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Political Committee (GA-5)

Question of Catalonia's Claims for Independence



**RESEARCH
REPORT**

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Forum: Political Committee (GA-5)

Issue: Question of Catalonia's Claims for Independence

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Introduction

Spain, compared to many other European countries, has a different “style” of governing, i.e. it has seventeen autonomous communities under the roof of the same country, and Catalonia, the exact topic of this report, is one of those autonomous communities. The autonomous communities all have their own institutional laws called the Statutes of Autonomy, their own presidents, their own flags, legislative powers, legal powers, and a considerable amount of financial control on their own autonomous regions. However, Spain still is not a federation, but rather a highly decentralized unitary state. This leads to conflicts and claims for independence by the autonomous communities, the most prominent one being the question of Catalonia. This report will, therefore, discuss **the question of Catalonia's claims for independence**.

Definition of Key Terms

Autonomous community: A political and administrative region created by the Spanish constitution of 1978, where each autonomous region is provided with partial political and cultural independence.

The Statute of Autonomy: A law located under the hierarchy of a constitution of a country, but it ranks hierarchically higher than any other form of legislation.

Federation: A union of partially self-governing regions. Examples are: the United States of America, India, Canada, Russia and etc.

Unitary state: A state governed by a single, supreme power. Examples are: the People's Republic of China, France, and etc.

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General Overview

The land that the autonomous community of Catalonia lies on has been a habituated place since the Middle Paleolithic Age. Many different communities; Iberians, Romans, Visigoths, Muslims, Franks, and many other communities came and habituated the region. The changing nature of the region didn't hold the Catalans back from coming up with their own courts in 1192 (the Catalan Courts) or writing their first own constitution in 1283. Since then, there was a constant tension between the unitary states that tried to take hold of the autonomous community and the Catalans.

The current situation in Catalonia, therefore, has a rich background; however, the following explanations will generally mention recent history since it provides healthier and more in-depth solutions to the issue at hand.

The Napoleonic Wars hit Catalonia in the beginning of the nineteenth century, making it the Government of Catalonia under the control of Napoleon and the presidency of Marshall Augereau. After the French evacuated Catalonia at the end of 1814, the Catalans started dividing up into traditionalist and liberal groups.

Following such divisions in the community, the region started to become an industrial center, and in 1832, the first factory that worked with a steam engine was established in Barcelona (the current capital of Catalonia). Accompanying that, many independence-related protests started happening in the region, which led to a tension between the central government of Spain (the First Spanish Republic at the time) and Catalans.

After a few attempts for independence and a few failures to establish that, the region was finally named the Catalan Republic, receiving its first Statute of Autonomy. However, when the Spanish Civil War broke out and the Spanish Republic was replaced with the dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the Catalan Republic lost its autonomy and any Catalan nationalism, as well as any other form of free speech, was banned. Like the rest of Spain, the Catalans suffered severely after the Spanish Civil War; however, after the death of Dictator Franco, they voted for a democratic constitution for Spain to adopt in 1978. This new constitution provided the region partial political and cultural autonomy, and the community is now one of the seventeen autonomous communities of Spain.

Being one of the most crowded regions of Spain, producing 25.6% of the national exports, 19% of Spain's Gross Domestic Product, and 20.7% of foreign investment, the autonomous region of Catalonia is a crucial part of Spain. The autonomous region held an independence referendum on October 1st, 2017. The results indicated that 90% of the voters supported independence; however, the Constitutional Court of Spain declared that the referendum was illegal since it breached the constitution that was produced in 1978. Even though there was a symbolic declaration of independence on October

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27th, 2017, Spain dissolved the Catalan Parliament and jailed many Catalan officials under different charges, the most prominent one being rebellion. Following this intervention, a new election was made where the Spanish government prevented the attendance of three candidates, and Quim Torra was elected as the new president of the autonomous community of Catalonia.

Chronological Order of Events

1803-1815	Napoleonic Wars (resulting in Napoleon's control over the Government of Catalonia)
late 1814	Catalans starting dividing up into traditionalist and liberal groups
1832	Establishment of the first factory that worked with a steam engine in Barcelona (followed by independence protests)
1936-1939	Spanish Civil War (Catalan Republic has lost its autonomy)
December 29th, 1978	Spanish constitution of 1978 was brought to power (resulting in the grant of autonomy to regions)
October 1st, 2017	Independence referendum held by Catalan citizens (resulting in a 90% vote for independence)
Mid-October 2017	Spain declaring that the referendum is illegal
October 27th, 2017	A symbolic declaration of independence by Catalonia
Late-October, early-November 2017	Spain dissolving the Catalan Parliament, arresting many officials
May 17th, 2018	Quim Torra being elected as the new President

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The autonomous community of Catalonia / the Catalan Parliament: This is the regional government, i.e. the autonomous community that held the aforementioned independence referendum

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and seeks for independence as the autonomy of Catalonia. The community also made a symbolic declaration of independence and is under the great impact of lasting Catalan nationalism.

Spain (official name: the Kingdom of Spain) / the Cortes Generales (the Spanish Parliament): The central government of Spain still abides by the constitution produced in 1978, which allows the autonomous communities to only have partial political and cultural independence, and limited control over their regions. The government prevented an independence movement by Catalans by declaring that the independence referendum was illegal and jailing numerous Catalan officials. The government strives for abidance by the Spanish constitution of 1978.

Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium and Slovenia are some countries which have shown some type of official support for Catalonia.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

There has not been a solution attempt that takes both sides of the conflict into consideration; however, the intervention of the central government of Spain to the independence referendum was the most prominent solution attempt in this process, even though it was clearly one-sided and only catered to the needs of the central Spanish government. The results were clearly unsatisfying since Catalan citizens are deeply bothered by the solution attempt and it increases the tension between the central government and the autonomous community.

Possible Solutions

Considering that the only prominent solution attempt to this conflict was a one-sided approach, delegates are encouraged to strive for bringing the two sides of this conflict together. As in many other conflicts throughout the world, the keys to the solution to the issue at hand are communication and negotiation:

- **Reaching common ground for negotiation:** The representatives from both sides of the conflict should be brought to favorable circumstances for negotiation. The delegates should ensure that there is a supervisory and neutral organ (e.g.: United Nations organs) in possible meetings between sides to ensure transparency. The delegates should also ensure that there are also sufficient incentives for both sides to strive for negotiation rather than pushing the tension further.

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- **Producing a legally binding guideline:** The current guideline for autonomous communities is set by the Spanish constitution of 1978, and the conflict is mostly caused by the definitions and limits of the autonomy system; the two sides should produce a new legally binding guideline as a result of the negotiations.

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