Catalonian nationalism in Spain’s time of crisis: From asymmetrical federalism to independence?

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In a Spain devastated by an ongoing economic crisis since 2008, Catalan nationalism seems to have found a new life. A renewed nationalist fervour was evident at the great popular mobilization of the *Diada Nacional* (Catalonia’s national holiday) on September 11, 2012, which brought more than a million people into the streets of Barcelona marching under independence slogans. Since the democratic transition that followed the death of Franco on November 20, 1975, Catalan nationalism has taken advantage of the institutional autonomy and the political room of maneuver conferred by the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and the new State of Autonomies (*Estado de las autonomías*). These have in fact allowed Spain to evolve from the territorial structure of a unitary State governed in the name of the ideology of “National Catholicism”, distinguished by the defence of the Catholic religion and Spanish nationalism, towards a quasi-federal structure where the Senate represents the diversity of Spanish territories and where each region has become an “autonomous community” that can assume a greater or lesser degree of autonomy; in education, health, and law enforcement, for example.

Recognized as a “nationality” on the same basis as Galicia and the Basque Country, the Catalan identity has been able to emerge again in strength on the political scene. Autonomy in law enforcement, health and education has enabled nationalists, led by Jordi Pujol (*Convergencia i Unio, CIU*), to use the instruments of democratic politics to enlist regional power to support the formation of a Catalan nation. The “linguistic normalization” policy in effect since the 1980s has thus enabled the establishment of a *de facto* bilingualism, which is the foundation for the promotion of a sense of belonging to Catalonia. With Spain in crisis, what is the political situation of Catalan nationalism today? What forces are in action on the Catalonian and Spanish political scenes?

In answer to these questions, we propose to review the situation; to cast a contemporary light on the current course of Catalan nationalism, while putting it into a wider socio-historical context. The thesis of this article is that Catalan nationalism has recently evolved from its historic demand for an “asymmetrical federalism” in the Spanish State towards a more outright but unbalanced nationalism, because of the internal dynamics of the Catalan political scene. The Catalan nationalism prevailing since the transition has been both non-dogmatic and pragmatic, seeking the constitution of a nation for Catalonians, while favouring the progressive process of nation-building rather than independence per se. This has led it to be possibilist, making concessions and accepting increased margins of autonomy. In contrast to this nationalism that puts an emphasis on the political project of building the Catalan nation, Catalan independentism prefers institutional emancipation and the creation of a “new European State”. The emergence of an unbalanced Catalan nationalism in contemporary Spain can be explained by the relatively consensual character of the politics of identity within Catalan society, as well as the weakening of integrative nationalism in favour of independentism.
1.1. Catalan nationalism: the renaissance of pluralism

Catalan nationalists paid a heavy price in the victory of the Franco insurrection: it brought the disappearance of the Generalitat that had been established since the Second Republic, the dissolution of the statute of autonomy of 1932, as well as the prohibition of the language, culture and all symbols of Catalonia (Benet, 1973, p. 12). Francoism imposed a centralizing, conservative regime that followed the National Catholicism ideology, and which negated the cultural and national heterogeneity of Spain. The repression of opponents brought the near-disappearance of parties and their scattering into exile. It was not until the 1960s that social movements began to arise again. The emergence of a middle class, the great increase in education levels since 1930 and the gradual secularization of civil society caused social change that was a prelude to profound change in political structures that had become anachronistic (Solé Tura, 1985, p. 80). The creation of the Comissió Coordinadora de Forces Polítiques de Catalunya in 1969, then the clandestine Assembly of Catalonia on November 7, 1971, united Catalan democrats around the demand for autonomy and centre-left politics (Balcells, 2003, p. 181). After the death of Franco in 1975, the Catalan political scene was focused on the establishment of the Generalitat on September 29, 1977, following the return of its President, Josep Tarradellas. The unanimity of the nationalists was evident in the massive demonstration of September 11, 1977, which brought a million people into the streets in favour of a statute of autonomy (Guibernau, 2004, p. 66). The inclusion of Catalan parties in the process of defining the Spanish Constitution of 1978 allowed the approval of a new status for Catalonia in 1979.

The consensus between the Catalan parties focused more on the rejection of the tutelage of the central State than on the degree of autonomy to be achieved for Catalonia. Still today, the unity between the Catalan parties bears on their relations with the government in Madrid, while their divergences are about internal debates in Catalonia, for example in the degree of protection to extend to Castilian. The first dissonance during the transition came from the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) which campaigned for the “No” side during the December 6, 1978, referendum on the Constitution. ERC opted for a Republic rather than a parliamentary monarchy and claimed the right of self-determination. The party showed its pragmatism, however, by voting in favour of the statute of autonomy of 1979. Other dispositions of the statute contained the germs of future dissension: the powers of the Generalitat were said to “emanate from the Constitution, from this Statute and from the people” (art. 1.3), which suggested that they flowed from a decision by all of the people of Spain, rather than the Catalan people. The identity and degree of self-government of Catalonia were recognized, but additional independentist demands thus could not be conceded without constitutional reform.

