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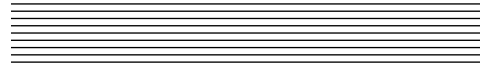
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Lost Credibility: Who Should Be Blamed for the Increasing Support for Separatism in Catalonia?*

*Lucie Coufalová***

Abstract /

The recent growth of the Catalan separatist movement is traditionally interpreted as a consequence of the bad economic performance of the region, or rather the whole country. This paper, however, aims to prove that despite the economy's unquestionable role in the intensification of the nationalist conflict there may be other important factors involved. One of them is the case of the central government's loss of credibility and grievances felt by the Catalan people. This may have led to an increase in separatist tendencies. On the other hand, the general political environment can be seen as a determinant of bilateral trade. Therefore, the bad relations between Catalonia and Spain and the increasing separatism in Catalonia affect negatively the mutual trade links between the region and the rest of the country. However, this effect acts in both directions, as trade diversification and internationalization may also have encouraged separatism. The lack of credibility of the government of Mariano Rajoy and the Popular Party has resulted in responses by the inhabitants of Catalonia which are the completely opposite of those expected by the prime minister and his party. The absence of dialogue from the central government encourages the separatist movement rather than discouraging it, and threats act as a very strong motivator for those who desire an independent Catalan state.

Keywords /

bilateral trade, credibility, European Union, grievances, nationalism

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Introduction

Since the second half of 2013, there can be seen a strongly increasing demand for autonomy in the Catalan region. This development is in line with the theory of *lost autonomy* presented by Siroky and Cuffe (2014) who state that groups which have lost autonomy are more likely to pursue independence than those who conserve it or those without historically embedded autonomy. This is due to the fact that the “[r]etracted or lost autonomy provides a strong motive and need not significantly diminish the group’s collective action capacity. Moreover, it considerably weakens the government’s ability to make credible commitments that might otherwise prevent tensions from escalating, making “voice” seem less likely to yield positive results than exit, thereby increasing the probability of secession. (...) lost autonomy engenders resentment, which increases the group’s grievances, reduces the government’s capacity to make future credible commitments that might bring cooler heads and calmer voices to the fore, and does not necessarily reduce the collective action capacities and advantages that groups gained during autonomy (i.e., leaders, elite networks, and administrative experience)” (Siroky & Cuffe, 2015: 8).

The theory of lost autonomy can be applied to the case of Catalonia. Increasing nationalism is traditionally explained in terms of the economic situation. Nevertheless, it is also a consequence of the central government’s loss of credibility, as well as of the switch in preferences of the local political groups desiring to obtain more votes.

In the December 2015 general election, Mariano Rajoy’s Popular Party obtained only 11.12% of the votes in Catalonia, which was quite a disappointing result in comparison to the 20.71% in 2011 (El País, 2015). The later election in June 2016 assigned them 13.36% of the votes, which still remained below the expectations (El País, 2016). Hence, the general political background may be also of interest when identifying the causes of the calls for independence from the Catalan people. This is due to the fact that the development on the Spanish political scene is also determined by Catalan international trade, which constitutes one of the most important components of the Catalan economy, and would be a crucial one in the case of an independent Catalonia. The goal of this paper is therefore to present the key factors of the increasing tendency in the region’s separatist movement and to analyze possible changes in the trade patterns which would follow eventual independence.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part offers a short insight into the origin of Catalan nationalism. After that, attention is paid to the global political context in Spain and to the development of the traditional political discourse. The core part analyzes trade policy arguments related to Catalan independence. In the last section, several conclusions are drawn.

1 / Catalan nationalism: its origins and development

In the 12th century, Catalonia became part of the Aragon Crown through the marriage of Petronilla of Aragon and Count Ramón Berenguer IV. Their descendants merged both,

previously independent, political regions. Later on, in 1516, it was Carlos I, son of the Catholic Kings, under whose reign Aragon and Castile merged into a single state, which in the future would be known as Spain (Ubieto et al., 1995). In 1359 the current Catalan government, called *Generalitat*, was established and from its start it focused on avoiding the excessive fiscal demands by other state institutions. The achieved fiscal independence was lost in 1714, as a consequence of the Catalan defeat in the War of Succession and the following abolishment of its institutions (Paluzie, 2015). It was not until the 20th century, during the Second Republic, when *Generalitat* re-appeared. Notwithstanding, its brief action period was interrupted by Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975). Yet, in 1932, the Catalans defined themselves in their *Statute (L'Estatut d'Autonomia)* as an autonomic region with their own government (*Generalitat*), Parliament and Executive Board. The actual democratic Spanish state was built after Franco's death (1975), and the new constitution of 1978 organized it into 17 autonomous regions and two autonomous cities in North Africa. In 1979, the first elections to the regional Parliament were held.

At the same time, a new Statutes of Autonomy Act was also approved, which “*shall be the basic institutional rule of each Self-governing Community and the State shall recognize and protect them as an integral part of its legal system*” (Constitution, 1978). There is a considerable asymmetry in autonomy among the different regions in the country, as the constitution recognizes Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia as historical nationalities. In general, these three nationalities have more power with respect to tax collection and the approval of new rules (Ramírez & Riviere, 2013).¹ Nevertheless, there are disparities among their administrative powers.

As far as Catalan nationalism is concerned, its seeds were planted during the political and economic collapse which engulfed Spain in 1640 (Ridao, 2011). It was not until the 19th century, however, that it started to take shape. This original form of Catalan nationalism was, as stated by Dvořáková and Ferrarová (2014), basically regionalist. For decades, the Catalans pursued, above all, more autonomy within the Spanish state. Yet in the last decade, the situation has changed.

Nationalism, according to Gellner (2008), is a relatively new phenomenon, which appeared after the Industrial Revolution. He also states that prior to industrialization, there were no reasons for the emergence of nationalism. The different agricultural communities did not overlap and in this way each one could preserve its own culture and customs. Nevertheless, with the transition from an essentially agricultural society to an industrial one, and the consequent arrival of the mass education, tendencies towards the imposition of high culture started to emerge. However, the effects of industrialization are usually not distributed equally among all the inhabitants of one state. In communities that share a language and cultural customs, assimilation is possible. If this is not the case, nationalism arises, as those who do not form the dominant culture pursue their sovereignty. Therefore, nationalism gives the dominated ethnicities a chance to fight for their rights and opportunities. According to this view, the political and national units have to coincide and the rulers and the ruled should share common cultural values and belong to the same ethnic group.

Indeed, it is the feeling of a distinct identity of the people of one region relating to the mother state that initiates nationalist tendencies. These then lead to demands for the creation of regional political institutions that are often legitimated on the basis of regional history. Therefore, language and culture are the key factors in this movement (Dvořáková & Ferrarová, 2014). All of them are essential for the creation of a collective identity, based mainly on defining oneself with respect to the *others* (Giménez, 1993).

More recently, in his paper dealing with the sovereignty and independence of Catalonia, Edgar Straehle (2013) comes to the conclusion that it is not necessary to restrict the nationalist discourse to these questions in order to defend independence. In his view, there is not a unique nationalism, especially for the inhabitants of the region of the Iberian Peninsula. The most appropriate term, in this case, could be *sobiranisme de butxaca* (sovereignty in a pocket), an expression for a new form of nationalism, different from the classical one. This renovated nationalism focuses explicitly on material aspects, rather than on sentiment. Moreover, “*independence does not imply nationalism, at least if it is understood in the classic sense, as moved by an identity drive, nor does nationalism entail defense of independence*” (Strahle, 2013: 2012; author’s translation). Catalan nationalism is described in this sense because it has no clear definition and therefore it does not make much sense to speak of a fundamentally identitarian movement. Indeed, according to the BOP, a survey realized by the Centre d’estudis d’opinió (BOP, 2016), 38% of the interviewed answered that they feel Catalan and Spanish at the same time and 24.6% feel more Catalan than Spanish. Only 24.3% of the respondents declared themselves having a purely Catalan nationality. Although these results contrast with those of 2005, when a preference for shared nationality was selected by 40.3% of respondents, 27.2% of the people favored a Catalan identity, and only 14.9% felt strictly Catalan (BOP, 2005), they reflect the fact that different identity is not a key factor in the evolution of separatism in this region.

