The Catastrophe of Catalonia

By Mitchell Bonner

***Resolved: Spain should grant Catalonia its independence.***

Summary: In a time when national lines are fairly cut and dry, and the geopolitical landscape is stable, one region of Spain is trying to change that. Located in the northeastern part of Spain, the region of Catalonia seeks its independence from Spain. It claims that it should possess its independence on the grounds of long-seated cultural differences being suppressed by the national government of Spain, broken autonomy agreements, and not wanting to prop up an increasingly dwindling Spanish economy with little economic support in return. Many in the international community have supported this claim, saying it preserves democracy and the right to self-determination. However, the popular support, despite claims, is simply not present, which makes a current independent Catalonia suppressive of democracy and the true needs of its people. Therefore, we deny Resolved: Spain should grant Catalonia its independence.

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The Catastrophe of Catalonia

There is no doubt that the revolutionary spirit is definitional of the modern age. Since the mid 18th Century, movements worldwide have been enamored with the possibility of freedom and independence from the authority they perceive as tyrannical above them. The most recent of these movements has been the movement for Catalonian Independence. Located in the northeastern region of Spain, the region has moved for its independence on the grounds of cultural identity and economic freedom. However, the majority of Catalonians do not support an independent Catalonia, and Catalonian independence would prove far more harmful to itself and the world than its independence is worth. That is why my partner and I deny Resolved: Spain should grant Catalonia its independence.

Resolutional Analysis:

We interpret this resolution exactly as it is stated: that the nation of Spain should or should not grant its region of Catalonia its independence. This puts the burden on the Pro team to by preponderance of evidence that the *actor of Spain* should grant independence to the region of Catalonia. Our reason to prefer is that is the literal reading of the resolution before us.

Contention 1: Spain will not give it.

Spain has made it very clear it does not support an independent Catalonia. This reflects its view that Catalonia is currently operating in a rogue status, and is illegitimate as an independent state. This belief has gone so far as to cause Spain to trigger Article 155 of its constitution, which grants the national government power to seize control of whatever elements of the already very autonomous Catalonia it deems necessary. It did this to, in its mind, preserve the very democratic integrity of Spain and Catalonia itself as an autonomous region of Spain. Its prime minister Mariano Rajoy put it so:

Sam Jones, Stephen Burgen and Emma Graham-Harrison. (Reporters for the Guardian), “Spain dissolves Catalan parliament and calls fresh elections”, October 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/27/spanish-pm-mariano-rajoy-asks-senate-powers-dismiss-catalonia-president>

“What has happened today in the Catalan parliament is unequivocal proof of how necessary it was for the senate to approve the government’s proposals,” he said on Friday afternoon. “Today the Catalan parliament has approved something that, in the opinion of the great majority of people, is not just against the law, but is also a criminal act because it is intended to declare something that isn’t possible – Catalan independence.”

Later in the article, Spanish parliament member Carlos Carrizosa put forward the same idea.

“You’re like gods, above the law. How can you imagine you can impose independence like this without a majority in favour … and with this simulacrum of a referendum? Puigdemont will be remembered not for ruining Catalonia but for having divided the Catalans and Spain.”

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This idea is most clear stated again later in the same article by the statement made by the British government:

“The UK does not and will not recognise the unilateral declaration of independence made by the Catalan regional parliament. It is based on a vote that was declared illegal by the Spanish courts. We continue to want to see the rule of law upheld, the Spanish constitution respected and Spanish unity preserved.”

Therefore, it is clear that Spain has no intentions whatsoever of granting Catalonia independence. It views it as simply too much of a danger to its democratic process to realistically do so. Therefore, on grounds of inherency, the resolution falls. However, even if the possibility is granted that the Spanish government would grant Catalonia independence, it is still abundantly clear that independence produces more harms than good, and that Spain is rejecting Catalan independence for good reason.

Contention 2: Independence not wanted by Catalonians.

