Dear delegates,

My name is Stefanos Kerkoulas and it is my utmost pleasure to be the Co-chair of the Special Political and Decolonisation Committee, which is known as the 4th committee of the General Assembly. I am a final year high school student at Arsakeio General High School of Psychico, Athens.

To begin with, I would like to congratulate all of you on your decision to join this year’s Special Political and Decolonisation Committee, one of the most challenging and intriguing Committees in a MUN conference, as it is actively involved in a variety of political and diplomatic issues, concerning international relations and international law.

As your co-chair, I hope to cooperate with all of you throughout the conference. Writing resolutions, debating on solutions, informing you on the subjects and answering your questions will be my pleasure. I hope my study guide will provide you with insight into the topic. Finally, I would like to inform you that I will be at your disposal (stefanosker@outlook.com) for any information on the issue.

I am looking forward to meeting you at the ATSMUN conference.

Sincerely,

Stefanos Kerkoulas
Introduction

Referenda on sovereignty issues have been a prominent feature of the international political and legal landscape since the late eighteenth century. Up to now, more than 350 referenda have been held on sovereignty since 1791. Virtually all the post-Second World War referendums were related to the independence of territories under colonial rule. In this era, the right to self-determination of the people gained its utmost prestige, especially within the UN and in parallel with the decolonisation process. Several sovereignty referendums were held, under UN auspices in Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands and Latin America. It should be noted that European Referendums, which have been held since the 1970s, differ from those of the decolonisation process.

Definition of Key Terms

Referendum:

A referendum is defined as a direct vote by the electorate of a country to advise or decide on a specific issue. Referenda have been used either as required by the national constitution, or requested by the executive, the legislative or groups of citizens, or by an international organization. They are called to advise or decide on pre-determined issues of major national importance. Historically, they have often been connected with decolonisation, and the creation or expansion of the European Union.

Plebiscite:

Plebiscites, legitimately used at times to decide on territorial or sovereignty issues, or the adoption of a new constitution, have acquired a negative connotation when used by dictatorial regimes under
undemocratic conditions to approve or confirm the appointment of a ruler, or a political regime restricting individual freedoms.

**Self-determination:**

The principle of self-determination is prominently embodied in Article I of the Charter of the United Nations. More specifically, Art. 1 (2) of the UN Charter states that it is one of the purposes of the UN to “develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace”, as well as in Art. 55, Art. 73 and art. 76 (b). Nevertheless, the UN Charter neither supplies an answer to the question as to what constitutes a “people” nor does it lay down the content of the principle of self-determination. In the absence of any concrete definition, and taking into account the highly various facts of international life, it cannot realistically be interpreted, applied or implemented like a legal norm and thus primarily possesses a very strong moral and political force in guiding the organs of the UN in the exercise of their powers and functions.
Major Parties Involved

Algeria

An independence referendum was held in French Algeria on 1 July 1962. It followed French approval of the Évian Accords in an April referendum, approved by 90.8% of voters with a 75.3% turnout. The Évian Accords included a cease-fire and the organization of a self-determination referendum in Algeria in a three-month window to be held a minimum of three months after the signature of the treaty. Already in January 1961, Charles de Gaulle had received popular approval through referendum of a program concerning self-determination in Algeria. De Gaulle had already privately decided that the sole solution to the Algerian crisis was Algerian independence, a fact which he recognized as early as 1959-1960. The results in Algeria were 99.72% in favour and just 0.28% against. Voter turnout was 91.88%. As a result of the vote in favour, France declared Algeria to be independent on 3 July.

Canada

The 1980 Quebec referendum was the first referendum in Quebec on the place of Quebec within Canada and whether Quebec should pursue a path toward sovereignty. The referendum was called by Quebec's Parti Québécois (PQ) government, which advocated secession from Canada. The province-wide referendum took place on Tuesday, May 20, 1980, and the proposal to pursue secession was defeated by a 59.56 percent to 40.44 percent margin.

The 1995 Quebec referendum was the second referendum to ask voters in the Canadian French-speaking province of Quebec whether Quebec should proclaim national sovereignty and become an independent country, with the condition precedent of offering a political and economic agreement to Canada.

Scotland

A referendum on Scottish independence from the United Kingdom took place on 18 September 2014. The referendum question, which voters answered with "Yes" or "No", was "Should Scotland be an independent country?" The "No" side won, with 2,001,926 (55.3%) voting against independence and 1,617,989 (44.7%) voting in favour. The turnout of 84.6% was the highest recorded for an election or referendum in the United Kingdom since the introduction of universal suffrage.

Catalonia

The Catalan independence referendum of 2017 was an independence referendum held on 1 October 2017 in the Spanish autonomous community of Catalonia, passed by the Parliament of Catalonia as the Law on the Referendum on Self-determination of Catalonia and called by the Generalitat de Catalunya. It was declared illegal on 7 September 2017 and suspended by the Constitutional Court of Spain after a request from the Spanish government, who declared it a breach of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and observed irregularities in the constitution of the electoral syndicate. Additionally, in early September the High Court of Justice of Catalonia had issued orders to the
police to try to prevent it, including the detention of various persons responsible for its preparation. Due to the many irregularities in the administration of the vote (with people being able to vote more than once in some places despite organizers' claims to the contrary and on whether there was any control about it), as well as to the use of force by the National Police and Civil Guard, international observers invited by the Generalitat declared that the referendum failed to meet the minimum international standards for elections.
Bibliography

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