education and local policies. To him, it is because of this newly found autonomy that the sense of belonging to Spain has dropped from 35% in 1980 to less than 10% in 2017 while identification with Catalonia rose from 25% to 55% in that same timeframe (*Ros*, 2017). Other commentators argue that economic grievances lay at the heart of the increase in support for autonomy and the confrontation with Spain. Though this argument does not reflect reality, since it is important to underline that in the period from 2006-2010, Catalonia was experiencing economic expansion despite the stock market crash in 2008. Furthermore, the protests main slogan “we are a nation we decide” proves that the main grievance concerns the rejection by the Spanish state of defining Catalans as a nation (*Terricabras*, 2010).

### 3.2 Defining Catalan nationalism

Nationalist sentiments strongly rose in the years after the court ruling. It is important to define what characterizes Catalan nationalism and how it differs to other nationalist movements in Europe and in Spain. In his book “*Ethnic and Racial studies*,” *Daniele Conversi* analyses the importance of language in Catalan nationalism. In *Conversi's* view, ethnic languages rather than other values such as race or religion offer better, more peaceful prospects to further a nation's ambitions within democratic states (*Conversi*, 2010). Furthermore, language has an “inclusive character,” in the sense that it can be learned by anyone and there are therefore less barriers to integration. While *Raphael Minder* does not explicitly mention *Conversi's* theory in his book, he finds this element of inclusiveness when interviewing immigrants in Catalonia. During the “construction boom” of the 1990s, Spain made it easier for migrant workers to move and work in Spain. Catalonia's population grew rapidly with immigrants moving to the region chiefly from north Africa and south Asia. In a conversation with *Gagandeep Singh Khalsa*, the representative of over 12 thousand Sikhs living in Catalonia, the importance of language becomes evident. *Khalsa* states that the Sikhs are eager to learn the

Catalan language upon arriving to the region, since apart from wanting to integrate within society, they see in Catalan secessionism the same struggles the Sikh community went through in India. A similar opinion is voiced by the representative of the Moroccan community, who as of 2016 are the largest immigrant community in the region. Najat El Hachmi, observes how the Catalan school system allowed her to rapidly integrate in Catalan society. She therefore believes that since language is the only unifying factor of Catalan nationalism, it is “up to everyone to make herself Catalan in their own way.” Similar to the Sikh community, immigrants from Morocco come predominantly from the Berber minority, which faces struggles in its home-country and is therefore sympathetic to the Catalan secessionist cause.

There is a complex interplay between “ethnic nationalism” and “civic nationalism” in the case of Catalonia. The latter is a variant of nationalism which provides an “universalistic” vision of a nation, where the main requirement to be a national is the “individual’s allegiance and equality to the laws governing a given territory” (Hargreaves, 2000). This idea of nationality is one shared by Jordi Pujol who famously stated: “Catalan is the one who lives and works in Catalonia” (The Economist, 2012). This stance on nationalism is not surprising for a “pactist” politician like Pujol, since association with “ethnic nationalism” carries with itself a connotation of extremist views, intolerance and violence.

Yet one can argue that the Generalitat vigorously promotes ethnic nationalism. This variant of nationalism is defined by Hargreaves as one in which “boundaries are drawn exclusively” and an individual is only accepted if he or she possesses a number of required cultural trends. The Generalitat supports the narrative of a Catalan nation based on history, culture and language. It implements it through policies such as the “linguistic normalization,” which fosters the use of Catalan language over Castellán on its territory. Furthermore, it has made Catalan the predominant language in schools, public administration and local media. There has been controversy especially when it comes to education, since preferential status is given to Catalan over Castellán. After a Supreme court ruling in 2000, schools in Catalonia are required to teach a minimum of 25% of their classes in Castellán and can potentially teach the remaining 75% in Catalan (Armora, 2014). Many parents have taken issue with this system and have brought cases to court over the right to decide what language their child is educated in. Despite winning their cases in the supreme court, little has changed in when it comes to the use of Catalan in schools. In some instances, the children of the parents who insisted on Spanish teaching were later excluded and bullied by their peers, forcing many to change schools (Toledo, 2018). While conservative politicians throughout Spain have repeatedly claimed that Catalan schools are “breeding grounds for independentists” the Center of Opinion studies paints a different picture. The institute compared the correlation between Catalan education and support of independence on a sample of 35-year-old persons having been brought up in a Catalan speaking school, and 65-year-old persons growing up under Franco. There is no notable difference between the two, in that both show similar views on the issue of Catalan nationalism (Orriols, 2017).

## The Basque case

It is of interest to compare the evolution of Catalan nationalism to that of Basque Country after the Spanish constitution of 1978. While both regions have strong national identities, democracy peace prevailed in Catalonia, while in the Basque Country it did not. During Franco's rule in 1959 a group of dissatisfied Basque nationalists founded "Euskadi Ta Askatasuna" better known under the abbreviation "ETA," a terrorist organization for the separation of the Basque Countries from Spain (Britannica, 2018). The group was split in the 60s between those with Marxist views and others with solely separatist goals. After the transition to democracy, the group faced further problems of factionalism, with various internal groups seizing violent activities and turning instead to politics.

During the Franco regime, both regions faced migrants coming from poorer parts of Spain to the north. While nationalist leaders in Catalonia never set up barriers to those coming from other parts of Spain, the same cannot be said about the Basque Country. According to Conversi, one needs to adopt Basque culture and the desire for its independence in order to be considered a Basque national. The transition to democracy after Franco's death only escalated tensions and was seen by the nationalists as an attempt of the "colonialist Spain" to eliminate Basque identity (Conversi, 2000). With the election of the first regional governments, Basque politicians pardoned the crimes committed by ETA members showing if not an endorsement, a toleration of their crimes. The organization also enjoyed the support of large parts of the Basque population.

This is in stark contrast to the pacific nature of Catalan politics, which struck a careful balance of political pressure under Jordi Pujol to advance its interests within Spain. In his book "Nationalism, Violence and Democracy," Ludger Meers analyses the reasons as to why Basque nationalism turned to violence as a means to forward its interests. He points to the fact that ETA comes from societies lower classes and that it is thus more "class conscious" than the Catalan movement, which was historically supported by the bourgeoisie. A further aspect of interest is the element of culture and language. Meers believes that the weakness of Basque culture as a focal point has lead them to turn to more radical, violent means. A reason for this may be that Basque language is unrelated to any other European language and is therefore more challenging to learn (Basque government, 2016). The same cannot be said for Catalonia, whose language has Latin roots and as mentioned previously has been a factor of integration for many migrants.

Due to the notable differences in the nature of both nationalisms, the governments of both regions sympathize with each other without openly collaborating. The approach to politics varies greatly and the two governments were therefore never able to find a united approach to negotiating with Madrid. History has shown that the Catalans would try to profit of when the central state granted more autonomy to the Basques and vice versa. Never did the two governments collaborate on joint efforts of power decentralization. Concluding, Alfonso

Botti notes the difficulty of different nationalisms collaborating since nationalism by its nature entails the formation of an “us” against “them.” In many cases “them” also applies to other groups with a sense of nationality (Botti, 2017).