A split gradually developed on the question of autonomy between the representatives of “Spanish nationalism” (Partido Popular, PP) and the parties which shared the intention to defend Catalonia (ERC; Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya, PSUC; Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya, PSC; and CiU). Following the grouping of various independentist groups, ERC became radicalized around leftist republicanism and democratic independentism, becoming a pivotal party of support for the tripartite centre-left government from 2003 to 2010. ERC then formed a nationalist coalition with CiU following the 2012 elections. PSUC, within Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds-Esquerra
Unida e Alternativa (ICV-EUiA) since 2006, has positioned itself on the alternative left close to the position of ERC, but diverges in its independentism as well as the integrative Catalan nationalist of the PSC. It proposes an evolution towards a federal plurinational state. ICV-EUiA converges with the PSC, however, in the defence of the rights of Castilian speakers, unlike the vision of the ERC and CiU of a coercive predominance of Catalan. Initially social-democrat, CiU is a proponent of an institutional Catalan nationalist of the centre which has driven the Generalitat since 1980.

1.2. Political representation of nationalism in the Catalan Parliament (1980-2010)
The first Catalan elections on March 20, 1980, were a victory for the CiU (27.7%) over the PSC (22.3%) and the PSUC (18.7%). ERC had to be content with fifth place (8.9%), a long way from its hegemonic position during the Second Republic. These elections marked a great setback for the socialists, initially expected to win them, who refused to form a coalition with the CiU; in fact the PSC went into opposition for more than two decades. A “dual vote” dynamic emerged: the CiU nationalists consolidated their dominant position in Catalonia, while the socialists won the national legislative elections of that same year. (Pallarés and Keating, 2012, pp. 238-58). The Catalan elections of 1984 saw a triumph for the CiU (46.6% of the vote), giving it for the first time an absolute majority in parliament. The communist left incarnated by the PSUC fell sharply (5.6%), also the centre-right coalition of the Alianza Popular (AP) (7.7%), and the ERC (4.4%), which paid the price of its subordinate participation in the CiU government of 1980-84.

Note: * The PSUC became PSUC-ICV in 1988, ICV-Els Verds in 1995, ICV-EA in 2003, and has been ICV-EUiA since 2006. Following the split between IC and Izquierda Unida (IU) in May 1998, EUiA (Esquerra Unida i Alternativa) was formed in order to create a Catalanian version of the IU. All of these groups have formed a stable coalition (ICV-EUiA) since 2006.

** In 1999 and in 2003, the PSC-PSOE ran in the coalition PSC-Ciutadans per Canvi (PSC-CpC).
The power alignments remained unchanged until 1995, when the CiU lost the majority it had won in 1984, 1988 and 1992. These elections were marked by gains for the ERC (+1.6%), ICV-Els Verds (+2.5%) and the Partit Popular de Catalunya (PPC) (+7.2%). They led to the PPC supporting the CiU in Catalonia in exchange for the latter’s support for the government of José María Aznar. The 1999 elections enraged the Catalan socialists: the list of Pasqual Maragall, a popular mayor of Barcelona, won a higher percentage (38.2%) than the CiU (38.0%) but fewer seats (52 versus 56) while the PSC obtained fewer votes. The proportional voting system, based on the d’Hondt formula, tends to over-reward large party lists.

This translated into the continuation of the CiU minority government supported by the PPC. So it was not until 2003 that Catalonia had an alternative government, after 23 years of the reign of Jordi Pujol, ceding to a tripartite government which brought together the PSC, ICV-EUiA and ERC to 2010. The victory of Artur Mas (CiU) in 2010 owed a great deal to the great unpopularity of the PSOE at the national level because of the crisis, as well as the nationalist distrust of the PP. Also, new parties emerged, leading to greater fragmentation: Ciutadans de Catalunya which sought to represent non-nationalists; Solidaritat Cataloniana per la independència (SI) (Catalan Solidarity for Independence), led by the charismatic President of FC Barcelona, working for independence; and la Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC) (Platform for Catalonia), a populist, anti-immigrant party founded in April 2002.

1.3. Political Catalan nationalism: a powerful influence on the national scene

It is not possible to apprehend Catalan nationalism without giving full due to its influence at the national level. From the time of the transition, political Catalan nationalism has used three chief levers in the pursuit of its interests: 1) the implicit recognition then promotion of asymmetrical federalism in the State of Autonomies; 2) the establishment of a favourable voting system at the national level; 3) the definition of an autonomous financing system which emphasizes the principle of fiscal co-responsibility over inter-regional solidarity. The influence of Catalan nationalism on the path of the Spanish State was nothing new: it reflects a trend of long duration: the structural tension between the weakness of the integrative pretentions of the central State, and the weight of the strong peripheral regions such as the Basque Countries and Catalonia (Braudel, 1958, pp. 725-53).

