NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION OF CATALONIA

Аннотация:

Каталония – это регион в Испании, который имеет длинную историю насильственной ассимиляции, а также гражданских войн в борьбе за
независимость и позднее за автономию. В данной статье рассмотрена история самоопределения Каталонии, а также выделены различные точки зрения за выход Каталонии из состава Испании, наравне с аргументами за нормализацию и стабильность в этом регионе. Приведён краткий обзор основных национальных, языковых и культурных отличий, истории притеснения каталонцев и их борьбы за независимость и автономию.

Ключевые слова: международные отношения, национальное самоопределение, суверенитет, Каталония, Испания.

Annotation: Catalonia is a region in Spain, which has a long history of forced assimilation and civil war, fighting first for independence and later for autonomy. This article describes the history of self-determination of Catalonia, and also highlighted the different points of view for the secession of Catalonia from Spain, along with the arguments for normalization and stability in this region. A brief overview of the main national, linguistic and cultural differences, the history of the oppression of the Catalans and their struggle for independence and autonomy is given.

Key words: international relations, national self-determination, sovereignty, Catalonia, Spain.

Catalonia is a region in Spain, which has a long history of forced assimilation and civil war, fighting first for independence and later for autonomy. Catalonia has gained its autonomy in 1979 Catalan Statute of Autonomy, following a Spanish constitution in 1978. In 2010s, two major accidents happened, that lead to a rise of separatist movement in the later years: the discontinuation and modification of many articles of the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy by the Spanish Constitutional Court and the rejection of the Spanish central
government to offer Catalonia a new self-government arrangement. Since then, 
Catalan parliamentary elections has formed a strong coalition of leftist and 
rightist activists, followed by an independence referendum on October 1st 2017, 
which was not recognized by the Spanish government. [II, 25-26]

Many government officials, presidents and prime ministers have voiced their 
opinions on this issue. We can clearly see that it is formed by their country’s 
own history or current situation with separatism and independence movements. 
For example, Theresa May stated that ‘The UK does not recognize Catalan 
declaration of independence’ and that she wants to ‘see Spanish unity 
preserved’. [IV] Of course, if they recognize it, there should also be a way for 
recognition of Scottish independence – which British government does not 
fancy. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin stated that Catalonia is similar to 
Crimea and is an example of double standards: most of the western politicians 
were supporting Kosovo in its independence movement, but vote for unity when 
it comes to Catalonia in Spain and Crimea in Ukraine. [V]
First of all, I would like to talk about local democracy in Catalonia, as a proving 
point for self-determination and independence of this region.

Catalan government empowers participatory democratic practices, such as 
consultations, participatory organisms and processes. [III, 271] All three of them 
allow citizens to express different viewpoints and be heard. There are two main 
types of democratic institutions in Catalonia: highly institutionalized and local 
referenda. After this region became autonomous, its own government consists of 
Generalitat de Catalunya, which includes the Parliament of Catalonia, the 
President and the Executive Council. Catalan government has many policies 
empowering local participation, which is very important for towns with lower 
populations. This way, citizens become more conscious of their political power 
and so they want to engage in such activities more. Civic engagement in the 
country, however, was largely organized by the civic groups in order to help
people vote in favour of independence and to change societal perception of secession. [III, 268] Apart from unofficial vote on independence on November 9th 2014, civic groups have also organised a number of events to raise citizen’s participation. Among those are traditional cultural events, concerts, flashmobs, publishing of books, videos, and websites and so on. [I, 105]

Second of all, Catalonia has a long history of being independent or autonomous state. This region used to have territorial autonomy until the early eighteenth century, when it became a part of Spain due to the Decree of Nueva Planta. At that time, Catalan language was banned, political bodies dissolved (Catalonia used to have its own jurisprudence, administration, monetary and fiscal policies) and the Catalan public law was abolished. Territorial autonomy was gained back only in 1869 with a new Spanish constitution. In the following decades, Catalonia lost and gained its autonomy a few times. These processes tell us about a long lasting self-determination of Catalans that goes back for centuries in the history. [II, 26-29] Moreover, Catalans have their own distinct language, cultural traditions.

Another important part of Catalan history is the period of Francisco Franco’s rule (1939-1975). This dictatorial regime reintroduced Catalonia to assimilation through suppression of Catalan political entities and any symbolic tools of Catalan identity (flag, national anthem), as well as the Catalan language. [II, 28] During this period, Catalan cultural elite was split between those who supported Franco and those who decided to maintain Catalan language and traditions. In 1964, a Catalan cultural organization Omnium Cultural has gained recognition. In 1971, the number of members reached eleven thousand: they were teaching Catalan language, publishing journals in Catalan, holding literary competitions and so on. These measures helped to preserve Catalan cultural heritage. [II, 29]
However, one of the main arguments against Catalan independence is that it is against Spanish constitution. In the Spanish constitution of 1978, there were no articles on self-determination of states or that they could separate from the state by referendum. This way, one of the main arguments of Spanish government on why Catalan secession is impossible is that there is no possible way to do it under existing constitutional law.

Moreover, Catalonia lacks recognition. From what I could find, only one country officially supported Catalan independence – South Ossetia. Even Russian government, though expressing their support for ‘people’s right to choose’ stated that its country’s own deal.

Most of the European countries (Italy, Germany, the UK, France and others) consist of different regions, which used to be independent states and/or were concurred by some other country. Would it make sense for all of them to ask for secession? Larger nation states try to give as much autonomy as possible to those smaller regions, so they would not need separation. In addition, even if they do, the process is very hard and largely discouraged by the EU in most cases.

In addition, Catalan separatism is not a bottom-up movement; it is more of a top-down. However, because of the civic group’s activities, most people would probably characterise it as bottom-up. “Studies of nationalist movements generally stress the role of intellectual and political elites in formulating nationalist projects… The study of Catalan nationalism has been no different, painting it as primarily a bourgeois phenomenon that has depended on the intellectual elites at times when Catalonia had no autonomous government of its own” [I, 106].

To conclude, I would like to highlight that just like in any other political case, there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer or position. The questions of self-
determination are highly discussed in political sociology and are easy to form or dissolve using propaganda, media and so on. Sense of community, however, is a very strong notion, which can be very hard to control. More importantly, it raises under pressure. It is hard to predict, how this situation will end and how it will affect the perception of sovereignty in the EU, especially after the end of Brexit. We believe that this concept will gradually change so a state can be sovereign while being a part of some bigger entity (the EU or Spain), so its decisions can be affected and limited, but not fully controlled.

References


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