### 3.3 Radicalization and the end of dialogue

#### The ambiguity of Artur Mas

The 2010 elections in Catalonia are crucial to understand the current political situation in Catalonia. The socialist PSC lost 8% of its votes, due largely to Zapatero’s unkept promise of accepting any statute of autonomy passed by the Catalan parliament. Convergence and Union becomes the first political party with 38,43% of the vote, with the socialist second at 18,38 and the Partido Popular at 12,37% (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2010). Artur Mas, a veteran politician within the Convergence party and its nominee for president in 2010, sought the support of the socialists in order to have a majority in the Catalan parliament. Having been the leader of the opposition for the past 7 years, he had developed personal ties with the then-governing socialist president of the Generalitat José Montilla. What emerged after negotiations is what the Spanish press referred to as “entente cordiale” in which the two parties found common ground and vowed to work together on important questions which arise during the term (A. Piñol, 2010). Yet the “entente” was not a coalition. The PSC merely vowed to abstain from the vote of confidence to Mas’ government. Apart from belonging to opposite sides on the political spectrum, there were important differences their respective views on Catalonia’s position within Spain. The PSC had run a campaign on “deepening” Catalonia’s self-government and “re-gaining parts of the statute of autonomy.” Mas however had promised a period of “national transition,” without providing clarity over what that entails. One aspect which he repeated various times during the elections was a new fiscal pact with the Central government based on the Basque model. In addition, he defended “Catalonia’s right” to decide on its future rapport with Spain (Piñol, 2010). In the contract signed by the PSC and CIU there is no mention of Mas’ promises above, which is why many political commentators noted the fragility of the pact. This sense of fragility was amplified by declarations of the socialist leader in parliament who spoke of a “red line” not to be crossed when referring himself to the “national transition” and the “right to decide.” CIU’s leader was too ambiguous for the parties openly supporting the idea of an independent Catalonia. The leader of Esquerra Republicana stated that while his party supported many of Mas’ ideas, they would not support the government due to the lack of “concrete plans” on how to achieve its goals. Harsher statements were made by former president of FC Barcelona and founder of “Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència.” He criticized Mas for “lack of leadership” and accused him of being “co-responsible” for the financial crisis.

Mas can be considered a typical CIU politician, who adjusts his political position to maximize political gain. This is evidenced by the pact with the PP in Catalonia over the Region’s budget in 2012, where the

conservatives abstained to allow CIU's proposal to pass. While the Catalan media saw in this move the beginning of a new "Majestic pact," Mas was far less successful when negotiating with the PP's central government (García, 2012). Fiscal autonomy became one of the Mas' main objectives during his term, yet his requests were rejected by a central government, which was dealing with the effects of the financial crisis. Mas had repeatedly travelled to Madrid in order to negotiate with Mariano Rajoy, Spain's Prime Minister and secretary of the PP. After one meeting on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012, the President of the Generalitat famously announced the failure of the negotiations after a "franc and direct no" from the Prime Minister (García, 2012). In that same press conference Mas announced the possibility of new elections in the coming months and did not discard the possibility of holding a referendum over the future of Catalonia in Spain. He did however mention that it was not his intention to "rupture with Spain," because it would lead to the "complete isolation of Catalonia" and its exit from the EU. Others in his party did not share the same view. In an interview Carles Puigdemont, then the mayor of Girona and member of CIU gives his opinion on the regional governments actions. Puigdemont speaks highly of his party's pact with the PP over the regional budget stating that he agrees with the practice of "finding the best alliances to further one's political ideas." To the question whether the pact interferes with his independentist views he replies: "I have been an independentist militant since 1983 [since then] the question of independence has moved from the margins of the political debate to its center" (Marco, 2017).

#### The radicalization of *Convergència i Unió*

Elections are held in 2012, amid popular opinion shifting towards independence. Despite not reaching a majority among the population, it stood at 44,5% against 45,3% responding in favor of unionism (Ríos, 2014). This was expressed through street protests, most notably on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, to commemorate the fall of Barcelona to the Bourbon army in 1714. The slogan of the manifestation changed from "we are a nation, we decide" to "Catalonia, new state of Europe." It was organized by "Assemblea Nacional Catalana" an organization for the independence of Catalonia founded in 2009, which by 2012 had gained the support of many regional politicians. This evidences a shift to independentism due primarily to the repeated rejection of Catalonia's autonomic ambitions; in 2010 with the constitutional court decision and in 2012 with the rejection of a fiscal pact. The results in the elections reflect this trend, with independentist parties gaining seats over the 2010 elections. During the campaign Artur Mas pledged to hold a referendum on Catalan self-determination. Despite this, *Convergència i Unió* loses 8% of its electorate because of its past ambitious stance on the question of independence and the austerity measures it put into place. While CIU remained the region's first political party, *Esquerra Republicana* made important gains during the election, moving from 7% of the electorate to nearly double the amount at 13,70% (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2012). The elections forced Mas to change alliances and seek the support of *Esquerra Republicana* in order to form a government. This alliance hinged on the celebration of a referendum on Catalan independence to be held within the mandate. The move also sparked criticism within the party from members with moderate views on the territorial conflict (Tucker,

2012). One can observe how this represents a clear political shift from the alliances with national parties in the past such as the socialist or popular party.

#### Referendum 2014

As promised the Catalan government pursued its goal of holding a referendum on Catalan independence. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the parties forming the Catalan government come to an agreement over the question to be asked at the referendum. The ballot would include two questions, the second of which would hinge on an affirmative answer to the first; “Do you want Catalonia to become a State? If yes, would you want that state to be independent?” (Norguer, 2013). Subsequently, a request of the delegation of the power to call for a referendum had to be submitted to the Spanish chamber of deputies. The final draft of the request was put to a vote in the regional parliament on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Its preamble makes reference to the region’s desire for more autonomy which have been expressed in the statute passed by the Catalan parliament in 2006. It laments the “difficulties” which posed by Spanish institutions, which have repeatedly halted the “evolution of the Catalan people’s will” (Parlament de Catalunya, 2014). Furthermore, it sees in the “massive popular demonstrations” taking place during on September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2013 and 2014 the evidence of popular discontent with the actions of the Spanish state. The referendum was to be “consultative” meaning it would have no legally binding consequences and would merely be an expression of Catalan’s opinion. The document is passed with 83 votes in favor and 43 against (Mateos, 2014). Alícia Sánchez-Camacho, the president of the Popular Party in Catalonia denounced the vote stating its “illegality” and that national sovereignty could not be “delegated.” A similar answer was given by Prime Minister Rajoy in his remarks to the Spanish chamber of deputies when debating the proposal. In a 40-minute speech he reminds the delegates of the Catalan government that the state cannot delegate its exclusive competences unless the constitution is changed. Rajoy points to the common heritage of Catalonia within Spain and underlines that “never before has the region enjoyed more autonomy as under the Constitution of 1978.” (Cortes Generales de España, 2014). The Cortes then went on to reject the request by the Catalan parliament by with 299 votes against and 47 votes in favor (Garea, 2014). While PSOE’s members of parliament voted against the delegation of competence they voiced their desire to modify the constitution so as to grant a statute of autonomy which would guarantee the coexistence of Catalonia within Spain. Representatives of the Basque countries voted in favor and criticized the argument of legality made by Mariano Rajoy stating that while “democracy needs the rule of law to function” one must not forget that “authoritarian regimes were also based on legality” (rtve, 2014).

