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The Catalan Separatism: Uncompromising but "pro-European"¹

This article deals with the motives of the Catalan independence movement and the question of why their demand for an independent state has become so popular in Europe at the moment. The hopes of separatist parties for political support from institutions of the European Union (EU) can hardly be fulfilled because they contradict its principles. Because the member states are united by the goal of political and economic integration "in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe".² Article 3 of the EU Treaty goes on to say: The Union "shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States". What is disputed among EU members is what type of integration should be, whether the existing national borders should become more permeable or even superfluous.

Regardless of where the deepening of the EU will lead in the future, today's political agenda of the EU is diametrically opposed to separatist efforts towards state disintegration. Because every secession aims at the dissolution of states whose societies have grown together politically and economically over centuries and are largely integrated. Therefore, those representatives of independence movements who were elected to the European Parliament in May 2019 are facing a decision: Either they become refined supporters of European integration and give up their plans for secession, or they strive for such a change in the political system of the EU that brings them

closer to their goal of territorial separation and the establishment of a state. In the latter case, the already clearly visible secession conflicts in Catalonia, Scotland and Northern Ireland would become Europeanised and thus directly affect all EU member states.

In order to elaborate these interactions between the regional, national and supranational levels using the Catalonia conflict as an example, the three thematic focal points of this anthology on the motives, developments and perspectives of the conflict are dealt with one after the other and each

Figure 1:

The autonomous community of **Catalonia** in Spain's internal administrative borders



¹ This article is a translation: Sabine Riedel, Der katalanische Separatismus: Kompromisslos aber „pro-europäisch“, in: *Forschungshorizonte Politik und Kultur (FPK)*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (2021 Oct 14), 16 pages, which is a reprint of the publication under the same title in: Rudolf Hrbek, Martin Große Hüttmann, Carmen Thamm (Hrsg.), *Autonomieforderungen und Sezessionsbestrebungen in Europa und der Welt. Beweggründe – Entwicklungen – Perspektiven*, Baden-Baden 2020, S. 76-91. This anthology contains contributions to a lecture series on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the European Centre for Research on Federalism (ECFF) at the Eberhard Karl University of Tübingen. For this reprint, the essay (state: 20.2.2020) was updated to 14.10.2021 (state of the internet sources).

² Art. 1 and 3 in: *Treaty on European Union (Consolidated version 2016)*, Eur-Lex, Access to European Union law.

examined under two aspects. On the one hand, the immediate tension between the regional and the central government level is of interest, but on the other hand, the context on the European and international level in which the regional conflict is embedded. As will be shown below, these framework conditions can have a decisive influence on whether an amicable solution will be reached or whether there will be further escalation. However, the final decision on this lies in the power of the parties involved in the conflict themselves. Both sides must actively seek understanding and reconciliation, not only to restore peace within society, but also to preserve today's European peace order.

1. Motives und Arguments for a State Independence of Catalonia

The arguments and motives of the Catalan independence movement differ depending on the political orientation of the relevant actors. Because almost all world views or ideological currents can be found in it. That is the reason why the conflict could break out openly. The cross-party alliance that came together in 2012 does not form a majority in the elected institutions to this day, but it does form a critical mass in order to make the demand for a Catalan state appear legitimate.³ The signing of the Declaration of Independence on 10.10.2017, which was effective in the media, kept the public hidden from the fact that the alliance of the three separatist parties was already beginning to fall apart at this crucial moment.

The then regional president of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, hesitated to proclaim independence and make it legally binding. In doing so, he alienated his Catalan allies, but avoided breaking with European cooperation partners. This setting of priorities is reflected in the name of his party, the Catalan European Democratic Party (Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català, PDeCAT). It emerged in 2016 as a formation from the conservative Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, CDC), which under Jordi Pujol still belonged to the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament. It was only under Artur Mas, his successor and Puigdemont's predecessor, that the CDC adopted an economically liberal course in 2012, which it combined with the demand for independence.

Until then, the CDC focused on expanding the autonomy rights of the Spanish region. It was founded on 17.11.1974 with the aim of wresting self-administration rights from the Franco regime. The ruling doctrine of Spanish nationalism at the time defined the nation as a community of cultural values with a long historical tradition. Following this ideological paradigm, CDC representatives argued that Catalans were also a distinct, historically developed cultural community. Therefore, the „Reconstruint la nació catalana“, i.e. the "reconstruction of the Catalan nation", enjoyed top priority.⁴ The CDC stuck to this course after Franco's death at the end of 1975, although Spain adopted a democratic constitution that made all citizens equal regardless of their cultural or religious orientation.

This anachronism of Catalan nationalism became clearly visible when the regional government tried to declare the Catalans as a "nation" in 2006. After the Constitutional Court rejected a corresponding reform of the Statute of Autonomy as illegal, the CDC increasingly questioned the rule of law in Spain. With the outbreak of the Spanish banking crisis in 2012, the regional government finally intensified its criticism of the central state at the financial policy level. Since then, Barcelona has been complaining about excessively high taxes and duties, which affect Catalonia as an economically strong region the most and therefore put it at a disadvantage.⁵

Under Carles Puigdemont, a coalition government was formed for the first time between the CDC successor party PDeCAT and the Republican Left of Catalonia (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, ERC). As its name suggests, its history goes back to the beginnings of the Spanish Republic in 1931. But although it sees itself as a left and progressive force, it did not support the introduction of a modern understanding of the nation after the end of the Franco era. Rather, it insists on a culturalist concept of the nation, which regards the Catalans as a community of descent that differs from the rest of the Spaniards through its own history and language. This is the substantive point of contact with conservative Catalan allies, whereby the nationalist doctrine of the ERC also has an expansionist character: They also see themselves as representatives of the Catalan-speaking population in the neighbouring re-

³ Addendum to this issue: In the last parliamentary elections in Catalonia (14.2.2021) the three separatist parties received about 48 per cent of the vote, 0.5 per cent more than before on 12.21.2017, but with a reduced turnout: 53 compared to 79 per cent (2017, see p. 11).

⁴ Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia): [CDC Història](#) [History].

⁵ [CDC Programa Electoral 2016](#), p. 3.

