

Regions Autonomy

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Michal (31/12/06, Głogow, Poland) I don't know if there was a thread about that but I have some questions to someone (like Xoán) who will know about that.

Why some regions in Spain wants autonomy? I heard about that much times (about Vizcaya/Biskaia - don't know English name - and Catalonia) but last time I heard Galicia wants autonomy too. Can someone tell me why?

I heard a lot about ETA from Vizcaya and their murders. And I also saw that in every match where play Catalonia team there are flags on the stadium with words 'Catalonia not in Spain'. But I also have never seen Spanish flag on Riazor. Spanish flags I saw only in stadiums like Bernabeu and Calderon. Next question - Does Andalucia, Cantabria and other regions want autonomy too?

I also was very surprised when I saw during match Catalonia - Euskadi (that one when Verdú scored) about 70,000-80,000 people at Camp Nou. When in Poland region teams plays matches you can see about 4000-5000 people - that was shock for me! Also on Galicia - Ecuador there were about 20,000 fans in Riazor...

And the main question - why they want autonomy? Why they all hate Spain? Can someone answer me for that questions? I will be very pleased!

Deporiginal (31/12/06, Belgium) I don't really know much about that, but I think Catalunya wants to be independent because that region is a lot wealthier than the southern sides of Spain, like Sevilla. I went to both Catalunya and Sevilla, and the difference is actually quite obvious. I wouldn't know about the rest though.

Michal (01/01/07, Głogow, Poland) Thanks Deporiginal, but why Galicia? They aren't rich... Can someone answer?

Xoán (02/01/07, Ireland) God... this is way too complex to discuss in a Depor forum... "Spain", like any other contemporary nation-state is a construct, a 19thC creation. The difference is that some models of state worked (i.e. Germany, Italy, France - more or less), and some others didn't work 100% (i.e. Spain, Belgium, even the UK).

As Chase (1942:166) says: "Spain, said Ortega y Gasset, is not a nation, but a series of watertight compartments ... Each region [sic] of Spain thinks, feels, and rests in terms of its own particular interests and inclinations. National unity in Spain has never been a natural, organic growth. Rather has it been an extraneous concept imposed by the political and cultural hegemony of Castile, and arduously enforced by the monarchist policy of centralism"

Ok so. The modern state tried to "unite" different kingdoms, regions, cultures, etc. - to no avail, really, 'cos there never was a consensus from the beginning. The current constitution (1978) also tries to solve this problem by granting autonomy to regions AND nations. Three autonomous territories are endorsed with *national status*, and these are Galicia, Basque Country and Catalonia. Why these 3 only? 'Cos these are the 3 that had an administration and political entity before modern Spain existed (that is to say, they were already countries before Spain existed), 'cos they have a different language and -most importantly in legal terms - 'cos they had an statute of autonomy before the Civil War already (up to 1939).

Another quotation from Lalaguna (1990: 225-226): "The most novel aspect of the Constitution of 1978 was the reorganization of the Spanish territory as a semi-federal state of autonomous communities. Article 2 of the Constitution recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions in which Spain is composed and the common links that bind them together. In the early nineteenth century, as a unitary state firmly and unequivocally directed from the capital, the Spanish territorial base was divided into fifty-two provinces ... an irrepressible will to obtain a measure of freedom from this highly centralized structure of power emerged. This desire for autonomy was not equally urgent nor similarly voiced by all the interested 'nationalities and regions'. The nationalities most assertive in this respect were those whose history, culture and language had uniquely survived through the vicissitudes of imperial domination from the Castilian centre, and repeated civil wars. Other regions with a lesser claim to separate status were seeking self-government to promote and develop their own potential. Their expectations were widely different, and their tactical approaches equally at variance.

From the capital of the country, what appeared as a constant in this permanent struggle was the hostility of those in control of the state to any loss of power to the provinces. Whatever concession came from the centre, they were always reluctantly granted and severely hedged in whenever politically feasible. It always looked as if the central government, no matter what the social and economic forces in power might be, was giving away with one hand what it was trying to retrieve later on with the other"

Michal (01/01/07, Głogow, Poland) Thanks Xoan. This is the answer I was waiting for.

Paul (03/01/07, Brisbane, Australia) What would be some negative repercussions if Spain actually did give these regions independence?

Xoán (03/01/07, Ireland) No negative repercussions really as long as they all were EU members. Trade could be affected otherwise, with bad effects for Spain - remember that almost 50% of Spain's wealth is generated by Catalonia, or that Galicia produces almost 30% of the electricity in the north, not to mention food and forestry resources.

As EU independent states (or as members in a real internal federation) they could all negotiate on equal terms, which is the main issue, preserve their own identity and still get along with each other (think of Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, the Czechs and the Slovaks, etc).