The negative response by the Central government did not hinder Mas who vowed to find other paths to celebrate the referendum. In an interview with Reuters after the Cortes’ decision he spoke of passing a regional law on “setting the rules for a popular consultation to be held”. Holding a referendum Mas believed would give him leverage for later negotiations with the government. He makes reference to the Scottish referendum which had taken place on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 and hopes the same could take place in Spain (Reuters,



2014). However as mentioned previously in this paper the constitution proclaims the “indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation” which means a special procedure to amend the constitution is needed in order to hold a referendum of such nature. What ensued are various decrees and laws being passed that aimed at bypassing the constitutional courts declaration of unconstitutionality. Ultimately the Catalan government decided to ignore the verdict of the constitutional court and move ahead with the vote. In a televised speech shortly before the referendum, Catalonia’s president addresses 3 different audiences in their respective languages. Speaking to Catalans he makes reference to the sovereignty of the Catalan nation and their right to decide about their future. He points to the continuity of the Generalitat, which since 1359 is the “expression of Catalonia’s will for self-government.” Throughout history this institution has been repeatedly oppressed by “foreign powers,” meaning the Spanish state. Mas moves on to address Spaniards in Castellán, speaking about the long common history between the two nations. A history he promises will continue through “working together within Europe,” alluding to the possibility that Catalonia would secede from Spain in the near future. Concluding, in the Spanish part of the speech he explains Catalonia’s notion of nationalism, inspired strongly by Pujol’s ideas of civic nationalism. He states that Catalans need not come from Catalan territory to be considered nationals and they are also not required to speak the region’s language. The president of the Generalitat then speaks English to address himself to European leaders and people living outside Spain. His main message to them is the democratic nature of the referendum, pointing to the elections in 2012 which gave a majority to those who had pledged to defend “Catalan’s right to decide” (Artur Mas signs decree calling referendum on Catalonia’s independence, 2014).

The vote was to be organized and carried out by volunteers, without the participation of the regional government. Over 42 thousand Catalans signed as volunteers for the “day of participation” (García, 2017). It was held on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 with any resident of Catalonia over 16 years of age being able to cast a vote. The same was true throughout the region, with no notable disturbances being reported. A total of 2.34m votes were cast, with 80.76% voting yes twice, 10.07% voting yes and no, and 4.5% voting a single no (participa 2014, 2014). The election results cannot however be taken as a true expression of popular opinion. The State’s campaign to boycott what they considered to be an “illegal” referendum, lead many not to take part in it. Due to widespread boycott, Rajoy considered the referendum to be “a major failure for the independentists” (El País, 2014).

The celebration of a referendum despite its proclaimed illegality by the institutions marks the beginning of a rapid worsening between the central government and Catalonia’s Generalitat. A worsening which will lead to the end of dialogue between the two, and the escalation of the conflict.

### 3.4 From autonomy to independence

Carles Puigdemont

In 2015 the offices of the Convergence party were raided in an investigation on corruption. It was discovered that the party had used the restoration of Barcelona's music hall (Palau de la Música) to obtain commissions amounting to 6.6 million euros from the construction company in exchange of the public work contract. 12 people were jailed as a result, including the treasurer of the party Daniel Osàcar (Jones, 2018). The year before, Jordi Pujol was found to have undisclosed bank accounts in Switzerland which he had never declared. In addition, his sons, who also held positions within the party, were investigated for taking bribes and "carrying bags of 500-euro bills to Andorra" (The economist, 2014). These scandals did not affect the independence movement since many believed the investigation to be an attempt by the government to harm CIU's image. Mas also faced difficulties for his role in the holding of the consultative referendum with the Spanish attorney general charging him with "disobedience, prevention of the course of justice, misuse of public funds and the abuse of power" (Burgen, 2014). The combination of these events culminated in political instability among the coalition government of the convergence party and Esquerra Republicana. The latter believed the corruption scandal of their political partner to damage their own reputation. As in 2012, Mas calls for early elections in which the Convergence party does not present itself unitedly, splitting back into 2 political forces: The Democratic Convergence (CDC) party and the Union party. The reason for this change and the end of 37 years of collaboration are the corruption scandals which were closely associated with the name of the party (La Vanguardia, 2015). Artur Mas becomes the presidential candidate of the CDC and forms an alliance with Esquerra Republicana and other pro-independence leftist groups. Under the name "Junts pel Sí – together for the yes" they base their campaign on the pursuit of Catalan independence.

Corruption scandals in the Convergence party and in the Popular party on a national level, had a significant impact on the redistribution of power within Catalan politics. The novel "Ciutadanos – Citizen's party" founded in 2006 became the second largest political force in the region. Its unionist stance and centrist ideology made it a competitor to the Popular party and the unionist electorate of CIU, who felt disillusioned by the party's shift towards independence. Not having gained a majority, the coalition seeks to reach a majority with the support of the "Candidatura d'Unitat Popular – Popular Unity Candidacy." The party can be considered the most radical in seeking independence. It holds a view of "ethnic nationalism" calling for the unity and independence of all Catalan speaking territories, in Spain and beyond (CUP, 2012). Furthermore, it calls for a "socialist economy" based on "economic planning and solidarity." Their candidates are characterized by their casual dress code and the often-divisive statements on their shirts, which distinguish them as "the anti-establishment party" (Huffington Post, 2017). During the negotiations with Artur Mas, it quickly became clear they would not support him as candidate for president. Apart from not sharing the same political views, they believed he did not pursue independence decisively enough. Mas came from a political

tradition characterized by the “pactist” practices of his political father Jordi Pujol, which were no longer popular in a region where around half of the population supported the secession from Spain. In a congress with its political council, its 67 members voted against any type of support to a Mas presidency, effectively “vetoing” his appointment (Julve, 2016).

After long negotiations between Junts pel Sí and the CUP, an agreement was found over the name of Carles Puigdemont, the mayor of Girona and a strong advocate of Catalan independence. In the past, Puigdemont held the presidency of the “Association of municipalities in favor of independence.” The organization unites Municipalities that feel “Morally excluded from the Spanish constitution” after the constitutional court ruling of 2010 (Lladò, 2011). During the debates prior to the vote of confidence, Anna Gabriel, the spokesperson for CUP made declarations which would mark the successive presidency of Puigdemont. She stated that they would support the presidency as long as it was one of “rupture with the Spanish State.” Gabriel considers the elections of 2015 to have been a clear vote in favor of Catalonia’s independence and the establishment of the republic. Most importantly for this the context of this paper are is her following declaration: “We pledged not to support a president who would seek autonomy, but one who decisively seeks independence” (Parlament de Catalunya, 2016). Just as the previous government under Mas, political support for the government hinged on political parties with radically different views than that of the President’s. This instability was amplified by the fact that Junts pel Sí relied heavily on the support of a radical party, which aggressively sought secession from Spain.

