

Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC-GA1)

Issue: Autonomous groups in Western Europe: their rise, influence and involvement in the political scene.

Student Officer: Alexandros Rodopoulos

Position: President

INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

The issue of independence of autonomous regions in Europe is a situation on the rise which should not be taken lightly. Numerous regions in the continent are on the verge of independency, creating economic and political instability to their sovereign states. In fact, in some regions independence movements have gone violent and have led even to the creation of military groups to fight the state they



are trying to separate from.

In many situations this has led to deaths and injuries of innocent people.

The issue itself is a very difficult situation to handle as both the country and the autonomous region that wants to separate never tend to find common

ground in order to solve the situation. Most of the times, the state turns down the request of the region to become independent, creating a negative atmosphere to the negotiations to come. It is also a matter of ethnic and religious differences in the population. Although most of the time the majority of the population wants the same thing, there are some minorities who think otherwise and because of the differences aforementioned it provokes violent tensions between the two sides leading frequently to civil wars. The degree of power of this issue is on such a big scale that various researchers have considered it will be one of the causes that will lead to a WW3 in Europe due to the instability that it will provide to the continent.

The conclusion is that it is matter of great importance with human lives at risk and dominant states in jeopardy.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Autonomous regions

An autonomous region has full control over its decisions and has the freedom to act without foreign surveillance. They are sections of land or sea of a nation which have free will in most issues that involve them. For a region to gain autonomy, the region must be located a reasonable distance from the nation that it's a part of or contain minority ethnic groups. Autonomous regions also deviate from federal units and independent states as they in a sense have a bigger degree of power when it comes to legislative powers.

Statute of Autonomy

A statute of Autonomy is a law which in its degree power belongs just under the constitution of a country and above all other laws including organic laws¹. The legislative assembly acknowledges a sub national area of the nation and then the articles² construct a constitution, which allows the area to institute the organisation of its autonomous government.

Autonomous Communities

Autonomous communities are citizens who obtain their nationality based on the area that they live or have been born. The volume of this phenomenon is really visible in Spain where most areas are diverted and even have their own flags and coat of arms³.

¹<https://www.merriam-webster.com/legal/organic%20law>

² Laws that have been wrote in the forms of articles

³ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/coat-of-arms>

Autonomous cities

Autonomous cities are sub cities or even capitals of nations which declare autonomy but are still part of the state. They function under the same constitution but however depend themselves on their own resources that they either gain from the city itself or the province.

Independence Referendum

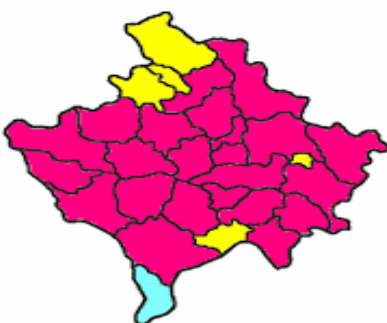
An independence referendum ⁴ is a referendum in which the citizens of a province, region or territory vote to determine whether they want the region to become an independent country nonetheless an independence referendum rarely leads to independence.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The first region in Europe to declare autonomy in modern era was the Åland islands in 1922 which they achieve through the Åland convention in 1922. The Åland islands were also demilitarized in 1856 by an agreement between the United Kingdom, France and Russia following the loss of the Russian empire in the Crimean war with the treaty of Paris. Since then, numerous regions have declared autonomy or gained it through treaties or agreements and now seek for independence. Most autonomous regions have not gained independence yet and still struggle both political and in military conflicts leading to some regions becoming worn torn and inadequate to sustain the safety of their civilians and the implementation of human rights in the area.

