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Separatism, Globalization, and the European Union

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<center>**Separatism, Globalization, and the European Union**</center>

<center>By Ross Dayton[*]</center>

Introduction

Globalization is both an integrative and deconstructive process. Globalization integrates states and non-state actors into transnational and global networks (Keohane & Nye, 2000, p. 105). These networks are based on multiple channels of interdependence that include trade, politics, security, environment, and socio-cultural ties (pp. 106-107). Due to advances in telecommunications technology, the expansion of globalization "shrinks" the distance between peoples (p. 105). On the other hand, globalization can also break up the existing political and social order (Mathews, 1997, p. 50). Globalization disperses power and information flows, thus enabling local and transnational identity movements to challenge states (pp. 51-52). This can be exemplified by separatist movements that seek to break away from central authorities.

Separatist movements either seek autonomy within their central states or to establish newly independent states. Since 1990, 34 new states have been established (Rosenberg, 2014). Many of these states gained their independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (Rosenberg, 2014). Separatist movements later declared independence in countries such as South Sudan, Kosovo, Eritrea, East Timor, and Montenegro (Rosenberg, 2014). Ongoing separatist movements throughout the world seek to establish new states, including Kurdistan in the Middle East, Tibet and Xinjiang in China, Kashmir in India, Palestine in Israel, Chechnya in Russia, Quebec in Canada, and many more.

Separatist movements are also prominent within the European Union, which now has over 40 separatist parties (EFA, 2014). The most notable of these movements include Scotland in the United Kingdom, Catalonia and the Basque Country in Spain, and Flanders in Belgium (Bieri, 2014, p. 1). Separatism in the European Union seems paradoxical at first; the European Union is often regarded as a "post-sovereign" system and possibly a model for globalization (Mathews, 1997, p. 61). The European Union resulted from the economic and institutional integration of European states in the decades following World War II (Jones, 2012). While it is not a state itself, the European Union is capable of overriding the national laws and executive decisions of its member states (Krasner, 2009, p. 28). Under the European Union, Europe's economy has been integrated into a single market under one currency, the Euro (Jones, 2012). Despite being so highly integrated, separatist movements are not only emerging but have the potential to destabilize the European Union.

Separatism in the European Union challenges many assumptions about globalization and the international system. On the one hand, it poses a threat to sovereignty and territorial integrity in the current Westphalian state system (Connoly, 2013, p. 67). On the other, it challenges the notion that globalization is bringing about the demise of the state; the demand for new states is increasing, not declining. To understand the rise of separatist movements in the European Union, their underlying causes and implications for European policy makers must be analyzed.

Separatist Movements and Identity

Identity often serves as the basis for separatist movements. Identity in separatist movements is often based on shared history, culture, language, and social cohesion (Gurr, 2007, p. 137). Identity becomes more important to members of a group as it suffers inequality and grievances from dominant groups with different identities (p. 138). Regional leaders can then frame the political discourse in separatist terms and promote autonomy or secession as a solution to collective grievances (p. 137). Based on these identities and grievances, separatists use communications technologies and transnational networks to organize political action and attract support from diaspora groups and foreign sympathizers (p. 136).

The role of identity in separatist movements can be seen in the Basque movement in Spain. The Basque Country have their own unique language that does not have any relation to Spanish or any other language (Macko, 2011, p. 5). Due to their cultural and linguistic differences with Spain, the Basques ruled themselves autonomously until the late 19th century (p. 6). Between 1939 and 1975, Francisco Franco's dictatorship revoked the Basque Country's autonomy and violently suppressed Basque identity to promote Spanish nationalism (p. 6). Consequently, the Basque terrorist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) launched attacks against the Spanish government from 1959 until 2011 (p. 4).

Historical grievances based on cultural and linguistic identities are also fueling separatism in Catalonia. Catalan identity and autonomy were also suppressed by the Spanish dictatorship (Connoly, 2013, p. 56). Under Franco's regime, the use of the Catalan language and expression of Catalan culture was forbidden (p. 56). Due to memories of repression, cultural and linguistic preservation is an important motive for Catalan separatists (Bieri, 2014, p. 2). After Francisco Franco died in 1975, Catalan nationalists worked within Spain's political structure to pursue their goals (Connoly, 2013, pp. 56-57). However, the Spanish government has blocked pro-Catalan legislation, including defining Catalonia as a nation and giving preference to the Catalan language in the region (pp. 57-58). Catalan nationalists wanted to hold a referendum on independence, but the Spanish government did not allow it for being unconstitutional (Muro, 2014). In addition, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is opposed to reforming the Constitution to allow a referendum (El País, 2015). Spain's refusal to let Catalonia vote for independence has further alienated Catalans (Muro, 2014). The Catalan regional government held a symbolic referendum on November 9th, 2014, in which 80 percent of 2 million voters (out of 5.4 million eligible voters) voted in favor of independence (BBC, 2014).

