

CATALONIA: ENDEAVOR FOR INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

The historical background of the nationalist and separatist sentiments in Catalonia, factors of the actualization of the problem of separatism at the beginning of the 21st century and the reasons for the transition of Catalonia-Spain relations to the active phase are investigated. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the driving forces of the modern separatism in Catalonia. The Catalan initiative made important legal and political mistakes that were decisive for its failure and led to increased social tensions and political instability in Spain and Catalonia. The announcement of the verdict to the Catalan separatists will largely determine the relationship of the state with Catalonia and will serve as a firewall for future attempts to gain independence unilaterally.

Keywords: *Spain, Catalonia, nationalism, separatism, referendum, charter of Catalonia, constitution of Spain.*

INTRODUCTION

One of the most developed and richest autonomous regions of Spain, Catalonia, is going through a difficult period. The reason for this is the region's aspiration for independence. In the past three and a half centuries the question of the independence of Catalonia has never been as acute as in the last decade.

The issue of independence of this region has always remained relevant for the local political elite, which sought to regain lost independence. Throughout its existence as part of Spain, the region has fought for cultural, economic and political independence. But due to the lack of political resources and levers of influence on the central authorities, the desire for secession was most often replaced by the requirement to expand the rights of the region as part of the Spanish state. After the fall of the F. Franco regime, the regional authorities, despite their desire to expand the political powers, focused on peaceful coexistence with the central authorities, sought to find a compromise. The beginning of the 21st century can be described as

a turning point in the development of the relations between the center and the regions in the Spanish state. Prerequisites arose that created the basis for the formation of separatist sentiments - both in the society and among the regional elite.

The existing problem affects the coexistence and political dynamics not only of Catalonia, Spain, but also of Europe as a whole.

The purpose of this article is to determine the roots of the Catalan separatism, the factors of the actualization of this problem at the beginning of the 21st century and the reasons for the transition of the Catalonia-Spain relations to the active phase.

In our study general scientific and special historical and political science methods were applied. The general scientific methods (deductive and inductive, analysis and synthesis) were used as specific cognitive tools necessary to implement the principles of historicism, systematicism and objectivity. The general and special historical methods (historical-typological, statistical, comparative-historical, problem-chronological) allowed us to make a comprehensive analysis of the problem of the Catalan separatism.

The empirical basis of the article includes such types of documents as legislative acts of Spain and Catalonia, statistical data, published results of the opinion polls, speeches of the party leaders, periodicals.

The degree of scientific development of the topic is very voluminous. The thorough information about the history of Spain of different periods that we used is contained in the studies of Ch. Powell, R. Cotarelo, V. Prego, E. González Calleja, P. Preston, Sosa-Velasco Alfredo J. and others. The history of Catalonia and the development of Catalan nationalism is studied by A. Balcells, whose work is mainly focused on the events of the 19-21 centuries; Claret Jaume, studying the period of Francoism, especially the formation of Catalanism; A. Smith, studying the origins of Catalan nationalism, as well as S. Henkin, G. Volkova, V. Danilevich, A. Tamarovich, A. Baranova and others.

The materials in this publication may be useful for further more in-depth study of the problem of modern secession movements, as well as to identify possible solutions to the problem of separatism in modern Spain.

HISTORY OF THE CATALAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The Catalan separatism has deep roots. The central and southern parts of the present-day Spain were ruled by Cordoban and Granad caliphs and emirs for seven hundred years, and the northeast was recaptured by the Franks in less than a hundred years and since then experienced French influence, not eastern.

In 798 Charlemagne granted his close associate Sunifred the Count of Barcelona. A special Catalan language began to form.

In 985 the famous Cordoban caliph al-Mansour briefly captured Barcelona. Brutal repression began, as a result of which Barcelona and the surrounding territories were looted. That is why the Count of Barcelona Borrell II turned to the Carolingians for help, but never received it [Méndez et al. 2017]. Three years later the Arabs were expelled. Count Borrell II declared his possessions an independent state and refused to swear allegiance to the first monarch of the Capetian dynasty, Hugo Capeto. The supporters of Catalan independence consider this event “the birth of Catalonia”.