Post and present war-torn autonomous regions

In 1989 Slobodan Milosevic president of the Yugoslavian republic established a constitution that disavowed Kosovo

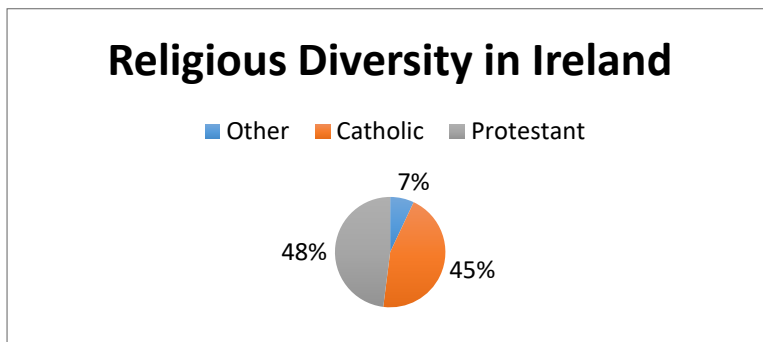


Ethnic map of Kosovo (1991)
● - Albanian majority
● - Serb majority
● - Muslim (Gorani) majority

dgc.org/dictionary/english/referendum

of its prominence as an autonomous area of Serbia. In response to that, Ibrahim Rugova, leader of the Albanian majority in the Serbian region, commenced a chain of nonviolent protests in contrast to the constitution that had just been voted. The overall majority of ethnic Albanians in the region brew tensions between the ethnic Serbians leading to conflicts and clashes. In 1996 the Liberation army of Kosovo (KLA) was emerged and started launching attacks on Serbian police and politicians leading to the Kosovo war (1998-1999). Kosovo although recognized by some states still struggles to become an independent sovereign state.

A similar situation to the aforementioned is the issue of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland has been fighting for independence in modern era for about a century. In 1919, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was formed by military nationalists with the purpose of removing English military forces from Irish land to achieve the goal of an Independent Ireland which was also accompanied by the Irish nationalist party (Sinn Fein) on a political level leading to the Irish war of independence in (1919-1921).



Later in 1922-1923 the Irish civil war had just started due to the diversity of the population's religion. The Protestants wanted to be a part of

the United Kingdom as they felt as a minority which they were and the Catholics wanted Ireland to become an independent sovereign state. In 1969 there was need of military presence due to the continuous attacks of the IRA which forced the British to deploy the British army in Northern Ireland. This action by the British infuriated the Irish leading to multiple attacks launched by the IRA and also the big bombing of Belfast known as Bloody Friday in which there were 9 deaths and more than 130 civilians injured. The clashes between the IRA, protestors and Irish civilians with the British army continued until 1998 when Ireland achieved the Good Friday agreement which led the Irish to form a new government based however still on British constitution. Ireland this way gained more autonomy but however still

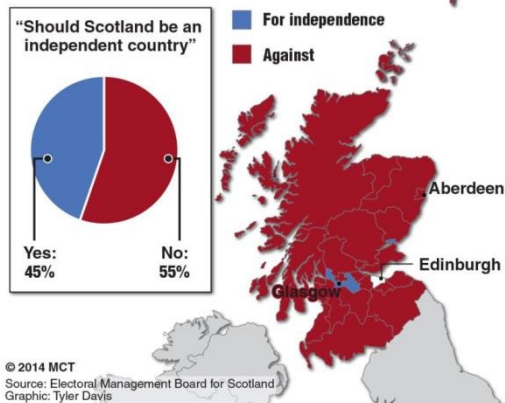
remains non independent. These are the only two autonomous regions who tried to ensure independence through severe force of the military.

Autonomous regions on the verge of independence

With recent events developing in Europe especially BREXIT, Scotland and Wales are on the verge of leaving the United Kingdom and declaring independency, threatening the stability of the region. In 1999 Wales and Scotland became a constituent⁵ country through the act of devolution which forced the British government to make several constitutional alterations. Later on, in 2011 Wales held a nonbinding referendum to increase the degree of power of the Welsh parliament’s legislation power, bestowing law making powers over the 20 controlling areas of the Welsh government. In 2014 Scotland held an independence referendum to leave the United Kingdom and become an

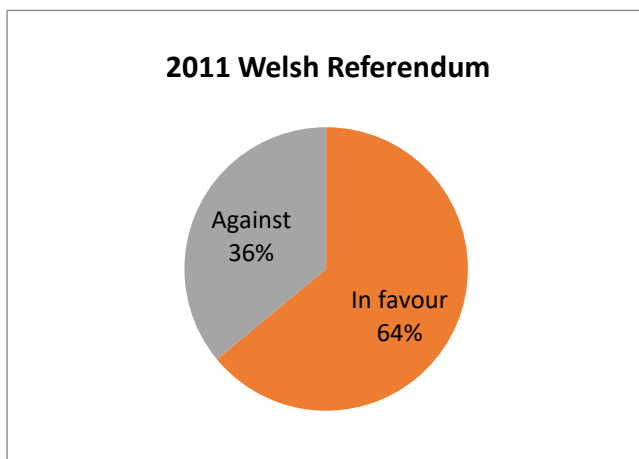
Scotland votes ‘no’ on independence

The people of Scotland voted Sept. 18 to remain a member of the United Kingdom.



