

Forum: The Security Council

Issue: Issue of Catalonia

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Introduction

Catalonia has been part of Spain since 1700's, after the local government had supported and fought with an Austrian family that laid claim on parts of Spain. After losing the War of Spanish Succession, Catalonia was absorbed into the Kingdom of Spain and lost its autonomy for a while. Catalonia slowly became the center for industrialization within Spain over the course of the 18th then 19th century, due to their status as one of the few regions that survived the Napoleonic occupation and the War in Spain. However, when the Second Spanish Republic was defeated in 1939, Catalonia and the rest of Spain suffered economic boycotts and other such sanctions. All of this led to Catalonia's fall from grace as a beacon of economic prosperity to being one of the poorer regions within Spain. It took nearly four decades before the "Spanish Miracle", which occurred in 1974, when the Spanish government rebuilt the Spanish tourist industry which then bolstered economic growth throughout Spain. In 1978, the Spanish government introduced a new Democratic Constitution which recognized Catalonia as an autonomous region with its own language.

The ongoing revolution within Spain has sparked international interest due to the parallel situation between the recent Brexit vote and the issue of Catalonia. The vote for independence was rather unprecedented in Spanish history and the news caught international media off-guard. International news outlets scrambled to cover the emerging issue that actually dates back to January 2015, when the Catalanian regional government or Generalitat de Catalunya announced the results of a non-binding opinion poll concerning the issue of Catalonia's independence from Spain. The reason that the Spanish government will most likely never allow Catalonia to gain full independence is due to Catalonia's hefty contribution to Spain's GDP totaling 223.6 billion Euros in 2016 or \$262.96 billion which makes up approximately 20% of Spain's GDP. The contribution is made through Catalonia's booming tourist industry despite Catalan's only making up 16% of Spain's population.

Definition of Key Terms

Generalitat de Catalunya

The Government of Catalonia is considered the autonomous regional governing body of Catalonia. It is made up of three branches of local government: Parliament, President and Executive Council. When the Government of Catalonia headed by President Carles Puigdemont declared independence from Spain in October 2017, the Spanish Constitutional Court ruled to dissolve the autonomy and Government of Catalonia as a response to the referendum.

General Overview

Amongst the multitude of historical issues that Catalonia has with Spain, such as being conquered and effectively annexed, Catalonia remains an estranged region from the rest of Spain. Historically, Catalonia was in between Spain and Portugal which make up the Iberian Peninsula, so when Spain invaded Catalonia, the Catalans persevered to uphold their laws, customs and even their language. Between 1715 all the way to the 1930's, Spanish kings and prime ministers tried to impose Spanish upon the Catalans until 1931 when the Spanish government instated the Generalitat de Catalunya. The creation of a proper autonomous government appeased the thousands of native Catalans, however a Spanish general by the name of Francisco Franco decided to quash any form of rebellion by the Catalans. In 1938, General Franco engaged Catalan separatists in the Battle of Ebro, which resulted in approximately 3,500 casualties and a 'victory' for the Spanish, who then promptly stripped the Generalitat of their autonomous authority.

In 1977, the reborn democratic Spanish government granted autonomy once more to Catalonia, which prompted to nearly three decades of a steady rise in support of an independence referendum within Catalonia. In 2006, the Spanish Constitutional Court declared any form of independence statutes to be considered null and void as the Spanish would never concede to recognizing Catalonia as a nation, especially since it is in Spanish borders. In 2008-2010, the economic crisis occurred, leaving Spain's economy crippled and in bad shape. It was during this period of economic crisis when the wealthy and prosperous Catalonian region was widely regarded as the crutch that propped up Spain's economy—with the region being the 5th most populated in Spain, yet contributing 18% to the country's GDP in 2015. By 2015, the Catalan regional government had issued a non-binding opinion poll on a theoretical independence referendum in order to gauge public opinion. The results were a near even split of 52-48% of the Catalan populations wanting an independence referendum. However, there were multiple issues that posed massive barriers to taking any further actions.

First off, the Catalan autonomous regional government wished to leave the EU along with declaring independence from Spain, an issue that parallels Brexit. Seeing as Britain is currently quite pained by the economic challenges posed by leaving the EU, it would not be an absurd thought to believe that Catalonia would not fare any better. Moreover, Catalonia does not have a functioning tax system as the Generalitat still relies heavily on the national Spanish tax system. If the Catalan government were so insistent on leaving, they would have to create their own tax structure, police and medical system within leaving Spain.

Second, the Spanish government led by the Spanish prime minister, Mariano Rajoy who is a staunch anti-separatist advocate; would block any attempts to leave the Spanish governance. Under Prime Minister Rajoy, the Spanish constitutional courts have declared any forms of independence, an act of rebellion against the Spanish government. Furthermore, Catalonia has enjoyed an annual average of 14,200 tourists boosting their economy which results in \$262.96 billion being contributed to the Spanish GDP. If Catalan ever became an independent nation, not only would Spain lose a major tourist region, Spain's economy would also suffer a significant 18% decrease of its GDP.

Finally, as of October 28th of 2017, the Spanish government finally declared the dissolution of the Catalan autonomous government and parliament, and constitutionally allowed the Madrid autonomous government to take over essential functions of Catalan.