In 1164, through a dynastic marriage, Barcelona County became part of the Kingdom of Aragon, which in the 13-15 centuries was a powerful power and controlled, in

addition to a significant part of the Mediterranean coast of Spain, Naples, Sicily, Sardinia and Mallorca [Woolard 1989].

Before the unification of most of the lands of the Iberian Peninsula in 1479 under the authority of the Catholic kings Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catalan lands had a number of privileges [Balcells 1996: 11]. So, being in alliance with the kingdom of Aragon since 1137, Catalonia had its own authorities, a court, the right to manage finances, establish taxes, etc. The political structure of Catalonia was advanced for its time. As a counterweight to the royal power in the Catalan lands, from the 13th century a class-representative body of the nobility, clergy and city dwellers began to gather, the “Corts Catalanas”, that many researchers consider to be one of the first European parliaments. In the 14th century from the members of the Corts, who gathered at least once a year, a permanent body called the Generality began to form, which operated between the meetings. Thus, a society with a developed awareness of its “particularity” has become part of Spain, which has long been accustomed to enjoy wide autonomy and civil rights [Khenkin S. 2015: 119].

In the middle of the 17th century Catalonia was swept by an uprising (the so-called “war of the reapers”), the purpose of which was its separation from Spain. For help, the local elite turned to the French king Louis XIII. Thanks to French support, the Catalans managed to fight back from the Spaniards for ten years - until 1651. But France at that time was in a state of political turmoil and could not continue to support the Catalans. The uprising was crushed in 1652. This conflict gave Catalonia its national anthem, “Song of the Reapers,” but at the same time it led to the loss of part of the territory that, following the results of the Pyrenees treatise, was lost to France [Torres 2008].

The Catalan historiography of the 19th and early 20th centuries presented these events as the “revolt of Catalonia” against the policy of “denationalization” of the Habsburg monarchy [Torres 2008: 20]. Subsequent studies emphasized the “social” nature of the uprising, rather than the “national” one. Thus, the “uprising of Catalonia” became a kind of double uprising: on the one hand, the struggle of the “poor against the rich”, and on the other, the reaction of some rich people who saw threats to their privileges in attempts to “modernize” the Catholic monarchy of Philip IV.

The national movement of the Catalans for the return of the traditional rights of the Catalan countries intensified after the introduction of the Nueva Planta Decrees. These decrees were signed during and immediately after the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714)¹. Catalonia in this conflict supported the Archduke Charles, the youngest son of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I, who was defeated.

On September 11, 1714, the troops of the second pretender to the Spanish throne, Philip V, took Barcelona (currently Catalonia Day is celebrated on September 11th). The Utrecht Treaty, which ended the war, meant the revival of the French Bourbon dynasty in Spain with Philip V as king. This monarch established an absolutist system of the government, which meant for the territories of the old Aragonese Crown, such as Catalonia, the end of their own institutions and constitutional order. Catalonia ceased to have its own state and finally became part of the Spanish monarchy.

¹ A major European conflict that began in 1701 after the death of the last Spanish king from the Habsburg dynasty, Charles II. Charles bequeathed all his possessions to Philip, the Duke of Anjou - the grandson of the French king Louis XIV. The war began with the attempt of the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I to defend the right of his dynasty (also the Habsburgs) to Spanish possessions.

The Decrees of the Nueva Planta destroyed all the local political structures that differed from the model of a more centralized Castile. In fact, the system of “general sovereignty” of the central royal authority and local governments was replaced by a centralized model, following the example of France, where the Spanish Bourbon dynasty came from. In Catalonia the local Parliament was dissolved. The Catalan-speaking territories no longer had the right to carry out economic, fiscal, legal control; the minting of their own money was canceled.

In the economic field the consequences of war and military occupation have been overcome. Catalonia went through a gradual process of development of the agriculture, trade and production, which laid the foundations for the industrialization of the country in the next century.