gions of Spain and in southern France (see the map below).⁶

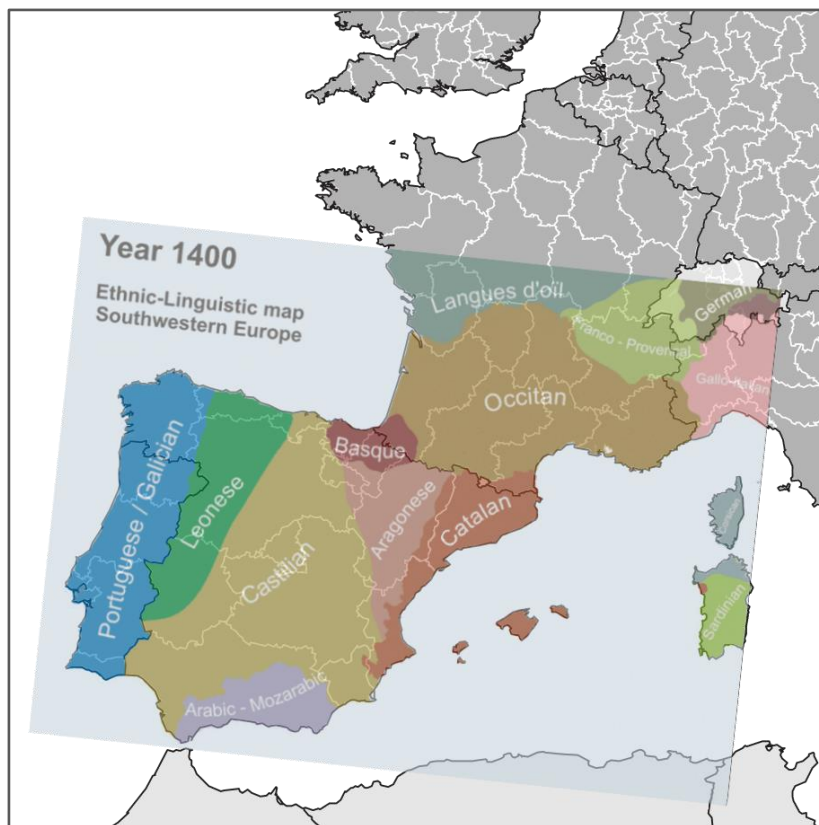
What distinguishes the ERC from other parties to this day is its consistent commitment to the republican form of government.⁷ Behind this is an open criticism of today's Spanish model of a parliamentary monarchy,⁸ which emphasizes its demand for independence. The left-wing parties are using the inadequate reappraisal of the Franco dictatorship to label Spain's conservatives as "post-franquist" and thus as opponents of the rule of law. They see the suspension of the Statute of Autonomy (27.10.2017 – 2.6.2018) and the arrest of deposed ministers such as the party chairman

of the ERC and former Catalan economy minister Oriol Junqueras as the culmination of permanent repression by the Spanish state.⁹

Currently, PDeCAT and ERC rival for the leadership position within the independence movement.¹⁰ But its course ultimately depends on the smallest separatist party, on the Candidacy of National Unity (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular, CUP), since it decides on majorities in the regional parliament. The CUP sees itself at the forefront of the "struggle for the national and social liberation of the Catalan countries".¹¹ So it links political ideologies that are fiercely opposed elsewhere, namely nationalism, socialism and anarchism. It stirs

Abbildung 2:

Spain's internal administrative borders and reconstructed language borders



Sources:

Own compilation, assembly of two maps:

1. Internal Spanish borders of the autonomous communities, see Map of the European Union NUTS 2 regions, 2007, [wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Map_of_the_European_Union_NUTS_2_regions), 29.4.2010,
2. Distribution of Catalan around 1400, reconstructed maps from: Alexandre Vigo, Chronological map showing linguistic evolution in southwest Europe from A.D. 1000-2000, in: History of Catalan, [wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Catalan).

⁶ [ERC, Esquerra Republicana té més de 100 seus repartides arreu del territori](#) [The Republican Left has more than 100 representations throughout the territory], Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya.

⁷ [ERC, Social progress, republicanism and independence](#). Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya.

⁸ Barrios 1997: Harald Barrios, Das politische System Spaniens, in: Wolfgang Ismayr (Hrsg.): Die politischen Systeme Westeuropas, Opladen, S. 549–587, S. 551.

⁹ [ERC, Història \[History\]](#).

¹⁰ ERC y Junts per Catalunya se disputan la hegemonía del independentismo [ERC and Junts per Catalunya fight for hegemony over the independence movement], [El País](#), 12.04.2019.

¹¹ Candidatura d'Unitat Popular: [CUP, Què és la CUP?](#) [Who is the CUP?].

up scepticism towards the institutions of the Spanish constitutional state in order to justify its fictitious Catalan nation model beyond the existing regional and national borders. After the sentencing of leading separatists to long prison terms (14.10.2019), it increased the pressure on its allies to adopt a declaration of independence.

2. The Limited Scope of the Separatist Movement at EU level

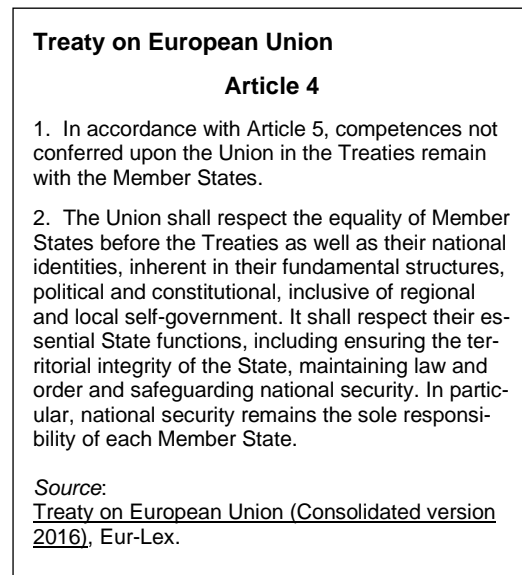
It is astonishing that the nation-building initiated by the CUP and ERC, uniting the "Catalan countries", has so far hardly met with resistance from the neighbouring states. It extends far beyond the autonomous province of Catalonia, in addition to the two Spanish regions or autonomous communities of Valencia and the Balearic Islands, it also takes over an area in southern France (see the map above).¹² Because national borders have become more permeable in the course of European integration, awareness of the problem has apparently been lost. However, as soon as Catalonia would be constituted as a separate state, its new borders would be a ongoing issue. The Brexit negotiations, in which a backstop arrangement for Northern Ireland was disputed in 2019, refer to this. In order to prevent the reintroduction of border controls at the British-Irish border, Northern Ireland, as a part of the United Kingdom, should remain in the EU's internal market until a compromise is found. Although Boris Johnson was able to negotiate away this treaty condition on the part of the EU at the end of 2020, the border question has remained a contentious issue to this day.¹³

Despite their interdependence, EU member states do not seem to be protected from new inter-state conflicts. On the contrary, it can be predicted that the close cooperation in various policy areas has made them vulnerable, so that sudden tensions can cause even greater damage. For this reason, any such foreshadowing should be taken seriously. However, in the case of Spain, the European Commission invoked the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the member states. However, the EU Treaty also obliges the Commission, as guardian of the Treaties, "ensuring the territorial integrity" of EU members, including their "regional and local self-gov-

ernment" (cf. Figure 3).¹⁴ It would have the competence to put those parties in the European Parliament in their place which, just by their programmatic orientation, violate this principle.

So far, the Commission has hardly done anything against separatist parties in order not to clash with the member states, which ultimately decide on their admission to regional, national and European elections. Germany, for example, has its own European Election Act (EuWG) in addition to the national party law.¹⁵ According to this, in addition to parties, "political associations on the territory of the member states" may also participate." They do not have to fulfil the requirements of the Party Law applicable to parties."¹⁶ This special regulation for European elections, including the lifting of the three-percent hurdle by the Federal Constitutional Court in 2014, favoured the candidacy of the Bavarian Party. Together with its Catalan alliance partner ERC, it is fighting for state independence. In their joint election manifesto for the 2019 European elections, they call for „another Europe – where Brittany, Elsass and Vojvodina have more autonomy, where Wales, Scotland, Catalonia and Bavaria become inde-

Figure 3:



¹² Vgl. ERC, Els Països Catalans, l'espai natural de la llengua catalana [The Catalan lands, the natural space of the Catalan language]; CUP, Com puc participar a la CUP? [How can I participate in the CUP?].

¹³ Riedel 2021, Sabine Riedel, Controversies around the Brexit. Discourse Analysis, Integration Theories and Ordoliberalism offer Insight and Orientation, in: Forschungshorizonte Kultur & Politik, Vol. 5, 2/2021, 11.2.2021.