In effect, there were a lot of Spanish speaking participants in the Catalan manifestations (*Diades*),² holding the Catalan independentist flag (*estelada*) as a legitimate part of the manifestation (Strahle, 2013). This may be because the *others*, in this case, are not the Spanish inhabitants or Spanish culture. The *others* against whom the nationalists define themselves are in this case rather the central government politicians. For the majority of the participants of the movement, to speak about *self-determination* is mainly to pursue a real democracy (Strahle, 2013). This may be the reason why Junts pel Si emphasizes an open, plural and strongly EU-friendly society and does not stress aspects related to Catalan identity (Casals, 2013).

Aspects related to identity are rather of interest to the civil society. Associations like Òmnium Cultural are concerned especially with the defence of the Catalan language in the education system and the preservation of the local cultural values. Indeed, the Catalan independence movement can be also characterized by this exceptionally important role of the civil society, which is represented by the Catalan National Assembly (*Assemblea Nacional Catalana, ANC*), the right civic hand of the government, and especially by the

Òmnium Cultural. The latter has nowadays more than 63,000 members and calls for the defense of Catalan values regardless of political affiliation (Òmnium, 2017). This association is primarily responsible for organizing the most important manifestations (Casals, 2013).

At the political level, Catalonia is endowed by a solid institutional background that resulted from centuries of historical evolution and therefore has the power needed to take action. The source of the current separatist movement can be observed in 2006 when the reform of the *Statute* was approved. Consequently, a switch in the preferences of the inhabitants of Catalonia started to be plausible.

The new *Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia* from June 2006, which was approved in a referendum by nearly 74% of the participants, triggered the bad relations with the central government. The then prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the leader of the center-left PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) decided to respect the will of the region's inhabitants. In contrast, the head of the major opposition party, the center-right PP (Popular Party), Mariano Rajoy, the current executive Spanish leader, called for stopping the constitutional process, based on the low participation of the voters (49,42%; Mora, 2006). His declarations foresaw the change in the Spanish political scene and the increasing grievances of the Catalans toward the central government.

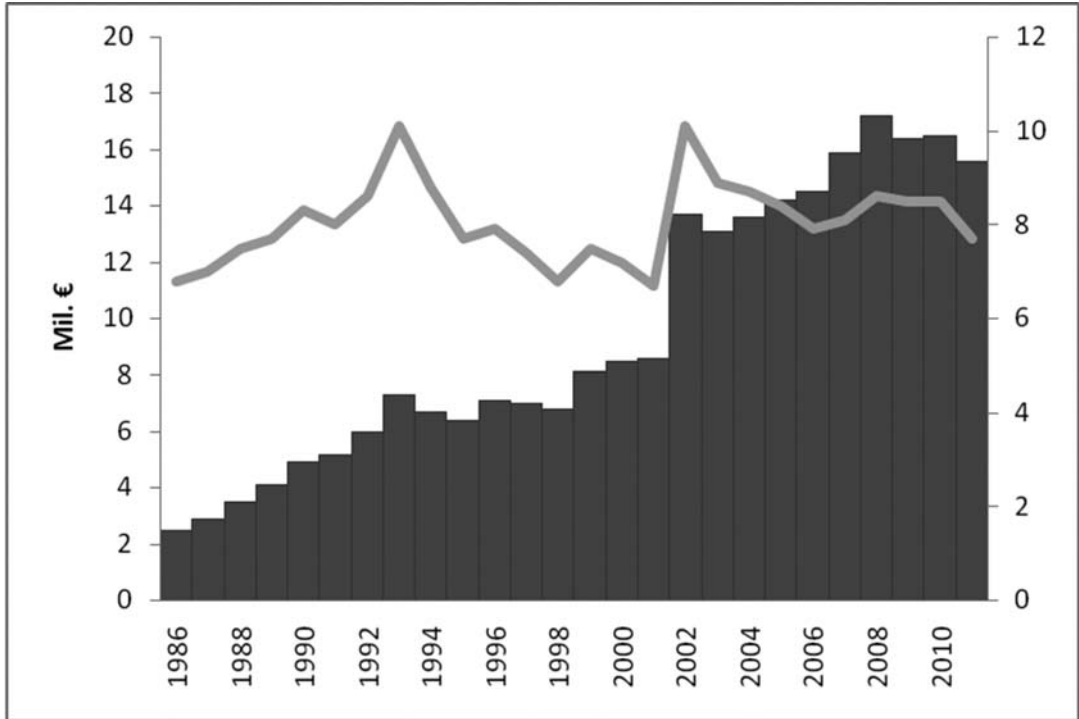
Afterwards, in 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Court canceled 14 articles from the *Statute*. After this decision, the voices calling for independence sharply increased, as the Court crossed out articles demanding more autonomy for the region (Constitutional Court, 2010). This decision was also controversial because of the political affiliation of its leader to PP, the party which raised a protest about the Statute's legitimacy (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2013a).

The original claim for major autonomy was centered primarily in the fiscal area. The Catalans demanded the so-called *concert econòmic*, a privilege traditionally granted to the Basque Country and Navarra. Both regions are endowed with the right to collect and adjust their taxes and only have to pay a corresponding amount to the central budget. This part, called *cupo*, should be negotiated every five years. It is, however, rather fixed, and for example the Basque Country pays to the central budget a part corresponding to 6.24% of the Spanish GDP, an amount that underestimates the real importance of the region in the state economy (Fuente, 2009). As a consequence, this arrangement converts the former to a net beneficiary, and consequently to the second richest region in Spain, with GDP per capita in 2014 exceeding by 30% the national average. Also, the latter receives more than it sends to Madrid and in the same year, it was the third richest region in terms of per capita income (INE, 2015). Contrary to them, Catalonia is a net payer, as can be seen from Figure 1.

The dispute revolves around these fiscal transfers from Catalonia to the central budget. As Dvořáková and Ferrarová (2014) point out, for decades, the Catalans had shown a considerable solidarity with the poorer regions of the country. For this reason, they call for the same fiscal authority as the regions mentioned above. Nevertheless, this would not be feasible for the Spanish state either from the economic or from the political point of view, as Catalonia comprises a considerably bigger part of the whole economy (INE, 2016).

The demand for a major fiscal autonomy was intensified by the last economic crisis which affected the whole country. The Catalan economy suffered a serious slump following 2008, with an extremely high unemployment rate, considerable fiscal deficit, and an increasing government debt. This bad economic performance may have undoubtedly acted as an aggravator of the bad relationship between the Catalans and the central authorities. Yet, it is not likely to be the sole culprit. Boylan (2015) explains this situation rather in terms of the wealth maximization problem. He views separatism as a function of the bad relations between the centre and the periphery. The rich regions want to secede because they do not want to finance the poorer ones. Independence is, therefore, a way how to increase Catalan’s welfare, shrunk owing to the “vertical fiscal imbalance” (Boylan, 2015: 764–765).

Figure 1: Catalan transfers to the central government budget in millions € (left axis) and as a percentage of the region’s GDP (right axis)



Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, 2012; 2013b; 2015.