Votes on Scottish Referendum

independent state. The Welsh referendum was a success but the Scottish failed due to various cultural differences. Both constituent countries are on the verge of leaving if a BREXIT deal doesn’t take place in the following months.



The country in crisis of losing several regions is Spain. Spain consists of 17 autonomous communities and 4 autonomous Regions (Andalucía, Catalonia, Basque country, Galicia). All of them are on the verge of

⁵ https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/constituent_country

declaring independency, particularly Catalonia and Basque country. For Catalonia it all started in the 2008 crisis in which the region received a big economical blow as the province felt that it was paying more taxes to Madrid in comparison to their economical gains. This started an independence movement among the people of Catalonia. In 2010 the constitutional court of Spain limited the claims of Catalanian nationhood infuriating the separatist population and expanding the member participation of the independence movement. In 2014 Catalonia held a nonbinding independence referendum which was a success with 80% in favour and 20% against. Due to it being non binding the Catalan parliament held new elections in order to strengthen the existing mandate on Catalan independency. In 2017 another

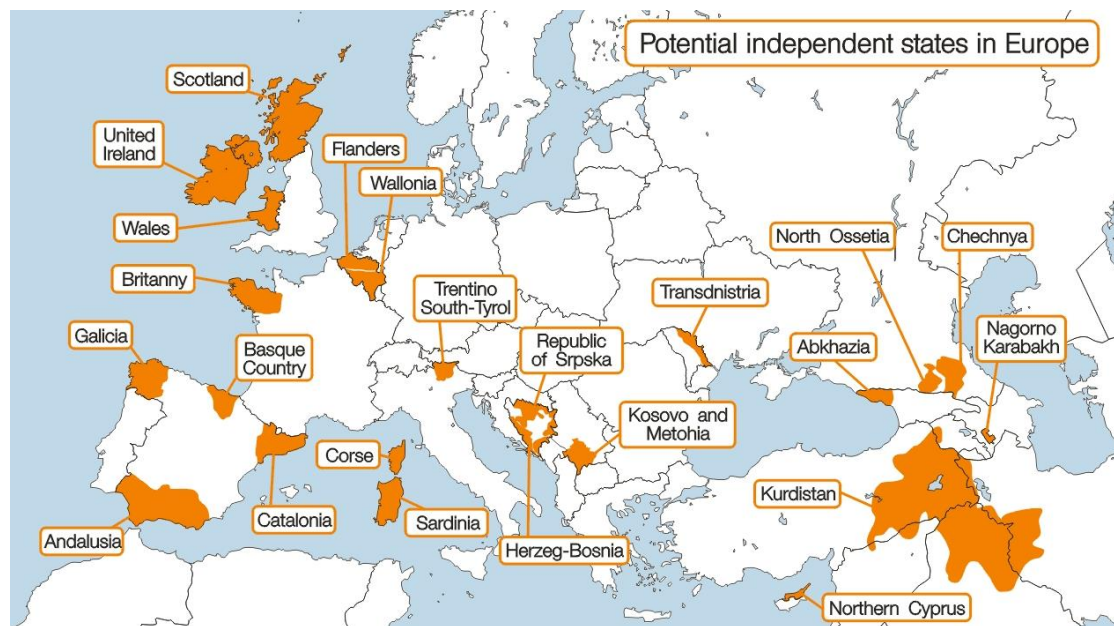


Independence referendum was called upon, but it had no effect as the Spanish government supported that Catalonia had no constitutional right to separate. Basque country has also made its fair share of