And the question of the damaged pride, of course, but that's a different story altogether... That's actually the main cause of concern! How to lose a piece of what you consider to be "your" territory?

Jon_hall (03/01/07, Liverpool, England) Didn't realise Catalunya produced that much of the wealth. I know other regions in Spain were trying to boycott Cava etc to get back at them, but that's a hell of a lot of the wealth in one area.

Suppose it's similar to most of the British wealth being in the London region rather than spread around.

Xoán (03/01/07, Ireland) Yep. They have big productive companies; they have traditionally been "merchants", the "traders" of the peninsula. They always wanted to be like the Dutch, and eventually became a major force in the Mediterranean. They have a few big banks too.

The so-called boycott was a political/propagandistic move, and a stupid one, that led nowhere (and had no impact whatsoever by the way)

Feliuk (3/01/07, Watford, England) So what would happen if you removed 'Spanish' companies from Cataluña - Or multinational companies based in Cataluña BUT actually are seen as Spain by the parent companies? Where would they be then?

When I worked for Sanyo and had to go to Barcelona. I remember having a discussion with their sales director and he basically said that 90% of exports from Cataluña where to Spain. They could not survive if Spain said we are not buying from you.

Xoán (03/01/07, Ireland) All the way around actually... Spain needs Catalonia 'cos if Catalan companies (or Catalan-based) don't sell to Spain, then Spain would have to import from a third country paying a lot more; Spain wouldn't survive. Catalan companies would obviously suffer 'cos they'd have to look for new markets (as they're already doing), but not as much as Spain, 'cos Catalans have the companies and Spain don't. Plus, they do have an (increasing) international market. Then again, international companies go to Catalonia 'cos they are competitive; those companies don't go to other parts of Spain with the same infrastructure. I'll give you an example of another big company that differentiates Catalonia/Spain to this regard: Apple.

Galicia is not even on the map for this! We have other set of problems altogether, mainly linked to bad planning, bad territorial management, mad exploitation of natural resources (plunder really), and clientelism/nepotism. I wish we had the "problems" the Catalans have!

Anyway, I don't know why this should affect the more autonomy/maybe independence issue. With free trade and everybody respecting everybody within the framework of the EU... there shouldn't be any problem...

(note that I don't necessarily share this vision of economy! just playing devil's advocate here)

Jon_Hall (03/01/07, Liverpool, England) I do know that one UK company (can't remember who it is) moved their call centre operations to Barcelona due to being more competitive or cheaper as we usually call it.

I think they may have even transferred the English speaking call centre as well.

One place i would love to live is Barcelona but I'd miss the football too much, mind Easyjet fly to Liverpool. Maybe when i win the Euromillions...

Paul (04/01/07, Brisbane, Australia) I think that this tension between the different factions in Spain will eventually cool. Aznar started the initiative when he decided not to negotiate with ETA. Since, there hasn't been a death from an ETA attack in 3 years and the attacks they carry out now are forewarned so that the area can be evacuated.

Xoán (04/01/07, Ireland) They're not necessarily much cheaper John. They are competitive 'cos they have the infrastructure, the contacts and the know-how.
Paul... er... I'm afraid it's not like that... It's a little bit more complex...

MCORTES (04/01/07, London, England) I love this topic when it comes up in the forums! Personally, I'm an Galician independentist and proudly want an independent Galician nation. When I was younger, I always thought that the way forward for Galician independence came in the shape of resistance and urban terrorism against the Spanish state, supporting the overly far left organizations that support these ideas. But as I matured I began to realise that independence must be a slow and peaceful process for it to succeed. I began supporting the BNG. I personally believe that independence shouldn't be automatic and done over-night, it needs to be a progressive process, starting with full autonomy and slowly progressing towards full independence from Castela. Xoán, if you don't mind, what organizations, if any, do you support or follow, regarding our independence, and what are your personal thoughts on Galician independence in general?

DepHun (04/01/07, Hungary) it would be quite strange if there were some 10 small countries on the Iberian peninsula (Portugal, Castille, Galiza, Catalonia, Pais Vasco, Andalucia, Aragon, Asturias, Cantabria, Navarra, Murcia etc.)
And to establish small countries (Galiza has some 2,8M people) with a lot of border would be against the common Europe without borders, I think so.
But: if people of Galiza want this, peacefully, I would support them.

Xoán (04/01/07, Ireland) Mcortes: There are no white or black answers for that. In politics it is all a question of gradients, and very especially in Galician politics.
On the other hand, there'll never be 10 states 'cos apart from the 2 existing at the moment, only 3 other territories have historically expressed a will to become an independent state in a consistent manner; these are the 'usual suspects'. So, even if they ever get their own state it won't go beyond 5 in total. Strange? To the uninformed maybe. Thus, the EU is based on its diversity: that's one of the core ideas behind it. There'll never be a truly united Europe until all diversity is acknowledged and accounted for - and no, it's not a contradiction, it's the very essence of Europe. I do believe that this can be done -in time- and that it could set an example. Will it be done? Well, knowing the history of humankind... probably not. We're that stupid.