Historical marginalization by the French speaking population in southern Belgium (Wallonia) over the Dutch speaking population of the north (Flanders) has long been a source of tension and resentment (Connoly, 2013, p. 63). After Belgium was founded in 1830, economic wealth and political power was concentrated in Wallonia (p. 63). French became the dominant language for politics, culture, and commerce in Belgium (p. 63). Francophone elites regarded the Dutch language as suitable "for domestics and animals" and the Flemish as "uneducated, backward peasants, suitable to do manual labour and little else" (p. 63). Under pressure from Flemish nationalist movements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Belgian government gradually extended linguistic and cultural rights to Flemish regions (p. 63). As a result, the Flemish and Walloon populations are now heavily divided by language, territory, and political and civil institutions (p. 63). The Belgian national government is continually growing weaker as more authority is devolved to the Flemish and Walloon governments (p. 64). As a consequence of political deadlock between Flemish and Walloon parties in parliament, Belgium broke Iraq's record for the longest time without a functioning national government in February 2011 (p. 66). Belgium has subsequently been described as "the most successful failed state ever" (p. 62). The

LA Times humorously characterized the situation in Belgium as "a (very) civilized war as told by Dr. Seuss, with the French-speaking Walloons on one side and the Dutch-speaking Flemings on the other" (p. 52).

Cultural and linguistic identities are not always emphasized by separatist movements. While Scotland has distinct cultural and linguistic identities from the rest of the United Kingdom, contemporary Scottish separatists did not use identity-based grievances as a cause of separatism (King, 2012). Scottish nationalists assured that Scotland would continue to have close cultural ties with England after independence (King, 2012). English would still have been the primary language and the British Pound would still have been the official currency had Scotland voted for independence (King, 2012). Instead of accentuating cultural identity and grievances as a cause for independence, the Scottish National Party recently relied on political and social values to rally support (King, 2012). Scottish leftists have felt alienated by past conservative governments; conservative economic policies under Margaret Thatcher that negatively impacted Scotland have pushed its drive towards self-governance (Tharoor, 2014). Scotland has more progressive social programs than the rest of the United Kingdom, such as free university tuition and healthcare, that they wish to expand (BBC, 2014). Scottish separatists want a state that more closely resembles Scandinavian welfare states than the United Kingdom (Bieri, 2014, p. 3).

European Institutions and Separatism

The European Union's institutions have enabled separatist movements. European regionalization has decentralized authority from nation-states to regional governments and centralized authority to supranational institutions (Pantovic, 2014, p. 15). This devolution of authority gives sub-state regions more autonomy and enables them to pursue their own interests over national interests (p. 15). National leaders may find it difficult to satisfy both national and regional agendas (p. 15). As regional populations become discontent with their central state's inability to provide for their needs and interests, they are more prone to want greater autonomy or even independence (p. 15).

The European Union's institutions also makes independence more attractive for sub-state regions. Smaller states can have a greater voice in international affairs and access to more financial assistance (Pantovic, 2014, p. 16). In addition, smaller states in the European Union face significantly less security issues than small states have outside of it (p. 16). EU member-states have not gone to war since World War II due to complex interdependence and institutionalization (p. 16) (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 78). In addition, NATO could continue to provide military protection to secessionist regions if they are granted membership in the alliance (Pantovic, 2014, p. 16).

Separatist movements have already benefited from the European Union by creating transnational networks through it. Separatist regions, such as Catalonia and Flanders, have promoted the spread of their culture and economic relationships with other regions in the EU (Connoly, 2013, p. 82). They have established liaison offices and connections with EU officials, and created transnational organizations such as the European Free Alliance (EFA), a political party in the European Parliament whose membership include many of the progressive separatist parties in Europe (p. 81). The EFA's goal is to "promote the right of self-determination of peoples" in the European Union (p. 81). In addition, separatist regions also participate in transnational political networks such as the Conference of European Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG), in which legislative regions across the EU come together for common concerns (p. 81).