an effort to declare independency. In 1958 tensions between the locals in the region with the Spanish government were raised high. This led to the creation of the separatist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna or ETA, which was later recognized as a terrorist group. The goal of this military group was to aid in the achievement of Basque independence. The first assassinations happened by the group were on 1968. In 1978 when dictatorship fell and democracy reemerged in Spain, Basque country was granted its autonomy back, nonetheless this did not put to ease the nationalist group ETA which continued to take out violent measures to attain independency. In 1987, ETA bombed the Hipercor shopping centre killing 21 civilians and injuring 45 more, making it the deadliest attack of ETA history. In 2010 ETA officially declared ceasefire with the Spanish government having killed until then 800

politicians, civilians, and police officers. In 2010 Basque politicians also made a push towards independency by introducing to the Spanish government a new statute which would give more autonomy to Basque country. However, it was turned down by the Spanish Government in fear that it would enable Catalan claims on independency. Moreover, the issue of independency in Spain is in a very unstable situation.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED



Andalucía

Andalucía is one of the seventeen autonomous Communities in Spain. It is located in the southern part of Spain and has an estimated population of 8 million civilians with its capital being Seville. Andalucía had no interest in becoming an independent region until the 2009 recession which affected highly the GDP causing it to drop and increasing unemployment in the area. The region has the worst rates of GDP per capita and unemployment in Europe, giving as such a sentiment to the majority of the population to vouch for independency. However no political action has been taken yet.

Basque country

Basque country is located between the border of northern Spain and southwest France with an estimated population of 2,189,534 people. It is a region with its own language, lifestyle and has poor relation with Spain despite being a province of the country. For Four decades the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) has been fighting for the independence of Basque country, since 2018 when it was disbanded. The majority of Basque population still remains strongly in favor of independence from Spain and Basque politicians are acting accordingly with protests also on the rise in the Basque Region.

Catalonia

Catalonia is a region in northeast Spain with a population of 7.5 million people and is considered the wealthiest province in Spain. With its capital being Barcelona, Catalonia is dominant over most of its public services including the police. It declared its autonomy in the Catalan parliament in 27 of October 2017 but despite the actions of the ruling separatists it failed to become autonomous as the Catalan leaders where sacked by the Spanish government during the 2017 national elections.

Kosovo

Kosovo is a region within Serbia which independently declared autonomy in February 2008 and has since then been recognized by various major states in the EU and also by the United States of America. It has a population of 1.8 million people, and its capital is Pristina. However, because of the diversity of their population in ethnicities and beliefs, and Serbia strongly opposing the autonomy of Kosovo with the help of the Russian Federation, they have not achieved independence yet.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is a state of the United Kingdom with a population of 1.8 million citizens and its capital is Belfast. North Ireland in modern era has been pursuing independence since 1922 where they achieved autonomy by officially being recognized as a free state with the Irish free constitution act⁶. With the BREXIT in 2017 Northern Ireland has shown strong interest in leaving the UK after the UK leaves the EU, becoming as such an independent state out of the United Kingdom.

Scotland

Scotland is a free state that belongs in the United Kingdom with an estimated population of 5.4 million citizens with the capital of the state being Edinburgh. Scotland was recognized as a constituent country in 1999 through devolution. Nonetheless with the BREXIT act taking place, Scotland tends toward calling up a new independence referendum. They still remain a free state of the United Kingdom.

Sardinia

Sardinia is one of the five autonomous regions in Italy; it is an Italian island in the Mediterranean with an estimated population of 1.6 million civilians and its capital being Cagliari. Recent polls taken out by the University of Cagliari have shown that 40% of the population of Sardinia is in favor of independence and the rest aspire more autonomy from Rome. On the other side of the coin no political actions have been made towards that aspiration.