Furthermore, from 2011 to 2013, expenses per capita in the social area in Catalonia were €1,091 lower, which represented a 22% drop in social expenses with respect to 2011. Also, the

budget that the Generalitat designates to health care was reduced by 5.7 percentage points, as a result of the economic decisions made by the central authorities by means of the imposed maximum level of the fiscal deficit (Ramírez & Riviere, 2013). This imposed belt-tightening in health care, education and employment in the public administration seriously affected the living standards of the region's inhabitants. These Madrid-made decisions, although obeying recommendations from the EU, may be one of the reasons why the Catalans resent the centre.

On the other hand, the Spanish economic crises went hand in hand with the political one. This was a consequence of the non-collaborative behaviour of the central government and corruption scandals that led to the loss of credibility of Rajoy's Popular Party. The autonomic government made use of the opportunity that arose from the bad economic performance of the country and the resulting restrictions in the Catalan welfare state and accused Madrid of robbing them. The resentment of the region's inhabitants towards Spain was converted into support for those defending nationalist interests.

Indeed, the notion of autonomy is closely linked with the concept of separatism. According to Wood (1981), separatism seeks primarily to limit the role of the central authority in a particular area. Some of these movements can crystallize in secessionist ones, striving for the emancipation of all the sovereign powers of the central government. Separatism is often associated with violence, an example of which may be the recent activity of the Basque separatist organization ETA. Nevertheless, it may also relate simply to a desire for greater autonomy, for example in the cultural field. Such a form of separatism may be promoted by the central government, which can, however, stand in opposition to secession.

2 / The lost credibility

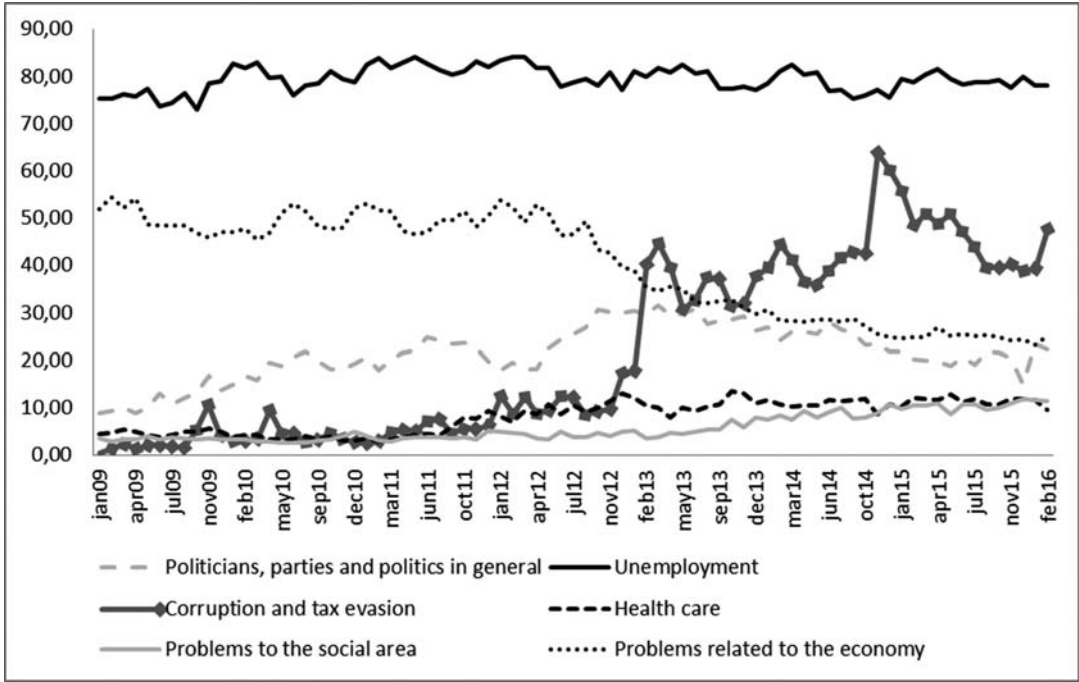
As pointed out by Estefanía Moreira et al. (2014),³ there was no dialogue between the Spanish central government and the regional one in 2012 and 2013. The central government's standpoint denying any discussion regarding voting about Catalan independence or even any form of an increase in Catalonian autonomy has been understood as anti-democratic behaviour and has seriously damaged communication between both administrative levels.

Estefanía Moreira et al. also show important deterioration in the quality of the Spanish political environment between 2008 and 2014. When the conservative Popular Party stood for the last but one parliamentary election, one of its slogans was "An Exemplary Democracy". However, the results of the mentioned study show a clear worsening of the perception of democracy in the country. This finding is in accordance with Brancati (2014), who argues that a higher degree of democracy in the country means lower demand for separatism. The opposite has happened in Spain.

Among all the factors, Estefanía Moreira et al. stress the influence of the government on the mass media. This fact contributes to the low transparency of the former's

decision-making process, as well as a lack of possibility of the Spanish inhabitants to participate in it. They also point out that, contrary to the electoral promise of PP, increasing corruption has been registered. This has led to a total loss of confidence in the government. In addition, Luis Bárcenas' case,⁴ which uncovered illegal PP funding and existing linkages between the political and the economic powers as well as poor prosecution of corruption by the government, exacerbated, even more, the mistrust of the public towards its political representatives (Estefanía Moreira et al., 2014). Numerous members of PP have been charged with bribery and the party leaders' names, as those of the Secretary María Dolores Cospedal or Mariano Rajoy himself, have been sullied (Romero, 2015).

Figure 2: Major problems in Spain. A multi-response survey



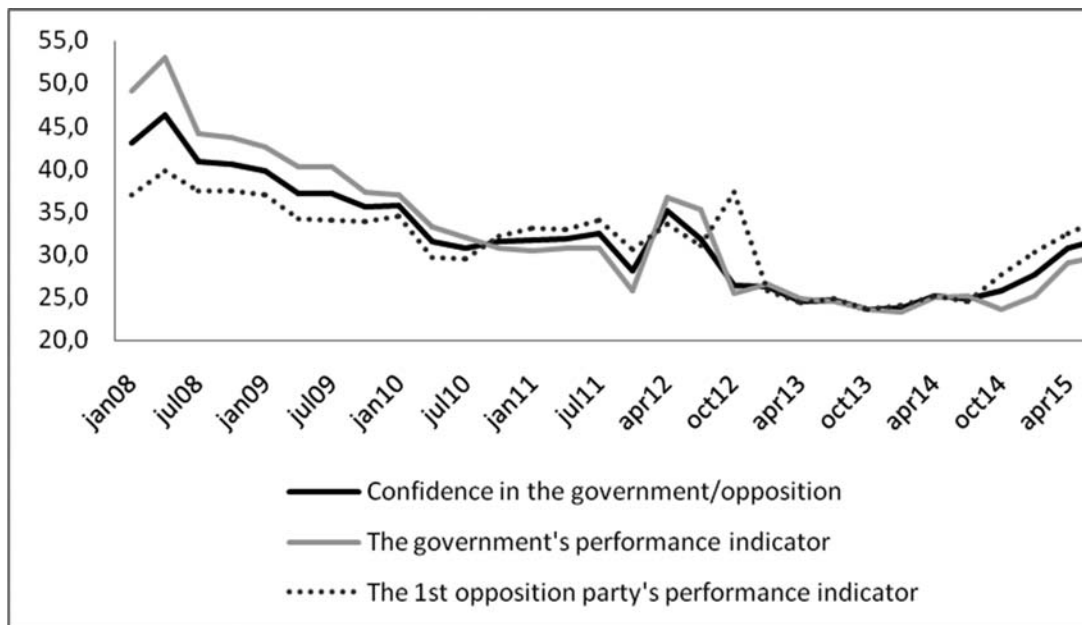
Source: CIS, 2016.