2. Ciutadans de Catalunya is a civic and cultural platform formed by a group of 15 intellectuals opposed to Catalan nationalism. By contrast, the Plataforma per Catalunya (PxC) is a populist, xenophobic and anti-immigration party founded at Vic (where the immigrant population is about 25%) on April 5, 2002, by Josep Anglada (former candidate of the extreme-right Frente Nacional in the 1989 European elections). The party saw important gains at the local level, from 4,900 votes in the autonomic elections of 2003 to 66,000 in the municipal elections of 2011, obtaining 67 municipal councillors.

3. Modern Spain arose from the dynastic union of the crowns of Castille and Aragon in 1479, but the merger of these two crowns into a unified kingdom lasted only until the War of Succession (1701-1714) in the reign of Philip V. Until the Nueva Planta decrees (1707-1716), “Spain” was just a geographic expression, within which two very different States cohabited. Also, while the central State unravelled, culminating in a disastrous year 1898 for Spain, when it lost many colonies (Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines), the Catalan bourgeoisie by contrast enjoyed the lead role in the industrial modernization of the country and the flowering of political liberalism.
The influence of the Catalan nationalist can be seen first in the pursuit of an asymmetrical federalism: constitutional recognition of a different status for the three “historic nationalities”: Catalonia, Galicia and Basque Countries, and their specificities embedded therein (article 2)4. Failing to obtain the status of a “nation,” due to the opposition of statist parties, and especially the Spanish right, the status of a “nationality” satisfied the nationalists for the moment. Distinguishing between a “fast track” (art. 151) and a “long track” (art. 143) to autonomy, the constituents provided a gauge of the will of nationalists in the peripheral regions to maintain an asymmetry in the territorial organization of the State. The willingness of Andalusia to shift to the fast track created a precedent that other communities sought to emulate: The Organic Law on the financing of autonomous communities (LOFCA) of 1980 and LOAPA in 1982 on the unification of the autonomous model (“coffee for all”) put its asymmetrical model into question (Moreno, 2001, p. 12). Since then, political Catalan nationalism has therefore sought to negotiate directly with the central State to obtain asymmetric changes for Catalonia, rather than support a federal state on an equal footing with the other communities.

In the second place, the influence of the Catalan nationalists has benefited from the type of voting system in place since the transition. At the regional level, the six successive CiU regional governments (1980-2003) enable the use of the institutions of the Generalitat to gain national influence and project Catalonia internationally by active “para-diplomacy”, notably with European institutions (Paquin, 2003). At the national level, even if the voting system for the legislature most benefitted the dominant parties (PP and Partido Socialista Obrero Español), it also favoured parties whose electoral base is concentrated territorially, such as the Catalan nationalist; this to the detriment of minor parties whose electoral support is dispersed across the whole territory (such as the Izquierda Unida). Two seats are allocated to each of the 50 Spanish provinces (one for Ceuta and one also for Melilla), and the rest of the 248 seats (out of 350) are allocated in proportion to the population. With 7.5 million residents in 2010, Catalonia has had 47 representatives in the Spanish Congress of Deputies since 2004 (13.4% of total seats). The voting system is therefore favourable to the nationalists: for example, during the legislative elections of 2008, with 969,871 votes (3.8%), Izquierda Unida won only 2 seats, while with only 298,139 votes (1.2%), ERC won 3 seats. With 779,725 votes (3.2%) in the same four Catalan provinces, CiU won 10 seats. In several respects, therefore, the CiU has played a pivotal role on the national scene, notably in 1993 when it supported the PSOE and in 1996 in supporting the PP government, negotiating political concessions for Catalonia in exchange for its support of governments in Madrid.

Finally, the influence of the nationalists has led to successive reforms of the autonomous financing system, in favour of the principle of fiscal co-responsibility over inter-regional solidarity. (Petithomme, 2009, pp. 75-101). At the origins, LOFCA provided for the principle of parity of structure, powers and financing, that is an obligation of fairness and solidarity between autonomous communities; while re-establishing the Foral System in the Basque Countries and Navarre (since the Partido Nacionalista Vasco, PNV, and the Navarre elites made the preservation of

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these privileges a *sine qua non* condition for their support for the Constitution); as well as special dispositions due to the geographical situation of the Canary Islands. The great difference between the equity formally proclaimed and the asymmetry in fact in favour of the Basque Countries and Navarre led to mutual misunderstandings, so that the Catalonian nationalists have since then always sought further evolution towards a more asymmetric system that would bring them to the fiscal autonomy of the Basque Countries and Navarre.