### 3.5 Referendum and the Unilateral declaration of Independence

#### Towards the referendum

After taking office, Puigdemont rapidly set out to organize and gather backing for the referendum his government vowed to celebrate. He sought support from university professors to find ways to justify the holding of a referendum based on the constitution, despite its declaring: “the in-dissolvable unity of the Spanish state.” While none were successful in finding a plausible legal basis within the constitution, a debate over the constitution began to take place. An unlikely critic of said constitution was one of the seven “fathers of the constitution,” Miguel Herrero y Rodríguez de Miñón. A Spanish lawyer, member of the Popular party and key figure in the writing of the constitution conceded that: “the constitution was an instrument of peace and transition” which made “disastrous generalizations on the map of Spain’s regions” (Minder, 2017). Another attempt was made to gain the recognition of the “Venice Commission,” the Council of Europe’s advisory body on constitutional matters. Its fields of competence cover a variety of aspects of the Catalan crisis, including “minority protection, decentralization, federalism and regionalism” (Council of Europe, 2018). However, the Commission has in past cases issued opinions on referenda held in Trento, Ukraine and Montenegro, in which it has sets precedents to the European standard on the issue. Josep María Castellà

Andreu, a member of the Venice commission points to the Essential criteria to the recognition of the latter are the “constitutionality and the adherence to national law” in addition to the “most broad participation of citizens concerned” (Andreu, 2017). After Russia’s annexation of Crimea, the Commission stated that while “referendums are the expression of the will of the people, that does not mean that any referendum will automatically be considered constitutional.” To find an agreement with the central government, Puigdemont travels to Madrid on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2017 to secretly meet with Mariano Rajoy. The Prime Minister reportedly told Puigdemont “That he could not, and would not grant a referendum” (March, 2018). This contrasts with the relationship Artur Mas had with the Spanish Prime Minister. From what is publicly known, the two politicians sought to find dialogue and held mutual respect for each other. In repeated public exchanges of letters, Mas and Rajoy repeatedly stated their positions and “openness to dialogue” (Huffington Post, 2013). With the new President of the Generalitat however, it can be said that both leaders profited from the escalating confrontation and lack of dialogue. In Spain, voters looked favorably on Rajoy’s hard stance against a secessionist movement (Cnbc, 2017). In Catalonia on the other hand, Rajoy’s unwillingness to find common ground nurtured the idea of a Spanish state that aims to oppress Catalan’s right to self-determination.

As it became clear that the referendum was to be held unilaterally (meaning without the consent of the Spanish state) Puigdemont had all of the members of government sign a pact that they would “organize, call for and celebrate” a referendum “no matter its legal basis” (March, 2018). Five ministers of the government were replaced since they were unwilling to sign the agreement. The law which would ultimately provide the legal basis for the referendum was presented on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2017.

#### Llei del referèndum d'autodeterminació de Catalunya

In its preamble the law gives sovereignty to the Catalan people “whose legitimate history and tradition was interrupted only with the force of arms.” A sovereignty, which has been denied with the constitutional court ruling in 2010. The region’s most recent elections in 2015, are according to the preamble, the expression of a nation’s will to hold a referendum about its future. In addition, reference is made to Spain’s signing of the declaration of human rights in 1977 and in so doing, should recognize the right of Catalonia’s right to secede from its territory. Finally, the preamble underlines the efforts undertaken by the regional government to find an agreement with the Spanish state without success (Diari Oficial de la Generalitat de Catalunya, 2017). Following the preamble are 34 articles specifying how the vote will be carried out. Article 3, establishes “an exceptional judicial regime” which “prevails over all other sources of law” and protects “any person or entity which is involved with the preparation, celebration and implementation of the referendum.” This law is of importance because it implies that the Spanish constitution would no longer be applicable on Catalan territory. The vote is to take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 2017 and is organized by the Region’s electoral committee assisted by international observers.

The law was put to the Catalan Parliament's floor on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 2017, despite it not being on the order of the day (Salles, 2017). Yet through a motion by the spokesperson of Junts pel Sí, the chamber was asked to vote on the law. This caused outrage among unionist deputies, who denounced the law and left the parliament chamber in protest. This act proves once more how political dialogue ceased to exist on the issue both on a national and regional level. Before leaving, representatives of the popular party placed Spanish and Catalan flags on their desks, which were then removed by Àngels Martínez, a representative of the Podemos party. Justifying herself she later stated in an interview that the Spanish flag "Is not a symbol of unity as long as it does not recognize the nationalities which constitute it" (Europa Press, 2017). The law is then passed with 72 votes in favor, 11 abstentions and no votes against. Suspecting the law's unconstitutionality, the secretary general of the Catalan parliament Xavier Muro refused to sign the bill. He also advised the president of the parliament, Carme Forcadell, to "impede or paralyze any initiative which could lead to a referendum or independence" (Altimira, 2017). A longtime advocate for Catalan independence and former president of the Catalan "national assembly," Forcadell gave little weight to the warnings she was receiving by her colleagues. The evening following the approbation of the law, the vice-president of the central government spoke of "shameful and undemocratic behavior" by the parliamentary majority and stated that "with Forcadell we are witnessing the end of democracy" (Ortega, 2017). On the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, the constitutional court suspended the law "cautiously" and reminded the 948 Catalan mayors committed to the referendum to cease their illegal activities. In addition, a message was directed to Catalan police forces, the regional media and members of parliament that would they promote the referendum in any way, they could face charges (Pérez, 2017).

## 1 October

Despite the unconstitutionality of the law and the repeated warnings of prosecution, the Catalan government did not discontinue the organization of the referendum. In anticipation of the vote, the central government decided to reinforce national police presence in Catalonia. 3 boats were commissioned by the Spanish state and docked in the ports of Barcelona and Tarragona, accommodating around 4 thousand members of the Guardia civil police force (Bathgate, 2017). Fearing police intervention on voting day, many supporters spent the night from the 30<sup>th</sup> September to the first of October in front of voting centers. A famous image shows a column of tractors entering Barcelona to be placed strategically to impede the work of police forces aiming to confiscate ballots (BBC, 2017). These acts prove the success of the independence movement in gathering the involvement of large parts of the population, who were willing to make sacrifices for its objectives.

The day of the vote was one characterized by police violence. The "Mossos d'esquadra," the Catalan police force, were ordered to confiscate voting material and impede people from entering the voting stations. Investigations show that they have been effective in closing 99 stations and confiscating 400 ballot boxes, yet in other cases the Mossos were reportedly by standing as people exercised their vote (Carranco, 2017). As the Civil Guards began charging against protestors in order to reach and confiscate ballot boxes, there have been

instances of confrontation between regional and national police documented on video and photographs. In some cases, voters called the local fire brigades to protect them from the Guardia Civil, showing how Spanish officials had lost all legitimacy in the eyes of Catalans (El Periódico, 2017). No significant acts of violence by voters have been reported, apart obstructing the civil guards from entering polling stations. The repeated chants of “we are people of peace” underline the pacific, non-violent nature of the independence movement mentioned previously in this paper. It is to this day unclear how many people were injured on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October. A day after the referendum, the Catalan government reported that 893 people and 33 police officers had been injured (Jones, 2017). The number has however never been confirmed independently. Nevertheless, there have been some nongovernmental organizations denouncing police action. Among them is “Human rights watch” which released a statement in which it assesses the “use of excessive police force” against “peaceful protesters” (Human rights watch, 2017).