¹⁴ Treaty on European Union (Consolidated version 2016), Eur-Lex.

¹⁵ Gesetz über die Wahl der Abgeordneten des Europäischen Parlaments aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

¹⁶ Bundesministerium des Inneren, für Bau und Heimat, BMI 2019, Teilnahme von Parteien an Bundestags- und Europawahlen.

pendent".¹⁷ Accordingly, in Spain, too, the national courts are responsible for the candidacy of separatist and thus unconstitutional parties.

As the example of the elections to the European Parliament show, the national laws of the member states are already influenced by European law and other national standards. Recent research has identified "Europeanisation values" that vary depending on the policy field: In Germany, the average value for labour market and tax policy is around 20 percent, while "the subject areas 'transport', 'economy', 'environment' and 'agriculture'" reach values of over 50 percent.¹⁸ Since Spain is also embedded in the EU legal system, the doubts about the independence of its judges affect the entire EU. For example, the separatist movement calls Puigdemont, Junqueras and other imprisoned regional politicians as politically persecuted. The most recent report of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), on the other hand, certifies that Spain has a high level of rule of law. Of the 884 convictions (2019) against the 47 members of the Council of Europe, Spain accounted for four, while France and Lithuania were each convicted in 19 cases, Greece in 24 and Romania in as many as 62.¹⁹

The European Court of Justice (ECJ) also considers Spain to be a functioning constitutional state, while it recently criticised Germany. Since the judgement of 27 May 2019, German judges are no longer allowed to issue European arrest warrants because their "independence from the executive", i.e. government officials, is called into question.²⁰ Even though this accusation does not concern Spain, the ECJ protects plaintiffs from the Spanish judiciary. On 19 December 2019, it granted Oriol Junqueras, sentenced to 13 years in prison, immunity from the European Parliament. As a result of his election as an MEP, he must be released from prison. However, it also emerges from the judgment that the national courts have the final say here. They would only have failed to apply to the ECJ for a waiver of his immunity.²¹ Junquera's initial success in Luxembourg ended with the Spanish Supreme Court contradicting the ECJ ruling. The European Parliament then withdrew his MEP status with effect from 3 January 2020. According to the President

of the Parliament, David Sassoli, it was "obliged to take immediate note of the final decisions of the competent judicial authorities of the Member States".²²

A good 14 months later, a majority of around 400 out of 705 MEPs also lifted Carles Puigdemont's immunity (cf. Figure 4).²³ ECJ, which

Abbildung 4:

Decision of the European Parliament, Brussels, 9.3.2021

Request for waiver of the immunity of Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó

The European Parliament, [...]

– [having heard Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó](#) in accordance with Rule 9(6) of its Rules of Procedure,,

– having regard to the [judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union](#) of 21 October 2008, 19 March 2010, 6 September 2011, 17 January 2013 and [19 December 2019](#), [...]

– having regard to Article 71(1) and (2) of the [Spanish Constitution](#),, [...]

D. whereas the status as Member of the European Parliament was acquired with effect on 13 June 2019; whereas the request for the waiver of immunity therefore [concerns facts and prosecution that pre-date the acquisition](#) of the status and thereby of the immunity as Member of the European Parliament; [...]

H. whereas the [European Parliament lacks any competence](#) to assess or query the jurisdiction of the national judicial authorities in charge of the criminal proceedings under consideration; [...]

N. whereas [it is not for the European Parliament to interpret the domestic rules](#) on the privileges and immunities of Members of Parliament;

1. [Decides to waive the immunity of Carles Puigdemont i Casamajó](#) under Article 9, first paragraph, point (b), of Protocol No 7 on the Privileges and Immunities of the European Union; [...]"

Source: [European Parliament, 2019-2024](#), Texts Adopted, P9_TA(2021)0059, 9.3.2021, Highlighting blue: S.R.

Result of the secret ballot: 400 of the 705 MPs for yes, 248 against: Source: [faz.net, 9.3.2021](#).

¹⁷ European Free Alliance 2019: [EFA, 2019 Manifesto. European Elections](#), Brussels, p. 26.

¹⁸ [Töller 2014](#), Annette Elisabeth Töller: Europäisierung der deutschen Gesetzgebung. Wissenschaftliches Kurzgutachten, FernUniversität Hagen, 14.04.2014, p. 1.

¹⁹ European Court of Human Rights, [ECHR Annual Report 2019](#), S. 134–135.

²⁰ EuGH zu Europäischem Haftbefehl. Deutsche Staatsanwälte nicht unabhängig genug, [Legal Tribune online, 27.05.2019](#).

²¹ [ECHR 2019](#), European Court of Human Rights, Urteil des Gerichtshofs (Große Kammer), 19.12.2019.

²² Separatist Junqueras verliert EU-Mandat, in: [Deutsche Welle, 10.01.2020](#).

²³ Thomas Gutschker, Immunität von Carles Puigdemont aufgehoben, [faz.net, 9.3.2021](#).

initially granted him access to the European Parliament, just like Junqueras.²⁴ Because the ECJ had to bow to national law in this case, the Catalans now only have the protection of other national courts. So far, Belgian judges are not the only ones refusing to extradite Carles Puigdemont and other comrades in "European exile" to Spain.²⁵ In the most recent case, Italian authorities in Sardinia resisted the European arrest warrant against the former regional president,²⁶ but only because they want to await his appeal to the ECJ. But even the German judges who had to decide on Puigdemont's extradition in 2018, ultimately did not oppose the request of the Spanish judiciary, but only wanted to influence the sentence. It was hardly known that the Attorney General of Schleswig-Holstein had a different opinion. He considered the rebellion to be justified and equated it with the "serious breach of the peace" in German law. This was because Puigdemont would have "created the danger of committing crimes in the form of violent riots against officials of the Spanish state".²⁷

3. Developments under the Catalan President Quim Torra (2018 – 2021)²⁸

The trial against nine of the twelve accused Catalan separatists began on 12 February 2019 after more than a year of preparation. The proceedings against Puigdemont and two other ex-ministers, however, could not yet be opened because they are still abroad. The Spanish government under Pedro Sánchez, as co-plaintiff, only demanded a conviction for sedition and not for rebellion as the Spanish prosecution had done. This may have contributed to the fact that the Spanish Supreme Court was ultimately lenient. On 14 October 2019, it sentenced the defendants not to 30 years in prison, but to prison terms of eleven to 13 years.²⁹

The Catalan regional parties, however, saw the central government's concession and the dialogue offers as a weakness that they understood to exploit. Sánchez has been under pressure since his election as head of government in mid-2018 because he led a minority government with

85 of 350 seats in parliament for his Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE). His predecessor Mariano Rajoy was dependent on changing majorities with his People's Party (Partido Popular, PP) and 137 seats. It was only after long negotiations and fiscal concessions to the Basques that he passed his state budget in spring 2018. Sánchez had a similar fate, but he was less skilful, because on 13 February 2019 the Catalan regional parties ERC and PDeCat withdrew their support.