Indeed, dissatisfaction with the state of democracy in Spain has been increasing systematically since the start of the economic crises. In 2014 the number of failing democracy indicators⁵ rose to 49% compared to the 22% in 2011, the year when Mariano Rajoy held the reins. The overall mark was 5.2, which on the scale from 0 to 10 still means a pass, but is very close to 5, the border of a failure. However, too many partial threats are hidden in this omnibus result. The principal ones are a decline in health care⁶ resulting from

privatization of that sector by the leading party, in the workers' rights⁷ and public education. Notwithstanding, the most important downward trend registered the government's accountability and transparency.

The Centre for Sociological Investigation (CIS) presents a monthly multi-response survey of the major problems that Spain faces, as perceived by its inhabitants. In 2013 corruption became the second major problem in the country. The first place was, by far, dominated by unemployment, whereas problems related to the economy, in general, fell into third place. The deteriorating perception of politics in general, which went hand in hand with decreasing confidence in the two principal parties, PP and PSOE, is also worth mentioning.

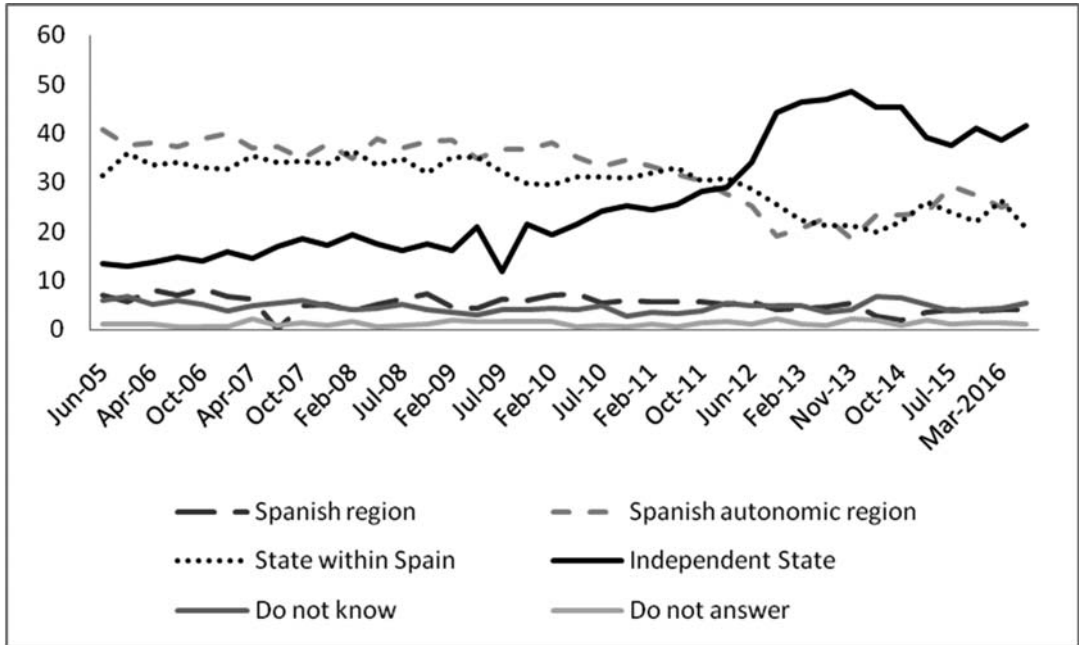
Figure 3: The government's loss of confidence



Source: CIS, 2016.

As has been previously stated, Estefanía Moreira et al. (2014) show a clear downward tendency in the evaluation of the Spanish democratic system since Mariano Rajoy and his party started to lead the country. This negative trend was accompanied by a significant growth in Catalan separatism, as shown in Figure 4.

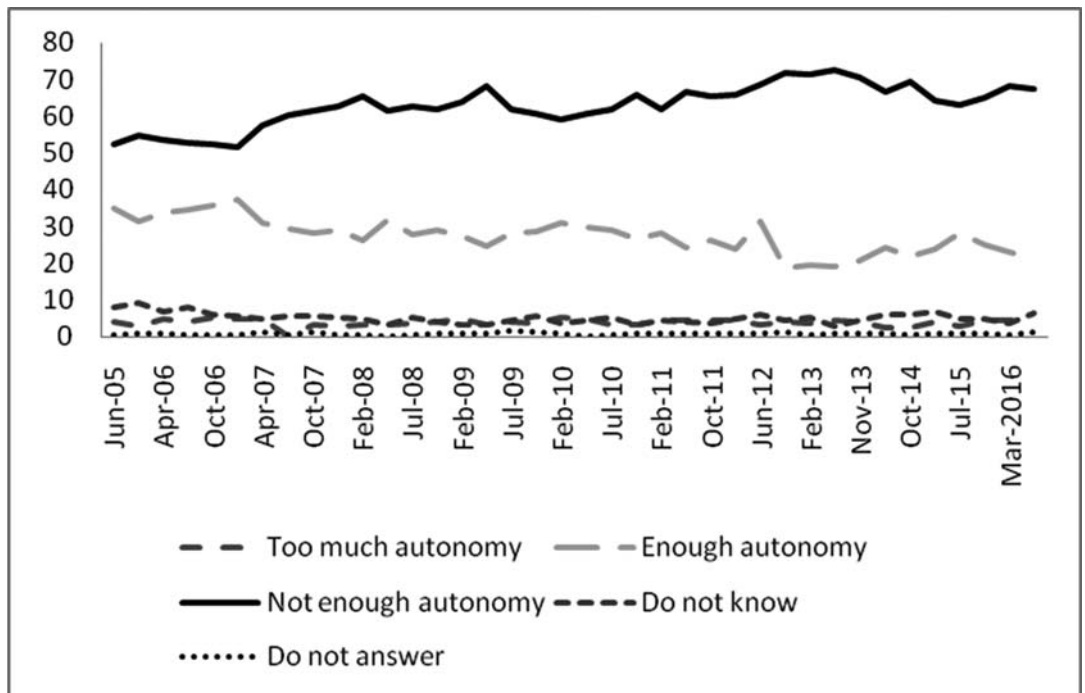
Figure 4: The desired status of Catalonia within the Spanish state



Source: BOP, 2005–2016.

In 2006, when the *Catalan Statute of Autonomy* was approved,⁸ the inhabitants of the region calling for independence were a minority (13.9% in April 2006; BOP, 2016). Immediately after the ratification by Juan Carlos I, critical voices from the Spanish opposition started to emerge. This also led to a significant turnover in the regional parties’ discourse. After the victory in the parliamentary elections in 2010, CiU’s leader Artur Mas intensified the request for a referendum. He argued that it would be “one of the most powerful democratic operations” in Europe (El Mundo, 2013). Given that the British government allowed the Scots a referendum on independence (BBC, 2014), the Catalans looked to the central government in Madrid with the hope that they would be also enabled to vote on the future of the region. Hence, Mariano Rajoy’s repeated categorical refusal (Roger, 2013; La Vanguardia, 2013) resulted in a clear difference of opinion between the autonomous government and the central one, primarily after the second half of 2013. This fact, together with corruption scandals, led to a significant loss of credibility in the Spanish democratic system.

Figure 5: The perception of the level of autonomy of Catalonia



Source: BOP (2005–2016).