### Post-referendum

The referendum results published by the regional government show that of the 2.286.217 votes cast, 90,18% were in favor of independence, 7,83% against and 1,98% were blank (Generalitat de Catalunya , 2017). Both the Spanish and Catalan government called the vote a success. In a speech given on the same day of the vote, Puigdemont speaks of “police brutality” which, along with “countless other instances of oppressions in Catalonia’s history” which have made Catalans “win their right to sovereignty” (Rtve, 2017). In Madrid, Rajoy stated that there “has not been a Catalan referendum today” and denounced the Catalan government of “acts that are repulsive to any democrat.” In addition, he mentioned the fact that the “majority of Catalans did not participate in the vote,” and who “therefore stood by the side of democracy” (The Guardian, 2017). In none of the two speeches was there an offer for dialogue or a proposal to de-escalate the political conflict. The speech by Felipe VI, who had been enthroned in 2014 did little to solve the conflict. As mentioned earlier, the king holds a “super-partes” role under the Spanish constitution. His speech given on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017, was seen by many Catalans as partisan and divisive. In it, the king denounces the wrongdoing of the autonomous government at length stating that the Catalan government “has divided the region’s society” and violated its “harmony.” He later encourages those in Catalonia who do not agree with the referendum to “stay strong” and promises them that “the whole Spanish nation supports them” (Palacio de la Zarzuela , 2017). The speech did not mention the millions of Catalans who are unsatisfied with the current standing of Catalonia in Spain. While Felipe’s father Juan Carlos was for many Catalans an admired embodiment of the transition to democracy, his son lost legitimacy in the eyes of many after this speech. An interesting figure that puts this fact in evidence is that while 63.8% of Spaniards watched his Christmas address in 2017, the number is considerably lower in Catalonia at 39.6% (González, 2017).

## Unilateral declaration of independence

The period following the referendum exposed again the weakness of an independentist coalition comprising parties opposed to each other ideologically. The law for the referendum states that independence would be declared 48 hours after an affirmative vote. This part of the law was violated due to disagreements among the coalition partners on how to proceed. Members of the CUP expected Puigdemont to declare independence immediately and were disappointed by the speech he held on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October. The Catalan president suspended the declaration, despite not having declared independence previously. The suspension according to him should allow for “dialogue” with the central state. This might be interpreted as an attempt to return to the “pactist” strategy which characterized the party Puigdemont was part of for most of his political career. His ambiguous speech did not please the radical independentists, nor the unionist representatives in the opposition. The spokesperson for the Catalan socialist party confessed he was not sure he understood the speech well due to its “complex” wording and the logic behind “suspending a declaration which has not been made.” On the government’s side, members of the CUP demonstratively decided not to clap at the end of the president’s speech and stated that “only by declaring independence can one negotiate with Spain” (Minder, 2017).

In Madrid, Mariano Rajoy held a press conference in which he asks Puigdemont to give “clarity” over whether independence has been declared or not. This is of importance to the central government in order to initiate the procedure to activate article 155 of the constitution. The article concerns the workings of the autonomous regions, giving the central state the power to suspend regional government in case of its “violation of the constitution or a grave attack on national interest.” In case the law is approved by an absolute majority in the Senate, it gives the central government to take “the necessary obligations to enforce the constitution and defend the national interest” (Congreso de España, 1978). Barcelona’s response came on October 27<sup>th</sup>, when the Catalan parliament voted for the region’s independence, basing themselves on the referendum results. A few days prior Puigdemont still considered calling early election, trying to avoid the application of article 155. The vote is televised but held anonymously, to circumvent the expected prosecution by the Spanish state. As with the referendum law, all members of unionist parties left the chamber to boycott the vote. The bill named “independent, and sovereign, democratic and social state of law,” passes with 70 votes in favor and 10 against (Stothard, 2017). The central government’s response was immediate, bringing article 155 to the senate floor, where it is approved by the required absolute majority of its members (El País, 2017).

## Political prisoners or imprisoned politicians?

The Catalan parliament and its government are dissolved. Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, Spain’s deputy prime minister is encharged with defending the state’s policy in the region. Simultaneously first arrests were made related to the referendum in what would become a large scale judicial operation involving Catalan politicians and activists. Already prior to the declaration of independence, Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, the presidents

of Òmnium Cultural and the national assembly, were jailed on charges of rebellion. The “two Jordis” as they are commonly referred to in Catalan media, were charged over an event on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, when a pro-independence rally was organized to allegedly hinder an operation by the civil guard (The Guardian, 2017). This led to large scale demonstrations across Catalonia under the motto: “free political prisoners.” A yellow ribbon was adopted as the symbol of protest against their imprisonment, which sympathizers began wearing on their clothing or hung in public places. The ribbon gained most media attention when Pep Guardiola, a successful Catalan football manager, began wearing it during games at his current club Manchester city. Wearing political messages during games is explicitly prohibited by the English Football Association, the body governing the rules and regulation in British football. Guardiola defended himself by stating that his was not a “political message, but rather a personal one” (AFP, 2017). Despite this, his club asked him to cease wearing the ribbon since it is closely tied to the “political prisoners Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez.”

The term “political prisoners” has been one of debate in Spain and beyond. On the other hand, the current Justice Minister Rafael Català assured “there are no political prisoners in Spain, rather imprisoned politicians” (Sills, 2017). Towards the end of October, Spanish prosecutors pressed sedition charges against Carles Puigdemont, who fled the country along with other members of the disposed Catalan government. In Belgium, the host country to many European Union institutions, the politicians sought protection from the Spanish judiciary. They received support both by the Belgian government and secessionist parties such as the “New Flemish Alliance” (Stone, 2017). Some Catalan politicians who did not leave Spanish territory and were jailed while awaiting their trials to this day. The most prominent among them is Oriol Junqueras, the leader of Esquerra Republicana. Despite being incarcerated, he is able to participate in political life with the help of his entourage, who among other tasks, manage his social media. With Tweets such as: “If the price of liberty is prison, we will never renounce liberty,” they portray him as a martyr-like figure in the independence movement. In the same spirit, many independentists have drawn parallels between the exile of Puigdemont and that of Luis Companys, who as mentioned previously fled to France and was later executed by Franco’s troops. Others however, do not support this comparison. Andreu Mayayo, professor of history and geography at the University of Barcelona believes that “Puigdemont is a caricature of Companys who fled Catalonia for his own benefit” (Baiges, 2018).