Sánchez had to accept this defeat one day after trial against the separatist leaders began. He actually had no reason to hope for a solution to the Catalonia issue: Puigdemont's successor, Quim Torra, has been uncompromising since taking office on 15 May 2018. At a cabinet meeting of the Zentral government held in Barcelona on 20.12.2018 as a gesture of accommodation, he presented Sánchez his proposal for the conclusion of a "state treaty" with 21 demands. These include the recognition of the "right for self-determination of the Catalan people" and the "sovereignty for Catalan institutions", the renunciation of a renewed suspension of autonomy and the termination of the legal proceedings against the imprisoned regional politicians (cf. Figure 5).³⁰

In order to meet these conditions, the Spanish head of government would have had to disregard the constitution and challenge the independence of the courts. Thus Torra had not built bridges for an agreement, but rather contributed to the hardening of the fronts. As a result, Sánchez now appeared as a loser whose willingness to engage in dialogue has failed for the time being. First of all, the regional government itself did not offer any compromises. Secondly, its list of demands was only published after massive pressure from the Spanish opposition parties in early February 2019. Above all, the conservative PP and the liberal Ciudadanos party (Cs) in particular are asking the critical question of whether Sánchez may have already given in to the separatists on some points.³¹ It should be added to these arguments that Catalonia's supposed sovereignty rights are

²⁴ Puigdemont darf ins EU-Parlament, [Taz.de, 20.12.2019](#).

²⁵ Puigdemont: „Belgische Justiz erkennt unsere Immunität an“, [Legal Tribune online, 02.01.2020](#).

²⁶ Puigdemont: Frei und glücklich in „Klein Barcelona“, [euronews.com, 25.9.2021](#).

²⁷ [Der Generalstaatsanwalt des Landes Schleswig-Holstein 2017: Auslieferungssache 004 AuslA 18/18 GenStA Schleswig, 01.06.2018, S. 7–8](#).

²⁸ Cf. the development until then: Sabine Riedel: Katalonien: die europäische Dimension eines Regionalkonflikts, in: [EZFF 2018](#), Europäisches Zentrum für Föderalismus-Forschung Tübingen (Hg.): Jahrbuch

des Föderalismus. Föderalismus, Subsidiarität und Regionen in Europa, Baden-Baden, S. 309–321, Nachdruck: [Riedel 2019](#), Forschungshorizonte Politik & Kultur, Vol. 3, 12/2019, 26.12.2019, 9 pages.

²⁹ Supreme Court finds jailed Catalan secession leaders guilty of sedition, [El País, 14.10.2019](#).

³⁰ Los 21 puntos que Torra pidió a Sánchez en su última reunión [The 21 points Torra demanded from Sánchez at their last meeting], [El País, 06.02.2019](#).

³¹ Original text in: Torra recupera los 21 puntos que entregó a Sánchez en su reunión de diciembre [Torra repeats the 21 points he gave Sánchez at his December meeting], [La Vanguardia, 05.02.2019](#).

only one of three points of the "state pact". The other two include the demand for a "democratic renewal" of Spain and its "de-franchisation".³² Thus, the Catalan government forbids itself any interference in its self-administrative rights, while prescribing to the other Spanish regions how their democratisation should look like.

In this precarious situation, Sánchez decided to resign with the aim of changing the balance of power in the Spanish parliament in his favour through early elections. In order to convince voters from the opposition camp, he declared his loyalty to the constitution during the election campaign: "No means no. There will be no referendum in Catalonia on the Constitution. There will be no referendum on self-determination in Catalonia."³³ At the same time, he insisted on the position that under his leadership there would be no renewed suspension of the autonomy statute and that the dialogue with Barcelona should continue. He warned against a coalition government along the lines of Andalusia, where the alliance of PP and Ciudadanos only came to power at the beginning of 2019 with the support of the new VOX party. This would lead to a nationwide shift to the right and further fuel the conflict in Catalonia.

But the example of Andalusia clearly shows that the socialists themselves have contributed to the loss of their government majority there with their fruitless dialogue initiative. After all, this region is one of the economically weak areas of Spain, which because of its average unemployment rate of around 30 per cent is more dependent than others on financial compensation from the central state. The termination of national solidarity on the part of the Catalans and Basques therefore concerns the Andalusians far more than other Spaniards. It is therefore not surprising that in the recent regional elections they favoured those parties that oppose the demands of the separatist parties.

PP, Cs and VOX jointly rejected the "State Treaty" of the Catalan regional government, but with different arguments. The PP called for the "formation of a Catalan government that respects the Spanish Constitution and the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia".³⁴ Ciudadanos shared this

view, but its leader Albert Ribera found particularly clear words. In order to defend the unity of Spain, he wanted to apply Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution and suspend the autonomy once again. "We can no longer tolerate that Torra and the separatists use public facilities to sow hatred and confrontation among Catalans."³⁵ VOX agreed to this and called for a transfer of powers from the autonomous communities back to Madrid, which could only be done through new autonomy statutes.³⁶

In the parliamentary elections of 28 April 2019, Ciudadanos and Vox were very successful with their offensive for Spanish national unity. While the Citizens' Party became the third strongest party with 57 seats, Vox entered the Spanish parliament for the first time with 24 deputies. However, these gains did not compensate for the weakness of the Conservatives, who lost 71 parliamentary seats under the leadership of their new

Figure 5:

The President of Catalonia, end of 2018:

Proposal of the Government of Catalonia at the Summit with the Government of Spain:
A state pact to resolve the conflict between Spain and Catalonia [...]

A democratic response for Catalonia

1. There can be no government against Catalonia.
2. **The right for self-determination of the Catalan people must be recognised and enforced.**
3. **International mediation is necessary**, which must enable negotiations on equal terms.
4. **The sovereignty of the Catalan institutions must be respected** and not threatened by the application of Article 155.
5. The police and economic violations against the people of Catalonia must be investigated. [...]
6. The judicial route must be left behind. [...]

Source: Un «pacte d'Estat» que reconegui l'autodeterminació: la proposta de Torra a Sánchez [A "pacte d'Estat" that recognises self-determination: Torra's proposal to Sánchez], [Naciódigital](#), 5.2.2019. Highlighting blue: S.R.

³² Un "pacte d'Estat" que reconegui l'autodeterminació: la proposta de Torra a Sánchez [A "pacte d'Estat" that recognises self-determination: Torra's proposal to Sánchez], [Naciódigital](#), 5.2.2019.

³³ Sánchez: „No es no; no habrá referéndum en Cataluña [No means no, there will be no referendum in Catalonia]”, [El País](#), 08.04.2019.

³⁴ [Partido Popular Catalán](#), Una Puerta al Futuro. Las 150 propuestas del Partido Popular Catalán. Contra-

to con los catalanes [A door to the future. The 150 proposals of the Catalan People's Party. Treaty with the Catalans], p. 18.

³⁵ Ciudadanos – Programa electoral: estos son sus „compromisos con los españoles [Ciudadanos – Wahlprogramm: Dies sind unsere „Verpflichtungen gegenüber den Spaniern]”, [Cuidadanos, ABC](#), 11.11.2019.

³⁶ [Vox España, Manifiesto Fundacional](#) [Basic Manifiesto], p. 3.

leader Pablo Casado.³⁷ In contrast, the Socialists improved their presence by 38 to 123 mandates. Nevertheless, once again it would have only been enough for a minority government that depends on the support of the left-wing Unidas Podemos (Pod, meaning United We Can, 42 mandates) and the Catalan and Basque separatists. However, Sánchez rejected all coalition offers from Podemos, which delayed the formation of the government for months until new elections were finally necessary on 10 November 2019.