It has been often stated in referendum results that the vast majority of Catalonians desire independence from Spain. However, when one looks a little deeper, the numbers tell an entirely different story. An October referendum would seem to imply a 90 percent majority in favor of secession. However:

Caroline Mortimer. (Reporter for the Independent), “Catalonia independence: Thousands of pro-unity supporters take to streets of Barcelona”, October 29,2017. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/catalonia-independence-pro-unity-demonstration-barcelona-catalan-crisis-latest-a8025971.html>

The final result saw 90 per cent of people opting for independence on a turnout of 43 per cent, which the Catalan government said gave them a mandate for independence, but critics said unionists mostly boycotted the vote.

In other words, mathematically only 38.7 percent of people voted in favor of independence, with those not in favor of secession not voting in what they viewed as an unconstitutional referendum. The results for Catalan parliament would also seem to indicate a victory for secession, but David Lublin, professor of government at American University, notes why this too is deceiving:

David Lublin. (Professor of government in the School of Public Affairs at American University), “How Catalonia’s election was biased in favor of the Separatists”, December 22, 2017. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/12/22/how-a-bias-in-catalonias-elections-helped-the-separatists-win/?utm_term=.4099a70f1555>

Catalonia’s pro-independence parties won a major victory Thursday: Together, they secured a five-seat majority over all other parties in the Catalan Parliament. Separatists were triumphant about their victory.

But here’s the problem: The separatist victory is a manufactured product of Catalonia’s electoral system, in which voters cast their ballots for a single party list and seats are awarded to parties proportionally using the d’Hondt formula within each of Catalonia’s four provinces.

As I’ve explained before, this system is stacked in favor of the separatists — which is how the three pro-independence parties won a parliamentary majority while receiving just 47.7 percent of the vote. Three factors skewed the results.

First, Catalonia gives the three more rural provinces, where separatist parties do well, 15 more of the 135 total deputies than they merit based on population. Conversely, Barcelona, the most unionist province, is underrepresented.

This is known as “malapportionment.” Had Catalonia allotted seats fairly among the provinces, pro-independence parties would have fallen one seat short of a majority.

Nacho Blanco, professor at the Abat Oliba CEU University of Barcelona, notes the dangerous political implications of such an action:

Nacho Martin Blanco. (Professor at Abat Oliba CEU University of Barcelona), “The case against Catalan secession”, September 1, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/case-catalan-secession-170728105819426.html>

Today in Catalonia we have a government presuming to be the only qualified judge of its own cause, deciding as they please which laws or judicial resolutions are applicable to them and their relatives, and which are not. If we were to accept this, it would also mean accepting, by extension, that everyone else in society has the same right, and could presumably take the law into their own hands. This would lead to nothing less than the wholesale destruction of the democratic state and the rule of law.

Therefore, by granting Catalonia independence, Spain would be undermining democracy and rule of law, both of which are foundational to a stable society. To avoid these harms, a Con ballot must be cast.

Contention 3: True Desires Ignored

Not only would granting Catalonia independence undermine democracy, but it would also ignore the very real desires the Catalan people have: a larger voice consistent their status as a core component of Spain's success in the EU and more autonomous, yet not independent control over their own future. William Hunt of the St. Lawrence Solidarity project puts it this way:

William Hunt. (Founder of the St. Lawrence Solidarity project, a project founded to support democratic culture in postcommunist Europe), “The Ghost in The Ballot Box: Catalonia’s Crisis in Context”, October 10, 2017. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/catalonia-independence-referendum-crisis-history-franco>

For the past two hundred years, however, the primary objective of Catalanism has not been separation from Spain, so much as the transformation of Spain from a centralized Castilian monarchy into a pluralistic “nation of nations.” In 1932, Francesc Macià, father of modern Catalanism and first president of the revived Generalitat, proclaimed a “Catalan Republic within the Iberian Federation,” though he had to accept a more restricted autonomy. His successor Lluís Companys (revered as Catalonia’s iconic martyr after being executed by Franco) called for a “Catalan State within the Spanish Federal Republic.” Puigdemont might well settle for something similar, eventually.