Despite the repression by the Spanish monarchy and the lack of their own political and administrative structures, the Catalans retained their national identity and began the struggle to regain their rights. As early as 1734, the French translation of the political work entitled “An Exit for the Sleeping” (Cat. *Via fora els adormits*), calling on the European states to restore the independence of the Catalan countries and create either a “free Catalan republic” or recreate an independent Kingdom of Aragon. The crisis of feudalism, the development of the capitalist relations stimulated the emergence of the movement of the Catalan Renaissance (*Renaixença*). Its name arose from the desire to revive the Catalan language as a literary and cultural language after centuries of diglossia in relation to the Spanish language. So-called Catalanism is emerging, aimed at establishing the Catalan identity. Catalanism is gaining ground initially in the cultural, and then in the political sphere - a number of works appear proving the existence of the Catalan “uniqueness”, a special Catalan “national spirit”. The ideologists of Catalanism criticized the center for ineffective administration policies, neglect of the needs of the periphery.

The Renaissance began in August 1833, when the publication the “Odes to the Homeland of Bonaventura Carles Aribau” appeared in the newspaper “*El Vapor*”. It was followed by 27 Catalan poems by H. Rubio i Ors, published in the “*Diario de Barcelona*” in 1839, Rubio i Ors wrote: “Catalonia can still strive for independence; not for politics, because it weighs very little compared to other nations that can put on the scales, in addition to the volume of its history, an army of many thousands of people and detachments of hundreds of ships; but to the literary, to which politics does not apply” [Claret et al. 2014: 57].

Catalanism was reinforced by the rapid industrialization and modernization of the Catalan society in the second half of the 19th century. Rapid social and economic shifts widened the gap between Catalonia and most of the more backward regions of Spain, as well as the imbalance between its economic power and “zero political influence”, not being represented in the Madrid corridors of power. The changes that were taking place caused a mixed reaction among the Catalans, in which pride for their land was intertwined with the desire to rebuild Spain in the Catalan manner, to gain greater independence, and even to isolate itself from the “Spanish backwardness”. Catalanism became the foundation for the formation of the Catalan nationalism, the birth of which coincided in time with the sharp weakening of the Spanish colonial empire and statehood as a whole. Catalan nationalism largely arose as a search for an alternative to the crisis of the Spanish state [Khenkin 2015: 121]. The development of Catalan nationalism is activated in the early years of the restoration of the Bourbons in Spain after the failure of the federal experience of the First Republic. According to John E. Elliot, the term “Catalanism”, “still reduced to a

cultural movement began to acquire serious political significance during the so-called revolutionary sixth anniversary, from 1868 to 1874” [Elliott 2018: 252].

In 1885 the appeal of the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie of Catalonia to the King of Spain Alfonso XII with the requirements to restore certain rights of the Catalans appeared - a Petition to protect the moral and material interests of Catalonia. The Petition was submitted by Joaquim Rubio i Ors in March 1885 to the king on the occasion of his visit to Barcelona. The “Petition for Protection” is considered the first modern manifestation of the Catalan national movement in the legal field of Spain. The following requirements were set out in the document: recognition of Catalan as an official Spanish language; preservation and reform of the Catalan civil law; the establishment of the Catalan Supreme Court; the establishment of a Catalan administration; promotion of the economic protectionism; enhancing the commercial character of Catalonia. The principles of the “Petition for Protection” were the basis for the “Manrez Principles” (Bases de Manresa), published in 1892, which proposed the restoration of the medieval Catalan constitution, which was valid until 1714. The “Manrez Principles” was “the first Catalan program to reorganize the Spanish state” [Smith 2014].

In 1901 the ideologist of Spanish conservatism, E. Prat da la Riba, created the Regionalist League, the political party of Catalonia, which in the same year entered the Spanish parliament [Navarra Ordoño 2013]. The League represented the interests of the big national bourgeoisie, merchants, and the Catholic Church. Around it linguistic societies, schools, courses, dance groups, tourist clubs and other public organizations were grouped, striving to develop the Catalan language, culture and traditions and thus establish a regional identity that was different from Castilian.