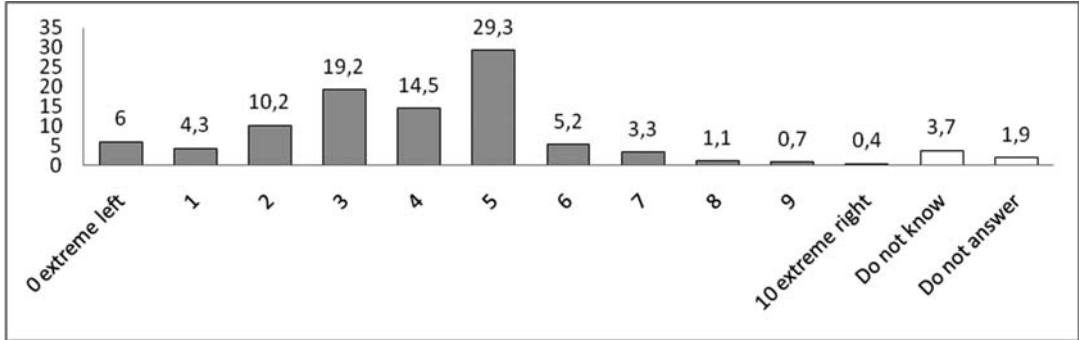
3 / Regional politics

Catalan regional parties made use of the situation and found the right way to succeed in the autonomic elections. The traditional leader of the Catalan Parliament *Convergència i Unió* (CiU, Convergence and Union)⁹ has historically pursued a policy of staying within Spain. The party, which was founded as a consequence of the merging of *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) and *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC) in 1978, concentrated for decades on building a stable political infrastructure which would give the region the capacity to win a better position on the country's political scene. Its ambition, therefore, was not to secede from Spain:

At least until the mid-1990s, and in a context where statewide parties contesting Catalan elections were unable to present a credible territorial political agenda, CiU's moderate territorial strategy – which sought to increase Catalan autonomy within the extant constitutional framework of the Spanish state – successfully appealed to Catalan voters across the traditional left-right ideological divide. (Elias, 2015: 85)

In effect, the different political preferences of the inhabitants of Catalonia with respect to the mother state represent another friction point. Whereas Spain is dominated by the center-right Popular Party (*Partido Popular, PP*), the preferences of Catalan voters are traditionally more on the left side of the political spectrum. The distribution of answers to the question “Can you tell me where are you located on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means extreme left and 10 extreme right?” included in the survey of CEO in 2016 can be seen in Figure 6. It is obvious that the distribution of political preferences in Catalonia is significantly biased towards the left. The average is 3.83 which means that the Catalans are center-left or left-leaning.

Figure 6: The distribution to the answer “Can you tell me where are you located on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means extreme left and 10 extreme right?”



Source: BOP, 2016.

CiU used to collaborate with the national parties, such as PP or PSOE (Ramírez & Riviere, 2013). However, under the weight of the calls for independence, CiU had to face an important dilemma. The consequent change in the Spanish political panorama led to a significant switch in its discourse. Its rhetoric, traditionally moderate and non-separatist, started to dominate the Catalan struggle for independence. “*The party advocated independence on the basis of quality-of-life arguments grounded in long-standing commitments to equality and social justice*” (Elias, 2015: 87).

The mentioned switch in objectives in 2010 was due to the still increasing demand of the Catalans for major financial autonomy. This demand became even more urgent because of the bad economic performance and the restrictions imposed by the central government. This made the party change its discourse and disassociate from PP, which had strictly refused to provide the region with more power regarding its budget. It was, therefore, a great opportunity for CiU to regain the votes lost due to its collaboration with PP.

Contrary to Artur Mas and his party, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC, Republican Left of Catalonia), its major regional rival, proclaimed, from the very beginning, more radical opinions. In the early 90s, the discourse of independence was the party's principal strategy how to lure CiU's votes; however, its coalition with the *Partit Socialista de Catalunya* (PSC, Catalan Socialist Party) between 2003 and 2010 resulted in the party's loss of credibility regarding its devotion to the cause of Catalan independence. This resulted in a considerable drop in support among its former voters. In order to convince them, the party opted for leadership replacement. This "*ERC's independentist pedigree (...) brought credibility to this shift, and, in the context of a groundswell of popular support for independence, the party saw significant gains in the 2012 Catalan election*" (Eliás, 2015: 90–91).

Together with CiU, ERC redefined its discourse, pursuing a policy of filling the vacancy left by the national parties. The separatists, associated in *Junts pel si* (Ferrer, 2015), are trying to battle for votes laying stress on the economic aspects of the conflict with phrases like "Spain robs us" ("España nos roba"; La Gaceta, 2015). In contrast to them, the national parties argue that Catalonia would not survive as an independent state. One of the key points of the Spanish central government's discourse is that the Catalan economy would suffer a great economic depression as a consequence of the drop in the bilateral trade with Spain.

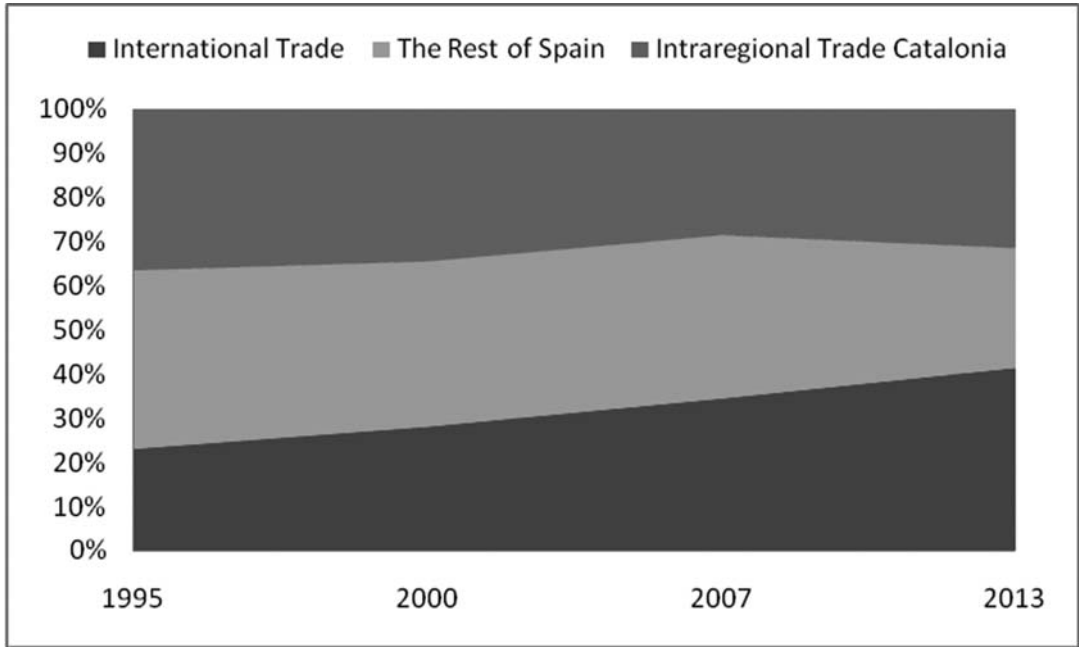
4 / Catalan home bias and European integration

Mariano Rajoy and his government try to discourage the Catalans from leaving the common state by means of threatening them with a Spanish veto to Catalan membership in the European Union. Leaving aside the currently hottest issue of the legal framework of the membership, it is obvious that trade with the EU members, other than Spain, would be a key point for the survival of the new state. Since McCallum's *National borders matter: Canada-US regional trade patterns* (McCallum, 1995) about the home bias in the trade of the Canadian provinces, there has been a vast range of studies on the same topic and most of them focus on trade relationships between Spain and Catalonia. Their objectives are either to demonstrate the strong dependence of the Catalan economy on the exports to Spain or, on the other hand, to stress the considerable reorientation of Catalan trade towards foreign markets. For example, Gil-Pareja et al. (2005), who analyze 1995–1998 exports among the Spanish regions and 27 OECD countries, estimate that Catalonia trades 22 times more with other parts of Spain than with foreign countries. Their work is developed by Llano-Verduras et al. (2011) who, analyzing the period 2000–2005 and reducing the sample to 25 OECD countries, conclude that the border effect in their country is to a large extent a result of geographical aggregation. For the disaggregated intra-national trade flows, they find the previously estimated effects of the borders overestimated.