The critical issue for most Catalans is the right to decide, rather than independence per se. Many Catalans who were willing to risk jail to support the referendum would have voted against separation. The irony is that if the Spanish government were to permit a free expression of opinion, a majority of Catalans, having won the right to secede, would probably not feel the need to exercise it. They would, after all, have the weapon of secession at hand should they need it in the future, because the bond with Spain would have become a voluntary union of equals. Even for many independentistas the threat of secession is primarily a blunt instrument with which to get Spain’s attention. For them to admit as much in advance, however, would be to throw the match. A “right to decide” is only meaningful when it is wrested from the force that would deny it.

The key takeaway is that the Catalans have never really desired their own independence, but rather increased autonomy within the Catalan vision of a “nation of nations”. Pau Marí-Klose and Ignacio Molina point out that the referendum for independence conducted in October only further serves to widen the problem:

Pau Mari-Klose and Ignacio Molina. (Associate professor of sociology at the University of Zaragoza and senior analyst at the Elcano Royal Institute in Madrid respectively), “Catalans don’t want to secede, they want to be heard”, September 30, 2017. <https://www.politico.eu/article/catalonia-referendum-independence-want-to-vote-not-secede/>

What this all boils down to is that Catalans — like citizens of other post-industrial countries — want to be consulted on their future. What it does not mean is that a referendum on secession from Spain is the only response to this desire for self-determination, as nationalists claim. Indeed, an independence referendum is particularly dangerous in a region like Catalonia. Referendums are not suited to divided societies. Places like Belgium and Northern Ireland, for example — where cleavages are based on entrenched ethnic, linguistic or religious divisions — hardly ever resort to them. And, when they do, the experience has been traumatic, both exposing and deepening sectarian hostility. Divided societies need powersharing strategies to defuse conflicts. Given the strong correlation between language and political preferences on the issue of Catalan independence, a referendum will become a divisive zero-sum mechanism, in which a small — and probably unstable — majority imposes its preferences in a manner not easily reversible.

Note that even though this speaks of a majority, it is speaking before any referendum took place. The fact that not even a majority voted for independence shows Catalonia’s true desires. It simply seeks a means to address its grievances and increase its autonomy. Nacho Blanco further elaborates that such means are already present in the current Spanish constitution:

Nevertheless, the fact that our constitution does not contain intangibility clauses means that it can be changed. Thus it is not true that the nationalists have no choice but to put Catalan institutions outside the law. They could try to achieve their political aim through a reform that introduced the right to secession in the Spanish Constitution. The problem is, they know that reform of our constitution, like that of any other, is a lengthy and expensive process that requires qualified parliamentary majorities, and that is precisely what the nationalists do not have. They do not even have a qualified majority in the Autonomous Parliament of Catalonia itself. It is worth remembering that the nationalists are launching their challenge when they do not have the support of even half of Catalans. They know that the timing and political circumstances are against them; according to all the opinion polls, support for independence, which reached its peak at the end of 2014, has only decreased since then, coinciding with an improvement in citizens' perceptions of the economy.

Thus, given that they make no attempt to use these means, the independence movement can be seen merely as a misguided and divisive attempt to address the wider issues. In the end, independence does not solve any of the real issues at hand, but rather further stokes language and political divisions within Catalonia and Spain. That is, of course, if the movement trulywants independence as its end result. Therefore, Spain should reject the independence movement as an inadequate solution to Catalonia’s problems, and not grant Catalonia its independence.

CON-AT: THE CATASTROPHE OF CATALONIA

AT: Independence preserves historical/cultural identity of Catalonia

1. Historical/cultural identity of Catalonia has been as part of unified Spain.

Nacho Martin Blanco. (Professor at Abat Oliba CEU University of Barcelona), “The case against Catalan secession”, September 1, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/case-catalan-secession-170728105819426.html>

The nationalists constantly invoke a supposed Catalan sovereignty before the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713), although at that time no peoples in the world could for one moment be considered sovereign.