The “open” character of the State of Autonomies encouraged two opposite interpretations that emphasized either “inter-territorial solidarity” through the equality of rights and access to the services of the State, or “regional autonomy” through the principles of decentralization and financial self-sufficiency. In the line of the second interpretation, Catalonian nationalism has developed a strategy since the 1980s that can be summarized in five main points: 1) support for an open process of fiscal federalism that could lead to successive renegotiations; 2) the intention to obtain a system similar to the Foral System in place for the Basque Countries and Navarre; 3) the denunciation of any situation imposed by the central State as “unjust and discriminatory”; 4) the intention of obtaining the maximum degree of financial autonomy; and finally, 5) the goal of replacing multilateral negotiation with bilateral accords between the *Generalitat* and the central State.

5. The *fors* introduced in the Middle Ages a set of rights and privileges granted by the king or lord of the land considered in concertation with the population. They were not granted after the 13th century and were abolished by Philip V.

6. This defence of a special status for Catalonia explains the indifference of the nationalists regarding multilateral organs: in the eight meetings since the establishment in 2008 of the Conference of Governors of the Autonomous Communities, Catalonian leaders have been most noticeable for their repeated absence, as with the Santander meeting of March 21, 2011.
Beyond the Catalan political scene and the national influence of Catalan nationalism, it is important to consider the convergences and differences between the main nationalist parties (ERC and CiU) in their respective programs. Such a study enables a more precise assessment of the political effects of Catalonia’s internal ideological cleavages. The nationalists are split first on the definition of the contours of the Catalan national identity, the status of Catalan, and the goals and means of action of nationalism, as well as the nature of relations with Spain.

First, regarding the contours of the Catalan nationality, the ERC sees the Catalan identity in an oppositional perspective: In Catalonia, citizens must deliberately opt for a Catalan identity rather than a Spanish identity. The party has thus played a key role in social movements pursuing symbolic attacks on the Spanish identity, such as the banning of bullfighting in Catalonia since 2012\(^7\). The two parties (Convergencia Democratica de Catalunya, CDC and Unio Democratica de Catalunya, UDC) which have formed the CiU coalition since 1978 consider that the Catalonians constitute a nation with its own linguistic space, but they define Catalan citizenship more on a civic than cultural base: in the classic definition by Jordi Pujol, “Catalonian” corresponds to all who live and work in Catalonia and wish to be Catalan (CDC, 1992, p. 1). CiU sought to develop a “national awareness” through the public policy of the Generalitat, which favoured the integration of migrants from Spain or elsewhere within a strong Catalan identity, in the role of a friend and facilitating the emergence of a sense of belonging because of the exemplary political, economic, and cultural path of Catalonia.

Second, regarding the status of Catalan, for ERC the Spanish Constitution of 1978 obliges Catalonians to know Castilian while their own language is official only in Catalonia, which means they are treated as a linguistic minority within the Spanish State, and not as a full-fledged nation. ERC therefore advocates an egalitarian multilingualism, which implies the recognition by the Spanish State of equal status for the four main languages (Castilian, Catalan, Basque and Galician), while maintaining the pre-eminence of Catalan in Catalonia (ERC, 2001, p. 12). While the ERC considers Castilian as a language that is exogenous to Catalonia, CiU recognizes the existence of Castilian speakers, but prefers a voluntary linguistic policy, to make the sentimental preference for Catalan natural. As the principal sign of their specificity, this is about “normalizing” Catalan through “bottom-up” policies that focus on the “family-work-culture triptych” to develop a feeling of nationhood and the use of Catalan in society (Rigol, 1996, p. 128).

Third, regarding the goals and means for action of nationalism, ERC clearly opts for “independence and self-determination by peaceful means” (ERC, 1993, p. 13). ERC calls for an emancipatory “nationalism of liberation” (Carod-Rovira, 1997, p. 60). It promotes the formation of a pro-independence majority in Catalonia, which would be a *sine qua non* condition for building the Catalanian State. CiU claims the label of “Catalonian nationalist” by seeking to obtain more freedom and autonomy for Catalonia. Long associated with Jordi Pujol at the *Generalitat* (1980-2003), CiU seeks to remodel Catalonia through a pragmatic nationalism willing to enter into political pacts with the central State. CiU thus emphasizes the “national reconstruction” of the Catalanian nation, and Spain as a plurinational and multilingual State (CDC, 1997, p. 33). Its goal is to build national awareness through exemplary economic and social modernization, wide citizen participation and international promotion of Catalanian culture and political thought.