### 3.6 The central role of traditional and new media in Catalan independence

The role of the media is central in the Catalan independence movement. It is of interest to analyze the development of different types of mass media after the end of Franco’s dictatorship. Being an authoritarian regime, the media was used as an instrument to “limit political pluralism” and promote “political demobilization” (Linz, 1974). The regime exercised total control over what was to appear on newspapers, radio stations and televisions. The latter were the regime’s preferred propaganda tool, where they portrayed a constant struggle between the good, embodied by Spain, and the evil abroad. González Seara, a Spanish



sociologist, writes the typical news broadcast would include a “string of foreign disasters” followed by Spain’s achievements to the tune of “cheerful bagpipe music” (Gunther, et al., 1999). Profound changes were made after the transition to democracy. Through an organic law passed in 1980, state owned television channels were to become impartial, regulated and instruments to promote the ideas of democracy. Notwithstanding this development, the head of state owned “RTVE,” was still appointed by the government. This led to constant mistrust by viewers and parties, which repeatedly complained about a pro-government media bias. With the introduction of autonomous communities, regional governments began pushing for their own television and radio channels. The Generalitat passes the “CCMA” act on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1982 which regulates regional radio and television broadcasts. Radio broadcasts by “Catalunya Radio” begin in 1983, followed by Catalonia’s television channel “TV3” in 1984 (CCMA, 2018). According to the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP), around 25% of the Catalan audience watched TV3 regularly in the early nineties.

In recent years, media bias has been a key issue of discussion in Spain. As Professor Josep Maria Carbonell mentioned in an interview held for this paper, TV3 has become a “propaganda machine” for the Catalan government. While it may not be partisan during regional elections, it is biased in favor of independence before and after campaigns. The same holds true for radio stations like “Catalunya radio,” which equally promote the narrative of the Generalitat. Catalonia’s largest newspaper “La Vanguardia” with a circulation of over 230 thousand copies, is less biased according to Carbonell. While its editorial line is against independence, it publishes articles both for and against independence equally. Media bias is just as evident with public and private television in Spain. This leads the professor to make comparisons with Italy where television channels were traditionally assigned to major parties and private channels reflected the interests of their owners. Catalan television can also be analyzed through the lens of Michael Billig’s theory of “Banality of Nationalism.” In his book “Banal nationalism” he gives examples of small events and actions which strengthen nationalism, which often go unnoticed by large parts of society. An example for this is the weather forecast held Tomàs Molina on a local Catalan Television channel. The map used during the program is that of the Catalan regions within Spain and beyond, hinting at a unification of all territories within one state (inews, 2017).

## Social media

Social media was used both by the Spanish state, as by the Catalan government and pro-independence organizations to sway public opinion in its favor. Manuel Castells, a sociologist and communications expert, examined the use of social media’s impact on social movements during the “Arab Spring.” Much of the phenomena analyzed in north Africa can be applied to the Catalan independence movement. A key element in Castells findings is the aspect of “horizontal leadership” in social movements using social media (Castells, 2007). As in the Arab spring, there is no one clear leader in the Catalan independence movement. While current politicians are certainly figures of relevance, they alternate with time. Social media has been a key tool for independentist politicians during the referendum, to promote the referendum and give announcements while

the Spanish police took action against pro-referendum websites. President Puigdemont tweeted ways in which Catalans could access websites banned by the Spanish government through a list of proxies (Puigdemont, 2017). A parallel can be drawn here with the actions of the Tunisian government, which as Castell noted, equally halted access to individual websites without being able to control social media. On referendum day, many sympathizers across Europe used Twitter to express their support of Catalan's right to vote. Posts by the page "@Catlansvotefortes" were shared by 50,211 users across all 28 EU member state countries (Zaghi, 2017). Simultaneously, the Spanish police used their social media accounts to promote the idea that their intervention in the referendum was "proportional" under the recurrent phrase of "estamos por ti – we are there for you" (Europa Press, 2017). The same phrase was posted on the accounts of conservative Spanish politicians such as the minister of interior, blurring the lines between the state and government in the eyes of Catalans. After the referendum, Twitter remains a key tool for Catalan politicians who fled to other parts of Europe. The content of these Tweets is often provocative and controversial, especially on Puigdemont's account, which leads Carbonell to compare his page to that of US-president Donald Trump in that it polarizes and is later discussed through traditional media channels.

## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1 Point of no return?

The aim of this paper was to evidence how a region's desire for more autonomy lead to a conflict with the central state. Over time, this conflict has deteriorated the relationship between the region and the state, to the point that it aims to become a sovereign entity itself. Recent developments in Spanish politics give reason to believe that Spanish territorial unity can be maintained, despite the strength of the independence movement. As mentioned in this paper, relations among the Popular Party and Catalan governments, have worsened strongly after the "Majestic pact" of 1996. By initiating the supreme court enquiry into the Catalan statute of autonomy in 2006, and repeatedly rejecting dialogue with the Mas and Puigdemont administrations, they have shown an unwillingness to decentralize power within the Spanish state. The latest regional elections on December 21<sup>st</sup> have been a victory for the pro-independence coalition, despite many of their members residing abroad during the campaign in fears of being jailed by Spanish police. Pro-union Ciudadanos gain 25.4% of the vote to become the first political party in the region, much to the expense of the Partido Popular who drop from 8.5% to 4.2% leaving them unable to form a parliamentary group for the first time in history (Meler, 2017). After three attempts by the independentist coalition to appoint jailed or exiled politicians to government, Puigdemont abandons his ambitions to the presidency and consents to the formation of a government presided by Quim Torrà. A long-time advocate for independence, his first speech after being appointed president revolved around the establishment of a Catalan republic, the appointment of Puigdemont

as president and the release of all “political prisoners” (Veronese, 2018). Prospects to a solution to the Catalan conflict seemed dim at first, until Mariano Rajoy’s government fell after a successful motion of no confidence in the Spanish Parliament. The motion was initiated by members of the PSOE after the “Audiencia Nacional,” a specialized Spanish high court, proved a scheme of “effective and systematic corruption” within the PP (Vázquez, 2018). Pedro Sánchez, the leader of the socialist party, becomes Prime Minister and vows to reestablish “democratic normality” and call for early elections (Cortizo, 2018). The position of the PSOE on Catalan independence is moderate. While it supported the PP’s application of article 155, it has repeatedly called for the modification of the constitution, in order to “perfect the status of autonomous communities” (Luena, 2018). At the time of writing on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Torrà is optimistic that “dialogue is the only way to solve the problem” and wishes to have “open talks” with the new Prime Minister (Torregrosa, 2018). Despite these changes in national politics, it is unclear if any dialogue can still be fruitful, since many Catalans have lost hope in a Spanish state that has repeatedly granted Catalonia autonomy, only to reduce or abolish it at a later time.