This is because the concept of sovereignty vested in the people, ie, the concept of national sovereignty as opposed to the sovereignty of the king, did not begin to take hold in practice - at least in continental Europe - until the French Revolution (1789), and did not take shape specifically in Spain until the Courts of Cadiz (1812).

This is where the modern concept of nation stems from, that of a political nation as a collection of free men who are the subjects of rights and obligations, which is developing in Europe and across the Western world to this day and has become synonymous with citizenship.

This political nation, the nation state, the political community of Spain, is the only collective subject of sovereignty this country has known throughout its history. Since it resides in the people, sovereignty in Spain has always resided in the Spanish people as a whole and the Catalans have always played a key role in shaping this framework of coexistence and solidarity based on the unity of sovereignty.

It would be senseless to break this shared history at the behest of a temporary or accidental opinion induced by the propaganda of the Catalan nationalist parties. Furthermore, it does not seem fair for the Catalans to assume the power unilaterally to put an end to that which we, the Spanish people as a whole, have put such an effort into building together.

Two of Spain's seven founding fathers, responsible for the country's current constitution, are of Catalan origin. This constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation. Its ratification in 1978 was the result of a broad consensus across diverse parties, including the Catalan nationalists of Puigdemont's party, and received support from more than 90 percent of the Catalan voters in a referendum.

AT: Independence preserves right of self-determination

1. Circumstances fall outside UN definition

Nacho Martin Blanco. (Professor at Abat Oliba CEU University of Barcelona), “The case against Catalan secession”, September 1, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/07/case-catalan-secession-170728105819426.html>

The pro-independence parties are starting to dispense with euphemisms, talking less and less about the non-existent "right to decide" and more about a right codified in international law, the "right to self-determination".

They face the problem that, as the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon has explained, the case of Catalonia does not fall within any of the circumstances provided by the UN for this right to apply. This right is limited to decolonisation processes and undemocratic regimes that do not respect the rule of law, subject to conditions established by the UN that have nothing to do with the situation in Catalonia.

AT: Independence produces economic benefits for Catalonia

1. Corporation confidence drops as a result of independence

Will Martin. (Business Insider Contributor), “A Catalan split from Spain could be even worse than Brexit”, October 2, 2017. <http://www.businessinsider.com/catalonia-split-spain-economic-impact-ing-2017-9>

Declaring independence from Spain would automatically mean that Catalonia would have to leave the European Union, which would inevitably cause issues around its membership of the EU's single market.

"Most foreign companies, as well as Catalan ones, fear falling out of the European single market," Minne (ING Bank Economist) wrote. "A consequence would be that investment could be delayed or redirected outside the region."

"Probably the most impacted companies are those exporting to the EU. The EU accounted for 65% of exports and 70% of foreign investment in Catalonia over the last three years,"

Minne argued in conclusion that "the economic cost for Catalonia could proportionally exceed that of Brexit for the UK."

"All in all, building up the Catalan Republic turns out to be an expensive project and the bulk of the costs that could be cut depend on the goodwill of European governments (the Spanish one included).

"It remains difficult to evaluate the consequences of such an unprecedented event, but in the long run we can imagine that the economic cost for Catalonia could proportionally exceed that of Brexit for the UK."

Since the majority of EU countries as well as the United States have condemned the independence movement, such good will is not expected, thus resulting in these consequences.

In an article a day later speaking of the immediate financial results, Stratfor says thus:

Stratfor. (American geopolitical intelligence platform and publisher), “Spain: Companies in Catalonia Begin Weighing the Economic Pros and Cons”, October 5, 2017. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/spain-companies-catalonia-begin-weighing-economic-pros-and-cons>

Financial markets and companies are starting to worry about the economic consequences that would come if Catalonia declares independence. On Oct. 4, the shares of two Catalonia-headquartered banks, CaixaBank and Banco Sabadell, fell by more than 5 percent. The following day, Banco Sabadell's board of directors met to discuss the possibility of moving its legal seat out of Catalonia. In the meantime, drug company Oryzon announced on Oct. 4 a decision to relocate away from Catalonia, while telecommunications company Eurona announced on Oct. 5 that it, too, will move its headquarters from Barcelona to Madrid. (The company said the decision was made a year ago.) Several other businesses throughout Spain have said that they are also following events in the region closely and are considering various options for how to respond.