Finally, regarding Catalonia’s relations with Spain, ERC considers that the problems of Catalonia can be explained by its institutional submission to Spain: it contributes more to the budget of the Spanish State than the other autonomous communities, while receiving less benefit (Carod-Rovira, 1998, p. 84). ERC’s goal is therefore less to reform the State of Autonomies than it is to leave it (Barrera, 1997, p. 117). ERC is also distinguished from the other parties by its republicanism, which led it to oppose the Spanish Constitution of 1978, the King and the Parliamentary Monarchy. The position of the CiU is consistent with the historical mainstream current of Catalanian nationalism, not limiting its field to Catalonia, but also presenting itself as a player in modernizing the Spanish State (Roca y Junient, 1982, p. 35). Although the CiU knows how to strategically play the independentist card from time to time, the party is favourable to a confederal evolution of the Spanish State that would confer sovereignty to Catalonia in cultural and linguistic matters, while confirming its financial and fiscal autonomy and its possibilities of autonomous external diplomacy.
The controversy surrounding the new statute of autonomy of Catalonia crystallized the claims of Catalan nationalist from 2005 to 2011. The intent to obtain a new statute showed the wish to evolve towards an Act II of the State of Autonomies by going beyond the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and the system of autonomous financing, while giving greater recognition to the Catalan “national reality” (Cultiiaux, 2007, pp. 23-35). The fact that José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero compromised to support such a project and was then elected on March 11, 2004, opened the way to an opportunity. A consensus emerged between the parties of the tripartite Catalan government (PSC, ICV-EUiA and ERC) which enabled a statute recognizing Catalonia as a nation to be approved by Parliament on September 30, 2005 (120 votes for and 15 against). The PP, however, took this to the Constitutional Tribunal on November 2, 2005. Following a bilateral agreement on January 21, 2006, between José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Artur Mas, the Leader of the Opposition in Catalonia, an amended statute of autonomy was approved by the Spanish Congress of Deputies, then by the Senate. It was rejected by the ERC, whose militants felt it had lost the essence of the initial text: this precipitated the expulsion of the party from the Catalan government on May 11, 2006, and led to the organization of elections which would bring a new tripartite government. Meanwhile, the referendum on the statute of autonomy was approved in Catalonia on June 18, 2006, by a majority of 73.9% (26.7% No and 5.3% blank ballots). It was put into effect even though the rate of participation was only 49%.

Far from settling the controversy, the referendum sent it to the courts. On July 31, 2006, 99 PP deputies challenged 187 articles; the People’s Defender then challenged 112 articles; and five autonomous communities (Murcia, La Rioja, Aragon, Valencia and the Balearic Islands) dominated by the PP (except in Aragon) claimed that certain dispositions would harm their respective interests. Given the unprecedented politicization which emerged around the Catalan autonomy statute, the Constitutional Tribunal took four years to reach a decision, on June 28, 2010. The judges upheld the constitutionality of the text, although 14 of the 223 articles were declared unconstitutional. Three emblematic elements were rejected: 1) the reference to the existence of a Catalan “nation” was declared to have no legal foundation, while its historic and cultural value was recognized; 2) the preferred status of Catalan over Castilian was refused, although the Tribunal accepted its obligatory character in teaching; and finally, 3) the institution of a Catalan tutelage over the administrative jurisdictions of the State in Catalonia was declared invalid.

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9. The People’s Defender is an administrative institution that provides recourse for the defence of the collective interest of citizens with reference to various laws.
The Constitutional Tribunal based its decision to reject article 8 of the statute, regarding the legal recognition of a Catalonian “nation” (without denying its historic and cultural existence), on the consideration that it is contrary to article 1 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, which declares that “National sovereignty belongs to the Spanish people from whom emanate the powers of the state”, and article 2, which proclaims that “The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards”. Where the Catalan nationalists consider that Spain is a “nation of nations”, the Constitutional Tribunal held to the contrary, that from a legal point of view (but evidently not political), only Spain can be qualified as a “nation”. Also, the invalidation of the preferential nature of Catalan (while accepting its obligatory character), was founded on article 3.1 of the Constitution, which stipulates that: “Castilian is the official Spanish language of the state. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it”. Even though Catalan is recognized as the official language of Catalonia (article 3.2 of the Constitution), the official status of Castilian throughout Spain implies a legal co-official language status in Catalonia, which would be affected by article 6.1 of the Statute. The Constitutional Tribunal did not oppose Catalan being the language of normal usage in Catalonia, but did oppose the “preferential” qualifier which would jeopardize the co-official nature to give legal primacy to Catalan. Finally, the institution of tutelage over administrative jurisdictions was struck down because of the constitutional impossibility of instituting an independent Catalan judiciary, which is a key demand of the nationalists.