With reference to the development of this trend in time, Gil Pareja et al. (2006) show the decreasing tendency of the border effect for the Basque Country. They argue that this is

a direct result of the increasing integration of the region in international trade. Ghemawat et al. (2010) point out the decreasing value of this effect in the case of Catalonia. However, they find a certain shift in this trend in the last years of their analysis (1995–2006). Additionally, Lanasa Santolaria et al. (2015) estimate this effect separately for all the Spanish regions. The authors find huge disparities among them, evincing in Catalonia a smaller border effect (8.11) than the national average (10.5). They also show the downward trend of the effect in time. To illustrate, figure 7 represents a general tendency of Catalan trade with the trading partners within the national borders, as well as with those from other countries.

Figure 7: The evolution of the distribution of Catalan trade from 1995 to 2013



Source: C-interreg. CEPREDE.

Regarding the potential independence of Catalonia, Paluzie (2015) summarizes three negative effects on international trade traditionally attributed to Catalan secession: a boycott of the regions’ products, a new border effect and newly implemented tariffs and additional expenses due to a different currency. The last effect is considered by the author as completely unrealistic, as an independent Catalonia could sign bilateral agreements with its European trading partners as Switzerland and Turkey have done.¹⁰ This argument seems to be reasonable, given that if two countries trade, it is because this trade is profitable to both

of them. It is therefore obvious that potential trade barriers between Catalonia and Spain, as well as between Catalonia and other European trading partners, would harm both sides. Furthermore, a unilateral decision to pay in euros is a real possibility. However, the other two factors might influence in some way the level of Catalan foreign trade and therefore its gross domestic product.

The second effect discussed in relation to Catalan independence is a potential boycott of Catalan products by Spanish consumers and firms. There is indeed evidence from the first years of the 21st century. With José María Aznar leading the Popular Party and the central government (1996–2004), there were claims for more autonomy from the Catalan region, nevertheless with an adverse response from the centre. Even more, Aznar proposed a boycott of Catalan products by the consumers in the rest of the country. Therefore, another boycott might be one of the methods to prevent the Catalans from seceding.

Nonetheless, Modest Guinjoan and Xavier Cuadras (2011) state that due to its elevated costs a general boycott of Catalan production is not likely to happen. This theory is in line with the experience from other boycotts all over the world, which has shown that these usually focus on one typical exported article, such as French wine.

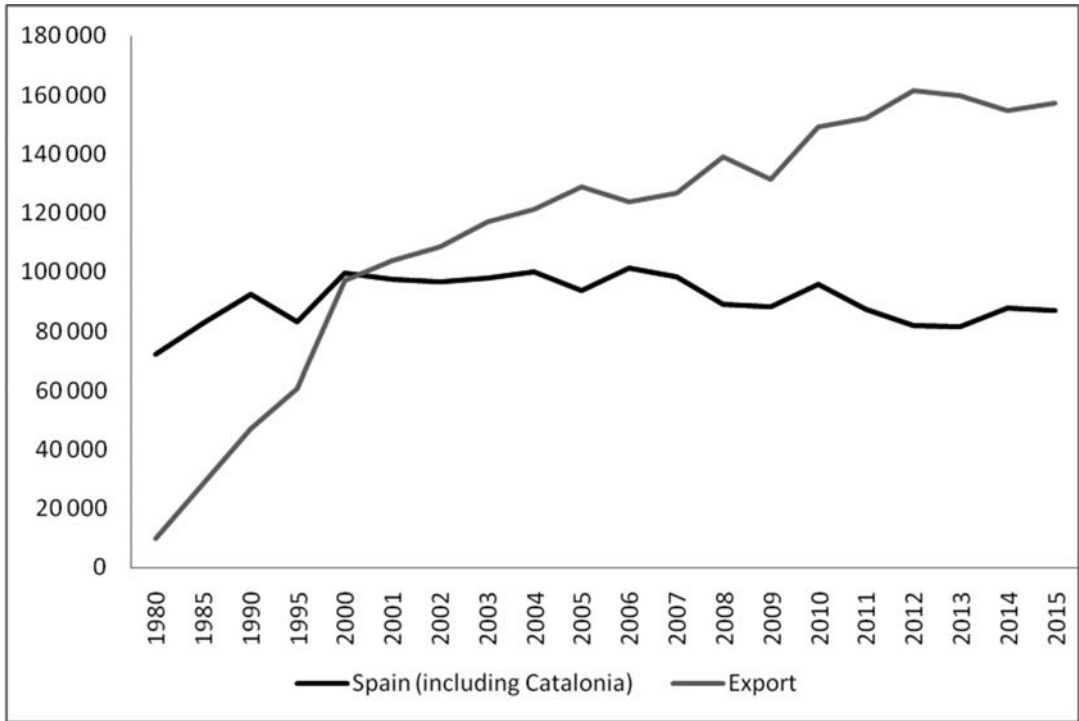
The most world-famous trade boycotts, as summarized by these authors, involved Chinese consumers' boycott of Japanese products and another one carried out by consumers in Australia and New Zealand, which may have served as punishment for nuclear experiments carried out by the French government. French companies also suffered a considerable loss after the country's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq. The Americans focused on the typical French export article, wine. The drop in the total American demand for the production from this Western European country was estimated by Michaels and Zhi (2010) at 15%. In the opposite direction there was registered an 8% drop in demand for US production. However, some experts, for instance Frank Vannerson (2004), deny that any kind of boycott ever happened.

In the case of Catalonia, its typical product is cava, a type of sparkling wine. The evidence from the 2005 boycott of this product shows that a 6.6% fall in its sales to consumers in other Spanish regions did not lead to a decline in major exporters' (Freixenet and Codorniu) profits. In spite of this, they have monitored a 3.3% increase in their sales caused by a substantial increase in the home demand and by the reorientation towards foreign trading partners (Guinjoan & Cuadras, 2011). The same behaviour was registered in 2012 when the separatist movement started to gain more power and the Spanish reaction was to reduce once more the consumption of this typical Catalan product. This trend is in accordance with a theory by Daumal (2008), who argues that a political disintegration of the national states leads to home market fragmentation and consequently to an increase in international trade.

Nevertheless, in recent times, Madrid, supported by some mass media, has returned to its favorite practice, which is to deter the Catalans from seceding via boycotting their products or via suspending, within the stipulations of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, the autonomy of the region (Collado, 2016; El Plural, 2014). The national parties, especially PP,

argue once more that Spanish consumers and companies would give up purchasing Catalan products, which may lead to a huge fall in the region's GDP. This threat, however, misses its target. In fact, it achieves quite the opposite, which is encouraging grievances among the people in Catalonia and inciting them even more to demand the creation of their own independent country.

Figure 8: The development of cava sales (in thousands of bottles)



Source: CRC, 2016.

Concerning the second point, as has been mentioned above, since McCallum's paper, a considerable number of papers have been published whose aim is to explain the importance of the border for the levels of trade exchange between two geographical units. More precisely, the impact of political disintegration on trade is researched, for example, by Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc (2003) and by De Sousa and Lamotte (2007).

Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc (2003) compare the drop in bilateral trade among the countries of the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia immediately after the political disintegration and they compare it with the reunification of Germany. For example,

in the case of the Czech and the Slovak Republics, there was a steep decline in bilateral trade immediately after the breakup. The original trade exchange between these states was 32 times higher than the normal level predicted by the gravity equation. In the early years of the existence of both republics, from 1993 to 1994, that level fell to 11 times the predicted one and in 1998 the exchange between them only exceeded 7 times the normal level. The authors observe a similar trend also in the other political breakups. However, they point out the need to evaluate this development in a broader context, under the light of the European integration and the Russian crises.