Manuel Baigorri. (Journalist for Bloomberg), “Catalan Uncertainty Is Putting Deals In Doubt”, October 17, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-18/catalonia-may-test-m-a-boom-that-beat-terrorism-and-bank-failure>

The uncertainty in the northeastern region, which accounts for a fifth of Spain’s economy, is starting to hurt.

Spanish business confidence dropped for the first quarter in seven, the National Statistics Institute said last week, while the European Commission’s gauge of consumer confidence has slipped for the past two months.

Some 700 companies have transferred their legal bases out of Catalonia to other parts of Spain since the Oct. 1 ballot, El Pais reported, citing data from Spain’s College of Registrars. On Monday, the government cut its economic forecast for 2018, projecting growth of 2.3 percent next year instead of the 2.6 percent.

1. **Spain suffers economically from Catalonian independence.**

Laila Kearney. (Journalist for Reuters), “Wall Street wanes ahead of holiday; Catalan vote hits euro, Spanish stocks”, December 21, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-markets/wall-street-wanes-ahead-of-holiday-catalan-vote-hits-euro-spanish-stocks-idUSKBN1EG045>

In Europe, the premium investors demand for holding Spanish bonds over top-rated German peers fell to its lowest in almost three months as Catalonia held an independence election.

The euro slid 0.1 percent to $1.1858 EUR=, but Europe's common currency was still up nearly 13 percent this year, on track for its best yearly performance in 14 years.

Spanish stocks were among the biggest losers, confirming analyst expectations that any shake-out from the Catalonia vote would be mostly confined to Spain.

Joan Tapia. (Journalist and Royal Academy of Economic and Financial Sciences of Spain member), “The Catalan Crisis Is Intensifying And Spaniards’ Confidence Is Declining”, December 28,2017. <http://thecorner.eu/spanish-politics/the-catalan-crisis-is-intensifying-and-spaniards-confidence-is-declining/67839/>

And lots of companies – starting with CaixaBank and Sabadell and followed by Gas Natural, Planeta and Catalana Occidente – have already been convinced they ought to transfer their headquarters outside of Catalonia so as not to lose the confidence of savers and clients.

But the instability could also affect the Spanish economy. The IMF and the rating agencies have issued a warning. The stock market has been nervous and the risk premium has increased. Up to now only slightly.

In this context, Spaniards’ confidence is beginning to be eroded. The INE’s Business Confidence Index had been rising for six consecutive quarters and, suddenly dropped 1.1% in the fourth quarter. The Consumer Confidence Index, which had increased without stopping since February, fell 5.6% in September, although is still slightly over the 100 base. And the CIS’ more general Index of Political Confidence, which ranges between 0 and 100, is at the very low level of 32,5, with a monthly decline of 4.1%, which is even more marked in the sub-index of expectations.

1. Pension system suffers as a result of independence

Javier Dıaz-Gimenez and Julian Dıaz-Saavedra. (IESE Business School and Universidad de Granada respectively), “ Catalonia: Independence and Pensions”, May 11, 2017. <http://javierdiazgimenez.com/res/pen51-pap.pdf>

This article confirms and quantifies the intuition that the consequences of independence for Catalonian residents will depend crucially on the long term growth rate of the new republic. It also shows that the demographic, educational, and productivity advantages of Catalonian residents, when compared with those of the rest of Spain, are not enough to ensure a more prosperous economic future for Catalonians or a more sustainable pension system.

Later in the conclusion:

In this article we quantify the consequences of independence for Catalonian pensions. As expected, these consequences depend on the size and duration of the post-independence recession and, especially on the long-run Catalonian growth rate. Even if the recession is small, if Catalonia only succeeds to grow at the same rate as the rest of Spain, it will take until about 2088 for Catalonian pensions to recover. We conclude that independence has complex and far-reaching economic implications that warrant a careful evaluation before any decision is made

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