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## Riassunto

### Capitolo 1

L'attuale crisi catalana è di grande importanza per la politica spagnola ed europea. Le sue cause sono molteplici, il che rende difficile stabilire un punto di partenza. Alcuni esperti indicano problemi contemporanei, come la crisi economica e il malcontento verso il governo in atto. Altri studiosi sostengono che le ragioni storiche giochino un ruolo importante, riconducendo la questione ai primi inizi delle istituzioni catalane e alla caduta di Barcellona per mano dell'esercito borbonico nel 1714. Lo scopo di questa ricerca è di individuare i diversi fattori che hanno un impatto sulla crisi e verificare che il tentativo della regione di aumentare l'autonomia nei confronti dello stato spagnolo è il fattore chiave del risorgere dell'indipendenza.

### Capitolo 2

Le prime istituzioni in territorio catalano nascono nella *Marca Hispanica* di Carlo Magno all'inizio del IX secolo. Le contee stabiliscono relazioni tra loro che culminano nella formazione di *Usatges* - una raccolta di dogane riconosciute da parlamenti e re, il cui ruolo fu di facilitare la tassazione nei territori coinvolti. Queste istituzioni, mantenute per secoli, contribuiscono a creare un senso di unità tra i principati. Il matrimonio tra il conte di Barcellona e la regina d'Aragona segna l'inizio di nuove istituzioni nei territori uniti. Nasce la *Generalitat* situata a Barcellona, che oltre a coordinare la tassazione, agisce come organismo di intermediazione permanente tra gli interessi del popolo e il monarca. Nel XVI secolo con l'Unione di Ferdinando II di Aragona e Isabella I di Castiglia, inizialmente sembra che la *Generalitat* possa rafforzare la sua posizione di fronte al re, dato che egli si mostra completamente indifferente a questioni catalane, lasciando



il Principato nel 1564 solo per tornare due decenni dopo. Ciò cambia con la crescente prospettiva imperialista e assolutista del Monarca, che tenta di frenare il potere che le istituzioni catalane avevano acquisito nel tempo.

Il culmine dello stravolgimento politico-istituzionale avviene nel 1593, quando il re sospende unilateralmente parti degli accordi stipulati con la corte di Barcellona nel 1583. Il malcontento popolare cresce di conseguenza, intensificandosi in una guerra tra la corona spagnola e la Catalogna, che si allea con la Francia. La Catalogna perde la guerra ed è di nuovo sotto il dominio spagnolo. Per evitare ulteriori conflitti, la *Generalitat* riceve poteri militari, aumentando così le sue competenze. Questo nuovo potere acquista un ruolo chiave nella guerra di successione al trono spagnolo nel 1702, quando la Catalogna si schiera con la dinastia degli Asburgo, che promette alla regione maggiore autonomia in cambio di sostegno contro la casa borbonica. Dopo 12 anni di guerra, Barcellona è messa sotto assedio dagli eserciti francesi e spagnoli di Felipe V di Borbone. Con la caduta di Barcellona, è abolita la *Generalitat* e introdotto un sistema centralizzato, basato sul modello della Francia. Il monarca borbonico agisce rapidamente per centralizzare il potere attraverso i decreti del 1716 *nueva planta*. Sono abolite tutte le particolarità del principato aragonese ad eccezione dei loro codici di legge, che dovevano essere applicati dall'amministrazione reale centralizzata.

Tra i catalani cresce l'impressione che una potenza straniera abbia assunto il controllo del territorio e abbia iniziato ad imporre le sue leggi e la sua cultura. Tale sentimento si manifesta in modo più evidente con l'introduzione del castigliano come lingua ufficiale, dando al catalano un ruolo secondario nella società. La lingua catalana si sarebbe rivelata uno strumento molto usato dai nazionalisti come elemento di distinzione della Spagna. Soprattutto con l'emergere del romanticismo in Europa, gli autori catalani iniziano a suscitare maggiore interesse nel passato e nella cultura medievale della regione. Una figura ricorrente nei romanzi di quel periodo è quella del "cercatore", destinato a intraprendere un percorso per trovare la sua vera identità. Nello stesso periodo vengono fondati giornali e concorsi letterari, che promuovono non solo il linguaggio catalano ma anche, come dimostra il *diari Català*, idee di autogoverno nel contesto di una Spagna federale. Questa tendenza si rafforza per tutto il XVIII e XIX secolo, con l'istituzione di ulteriori organizzazioni che diffondono idee di autodisciplina. L'instabilità politica sulla penisola in quel periodo porta alla caduta dell'istituzione monarchica e alla creazione della prima repubblica. Una repubblica che delude molti catalani quando respinge la proposta per la decentralizzazione del potere del famoso federalista Francesc Pi I Margall. La repubblica è di breve durata a causa di problemi agricoli e industriali oltre alla rivolta di Cuba contro il dominio spagnolo. Alfonso XIII è incoronato re e concede alla Catalogna lo status di *Mancomunidad*, che conferisce alle autorità regionali una varietà di competenze in ambito economico, educativo e commerciale. Segue la dittatura di Primo de Rivera, un famoso generale militare che pose fine alla *guerra del Rif* tra la Spagna e il Marocco. Ancora una volta, le istituzioni catalane vengono abolite, nonostante le promesse del generale di tutelarle. La lingua catalana è vietata, insieme a tutte le organizzazioni che si oppongono a Primo De Rivera. Politicamente il generale non fu in grado di ottenere un ampio sostegno dalle classi medie e basse.

Inoltre, il sistema misto dell'amministrazione provinciale e nazionale risulterà non strutturato e inefficiente. Nasce la seconda repubblica, sotto la quale la Catalogna riceve il suo primo statuto di autonomia nel 1932. Approvato con il 99% dei voti in un referendum regionale, nascono il parlamento e il governo catalano. Le sue competenze comprendono l'autonomia dell'iter legislativo, la polizia, le opere pubbliche e l'istruzione. Per i nazionalisti radicali catalani, lo statuto risulta insoddisfacente. Durante i negoziati tra lo stato centrale e le autorità Catalane, sono state modificate le frasi specifiche sulla sovranità nazionale Catalana. Mentre il testo fa inizialmente riferimento ad un "stato autonomo catalano", il documento finale afferma che la Catalogna diventa una "regione autonoma".

Segue la guerra civile e la dittatura di Francisco Franco, che abolisce ogni tipo di istituzione Catalana per istituire un sistema di governo autoritario sotto la sua guida. Durante la dittatura *franchista* si verifica l'oppressione sistematica dell'identità catalana nel tentativo di creare una nazione *castillana* uniforme. Franco muore nel 1975 e la Spagna inizia il suo processo di democratizzazione. La costituzione del 1978 prevede una monarchia costituzionale e regioni autonome. Il testo costituzionale è sottoposto a referendum: il 95,15% dei Catalani vota a favore, mostrando ancora una volta il desiderio di maggiore autonomia del popolo catalano. Segue un periodo di buone relazioni tra Madrid e Barcellona, caratterizzato da patti raggiunti tra politici regionali e nazionali. Jordi Pujol, un famoso oppositore del regime di Franco, fonda un partito catalano di centro destra che, grazie ai suoi seggi nel parlamento spagnolo, diventerà spesso un attore chiave nella politica nazionale. Chiamato "convergenza e unione", il partito ha sostenuto i politici nazionali in cambio di maggiore autonomia in Catalogna. L'esempio più famoso di questa pratica è il "patto maestoso", in cui Jordi Pujol incontra José Maria Aznar in un albergo di Barcellona per negoziare i termini del suo sostegno.