Economic Causes for Separatism

Globalization has shifted control of the global economy away from national structures (Hudson, 2009, p. 432). As multinational corporations gained more transnational freedom, control of production and market organization became more concentrated into cities and sub-state regions (pp. 432-433). Foreign Policy's Globalization Index shows that smaller states and regions are among the top beneficiaries of globalization (A.T. Kearney and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007, p. 72). With few natural resources and limited domestic markets, smaller states can attract foreign direct investment to become economically competitive with larger states (p. 72). Therefore, the European Union's open market decreases the costs and increases the benefits for stateless nations to seek statehood by facilitating foreign direct investment (Pantovic, 2014, p. 19). Smaller and wealthier regions like Catalonia and Flanders can make economic gains from becoming independent while staying in the EU.

The European economic crisis is also motivating separatist movements to seek independence. In times of economic downturn, wealthier regions will want independence to avoid paying for national burdens (Pantovic, 2014, p. 11). Catalonia, for example, is one of the wealthiest regions in Spain, but its taxes are collected and redistributed by the Spanish government; the funds that were dispersed back to Catalonia are much lower than the taxes that were taken (Connoly, 2013, p. 58). For every Euro that Catalans pay in taxes to the Spanish government, 57 cents are remitted back to Catalonia (Gonzalez & Clotet, 2012; La Vanguardia, 2012). Consequently, the Catalan regional government had to ask the Spanish government for loans to pay its debts (Gonzalez & Clotet, 2012). To combat Catalonia's debt, the Spanish government is forcing austerity measures on the Catalan government. The Catalan regional government was forced by the Spanish government to lower the deficit percentage of its GDP to 1.5 percent, which Moody's Investor Services considers to be unrealistic (Roth, 2012). In addition, the Spanish government did not offer any relief to Catalonia after the European Union gave concessions to Spain (Roth, 2012). Catalan separatists believe the Spanish government's tax and austerity policies are holding Catalonia's economy back and cite them as reasons for secession (Connoly, 2013, p. 58).

Flemish nationalists want to break up Belgium because they no longer want to economically support Wallonia (Connoly, 2013, p. 64). After World War II, the tides changed in Belgium and Flanders became one of the wealthiest regions in Europe (p. 64). While 58 percent of Belgium's population is Flemish, Flanders produced over 82 percent of Belgium's total exports in 2012 (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2014). Wallonia, however, went into an industrial decline and became increasingly reliant on subsidies from the national government (Connoly, 2013, p. 64). Flemish nationalists believe that Walloon government is wasting money and resent having to pay for its economic mismanagement (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2014). The Flemish also believe that breaking Belgium up would allow the government to lower taxes since they would no longer have to subsidize Wallonia (Knowledge @ Wharton, 2014).

Natural resources may also motivate separatist movements to pursue independence. The discovery of oil in the North Sea in the 1970s led to a resurgence in Scottish nationalism (Connoly, 2013, p. 60). Alex Salmond, the first minister of Scotland and leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party, argued that an independent Scotland could make 54 billion Euros in tax revenue from oil by 2016-2017 (Macalister, 2014). Scottish separatists like Salmond believe that control over sovereign oil revenues would make Scotland one of wealthiest countries in the world (Macalister, 2014). However, others have disputed these claims of wealth (Macalister, 2014). In addition, almost all licenses for oil production in the North Sea are owned by foreign companies (Macalister, 2014). Smaller states with oil often have to accommodate their tax structure to the preferences of international oil companies, which would compromise the massive amounts of revenue that Scottish separatists promised (Macalister, 2014).

International and European Law

Secession challenges two main pillars the Westphalian state system is based on: territorial integrity and sovereignty; when a new state is established, the parent state loses control over its former territory (Connoly, 2013, p. 67). Secession can lead to the dissolution of the parent state in extreme cases, as exemplified by the dissolution of Yugoslavia (p. 67). While the right to self-determination does exist in international law, it is often discouraged (pp. 67-68). Indeed, the current state system would be completely destabilized if every potential claimant to self-determination pursued it (p. 68). While separatist movements may invoke the right to self-determination to justify their cause, unilateral declarations of independence are only accepted by the international community under certain circumstances, such as colonialism or denial of democratic freedoms and human rights (pp. 70-72). Unilateral secession was recognized in the case of Kosovo due to human rights abuses from Serbia (p. 72). Negotiated secession, where the new state and the parent state agree to secession, is a more viable option for European separatists (p. 73).

Secession also poses legal questions for the European Union. Separatists argue that their regions would retain EU membership immediately after negotiated secession (Chamon & Van Der Loo, 2014). According to separatists, secession based on constitutional and democratic processes is protected by Article 2 of the Treaties on the European Union, which outlines the EU's core values of democracy and rule of law (Chamon & Van Der Loo, 2014). In addition, many separatist regions are politically and economically important, so excluding them would be problematic for the EU and European integration. These regions are already under EU laws, are part of the Eurozone economy, and use the Euro as currency (Connoly, 2013, p. 91). There is also the question of what would happen to the capital of the European Union, Brussels, which is located in Flemish territory (p. 90). Brussels is officially bilingual, so Wallonia would also try to claim the city as their own (p. 90). Brussel's fate in the event of Belgium's breakup remains unclear.