For Spanish nationalists, this ruling demonstrates the legitimacy and relevance of the Constitution, since it allows the regionalist claims to be associated (since most of the statute was accepted) with respect for the integrity of the Spanish State. However, for the Catalan nationalists, the ruling symbolized the obsolescence of the Constitution and led to lively citizen protests culminating in the July 10, 2010 march in Barcelona under the slogan “Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim” (We are a nation. We decide). This demonstration, supported by all of the Catalan parties except the PPC and the Ciutadans, brought together more than a million people, a larger crowd than the great historic demonstration of September 11, 1977. This march was all the more historic since it brought together under the same banner the six Presidents and ex-Presidents of the Generalitat and the Catalan Parliament: Heribert Barrera, Joan Rigol, Jordi Pujol, Pasqual Maragall, Ernest Benach and José Montilla (Fernandez Garcia and Petithomme, 2012, p. 90)

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13. Ibid.
4.1. The national context: crisis, austerity and “re-nationalization”

The Catalonian parliamentary elections of November 2012 must be considered in the light of the frustrations born from the rejection of the most emblematic elements of the Catalonian Statue by the Constitutional Tribunal. However, they took place in a Spain marked by three main facts. First, the political situation was characterized by the severe economic crisis which has engulfed Spain since 2008 following the bursting of the property bubble, the collapse of the construction sector (which had employed more than one out of four workers), the crisis of the Spanish banking sector and that of European sovereign debt. Weakened by historic overdependence on construction and tourism, the Spanish labour market is even more sclerotic than that of its European neighbours. Since then, this has translated into massive unemployment, reaching about 25% of the active population in February 2013. This severe economic crisis resulted from both long term and short term trends.

In the long term, none of the PSOE (socialist) or PP governments had shown any real willingness since the transition to deal with imbalances in the labour market by developing new sectors of activity, reforming education to reduce the excessive proportion of Spaniards without diplomas and develop continuing education for older Spaniards, and finally develop a social policy and equality between men and women in order to favour the access of women into the job market. In the medium term, the heavy immigration of less qualified foreign workers since the end of the 1990s (from 637,000 in 1998 to 4,145,000 in 2006), which was initially supported by employers in order to compensate for the lack of manpower and to put downward pressure on salaries, gave a major boost to unemployment since the 2008 collapse of the construction sector. This immigration even today puts less qualified Spanish workers in competition with foreigners, which stimulates xenophobia and populism. Finally, in the short term, the socialist government of José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero did not see the bursting of the real estate bubble coming during its first mandate (2004-2008), and did not manage the crisis convincingly during its second mandate (2008-2011).

Second, the very clear victory of the PP during the November 20, 2011 Spanish legislative elections (44.6% versus 28.6% for the PSOE) brought a political right turn in the central government in Madrid. The PP had been following an austerity program for more than a year, drastically cutting State expenses and the funds allocated to autonomous communities. Following the demands of employers, the government for example passed a law facilitating layoffs. In health, a law was passed to put an end to the equivalent of universal health coverage, which meant that foreign citizens (even those from other EU countries) would henceforth have to pay to get access to

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16. In Spain, the schedule for public schools from kindergarten to college (generally from 8am to 2 or 3 pm), the shortage of daycare and the absence of a policy regarding small children makes it even more difficult today for women to access the job market. Not only does this contribute to one of the lowest birthrates per woman in Europe (1.48 children per woman), but this situation also brings about a rather “structural” intermittent unemployment or an absence of professional activity on the part of women with fewer diplomas. For example, in Andalusia, even today only one woman out of two works in the workforce.
care in Spanish hospitals. In Madrid, a vast plan of privatization of eight hospitals was launched, sparking an unprecedented strike among hospital sector workers and a wave of resignations. The VAT and the prices of gas and electricity increased, the salary of public sector workers was reduced by 10%, hiring was frozen in the public sector and a major reform to contain the costs of universities was under discussion. However, this austerity cure did not have the hoped-for effects, since unemployment continued to rise: from 11.3% in 2008, it rose to 21.5% in 2011, then to 26.6% of the active population, that is, 6.15 million unemployed in January 2013. Some analysts think that the PP’s austerity program since 2011 has only aggravated the recession.

Finally, the Catalan elections of November 25, 2012, took place only two years after the November 28, 2010, victory of the CiU (38.4%, 62 seats) and the crushing defeat of the tripartite coalition (PSC, ERC, ICV-EUiA) that had been in power since 2003. Even though the PSC had been severely routed in 2010 (18.3%, 28 seats), Artur Mas (CiU) did not get an absolute majority. Following an agreement with the PSC that it would abstain, he obtained a working majority. Although the CiU gained power, the 2010 elections represented a weakening of this party compared to its dominant position during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as a greater fragmentation of the Catalan political landscape (7 parties obtained results higher than 3% of the votes). Confronted with the effects of the economic crisis, Artur Mas decided to support the budget restraint of 2010-2012, which increased the unpopularity of his government. He cut the expenses of emergency services and hospitals by 10%, reduced the salary of Generalitat employees, the number of hours (hence the pay) of professors as well as school budgets. This gave rise to the “Iberdrola” episode, when the lights went out for several days in public facilities in the province of Girona in June 2011 because of unpaid bills. The Catalan public debt nevertheless grew from 35 to 50 million euros in two years, so that the region finally had to request liquidity funds from the central government to avoid going to the markets again for financing. Despite the claims of Catalan nationalists, the 2.392 million euros of aid underlined paradoxically the dilemma of autonomous debt and the dependence of Catalonia on the central State.