⁶ The Irish Free State constitution act was an act authorized by the Parliament of the United Kingdom which officially recognized Northern Ireland as a free state.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1856	Demilitarization of the Aland islands
1919	The Irish Republican Army takes form, and the Irish Independence war commences.
1921	End of the Irish war of Independence
1922	Irish civil war begins, and the Aland islands gain autonomy through the Aland convention.
1923	Irish civil war ends
1958	The Euskadi at Askatasuna (ETA) emerge
1968	The ETA assassinates first targets.
1969	British army deploys in Northern Ireland
1978	Democracy in Spain is reestablished
1987	Hipercor bombing by ETA
1989	Yugoslavian Republic establishes constitution that detains Kosovo's autonomy.
1996	Assembly of the Liberation Army of Kosovo.
1998	The Kosovo war begins.
1999	The Kosovo war ends and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland gain autonomy through the act of devolution.
2008	Kosovo officially declares autonomy and the 2008 economic recession takes place.
2010	Spanish Parliament limits claims to Catalan Nationhood, ETA declare ceasefire with Spanish government and the Spanish parliament turns down statute proposed by Basque country.
2011	Welsh nonbinding Referendum takes place and succeeds disclosing Welsh belief on the matter of independence.
2014	Scottish Independence referendum fails, and Catalan nonbinding

	referendum succeeds.
2017	Catalonia holds an official independence referendum which gets intervened by the Spanish Government on the grounds that it was out of constitutional law.
2018	ETA disbands after apologizing publicly to the state of Spain.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- Resolution S/RES, 10 June 1999, 1244: Resolution 1244 was adopted by the Security Council in order to achieve the withdrawal of the Yugoslavian forces from Kosovo and to establish the United Nations mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to confront the humanitarian crisis that prevailed.
- Resolution S/RES, 11 March 2004, 1530: Resolution 1530 was adopted by the Security Council shortly after the Madrid bombing in 2004 by Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA). The main objective of the resolution was to condemn the Madrid attacks and assemble a counter terrorist task force which later on was not brought into play.
- The Northern Ireland Peace Agreement (The Good Friday Agreement) was instituted based on the peacemaking mandate with the goal to establish a new Irish government in which both unionist and separatists shared power, ensuring that way peace and temporarily solving the issue.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

The issue of independence of Autonomous regions is vital to NATO especially during the cold war and after. States that had declared independency across Central and Eastern Europe were their first priority as they wanted to preserve the regions' democracy and not let them fall in communism to Soviet Russia. That is why NATO funded several regions and recognized them as independent in order to ease their way towards independency. In 1999 NATO created a peacekeeping force in order to restore stability in the region. Since the deployment they have restored stability in Kosovo, and they have cooperated with the

United Nations in order to rehabilitate the area. They have also tried to help the negotiations between Kosovo-Serbia by strongly supporting the Belgrade-Pristina EU-brokered Normalization Agreement in 2013.

The United Nations during the Catalan elections in 2014 criticized the Spanish governments for their actions during the situation causing Spain to lose some Political influence over their own population and neighbor countries, aiding that way several separatist movements in Spain and increasing protests in the country. Except the United States and NATO the EU has done little concerning the issue of independence of autonomous regions.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Organize meetings between the sovereign states and the autonomous regions

The issue at hand has been threatening human rights and provoking the stability of these regions. An easy way to oppose to this situation is to organize meetings between the sovereign states and the autonomous regions with exterior oversight which will include historians, economists and political experts. That way experts can make a thorough research on the historical part of the region which will contribute to the progress of the meetings without jeopardizing the economical and political stability of the nation and region. At the end of the research the information will be analyzed, and a fair solution will be achieved.

Be able to auto-legislate

If an autonomous region is in crisis and human rights are violated a state should be compelled to let the region declare independency. Independency doesn't mean sovereignty or recognition. Even if a region declared independency there is no ensure way that it will be globally recognized. This way the region can come at ease but won't still have full independency leaving some claims to its past sovereign state.

Provisional rights on ethnic minorities

Nations have the tendency to turn down claims of autonomy or independence ending to the use most of the times of military power. To ensure this does not happen, provisional rights on ethnic minorities should be passed in every European country based on the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. With this approach minorities will not have the urge to protect themselves from the surrounding community as

they will feel accepted and protected by law, preventing conflicts between them and the majority of the population and tranquilizing separatist movements.

In general, delegates should focus on the safety of human lives and human rights in these regions and focus all their solutions on the question of : how can both sides be pleased? How can minorities be protected? How can autonomous regions who declare independency orchestrate a democratic functioning government?

For any Information or questions upon the matter don't hesitate to contact me:

Email: alexandrosmad1@gmail.com

Facebook: Alexandros Rodopoulos

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