As a result of this tactical manoeuvre, voter turnout dropped five points nationwide to 66.2 per cent. It also cost both left-wing parties two per cent of the vote, which meant that they lost ten mandates instead of gaining them for the necessary parliamentary majority. The PP and VOX, on the other hand, benefited from this, improving their election results by nine per cent and 50 parliamentary seats respectively. The conservative camp mainly picked up disappointed voters from the liberal Citizens' Party, which lost 47 of the previous 57 seats and was therefore one of the real losers.³⁸ This signals a further polarisation of the party spectrum, which will make a solution to the Catalonia question more difficult. On the other hand, it is positive that the Socialists and Podemos were able to agree on a coalition government, the first in Spain's democracy since the fall of Franco. On 7 January 2020, Pedro Sánchez was re-elected with 167 against 165 and 18 abstentions, and Pablo Iglesias as leader of Podemos was one of the three vice-presidents.³⁹

4. Developments of the Catalonia conflict since 2018 at European level

With its proposed "state treaty" at the end of 2018, the Catalan regional government made it clear that it did not take the dialogue offers of the ruling Socialists seriously. To this day, it sees no alternative to state independence and therefore continues to rely on confrontation. The focal point is the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, to which it no longer feels bound. This includes the region's obligation to contribute to a balanced budget for the entire state so that Spain can comply with the

European Union's economic and monetary policy. Article 3 of the 2013 Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance (TSCG) states: "the budgetary position of the general government of a Contracting Party shall be balanced or in surplus;"⁴⁰ According to this, the lower limit of the structural deficit, i.e. adjusted for inflation, lies between 0.5 and a maximum of 1.0 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP).

However, Catalonia's financial needs have risen continuously in recent years, namely by 17 per cent in each of the years 2018 and 2019 and by 18 per cent in 2020. This is why Barcelona had to take out loans, which since the Spanish banking crisis in 2012 have been provided by the central government's regional liquidity fund (Fondo de Liquidez Autonómico, FLA) founded specifically for this purpose. Between 2012 and 2018, this amounted to a sum of 63 billion euros for Catalonia alone, which is around one third of the total amount of the financial programme. Although Barcelona was previously the main beneficiary, it withdrew from the FLA at the beginning of February 2019. The socialist government had reformed Spain's internal financial system and granted Catalonia special concessions. It received an eight-billion loan from the Financial Assistance Fund (Fondo de Facilidad Financiera, FFF) in 2019 at the same interest rates, but with less central government control.⁴¹

The goal of Pere Aragonès (ERC), then Minister of Economy and Finance and today's regional President (see below), is that Catalonia should no longer refinance itself through the Spanish state budget, but through the free market. However, this is only possible with corresponding economic growth. In the third quarter of 2019, Catalonia's gross domestic product (GDP) was only 2.0 per cent higher than the year before, which is close to the national average of 1.8 per cent.⁴² This means that the good economic data of Spain as a whole and that of Catalonia have more than halved since the dispute over its independence broke out. The Spanish Ministry of the Economy therefore warned Barcelona of a structural deficit, which in 2019 was already 0.1 per cent.⁴³ This

³⁷ [Resultados, Elecciones generales, 2019-A](#) [Results, parliamentary elections, 28.4.20219], El País. [no date].

³⁸ [Resultados, Elecciones generales, 2019](#) [Results, parliamentary elections, 10.11.20219], El País [no date].

³⁹ Politisches Patt beendet Sánchez ist Spaniens neuer Regierungschef, [Spiegel.de, 07.01.2020](#).

⁴⁰ [Treaty on Stability](#), Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (2012), EUR-Lex, Document 42012A0302(01), p. 11.

⁴¹ Cataluña abandona oficialmente el FLA y acapara el 32% de las ayudas regionales [Catalonia officially renounces FLA and claims 32 per cent of regional aid], [CincoDías, 04.02.2019](#).

⁴² Statistical Institute of Catalonia 2019: [Gross Domestic Product](#), 2019 Benchmark revision, 23.9.2021.

⁴³ Catalunya pedirá al Estado 10.257 millones de euros en deuda en 2020, el 27% más [Catalonia will ask the state for a loan of 10,257 million euros in 2020, which is 27 per cent more], [La Vanguardia, 4.2.2019](#).

warning was justified, because the region had to ask the central government for a further loan of 13 billion euros at the beginning of 2021,⁴⁴ while the new debt for 2020 was still 10 billion (cf. Figures 6 and 7). The special rules for Catalonia not only increase the risk of a debt spiral, but also reduce the chance of self-financing on the capital markets. Above all, however, the central government is caught in a dilemma between an increasingly less controllable regional government and the requirements from Brussels to stabilise the Eurozone.

Nevertheless, the separatist parties PDeCAT, ECR and CUP continue to pursue the goal of an independent Catalonia, which as a new EU member should also remain in the eurozone. To this end, Carles Puigdemont and his successor Quim Torra had launched another Catalan movement in mid-2018, the National Call for the Republic (Crida Nacional per la República). Although it was supposed to represent Catalonia also at EU level, its "manifesto of principles" made hardly any substantive statements on European issues. Rather,

the initiators of the movement became increasingly entangled in contradictions: how is their demand for a Catalan state compatible with a "new European state, free, open, inclusive, prosperous, digital, decentralised, sustainable and dynamic"?⁴⁵ According to the current EU Treaty, there is no automatism from statehood to EU membership. This was already widely discussed in the Scottish independence referendum (18.9.2014). That is why Puigdemont had signed a declaration on 10.10.2017, but did not proclaim independence. After such a legal act, Catalonia would be outside the EU and the Eurozone. It could keep the euro as a means of payment, but would be in the position of Montenegro and Kosovo, which despite the euro, have no influence on the monetary policy of the European Central Bank (ECB). Catalonia would no longer be supplied with money and could not be able to print its own money.⁴⁶ Because of these imponderables, in the first months after the independence referendum, 2000 to 3000 companies relocated their headquarters to neighbouring regions such as Valen-

Figure 6:

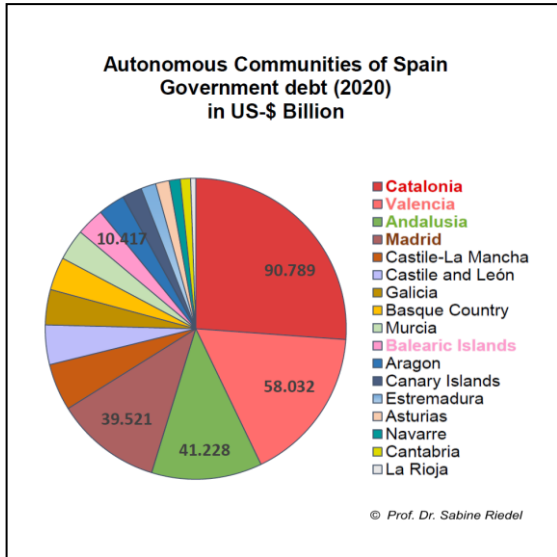
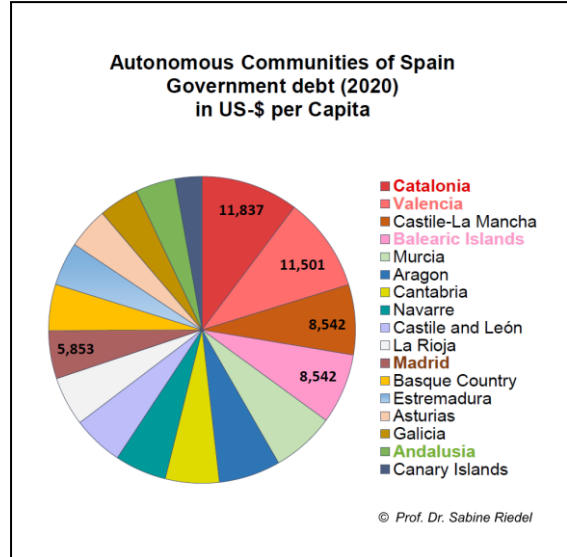


Figure 7:



Source: Own compilation, Autonomous Communities of Spain Government debt, countryeconomy.com, Stand: 14.10.2021

⁴⁴ Cataluña, al límite: anuncia que pedirá al Estado 13.072 millones para este año [Catalonia, to the border: announces it will ask the state for 13,072 million for this year], lainformacion.com, 15.1.2021.