4.2. Power relationships and the question of a referendum

In a situation marked by the return of the right to power in Madrid and the support of budget cuts by the CiU in Catalonia, the popularity of the Artur Mas government was largely dissipated barely two years after its arrival in power at the Generalitat. Thus, when many hundreds of thousands of people marched in the streets of Barcelona in honour of the Catalan national day on September 11, 2012, Artur Mas decided to change direction politically and try to take advantage of the ambient popularity of independence. Less than two weeks later, spurred by the massive demonstration and looking for issues to take attention away from his poor economic management, he decided to call elections even though his mandate was only half completed, in the hope of gaining a better majority by putting the question of independence at the heart of his campaign. However, CiU lost about 25% of its electoral support in the 2012 elections (from 1,198,000 to 772,000 votes): a setback for the party in power, which, far from winning an absolute majority, lost 12 seats in Parliament. It is true that that collapse of the PSC (which won only 14.4% and lost 7 more deputies) facilitated this. While there were gains by ICV-EUiA, PPC and the Ciutadans,
as well as the emergence of an extreme left-wing movement (Candidatura d’Unitat Popular, CUP) in the wake of the social protests and 15-N, the great winner of the election was the independentist party of Oriol Junqueras (ERC), which doubled its Parliamentary representation to become the third most popular party (from 7% to 13.7% and from 10 to 21 seats).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convergence and Union (CiU)</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalan Socialist Party (PSC)</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Party of Catalonia (PPC)</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiative for Catalonia Greens and United and Alternative Left (ICV-EUiA)</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens – Party of the Citizenry (C’s)</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP)</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalan Solidarity for Independence (SI)</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of seats

In other words, even though the balance of power between the nationalist parties (CiU, ERC and CUP) and non-nationalist ones (PPC, PSC, ICV-EUiA and Ciutadans) remained unchanged since each bloc received 46% of the votes, there was a redistribution of power within each bloc. Within the non-nationalist camp, the federalist part of the PSC collapsed, partly to the benefit of the ICV-EUiA, but also and above all to the benefit of the recentralizing message of the PPC and the Ciutadans. Meanwhile, in the Catalan nationalist camp, CiU did not succeed in reversing the harm to its image caused by budget cuts and the economic crisis of the past few years. Despite its turn to independentism, the recent surge of support for independence benefited the ERC (compensating for its defeats in 2010 and in local elections in 2011 when the party lost its representation in Catalonia’s major cities). The new CiU-ERC coalition government thus represented a weakening of the autonomist nationalism of the CiU and the development of the power of blackmail by the independentist fringe represented by the ERC, incarnating what could be considered as a type of “unbalanced independentism”.

Dependent on a partnership with the ERC to govern, CiU (ideologically on the centre-right) saw itself obliged to temper its program of budget restrictions (since it was now associated with a party of the left) and to put in place a more sovereignist agenda on the national questions. As in 2006, during the definition of the new statute of Catalan autonomy, ERC today plays a role as a pivotal party making a demand for the organization of a referendum on self-determination in 2014. The CiU is thus constrained to follow this agenda, even if recent developments underline that the organization of a future referendum will be a pretext, not for gaining independence, but for giving legitimacy to new transfers of powers and greater autonomy, for example on fiscal matters. Aware that a referendum cannot be legally valid according to the Constitution unless it covers all of the people of Spain, or if it is organized in Catalonia with the approval of the Congress of Deputies (i.e. the representatives of the people), Artur Mas has already declared that it would be more of a “consultation” without
legal force, but whose effects would be above all political. Also aware that the notion of having its own State is not unanimous in Catalonian society, Artur Mas is seeking to advance the idea of a “right to decide” of Catalonians: “the right to decide is one thing, having our own State is another; to obtain it, with these results, would require that we continue working”\(^\text{17}\).