UN Involvement

Due to the issue only becoming internationally relevant in the past several months, the United Nations has not had any resolutions, treaties and meetings upon the topic of Catalonia. However, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein declared in a statement referring to the recent imprisonment of former Catalan ministers that "I am very disturbed by the violence in Catalonia on Sunday". Furthermore, the High Commissioner had personally called members of the Spanish Government to "accept without delay the requests of relevant UN human rights experts to visit". As of current, this statement is the only official UN action that has been taken upon the issue of Catalonia.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
January 2015	The results of a non-binding Catalan opinion poll revealed that the majority of Catalans were in favor of independence from Spain
September 2015	The Catalan Separatist party wins the majority of seats in regional elections
November 2015	Catalonia's regional parliament votes for a resolution in favor of regional independence
December 2015	The Spanish constitutional court in Madrid rules that any attempt at a resolution for independence will infringe upon the Spanish National Constitution
Entire Year of 2016	Carles Puigdemont is voted in as president of the Catalan regional government and he vows to reach an agreement between the separatist party and the Catalan regional government.
June 2017	The Catalan regional government sets October 2017 as the date in which a vote for an independence referendum will occur
7 th -15 th of September 2017	The Spanish constitutional court in Madrid declares the Catalan government's upcoming referendum an illegal action and orders Spanish police to seize hidden ballot boxes from the Catalan regional government
20 th of September 2017	Spanish police take over Catalan government ministries in order to search for evidence that the Catalan regional government was breaking the national constitution by voting for a regional referendum. Protestors begin to muster in the streets of Catalonia as a response.
1 st – 3 rd of October 2017	Thousands of Catalan protestors occupy the streets and polling stations of Catalonia in a bid to prevent Spanish police forces from taking over. Due to the protests, King Felipe VI criticizes the Catalan regional government in a strongly-worded televised address.
	The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, called for the Spanish government to accept UN Human Rights officials to oversee the protests in Catalonia. Al Hussein stated, "I am very disturbed by the violence in Catalonia on Sunday."
11 th – 17 th of October 2017	Spanish prime minister Mario Rajoy, sets a deadline of October 16 for the Catalan regional government to declare independence or not. The Spanish courts issue an arrest warrant for the imprisonment of two leading Catalan separatist party leaders, Jordi Sanchez and Jordi Cuixart.

- 21st – 27th of October 2017 of The Spanish government suspends Catalan autonomy
- Catalan president Carles Puigdemont decides against declaring independence himself then flees to Brussels in order to “escape the violence because violence was never an option”
- The Catalan parliament votes and unilaterally declares independent by 70 (for) votes to 10 (against).
- In response, the Spanish senate approves the Madrid government to take over Catalan in a 214 votes (for) to 47 (against)
- 28th of October 2017 The Spanish Prime Minister formally dissolves the Catalan’s autonomy, the Catalan parliament and government
- 5th – 10th of November 2017 A total of nine ex-ministers of the Catalan regional government were arrested under an international warrant issued by the Spanish authorities. The charges were for sedition, rebellion against the government and civil disobedience.
- Catalan’s President, Carles Puigdemont, is currently seeking asylum in Brussels, Belgium as courts there are still debating whether or not to extradite Puigdemont back to Spain to serve a 15-year imprisonment for rebellion, sedition and civil disobedience.
- 21st of November 2017 The Spanish government in participation with the Madrid autonomous governing body have stated publicly that they are, “ready to discuss future fiscal autonomy for Catalonia”.
- 25th of November 2017 Carles Puigdemont, the ex-president of the now-dissolved Catalan government, has stated that he demands that Spain and the EU accept the passed independence referendum.
- Puigdemont also stated that he continues to be “the legitimate regional president” of Catalonia despite the dissolved status of Catalonian autonomy.
- In response to Puigdemont’s press releases from Brussels, Belgium; the Spanish authorities have stated that they have decided to extend Puigdemont’s jail sentence from 15 years to 30 years.

Possible Solutions

To begin, it is imperative to note that due to the Spanish government's dissolving of the Catalan autonomy and government, there is effectively no Catalan state. The UN, including the Security Council, does not have the power to demand or call for the re-instatement of autonomy on a specific member state's region. As of November 2017, the ringleaders of the Catalonian Independence movement have all been arrested and imprisoned for inciting rebellion against the government and for sedition. However, the Spanish government has stated on the 21st of November 2017, that they are willing to "discuss greater future fiscal autonomy" for Catalonia but no official word has been announced on the issue of an autonomous Catalan parliament or governing body.

So onto possible solutions:

- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights demands the Spanish government to allow unobstructed entry to UNHCR officials who will oversee the handling of imprisoned Catalan ex-ministers
- UN Security Council requests for Catalan autonomy and government to be reinstated
- Draw parallels between the Catalan's campaign for independence from Spain to:
 - The Philippines ARMM or the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
 - The Philippine government formally introduced autonomy in 1989, to the region known as Mindanao. It was done in order to appease all factions involved.
 - Even though the rest of the Philippines is Catholic, the south has retained its Muslim roots and culture due to constant influence from Brunei and Indonesia
 - The moro-islamic region as it is known, is quite unstable due to the multiple Muslim extremist factions as well as the numerous ambushes, fire-fights and skirmishes between the Philippine army and Muslim separatists.
 - Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
 - Scotland independence campaign
 - September of 2014 – An opinion poll on a national referendum was launched asking Scots, "Should Scotland be an independent country?"
 - 55.3% voted No and 44.7% voted Yes (with a voter turnout of 84.5%)
 - As of 2017, the Scottish National Party is seeking another referendum that agrees with the UK government. However, UK Prime Minister Theresa May stated that she will never agree to any proposals

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