Despite the separatists' arguments for EU accession, the EU treaties do not specify what the membership status of newly independent regional governments would be (Chamon & Van Der Loo, 2014). According to the European Commission, new states may have to apply for membership to re-enter the European Union under Article 48 or 49 of the Treaty on the European Union (Chamon & Van Der Loo, 2014). While accepting the new states would avoid disrupting the European Union, many member states may not accept the new states to impede their own regions from seeking independence (Chamon & Van Der Loo, 2014). Accession into the EU requires the consent of all of its member states, so newly independent states that pursue EU membership may be blocked (Lynch, 2014). Several EU members, including Spain, refused to recognize Kosovo's independence in order to not set a precedent for separatist regions in their own territories (Connoly, 2013, p. 87). Before Scotland's referendum, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy warned that it would take an independent Scotland 8 years to negotiate EU membership (Lynch, 2014). Between the EU's need to prevent disintegration and the desire of member states to preserve their sovereignty, the accession of separatist states could potentially create a legal quagmire in the European Union.

Policy Recommendations

Scotland's referendum for independence should be used as a model for European states with separatist movements (Muro, 2014). The referendum allowed Scotland and the United Kingdom to handle the question of independence democratically. Scotland ultimately voted against independence with a 55 percent majority because the UK offered to increase autonomy (Muro, 2014) (Neuman, 2014). UK Prime Minister David Cameron promises to give Scotland more power over its taxes, spending, and social welfare programs (Neuman, 2014). Other European states should pursue similar compromises to negotiate independence and autonomy in a democratic manner. Polls indicate that voters in Flanders and the Basque Country want more autonomy rights but only a minority are in favor of secession (Bieri, 2014, p. 3).

Support for secession is currently strongest in Catalonia due to the actions of the Spanish government. While Spain's opposition to allowing Catalonia vote on independence is based on constitutional law, it is detrimental towards resolving the situation (Muro, 2014). Catalans are being alienated by Spain's unwillingness to negotiate the matter (Muro, 2014). Spain has a relatively recent history of civil war, ethnic repression, and terrorism, so it must take steps towards a democratic solution if it wants to remain a stable and united country. In addition, secession may not be in Catalonia's best interests if it cannot gain international support for its independence (Muro, 2014).

The Spanish and Catalan governments must negotiate to prevent secession; protection for Catalan culture and language must be ensured, and the Catalan government must be given relief from over-taxation and austerity policies. The current conservative-led government is unlikely to want to make such a compromise, but the conservatives may be replaced by a left-wing government in the next elections (Muro, 2014). The rising left-wing party Podemos supports Catalonia's right to self-determination while preferring that Catalonia doesn't secede (Garcia, 2014). While tensions will remain high in the near future, the Catalan dilemma may still be resolved in upcoming years (Muro, 2014).

As political authority in Belgium is continually devolved to Flemish and Walloon institutions, Belgium will likely separate into different states over time (Connoly, 2013, p. 66). The breakup of Belgium should resemble the breakup of Czechoslovakia (p. 90). In Czechoslovakia's "velvet divorce," both states agreed to separation and neither the Czech Republic nor Slovakia adopted Czechoslovakia's legal personality in international organizations (p. 90). However, the question of Brussels may be a problem for Belgian separation. To prevent any conflict between the Flemish and Walloons over the EU capital, Brussels should be made into an autonomous capital district like Washington D.C (p. 90).

If a region and its parent state do agree to secession, then the new state should be accepted into the European Union. This would guarantee political and economic continuity for the European Union and prevent disintegration. However, newly independent states will have to negotiate with opposing member states to attain membership status. In order to avoid any potential quagmires, the European Union should work towards creating a formalized pathway towards EU membership for seceding states. This pathway should only be available after secession was negotiated with the parent member state, and it should ultimately discourage sub-state regions from wanting to secede. A possible measure could be to give separatist states only partial membership for a certain period of time. Under this partial membership, separatist states would still be part of the Eurozone economy and its citizens would still be under EU law, but the states would temporarily not receive full benefits and representation. Regardless of how the EU and its member states decide to handle to question of separatism, some compromise between transnational integration and territorial sovereignty must be made to prevent any potential European fragmentation.

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