Within the CiU coalition, the UDC of Josep Anti Duran, which represents the Christian Democratic sector, considers that the consultation cannot take place without an “ample majority” of the Catalonian Parliament (understood with the agreement of PSC as in 2006 during the ratification of the statute) and in respect of the “legal framework”, that is, by finding a way to avoid the censure of the Constitutional Tribunal. This is the context in which the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Catalonian People (in fact the 7th such declaration since 1989) was passed on January 23, 2013 by CiU, ERC, ICV-EUiA and CUP. It refers only to the “right to decide” but not to the notion of its “own State”, which the ERC had already accepted not to put forward. However, it is interesting to note that this notion of the “right to decide” was already put forward in 2005 by the Ibarretxe Plan, which was rejected by the Congress of Deputies. The Catalonian government thus created a National Transitional Council, in order to explore the jurisdictional paths allowing for the holding of a referendum, as well as the Diplocat organization seeking to internationalize support for the process.

Even though Pepe Navarro of the PSC recently demanded that the King abdicate “for the good of Spain”, it is not at all certain that the referendum will take place in 2014 (perhaps in 2016)\(^\text{18}\). Even though all of the nationalist parties seem to be in agreement on the idea that the voting age will be lowered to 16 (sociological studies show that young people are more inclined to support nationalism), many questions remain unanswered as to the number and type of questions that will be asked in the referendum; and the likely outcome of the vote appears very uncertain. At the date of writing, in February 2013, according to a Centre of Opinion Studies (CEO) opinion poll, regarding the preferred organization of their territory, 46.4% of Catalonians prefer an “independent Catalonia (16% more than in 2012), 22.4% prefer a “federal Spain”, and 20.7% preferred the model of the State of Autonomies. If a referendum had been held, 54.7% of Catalonians said they would vote in favour of independence, 20.7% against, and the rest of those polled (24.6%) were undecided. Also, even though a referendum on independence would be very mobilizing, the previous referendum on the Statute of Autonomy of 2006 had a very low rate of participation by the public (49%). Finally, it is not certain that such a referendum can be held, Marino Rajoy having clearly declared that the government will not authorize it and will demand its prohibition by the Constitutional Tribunal, which he has very good chances of obtaining.

\(^{17}\) “CIU orilla el discurso soberanista y se centrará en la crisis económica”, El País, February 18, 2013.

\(^{18}\) “Críticas generalizadas a Navarro por pedir la abdicación del Rey”, El País, February 21, 2013.
To conclude, it is interesting to look at the contemporary political situation of Catalonian nationalism by synthesizing its present course as the emergence of an unbalanced nationalism. In fact, if we reprise the debates in the history of Catalonian nationalism since the transition, several central elements deserve to be underlined. First, it is clear that the once hegemonic position of autonomist nationalism, represented by the CiU under the Jordi Pujol governments, is now greatly enfeebled. This is due to a much greater fragmentation of the nationalist political spectrum, notably with the rise of the ERC, but also and to the decline in the element of the Catalonian population seeking greater autonomy within the State of Autonomies. Secondly, on the other hand, the overtly independentist element of Catalonian society has very clearly grown over the past thirty years. The policy of linguistic “normalization” of the 1980s and the dissemination of nationalism through the institutions of the Generalitat, schools and media have contributed to the development of independentist feeling among many new social strata, and particularly among young Catalan speakers in mid-size cities in the interior regions of Catalonia. This social element, the most dynamic, today includes the Catalan-speaking middle class, especially in the public sector, who are represented by ERC, a party that has already had much government experience and has wind in its sails since its leadership has been renewed and its leftist discourse of the 1980s has been moderated.

The weakening of autonomist nationalism and the reinforcement of independentist feeling need to be viewed in the context of the parallel weakening of the socialist project at the federal level and the consolidation of Spanish nationalism in Catalonia. Autonomist nationalism seeking asymmetrical federalism in the State of Autonomies has lost strength to a more clearly punctuated confederal perspective. The federalist viewpoint represented by the PSC has also lost its audience because it is no longer in tune with contemporary Catalonian society, where a majority like the idea of Catalonia’s own political project to obtain a status very clearly differentiated from that of other autonomous Spanish communities. Spanish nationalism, however, while delegitimized at the transition by the Franco period, today is represented by the PPC and Ciutadans, and has regained ground even if it remains in a minority in Catalonia, which can be explained by an oppositional reaction to the independentist escalation, notably among Castilian-speakers and in business circles.

Finally, we are witnessing the development of an unbalanced nationalism in the sense that the situation of the 1980s, where a nationalism that was autonomist, integrative, and tinged with federalism was dominant in Catalanian society, and there were there were only two small minorities, Spanish nationalist and independentist, is now past. Today’s situation is much more fragmented, with four minorities co-existing (Spanish nationalist, federalist, autonomous nationalist, independentist), although overall the trend is to a nationalism no longer integrative but rather confederal. In other words, not only is traditional autonomist and federalist Catalonian nationalism enfeebled, but the ideological distance, the polarization between the different political options, has also increased.
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