⁴⁵ Crida Nacional per la República: Manifest dels Liberals per la Crida [Liberal Manifesto for the Call]. In

2021 the party disbanded, its website is therefore no longer available.

⁴⁶ Steiner, Christian 2017: Was passiert, wenn Katalonien die Euro-Zone verlässt?, [Neue Zürcher Zeitung](http://Neue_Zürcher_Zeitung), 6.10.2017.

cia, including the major banks Banco de Sabadell and Caixa-Bank.

Instead of making proposals on European policy, representatives of the Catalan independence movement use the European stage for their own national or nationalist agenda. Because their movement consists of a cross-party alliance, they were able to serve a broad audience in the European elections in May 2019. With its imprisoned leading candidate Oriol Junqueras, the ERC presented itself as a lawyer for politically persecuted people.⁴⁷ Together with the CUP, it recommends itself to a left-wing and anarchist-minded spectrum of voters who believe the state in general and the Spanish state in particular as the enemy. In contrast, PDeCAT and JxCat address the liberal and conservative camp, with their government politicians in other European countries already appearing as representative as if they were official guests of the state.⁴⁸ Alfred Bosch adorns himself with the title of Catalan foreign minister, which exists neither under the Spanish constitution nor under the Catalan Statute of Autonomy.

Carles Puigdemont and Oriol Junqueras were candidates for the European Parliament not least because they enjoy immunity as MEPs and can thus continue their mission in Brussels unmolested by the Spanish courts. But in recent years they have also been shown clear limits there. In autumn 2018, the European party Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) excluded Puigdemont's PDe-CAT as a member organisation. Officially, the liberals do not want to get involved in the Catalonia conflict.⁴⁹ Therefore, they justified their decision with allegations of corruption against its predecessor organisation CDC.

Thus the Catalan independence movement in the European Parliament can only rely on the European Greens, who have formed a parliamentary group with the EFA there since 1999.⁵⁰ The 10 EFA MEPs include two representatives of the Catalan Left (ERC) and one MEP from the Basque Country (Spain), as well as two members of the Belgian-Flemish party N-VA and a German-

Saarland representative of the Ecological Democratic Parties (ÖDP).⁵¹ There are thus sympathies for separatist demands especially in those EU member states where regional self-government is most developed, through a federal model or an autonomy system. This should give democracy and European research food for thought. Because it raises questions about the abuse of participation rights and promotes distrust of democratisation and regionalisation processes across the EU.⁵²

5. Prospects for a Solution of the Catalonia Conflict

As the violent riots in autumn 2019 showed, the signs in Catalonia continue to point to confrontation and not reconciliation. The Socialists have not been able to change about this. Since they took over the central government in mid-2018, they have pursued a policy of offering dialogue, which Barcelona met with demands that were in some cases unachievable and unconstitutional. Since the beginning of 2019 at the latest, outside observers can no longer understand why Pedro Sánchez is sticking to this course, even though the separatists withdrew their parliamentary support despite financial concessions and special rights. This resembled a public humiliation, which Sanchez responded to first with his resignation and, after a second attempt, with the formation of a coalition government. Therefore, since the beginning of 2020, the pressure to succeed has also been on Podemos. Both governing parties met with the Catalan regional government on 26.2.2020 for a first official dialogue. In a short joint statement, they announced that they would continue the dialogue they had started. The monthly meetings are to take place alternately in Barcelona and Madrid.⁵³

It is regrettable that the Spanish Socialists and the Catalan offshoot PSC (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya) have abandoned their original reform project for Catalonia.⁵⁴ At the height of the Catalonia crisis in autumn 2017, Sánchez had

⁴⁷ European Free Alliance (EFA): [EFA Lead Candidate](#) must be able to participate in the EU elections campaign.

⁴⁸ [Catalan foreign minister](#) celebrates St George's Day in Westminster, 23.04.2019.

⁴⁹ [ALDE, 27.10.2018](#), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party: PDeCAT no longer ALDE Party member, Press Release.

⁵⁰ [The Greens/EFA, Who we are](#). Our Group. We are Changemakers.

⁵¹ [EFA Members](#), European Free Alliance, Members of the European Parliament.

⁵² [Riedel 2019](#), Sabine Riedel, Emma-Katharina David, Europe's Regions: Bridges or Subjects of Disputes? Theoretical Background and the Example of Multilingualism in Trentino-South Tyrol, Italy, in: *Forschungshorizonte, Politik & Kultur*, Vol. 3, 9/2019, 22.12.2019, 10 pages.

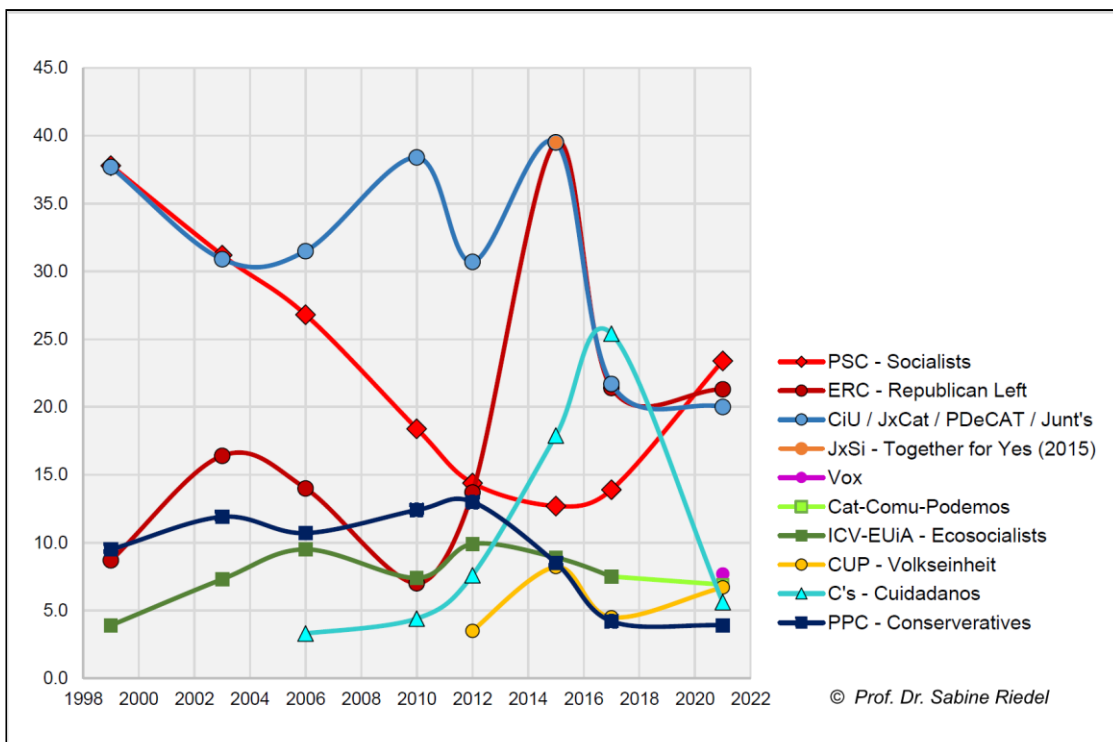
⁵³ Tomás, Nicolas 2020, Spain-Catalonia dialogue table holds first meeting, [elnacional.cat, 26.02.2020](#).