### Capitolo 3

Nel 2006, il parlamento catalano ha redatto un nuovo statuto di autonomia, a seguito di un referendum nella regione. Lo statuto è approvato con il 73,90% dei voti ed entra in vigore il 9 agosto 2006. Il Partito Popolare, opponendosi al nuovo statuto di autonomia sin dal suo inizio, ha presentato una causa alla Corte suprema sostenendo l'incostituzionalità di 128 dei 223 articoli del documento. Nella sua sentenza del 2010, la corte ha abrogato 14 articoli e ne ha modificati altri 27. La corte ha respinto la nozione di "nazionalità catalana", sostenendo che tale nozione comporterebbe una competizione con la nazionalità spagnola. Inoltre, è abolita la posizione preferenziale della lingua catalana, causando indignazione tra i catalani. Possiamo osservare l'ascesa degli indipendentisti, con grandi manifestazioni che si svolgono in tutta la regione sotto lo slogan "siamo una nazione, decidiamo noi". È quindi importante dare una definizione del nazionalismo catalano. Questa ricerca sostiene che il nazionalismo catalano contiene nozioni sia "etiche" sia "civiche". Etnico-culturali a causa dell'importanza della lingua, che attraverso la storia ha dimostrato di essere il fattore più importante nell'identità catalana e un elemento di distinzione dal resto della Spagna. Ma d'altra parte, i politici catalani

hanno ripetutamente affermato che chiunque lavori e viva in Catalogna è considerato un cittadino. Questo "nazionalismo civico" spiega perché molti immigrati provenienti da qualsiasi parte del mondo simpatizzano con il nazionalismo catalano per la sua natura inclusiva. Dopo il 2010, il partito di Convergència, che in precedenza non aveva mai avuto un'opinione chiara sull'indipendenza, forma una coalizione con partiti apertamente indipendentisti. Il presidente catalano Artur Mas incontra ripetutamente il primo ministro Rajoy per discutere di un accordo fiscale, che consentirebbe alla Catalogna di mantenere una parte più ampia delle tasse che raccoglie. Nel mezzo della crisi finanziaria, Rajoy rifiuta la sua proposta, provocando ulteriori indignazioni in Catalogna. Il governo catalano organizza un referendum consultivo, nel quale chiede ai suoi cittadini "Vuole che la Catalogna diventi uno stato? Se sì, vorreste che questo fosse indipendente?". Il voto si svolge contro il consenso del governo spagnolo e la dichiarazione di incostituzionalità da parte della Corte Suprema spagnola, segnando un nuovo punto basso nelle relazioni tra Barcellona e Madrid. Gli scandali di corruzione all'interno del partito di Convergència, guidano i suoi partner di coalizione a chiedere la rimozione di Artur Mas. Sorge così l'astro di Carles Puigdemont, un membro apertamente indipendentista del partito di Convergència che diventa presidente della Generalitat e promette un referendum vincolante sull'indipendenza Catalana. La sua presidenza è stata altamente divisiva e ha segnato la fine delle relazioni istituzionali tra lo stato centrale e la regione. La mancanza di dialogo culmina nella celebrazione di un referendum incostituzionale il primo ottobre 2017, in cui centinaia di persone sono stati ferite dalla polizia spagnola, portando molti a perdere fiducia nello stato a cui appartengono. I risultati del referendum pubblicati dal governo regionale mostrano che dei 2.286.217 voti il 90,18% era favorevole all'indipendenza. Il parlamento catalano proclama l'indipendenza unilateralmente, il che porta il governo spagnolo ad attivare l'articolo 155 della Costituzione, che gli conferisce il potere di adempiere "agli obblighi necessari per far rispettare la costituzione e difendere l'interesse nazionale". Contemporaneamente, vengono addebitate accuse contro i politici indipendenti e gli attivisti da parte della magistratura Spagnola. Sia la presa di autonomia politica che la persecuzione degli indipendentisti rafforzano la credenza catalana sull'oppressione e portano molti a fare parallelismi tra il governo spagnolo di centro-destra e la dittatura di Franco.

Segue un'analisi sul ruolo dei media nella formazione dell'opinione pubblica. In un'intervista per questa ricerca, il decano di Scienze Politiche dell'Università Ramon Lull di Barcellona, prof. Josep Maria Carbonell racconta come la televisione regionale sia diventata "macchina di propaganda" per il governo catalano. Pur rispettando le leggi di imparzialità durante le elezioni, svolge un ruolo chiave nel promuovere le ambizioni indipendentiste della regione. La televisione catalana può essere analizzata attraverso la teoria di Michael Billig chiamata "nazionalismo banale". Nel suo libro *The banality of Nationalism* spiega come un insieme di abitudini e comportamenti che spesso rimangono inosservati possano rafforzare il senso di appartenenza ad una nazione. Le Previsioni del tempo tenute da Tomàs Molina su un canale televisivo catalano si prestano come esempio. La mappa utilizzata durante il programma è quella dei *Països Catalans*, i territori in Spagna ed oltre, dove si parla il catalano, consolidando così l'idea di uno stato Catalano.

## Conclusione

Le ultime elezioni regionali del 21 dicembre 2017 sono state vinte da una coalizione indipendentista, nonostante molti dei loro candidati si trovino all'estero durante la campagna per timore di essere imprigionati dalla polizia spagnola. Dopo tre tentativi da parte della coalizione indipendentista di nominare governanti imprigionati o esiliati al governo, Puigdemont abbandona le sue ambizioni alla presidenza e acconsente alla formazione di un governo presieduto da Quim Torrà. Quest'ultimo è un noto sostenitore dell'indipendenza Catalana, il suo primo discorso dopo essere stato nominato presidente si appellava alla creazione di una "Repubblica Catalana". Le prospettive di una soluzione al conflitto catalano sembravano vaghe, fino a quando il governo di Mariano Rajoy non cadde dopo una mozione di sfiducia al parlamento spagnolo dovuto ad un caso di corruzione nel suo partito. Pedro Sánchez, il leader del partito socialista *PSOE*, diventa primo ministro e promette di ristabilire la "normalità democratica". La posizione del *PSOE* sull'indipendenza catalana è moderata. Mentre sosteneva l'entrata in vigore dell'articolo 155 da parte del Partito popolare, ha ripetutamente chiesto la modifica della costituzione, al fine di "perfezionare lo stato delle comunità autonome". Al momento della redazione di questo testo, Torrà si dichiara ottimista nel "dialogo come unico modo di risolvere il problema" e spera di avviare un confronto con il neo-insediato primo ministro. Tuttavia, nonostante gli stravolgimenti della scena politica nazionale, non è chiaro se il dialogo possa portare a risultati concreti, poiché molti catalani hanno perso fiducia nello stato spagnolo che ha a più riprese concesso autonomia alla Catalogna, salvo poi ridurla o stroncarla in un secondo momento.