In 1906 E. Prato da la Riba published the work “Catalan Citizenship”, which made a clear distinction between the nation (the natural community with its history) and the state (artificial political organization). Catalonia is designated as a separate nation. It is concluded that each nation should have its own state, and submission of a nation to a foreign state is a “pathological anomaly”. At the same time, E. Prato da la Riba wrote: “We are not fighting the Spanish state, we want something else: to rebuild it on the principles of equality and justice, creating a more adequate and perfect organization in which Catalonia can follow the path of freedom and progress”.

The nationalists considered Catalonia a nation with their history, language, literature, art, national character. At the same time, as a rule, they did not call for a “separation from Spain”. Although Catalan nationalism was a heterogeneous trend and its adherents shared different views - from autonomy within Spain to independence - the former prevailed. In the vocabulary of the leaders of the nationalist movement the concepts of “regionalism”, “autonomy”, and “federation” prevailed. And the propagation of the concepts of “nation” and “state” has since become an important feature of the Catalan nationalism [Khenkin 2015: 122].

In 1914 Madrid allowed the creation of an autonomous administrative body - the so-called “Mancomunitat”, for the first time uniting four Catalan provinces (Barcelona, Tarragona, Lleida, Gerona) into a single administrative unit. The decree on allowing the provinces to unite in administrative communities (which in other words meant the creation of the Catalan community) was signed by the king on December 18, 1913. For the first time since 1714 the Spanish authorities recognized the existence of the Catalan community at the official level.

The first president of the Catalan community was E. Prat de la Riba [Balcells 1977: 95]. The most important achievements of the community were the modernization of

the infrastructure of Catalonia - the laying of telephone lines, port management, optimizing the structure of the roads, railways, the introduction of new technologies in agriculture and the like.

During this period, the Institute of Catalan Studies [Navarra Ordoño 2013: 116], the library of Catalonia, an industrial school, a higher art school, and a school of the local administration were also created.

The Catalan community did not have much political authority, but following its example, the Autonomous Region of Catalonia and other autonomous regions of Spain, as well as the Generality of Catalonia were subsequently formed.

In 1919, a professional military officer involved in politics, Francesc Macia, created the Democratic Nationalist Federation, which proposed turning Spain into a confederation of Iberian peoples, and in 1922 created the Catalan state party. This party first proposed the complete state independence of Catalonia from Spain.

The process of cultural and political stabilization in Catalonia was interrupted during the dictatorship of the General Primo de Rivera (1923-1930). The Catalan community was canceled, the party of the Catalan state moved to an illegal position. The anti-Catalan measures taken by the dictator Primo de Rivera led to further disappointment among the Catalan conservatives, who initially trusted him because of the early support for regionalism [Sueiro Seoane 1992]. F. Macia was forced to emigrate to France. There he planned a military invasion of Spain and the forceful capture of Catalonia from the town of Pra-de-mol-la-Prest in Northern Catalonia. He was captured by the French gendarmerie, but this only added to his popularity in Catalonia.

One form of resistance was to bring information about events in Catalonia to the international organizations. To this end, the Catalan action (Catalan political party created in 1922) wrote a manifesto that was presented at the headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva. It condemned the repression against Catalonia and called for a referendum in favour of the Catalan autonomy under the supervision of the League of Nations [González Calleja 2005]. The anti-Catalan politics of Primo de Rivera also came across the Catholic Church of Catalonia, which was led by the Archbishop of Tarragona, F. Vidal and Barraquer and the Bishop of Barcelona, J. Miralles. They refused to order the parish priests to preach in Spanish.

After the fall of the dictatorship of the General Primo de Rivera, F. Macia returned to Catalonia in February 1931 and joined his party, the Catalan state, in the Left Republican Party of Catalonia, leading it. On April 14, 1931, after the municipal elections in Spain, which gave the majority of his party, F. Macia proclaimed the Catalan Republic as part of the Federation of Iberian Republics [Roglan 2006].

After the proclamation of the second Spanish Republic, the Spanish Parliament on September 9, 1932, Catalonia is recognized as autonomy and receives its own Charter. The self-governing body of Catalonia officially receives the name Generality, known from the Middle Ages.