⁵⁴ El PSC imita al PSOE y omite en su programa el modelo territorial [Die Sozialistische Partei Kataloniens ahmt die PSOE nach und lässt das territoriale Modell in ihrem Programm weg], in: [El País, 15.04.2019](#).

distinguished himself as opposition leader with an initiative for a new "territorial model" and convinced the conservative Mariano Rajoy to set up a parliamentary commission for this purpose. He proposed reforming the Spanish autonomy system in favour of a federal model along the lines of Germany or Belgium. This could institutionally strengthen the voice of all regions and balance out asymmetries and imbalances between the autonomy statutes. The Socialists received support for this from the Conservatives and Ciudadanos, but not from the Catalan regional parties ERC and PDeCat,⁵⁵ which only have the interests of their region in mind. However, Sánchez obviously abandoned this far-sighted concept in mid-2018 in order to become prime minister with the votes of the separatists.

Instead of securing the support of other Spanish autonomous communities for a major reform project, the Spanish head of government has made himself dependent on the two Catalan regional parties PDeCat and ERC. Many observers therefore believe that a legal referendum modeled on Scotland is possible. But Sánchez has so clearly declared his support for the Spanish constitution in the election campaigns and described the demand for a referendum in Catalonia as unlawful that he cannot make a sudden U-turn on this issue.⁵⁶ His political survival depends more than ever on a solution to the Catalonia conflict and thus on the willingness of the regional government to engage in this dialogue initiative.

Figure 8:
Parliamentary elections in the autonomous community of Catalonia in per cent (1999 – 2021)



Source: Own compilation, cf. the data from e.g.: Elecciones catalanas 2021, in: elpais.com (no date), 2021 Catalan regional election, in: Wikipedia, 18.10.2021. Note: In the 2015 election year, JxCat (under Carles Puigdemont) and ERC (under Oriol Junqueras) formed the joint list JxSi, but separated again afterwards.

⁵⁵ Riedel 2019, Sabine Riedel, Forschungshorizonte Politik & Kultur, Vol. 3, 12/2019, 26.12.2019.

⁵⁶ El PSOE endurece el discurso contra el secesionismo catalán para rebatir la estrategia de PP y Cs

[The PSOE strengthens its discourse against Catalan secessionism to refute the strategy of the PP and Cs], El País, 14.04.2019.

Should the separatists stick to their course of independence, Sánchez could also be forced to suspend Catalonia's autonomy. In that case, according to Article 155 of the constitution, the regional administration and its self-governing bodies would again be subordinated to the Spanish central government, the parliament and the senate for a transitional period. For such a project, however, the minority government needs parliamentary support. While Ciudadanos could only be won over for a limited impeachment, PP leader Pablo Casado advocates further measures such as control of the security organs and the media.⁵⁷ But a final dismantling of the autonomy laws, as demanded by Vox, is unlikely to happen.

Barcelona has repeatedly given cause for a renewed suspension of its autonomy statute, most recently due to the violent riots in autumn 2019. But disputes in the regional parliament over the adoption of the budget could also make such a step necessary. When, at the beginning of 2019, the regional government's proposal failed to win a majority, so that Catalonia had to continue to manage with the 2017 budget,⁵⁸ calls for Quim Torra's resignation were heard for the first time. Just one year later, at the beginning of 2020, the regional president faced the same problem. But this time he was threatened with impeachment because he had defied orders from the Spanish authorities. Thus, early parliamentary elections were held on 14.2.2021. Although the three separatist parties were able to improve their share of the vote from 48 per cent by 0.5 points and thus gain a parliamentary majority.⁵⁹ However, voter turnout was 53 per cent, 26 per cent lower than in 2017. Many supporters of Ciudadanos apparently did not vote, as they turned out to be the real losers with a loss of almost 20 percentage points.⁶⁰ These developments therefore indicate more to a polarisation of the political debate than to a solution of the conflict.

6. Catalonia's Future Prospects within the European Union

The ultimate demand of the Catalan independence movement remains the proclamation of a sovereign Catalan state. To this end, the Catalan

National Assembly (Assemblea Nacional Catalana, ANC) was established in 2012 as a kind of parallel body to the regional parliament of the autonomous community. It mobilises civil society through major events in order to increase political pressure on the regional government. Although its influence has grown steadily, no Catalan president has dared to finally secede Catalonia from Spain, including Carles Puigdemont. Even the two proclamations in 1931 and 1934 referred to a Catalan state within the framework of a "federal Spanish republic" or a Spanish federal state.⁶¹ As so, they remained an internal Spanish matter.

In contrast to these historical models, the ANC wants to turn its back on Spain altogether. It relies on international law and claims for Catalonia the right to self-determination. But the decisive question is, on the one hand, whether the Catalans are entitled to this right – after all, they have extensive autonomy rights – and, on the other hand, whether a majority of the EU member states would recognise an independent state. However, the reaction of the international community to the declaration of independence on 1.10.2017 was clear. No European government showed solidarity with them, not even Kosovo, which has been struggling for international recognition since its declaration of independence on 17.2.2008: Twelve years later, 40 per cent of UN members and five out of 28 EU states still have major reservations.

There were expressions of solidarity from the community of non-recognised states, esp. from the two breakaway Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, whose statehood is only supported by Russia. Regional governments of EU members that want to follow Catalonia's path to state independence have also shown solidarity, such as Flanders/Belgium, Corsica/France and Sardinia/Italy, not forgetting Scotland/United Kingdom. In addition, some European parties promote separatist movements, such as the EFA as a Europe-wide network of separatist parties, which forms a parliamentary group with the Greens in European Parliament.⁶² But individual national parties such as Die Linke in Germany also support the separatism of the Catalans.⁶³

⁵⁷ Casado defiende intervenir Cataluña incluso sin 155 [Casado defends intervention in Catalonia even without Article 155], [El País, 02.04.2019](#).

⁵⁸ Torra enterra sus Presupuestos pero descarta convocar elecciones anticipadas [Torra buries his state budget but rules out early elections], [El Mundo, 27.02.2019](#).

⁵⁹ Vgl. Elecciones catalanas 2021, in: [elpais.com](#).

⁶⁰ Vgl. Hofmeister, Friedek 2021, Wilhelm Hofmeister, Martin Friedek, Kein Sieg für Katalonien, in: Länder-

bericht Februar 2021, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

⁶¹ See: „Estado catalán [...] en la creación de una Confederación de pueblos ibéricos”, [La Vanguardia, 15.4.1931](#), also: [„Estado catalán dentro de la república federal española”](#).

⁶² Greens-EFA: [Catalan independence declaration, 10.10.2017](#).

⁶³ [Hunko 12.2.2019](#), Andrej Hunko, Schauprozess gegen die katalanische Unabhängigkeitsbewegung.

In conclusion, it can be said that the group of supporters for an independent Catalonia has remained small. The majority of democratically elected representatives and all European governments reject such secessionist demands, not least out of concern that they might fall back on them. The Catalan separatists will not receive any further sympathy either if they remain uncompromising towards all offers of dialogue by the Spanish central government. With their intransigence, they could trigger a new economic and financial crisis in Spain that would destabilise the entire Eurozone.