Contrary to these findings, De Sousa and Lamotte (2007)¹¹ stress the relatively low change in trade patterns. The authors challenge the traditional assumption of a steep slump of trade intensity between the partners after a breakup of any federation, applying a theoretical gravity model to the successor states of the same former political organizations as did Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc during 1993 and 2001. They conclude that there is no evidence of a systematic negative influence of the political disintegration on trade intensity. The established trade links change very slowly due to the sunk costs, which result from entering a new market and building a new infrastructure. This finding is in line with the idea of Eichengreen and Irwin (1997; in De Sousa & Lamotte, 2007: 826) who state that “countries with a history of trading with one another – whether for reasons related to politics, policies and other factors – generally continue to do so”. Also Paluzie (2015) states that a significant change in trade patterns may not happen in the short run. The established net of trade relations had been developing for many years, depending upon historical, cultural, linguistic and other factors. Therefore, it is rather a question of a long-run development.

De Sousa and Lamotte (2007), in accordance with Fidrmuc and Fidrmuc (2003), also find that in the case of Czechoslovakia, the breakup resulted in a significant drop in trade intensity between the successor states. In 1993, the trade between these two countries reached 33.5 times the normal trade intensity, whereas in 2001 it was only 11.2 times. However, this is in great part due to the fact that Czechoslovakia was a considerably closed economy and a vast majority of its not very large trade was directed to Eastern markets.¹² In addition to that, the new Czech and Slovak Republics were not members of the European Union. Therefore, they were facing an important turning point in their trade policies.¹³ However, this may not be the case of Catalonia, which is fully integrated into the European market.

For this reason, the European Union may play a key role in separatist movements. According to Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (2000), regions with separatist tendencies may support international trade in order to make a profit. The openness of a small country may compensate for the costs of the secession resulting from its reduced size.¹⁴ As a result of this, the “*economic integration leads to political «disintegration»*” (Alesina, Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2000: 1277), because in the globalized world, the small size of a country does not affect negatively the country’s income, so that there is a “*trade-off between the economic benefits of size (...) and the costs from heterogeneity resulting from large and diverse populations*” (Alesina, Spolaore & Wacziarg, 2000: 1278).

This heterogeneity in preferences between Catalonia and Spain seems to be incompatible with the current political organization of the Spanish Kingdom and the fiscal and administrative responsibilities distribution among its levels of government. It does not seem to be concerned only with cultural, linguistic or historical issues. It is rather based on the different preferences of the median voter in Spain, dominated by the center-right conservative PP, while Catalonia is a traditionally left-oriented region (Casals, 2013). The Catalans feel grievances towards Spain because their preferences are ignored by the central government. Their region's economy, more export-oriented, requires additional investment in infrastructure. However, Madrid has continuously overlooked the demands for investment in the "corredor del Mediterráneo", a railway which would facilitate transportation of products to Europe (Paluzie, 2015).

In general, separatist regions are characterized by supportive attitudes towards economic integration (Dvořáková & Ferrarová, 2014). Hence the EU acts in both directions. On the one hand, the Spanish government deters the Catalans from demanding independence, threatening possible loss of EU membership. On the other hand, economic integration facilitates trade with foreign countries and, consequently, it lowers the home bias, as well as the costs of being a small country. What should also be mentioned is the influence of the EU institutions that interfere in the democracy decision-making process, because they break the direct linkage between the voters and those who make the decisions (Dvořáková & Ferrarová, 2014).¹⁵ This fact, together with the downward trend in the perception of democracy in the country, works in favour of independence movements.

Conclusion

The Catalan separatist movement has been frequently seen as a response to the bad economic performance of the whole country. Moreover, it is also a fierce reaction to the non-reliable discourse of the central government. Notwithstanding, the belt-tightening imposed by Madrid due to the last economic crises has led to an intensification of the conflict between the central government and the regional one.

This fact, together with the corruption scandals which have tarnished the leading national party, has caused its utter loss of credibility. The linkages between those who make the decisions and the common people have been completely broken. All these events have deepened the feeling of grievances among Catalan citizens, who had been for decades supportive towards the central government. These grievances are believed to be one of the key factors in the escalation of the separatist movement. The nationalist issue in the region of the Iberian Peninsula should be viewed primarily as a consequence of different preferences of the median voter, rather than as questions related to the different culture and identity.

As a consequence of the deteriorating relationships between Spain and Catalonia, and owing to the possibilities offered by the European Union, the economy of the region

has experienced a considerable internationalization. Hence, the attempts by the Spanish government to discourage the Catalans from trying to secede have achieved the opposite effect to the one intended.

The global political context should be also considered as a determinant of international trade. The government headed by Mariano Rajoy and his party deters the Catalans from seceding by inciting Spanish consumers and firms to boycott typical Catalan products. Because a general boycott is not likely to happen, this method of discouragement becomes a further impetus to the call for an independent Catalan state. There is no empirical evidence proving disastrous consequences of the boycotts enacted all over the world, including the Spanish boycott of cava in 2005. Therefore, a claim predicting a huge drop in GDP resulting from different aspects related to international trade is not a persuasive argument that should prevent the Catalans from seceding.

The evidence from the break-up of Czechoslovakia demonstrates that if there is a political will, trade patterns can change relatively quickly and without a hard impact on trading partners. Because trade is beneficial for both sides in a bilateral relationship, some kind of an association agreement with the European Union may be possible in order to maintain the trading relationships established between Catalonia and other countries. With regard to the future Brexit, it may be particularly a stance Spain will adopt towards the Catalan membership in the EU.

Relating to trade patterns in general, there is no evidence that a rapid change in the bilateral trade relations with Spain should take place. Historical experience speaks in favour of a slow change in bilateral trade relations after a breakup. The only difference was in cases of the former centrally planned economies that, apart from the political disintegration of their mother states, had to face the breakup of the former COMECON trading net. The role of the European Union in a secession is ambiguous. On the one hand, it might lower the costs of being a small country, but, on the other hand, a possible danger of remaining outside the common market might discourage those who pursue independence.

Despite the somewhat falling support for independence following the Scottish “NO” in the independence referendum, the conflict between the central authorities and the Catalans continues at full throttle. Given the falling political support for PP in the region, Rajoy’s party may need to re-evaluate its strategy. Rather than threatening the abrogation of the region’s autonomy or a military invasion by the Spanish army in Catalonia, it may find it preferable to adopt some kind of cooperative approach towards the inhabitants of the region. There is a wide space for a dialogue between the executives of both levels of administration.