F. Macia became the President of the Generality, and after his death, on January 1, 1934, Lewis Companys i Jover [González i Vilalta 2011]. However, due to the acute internal political struggle and stubborn resistance of the right-wing forces – the supporters of the “united and indivisible Spain”, the region really enjoyed the fruits of autonomy for only three years - from the coming to power in Spain of the Popular Front in February 1936 to the capture of Catalonia by the Francoists in February 1939.

The victory of F. Franco in the civil war significantly worsened the situation of the national and historical regions. For caudillo all the national and territorial autonomous movements were carriers of anti-state ideas and separatism. F. Franco abolished the autonomy of Catalonia, liquidated the institutions of the regional and local self-government, and banned the national and regional parties and organizations [Danilevich 1995: 121].

After the end of the civil war, most of the deputies of the Parliament of Catalonia and almost all the Catalan politicians were forced to leave for emigration. First in Paris, and after the Nazi capture of France in London, the National Council of Catalonia was created. In August 1940 the president of the pre-war General L. Companys was captured by the Gestapo, and in October of the same year he was executed by the representatives of the Franco regime near Montjuic Castle, Barcelona [Preston 2012]. After the death of L. Companys, Joseph Irla was elected the President of the Generality in exile, and in 1954 he was replaced by Jose Tarradelyas.

After the end of World War II, the Franco regime, forced to adapt to the post-war democratic world order, embarked on a path of limited liberalization, expressed, inter alia, in concessions to the Catalan nationalists. Books and magazines began to be published in the region in limited numbers, and events were held in Catalan. In the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s the self-correction of Francoism became especially apparent. Reliefs in the field of cultural and linguistic policy stimulated the formation of the civil society structures in Catalonia that opposed the official policy of decatalization [Khenkin 2015: 124].

So, in November 1971, at the suggestion of the Coordination Commission of the Political Forces of Catalonia, the Assembly of Catalonia was created - an unofficial association of the majority of anti-Franco Catalan organizations, which lasted until 1977. It included most of the Catalan parties that were banned during the Franco dictatorship, as well as trade unions, movements, progressive sectors of the church, etc. Among the demands of the Assembly were the demands of social and political freedoms, amnesty for opponents of the Franco regime, the restoration of the Charter of the autonomy of Catalonia as a step towards the self-determination of the Catalan people.

The Assembly brought together diametrically opposed political organizations: communists, various nationalist movements, parties that advocated the independence of Catalonia, socialists, rightists, etc. Among the actions organized by the Assembly are peaceful assemblies in Ripoll in 1972, in San Cugat del Valles and in Vic in 1973.

The political Catalanism, which survived the harsh repression of the first two decades of Franco's dictatorship, reappeared since the 1960s. As John Elliott noted, "despite the repression, and partly because of this, the Catalan sense of identity reappeared, reinforced by the experience of those years" [Elliott 2018: 300-301].

IN THE CONDITIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Despite the repressions of the times of F. Franco, including the last years of the dictatorship, the struggle for the democratic and national rights of the Catalans became more and more intense.

The death of caudillo in November 1975 marked the beginning of a transition to democracy. The Assembly of Catalonia stepped up its campaign with the slogan "Freedom, Amnesty, Autonomy", which led to two demonstrations in Barcelona in

February 1976. The successful peaceful transition from the authoritarian dictatorship to democracy in Spain has traditionally been associated with the activities of the first democratic government led by Adolfo Suarez, who was appointed new Prime Minister by the king in July 1976. The actions of his cabinet in a democratic transition most scientists recognize almost standard [Hodlevska 2009].

The new government initiated a political reform that recognized universal suffrage, the creation of a bicameral parliament, the activities of the political associations and parties, to take measures to reduce tensions in the country, and provided democratic conditions for the elections to Cortes and the development of the Constitution [Hodlevska 2009].

This transition period allowed the reconstruction of a free political movement in Catalonia. Along with this, for the first time in many years, the celebration of September 11, the National Day of Catalonia, took place.

The government of A. Suarez issued a decree on the restoration of the Generality of Catalonia, which was headed by H. Tarradelyas, who returned to Spain. He created the Executive Committee of the Generality, where all the parliamentary forces of Catalonia were represented.