MCORTES (04/01/07, London, England) I think you are right Xoán - that the politics, especially in Galiza, isn't black and white, its definitely more complicated than that, but Galicians in general do consider themselves 'Galicians' first rather than Spanish, so really the mindset is already there, it's just a case of slowly incorporating independence bit by bit, having more and more autonomy. I think, personally, Galiza can be an example to the rest of Europe, if not the world, by progressively moving towards independence.

Jon_Hall (04/01/07, Liverpool, England) Apart from the high price rises in the cost of housing in the last 5-10 years, it is still a hell of a lot cheaper to live there (and probably for that matter anywhere in Spain) then it is in the UK or Ireland.

Xoán (05/01/07, Ireland) And it's even cheaper in other European countries... but companies are not necessarily leaving Catalonia for that. Most prefer to stay regardless of relatively "high" costs (when comparing with new EU members, for instance).

The are leaving Ireland for that matter... Prices here are a joke and the know-how and infrastructure are not assured. The only advantage is the taxes (quite good for companies). UK already has a 'slave-market' and its own dynamic; it won't be like Ireland.

Paul (05/01/07, Brisbane, Australia) For the EU to succeed at becoming a World Superpower, the members of it need to unite more. That would therefore mean that economically, there should not really be much difference as to whether Cataluña, Pais Vasco, etc. achieved independence or not. However, ideologically it would not work as just about all Spaniards I know have an extremely passionate stance on this issue.

MCORTES (05/01/07, London, England) Europe does need to unite, but only economically. The EU does promote regional and national differences. As a Galician myself, I want an independent Galician nation, but this doesn't mean I want nothing more to do with Spain or any of the other Iberian nations, in terms of trade. I want Galiza to be an independent nation but at the same time I want it to be a nation of Europe and a star in the EU. I still believe that this needs to be done progressively and work towards full independence, and not using tactics that the likes of ETA use. Nationalism on the Iberian peninsula is not economical.

Ekholm (05/01/07, Sweden) Interesting post! Do you think the EU is looking to become a global authority? It could sound like a good idea meaning that peace would be easier to achieve and issues like terrorism, cybercrime, trafficking and environmental problems would be more effectively handled.

The question is how it would be possible to reach such a global authority. You said it yourself, that the EU has to be more united. And if the EU, where most of the countries are pretty similar already, has difficulties uniting (or how about Spain..), then how would it be possible for the whole world with all its different cultures, religions etc. to unite? Interesting thought though.

MCORTES (05/01/07, London, England) I think that variety of culture, language, people, nations, traditions is something to be celebrated and promoted, not stamped out. We can still be united as European nations but yet enjoy independence as individual nations.

JW2 (05/01/07, Bonn, Germany) You are right to some extent. We need to unite, both politically and economically. There has to be a certain set of policy areas that are exclusive EU competences, but there also have to be important policy areas that remain national competences. Then for the EU it wouldn't matter if these national policy areas are dealt with in Barcelona, Madrid or Santiago de Compostela independently or only in Madrid.

We need to unite, yes - but the idea of the EU has always been the recognition and acknowledgement of the differences between the member states. I would say that there is a common European basis, shared values etc., but there will always be differences, and that's the interesting part of the EU. If we would even that out, that would be the end of the European idea. In an ideal world, different approaches and ideas (politically and economically) would lead to a "race for the best solution".

The official motto of the EU says it all: "United in Diversity".

About Spanish people being very passionate about it, yes. But if Catalonia, Pais Vasco and Galicia one day reached independence, it wouldn't be a "sudden act", but a gradual process which would most probably have a referendum as the "last act" (like in Montenegro). I guess that would cool down the passion a lot.

Paul (05/01/07, Brisbane, Australia) Uniting more could also lead to easing the deficit that most European nations are experiencing. Debt is an issue the EU really need to address otherwise it will end up on the brink of collapsing like the US.

MCORTES (08/01/07, London, England) I can't speak for other places, but in regards to the situation on the Iberian peninsula, I think Galiza, Catalunya and Euskadi, should now look towards making the most of autonomy and use it to lead up to independence. Independence for the nations goes a lot more deeper than just economic reasons, its the feeling of belonging, tradition, language, ethnicity, history and national pride. Galiza for example, has also natural boundaries and research has been made on DNA of Galicians, which has proven to be different from that of its neighbours - Castilians, Basques, Cantabrians etc.

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