Notes /

- 1 This system, based on a historically rooted regional autonomy, contrasts for example with France, a strongly unified country where the state is solely responsible for all the decisions. It has no need to consult the different interest groups. If it does so, it is only because the centre wants to justify its decisions in the eyes of the public (Grossman & Saurugger, 2004).
- 2 *La Diada* is the National Day of Catalonia. What at first was a small commemorative act of the fallen in that siege of the city of Barcelona on the 11th of September of 1714, have, in spite of the Spanish government disapproval, spread throughout the region and become a national day (Anguera, 2003). The *Statute of Catalonia* of 2006 states that “The feast of Catalonia is the Eleventh Day of September” (Parlament de Catalunya, 2016).
- 3 This analysis is based on the 6th round of the European Social Survey.
- 4 Luis Bárcenas, the former treasurer of PP was firstly accused of having participated in the Gürtel case, which discovered irregularities in the financing of the party. Later on, in 2013, the existence of illicit accounts (worth about €47 million) in Swiss banks was brought to light. The investigation revealed that during the 1990–2009 period, several leaders of the party were continuously primed with high bonuses. Also, the prime minister’s name was directly involved in these dirty-money operations, as well as in trying to cover up this corruption scandal (Romero, 2015).
- 5 There are 57 partial indicators of democracy.
- 6 The public health service has to be frequently supplemented by the private one. According to the European Commission, private health care in Spain in 2010 covered approximately 13% of the total. This holds for fully utilized services with a very long waiting time and dentists. In the case of Catalonia, this share reached 25% in the same year (Observatorio Europeo de Sistemas y Políticas de Salud, 2010). This was the consequence of the belt-tightening imposed on the regional government, which resulted in a reduction of the provided services, including the closure of some hospital units. As reported by Canadell and Macià (2012), the expenditures of the central government in this area were in Catalonia below the national average, generating disapproval among the Catalans.
- 7 This is the consequence of the labour market reform, which makes it easier to lay off workers and to sign far less binding contracts from the employers’ side (Pi, 2012).
- 8 Apart from demanding more fiscal autonomy, the new Statute demanded a preferential position of the Catalan language in the public administration, in addition to wanting Catalonia to be recognized as a nation (Carrillo, 2011).
- 9 CDC was founded in November 1974 with Jordi Pujol as a leader. In 1978, *Esquerra Democràtica de Catalunya* (EDC) joined the party. In the same year a coalition with CDC was formed. The party dominated in the vast majority of the autonomic elections, with Jordi Pujol (1980–2003) and Artur Mas (2010–2016) elected presidents of the Catalan Parliament. The union was broken up in 2015 when CDC decided to enter Junts pel Si, which strictly pursues independence (Ferrer, 2015).
- 10 Dalla Mulle et al. (2013) state that an independent Catalonia may also have a chance to enter EFTA and consequently have access to the European common market via EEA, which is the case of Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein.
- 11 The differences between the mentioned studies have resulted from the alternative specification of the model and a broader sample of countries used by De Sousa and Lamotte (2007).

- 12 According to Žídek (2006), the contribution of exports to GDP in 1987 was only 19.4% and about 70% of them were directed to Eastern markets.
- 13 They also stress the performed structural reforms which would result in a decrease in the internal trade even if there was no disintegration. The influence of the EU, CEFTA and WTO may also be of interest due to the fact that trade liberalization in general facilitates trade.
- 14 Also, Cabrillo Rodríguez (1994) points out that increasing economic integration between states lowers the costs of secession, whereas increasing integration within the state raises its costs. On the contrary, Daumal (2008) believes that this holds only for federal states, as the unitary ones' constitutions include the indivisibility of the country and therefore they do not recognize the right to secession. Despite the "*indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards*" (Constitution, 1978: 10), Daumal (2008) and Boylan (2015) suppose Spain to be rather a federation, almost *de facto*. Brancati (2014) refutes any kind of generalization of the influence of integration on separatism.
- 15 Dvořáková and Ferrarová (2014) argue that this happens because the European Union weakens the ties between the national state and its regions. The EU's regional politics also enforce different national identities.

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Appendix /

Table A: The principal destinations of Catalan products

1995		2000	
Destination	Mil. €	Destination	Mil. €
Total Spain	31,448.3	Total Spain	44,644.3
Catalonia	28,197.4	Catalonia	40,797.8
<i>Valencia</i>	5,881.4	<i>Valencia</i>	8,145.8
<i>Madrid</i>	4,652.5	<i>Aragon</i>	6,196.4
<i>Aragon</i>	4,533.1	France	6,018.5
France	3,536.3	<i>Madrid</i>	5,620.5
<i>Andalusia</i>	3,394.8	Germany	4,695.6
Germany	3,008.1	<i>Andalusia</i>	3,627.4
<i>Basque Country</i>	2,701.8	Italy	3,367.1
<i>Castile and Leon</i>	2,263.9	<i>Castile and Leon</i>	3,344.7
Italy	1,875.7	Portugal	2,940.8
<i>Canary Islands</i>	1,531.7	<i>Basque Country</i>	2,850.2
Portugal	1,375.3	<i>Canary Islands</i>	2,765.0
<i>Navarra</i>	1,278.3	<i>Balearic Islands</i>	2,595.3
<i>Balearic Islands</i>	1,172.9	<i>Navarra</i>	2,294.1
<i>Galicia</i>	1,143.3	UK	2,277.7

1995		2000	
Destination	Mil. €	Destination	Mil. €
UK	1,075.8	<i>Galicia</i>	1,668.0
<i>Murcia</i>	753.4	<i>Castile-La Mancha</i>	1,629.9
<i>Castile-La Mancha</i>	687.4	<i>Murcia</i>	1,403.2
USA	632.5	USA	1,342.2
Netherlands	565.5	Netherlands	1,234.6
Belgium	541.6	Belgium	940.9
<i>Cantabria</i>	499.2	<i>Cantabria</i>	922.9
<i>Asturias</i>	438.1	<i>La Rioja</i>	749.3
Japan	406.5	Turkey	619.5
<i>La Rioja</i>	327.1	Mexico	584.2
Andorra	237.5	Austria	565.5
Switzerland	235.2	Greece	450.3

2007		2013	
Destination	Mil. €	Destination	Mil. €
Total Spain	53,201.2	Catalonia	44,479.4
Catalonia	40,797.8	Total Spain	38,558.0
<i>Aragon</i>	11,505.5	France	9,893.3
France	7,611.1	<i>Aragon</i>	8,581.6
<i>Madrid</i>	7,170.2	Germany	6,713.1
<i>Valencia</i>	6,693.7	<i>Valencia</i>	6,674.8
<i>Andalusia</i>	3,984.8	Italy	4,630.3
Germany	3,907.9	<i>Castile-La Mancha</i>	3,777.0
<i>Basque Country</i>	3,846.2	Portugal	3,632.2
<i>Castile-La Mancha</i>	3,726.1	<i>Madrid</i>	3,390.8
<i>Castile and Leon</i>	3,490.2	<i>Andalusia</i>	3,362.6
Italy	3,374.6	UK	3,229.8
Portugal	2,675.1	Switzerland	2,334.7
<i>Canary Islands</i>	2,666.1	<i>Balearic Islands</i>	1,995.4
<i>Balearic Islands</i>	2,302.9	<i>Basque Country</i>	1,924.2
<i>Galicia</i>	2,123.5	Netherlands	1,903.3
UK	1,897.1	<i>Castile and Leon</i>	1,835.8
<i>Murcia</i>	1,706.1	<i>Canary Islands</i>	1,758.5

2007		2013	
Destination	Mil. €	Destination	Mil. €
<i>Navarra</i>	1,556.1	USA	1,658.9
USA	1,441.7	<i>Murcia</i>	1,425.0
Switzerland	1,220.8	Belgium	1,345.7
Netherlands	1,044.7	Turkey	1,315.0
Belgium	931.5	<i>Navarra</i>	1,308.8
Mexico	911.8	China	1,116.8
<i>Cantabria</i>	851.5	Algeria	1,111.0
Turkey	825.4	Morocco	1,068.3
<i>Asturias</i>	755.6	Mexico	1,035.0
Russia	617.0	Poland	902.0

Source: C-intereg. CEPREDE.

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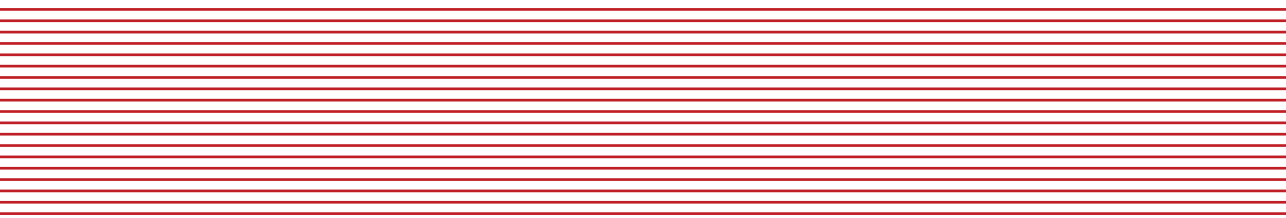
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