While Carles Puigdemont had already Europeanised the conflict, his successor Quim Torra tried to internationalise it. On 26.9.2018, he published an open letter to the Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez, a copy of which he sent to several political figures, some EU heads of government, the US President Donald Trump, the Chinese President Xi Jinping and Pope Francis. In it, he calls for mediation under international mediation with the aim of ensuring a peaceful process towards independence: with a threatening undertone, it says: "It is obviously in the interests of both sides, and of the world, for this process to succeed, since an orderly and peaceful resolution of the situation is the only means remaining to avert a European crisis."⁶⁴ This is an invitation to intervene in internal affairs of Spain and thus also in those of the EU. But no head of state would be a neutral mediator, but would pursue his own interests.

Even in the case of a repeal of the Statute of Autonomy, foreign states would have no right to interfere in this internal conflict. After all, it is not about a "state of emergency" or a "forced administration". Article 155 of the Spanish constitution may only be used for the purpose of restoring constitutional order. Even in autumn 2017, "no central government commissioner was appointed. [...]. The activities of the Catalan government as a collegiate body were authorised by the central government."⁶⁵ The rights of the regional parliament were restricted and its control rights transferred to the Spanish Senate.

This form of centralised territorial administration is the rule even in the democratically constituted EU members or other European states, whereas statutes of autonomy as in Spain, the United Kingdom and Italy, or even federal models

as in Germany or Austria, have remained exceptions. Here the Catalans could prove themselves and constructively contribute to the fact that further European states decentralise themselves and grant their regions more participation rights at national and European level. So far, Barcelona has not played an exemplary role, but rather contributed to autonomy statutes falling into disrepute because, following the example of Catalonia, they could endanger the territorial integrity of European states.

Addendum to this updated edition

Catalonia's Media Narratives⁶⁶

The former Catalan minister-president Carles Puigdemont is currently attracting media attention. From his exile in Brussels, he visited Sardinia on 24.9.2021 to participate in a Catalan cultural festival. This gave him the opportunity to meet his successor in office, Pere Aragonès, and other supporters of the Catalan independence movement. Since the European Parliament had lifted his immunity as a member of parliament on 9.3.2021, the Spanish authorities were able to demand that Italy execute the European arrest warrant against him. He was indeed arrested for a few hours, so was able to show himself again with his supporters and return to Brussels unmolested. The Italian court, meanwhile, postponed its decision and referred to the European Court of Justice (ECJ), which is currently examining Puigdemont's appeal against the waiver of his immunity. This factual situation reflects the legal dimension of the Catalonia conflict: Tensions are growing between the national and supranational EU levels.

In view of the popularity of Puigdemont, the reason for his visit has taken a back seat. The festival was not only about Catalan, but also Sardinian culture. It should demonstrate the close alliance between separatist regional parties within the EU. Their political programs refer to the cultural dimension of the Catalonia conflict: A reallocation of the EU member states along language borders. That is why they first fight for recognition as a separate (language) nation within their respective central state. This indicates the political dimension: the separatist parties next invoke the "right of self-determination of peoples", i.e. the supposed right to found their own state. The media discourse is not only lacking an explanation about this. The economic dimension of the Catalonia conflict is completely left out. This threatens the EU and especially the members of the Euro-

⁶⁴ Catalan president asks world leaders for mediation, in *Catalan News*, 04.10.2018.

⁶⁵ García Morales, María Jesús 2019: Bundeszwang und Sezession in Spanien: Der Fall Katalonien, Die

Öffentliche Verwaltung, DÖV, 72. Jg. Heft 1, S. 1–13.
⁶⁶ Published separately at: *Topic in Focus 4/2021*.

zone: The debts of Catalonia are growing steadily and the search for new lenders is proving to be the real problem ...

The Cultural Dimension: Catalonia has always been multilingual

- ◆ Contrary to the language maps shown above (cf. page 3), Catalan was created in mutual contact with other cultures. It has always been in a multilingual milieu, which was revived and strengthened by a democratic language policy after the Franco dictatorship (1975).
- ◆ The historical multilingualism of Catalonia intensified in the 20th century through internal Spanish migration and from 2000 by immigration from Latin America. A language policy that seeks to make Catalan the only official language has a discriminatory effect.
- ◆ The Catalan language policy not only calls into question the (Castilian-) Spanish official language, but also the distinctiveness of neighboring Romance language variants. It describes the dialects of Valencia and the Balearic Islands as variants of Catala.
- ◆ Multilingualism is increasingly viewed negatively and as an ideological instrument of the central government to ensure the supposed dominance of Spanish. With this argument, the population is cut off from the cultural heritage of their ancestors and from a world language.

The Political Dimension: Catalonia has no „Right to Self-Determination“

- ◆ The „right to self-determination“ was incorporated into international law about 100 years ago and today it supports the member states of the United Nations (UN) in their independent political and economic development. It does not refer to territories or regions.
- ◆ Under no circumstances can regions that enjoy autonomy rights to protect their regional cultures invoke this right to self-determination. This applies in particular to Catalonia and the Basque Country, whose special rights are far above the level of other Spanish communities.
- ◆ On the contrary, it should be noted that Catalan and Basque separatism violate international law. The reconstruction of historical state borders according to cultural models calls into question today's state borders, especially with France and Italy.
- ◆ With its demand for independence, Catalonia is endangering peace in Europe. Because a number of EU members will never recognise it for fear of copycat effects. On the other hand, it finds global supporters (e.g. in China, Russia, etc.) who benefit from an EU crisis.

The Economic Dimension: Catalan Separatism is about Money

- ◆ Catalonia is not only the richest autonomous community in Spain, but also the one with the highest public debt. Since the Spanish banking crisis in 2012, the central government has had to support Catalonia with loans from the liquidity fund, i.e. with money from all Spanish regions.
- ◆ It is true that under the socialist government, Catalonia received special conditions for granting domestic Spanish loans. But it has also given Madrid more control over regional financial policy, from which Barcelona would like to free itself in the longer term.
- ◆ Catalonia's declared goal is full financial self-government. But this puts Spain at risk of a growing public debt, which today is already over 100 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), 40 percent above the critical level of the Euro Stability Pact.
- ◆ From statehood, Catalonia expects direct access to funds from the European Central Bank (ECB). That is why Carles Puigdemont did not proclaim Catalonia's independence in October 2017. This would have led to Catalonia leaving the EU and the Eurozone.

The Legal Dimension: Competition between national and EU law

- ◆ Despite the clear legal situation at the supranational EU level, according to which breaking away from Spain would be equivalent to leaving the EU, the Catalan regional government is hoping for a "creative solution" to the Catalonia crisis, for a settlement beyond the EU treaties.
- ◆ Catalonia is hoping for growing competition between national and EU law. It speculates on an emergency in which the supranational level recognises Catalonia for fear of the state collapse of a member of the Eurozone, even against Madrid's resistance.
- ◆ The European Free Alliance (EFA), a European umbrella organisation made up of "47 nationalist, regionalist and autonomist parties" (quote: e-f-a.org), has already worked out a programme for this purpose: Through an "internal EU enlargement", the EU-27 is to become an EU-50 plus.
- ◆ The current controversy over Carles Puigdemont's extradition to Spain indicates growing tensions between national courts and the European Court of Justice (ECJ). At the moment, the ECJ still has to bow to Spanish laws. ...

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