Meanwhile, at the national level, a new constitution was developed and adopted, which was supported by an all-Spanish referendum on December 6, 1978.

The new Constitution introduced the term “nationality” and thus affirmed the multinational character of the Kingdom of Spain. The Constitution established a system of distribution of powers between the state and autonomous communities and specified the content of two types of autonomies: territorial (regional) and local (administrative). The territorial autonomy is understood as autonomy, the carriers of which are “nationalities and regions”. Autonomy is granted to them in the form of autonomous communities through the relevant charters of autonomies. This autonomy is qualitatively higher than the local one. It provides for the level of decisions that is most compatible with the principle of the state unity. The autonomous communities may have their own legal legislation, representative and executive authorities. By local autonomy is meant recognition of the interests of the local corporations, whose activities in accordance with the Constitution do not require the provision of political decision-making functions to them. They do not have their own legislation [Godlevskaya 2013].

The possibility of obtaining two-level autonomy was essential through the different willingness of the regions to take on a greater or lesser measure of independence and responsibility. Thus, different interests, the desire of the political and social forces within each region, the diversity of goals of the political elite and the general population were taken into account.

On October 25, 1978, a referendum was held in support of the Charter of Catalonia. 88.2% of the citizens voted “pro”, and only 7.8 voted “con”. On December 18, 1979, the “Organic Law on the Autonomous Status of Catalonia” was adopted, which regulated the issue of the powers of the local parliament, administration, finance and the economy (31). An interesting study is conducted during these events in this region. According to its results, 55% of the Catalans preferred autonomy, 20 - in favour of centralism, 10 - for the federation and only 11% for the independence of Catalonia [Powell 2001].

The Charter recognized Catalonia as a “separate nationality,” and the Generality as an institution that personifies the political self-government of Catalonia.

Compared with the 1932 charter, the 1979 charter defined more rights of the Catalan government in education, culture and the media, but less in the judiciary. The procedure for financing the autonomy was not clearly defined, which became the basis for the development of a new edition of the charter in 2006.

The main principle of the Charter was the “general sovereignty”. The Spanish state retains the sovereign rights, however, it recognizes the Charter of autonomy and gives the Generality the necessary powers for the national restoration of Catalonia, which suffered during the dictatorship of Franco. The second principle was “expanding the scope and standardization of the Catalan language”: print media began to be published in Catalan (education in the language and its use in the official sphere were forbidden in Franco’s time), Catalan-speaking radio stations and television channels formerly funded by the Generality appeared; subsequently, almost every more or less large city has its own local television channel and several radio stations. Soon on March 20, 1980, elections to the autonomous parliament took place. The largest number of votes and seats in the parliament was received by the party of the Catalan nationalists “Convergence and Union” – 28% of the vote (43 seats in parliament) [Prego 1999].

“Convergence and Union” represented the local business circles associated with the central authority, the cultural and educational elite, and the church, to a certain extent, separated from the central hierarchical elite. The most important for the self-determination of the parties (both local and national) in Catalonia was the choice of orientation to a population group depending on its penchant for Catalan or Spanish “nationalism”. It was necessary to take into account that the population is divided into three groups. The first consisted of those citizens who considered themselves more Catalan than Spaniard. On them the local nationalist parties (for example: “Convergence and Union”)relied. The second group consisted of those who related themselves equally to both Catalans and Spaniards. They were based on the Spanish Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party of Spain. The third group brought together those who felt more Spaniard than Catalan, and who opposed the state decentralization [Hodlevska 2009].

Catalonia received an autonomous charter quickly and without much controversy, which is explained by the experience of functioning, albeit short-term, autonomy during the Second Republic, the relative development of the civil society, the reasonableness of the claims of the national movements and the disposition of the elites to dialogue with the center.

J. Pujol, a representative of “Convergence and the Union”, was elected the President of the Parliament. Starting from these elections, the power gradually began to shift from the Spanish state to the Generality.

The model of “general sovereignty” was put into effect from 1982 to 2004, when Felipe Gonzalez and Jose Maria Aznar served as Prime Ministers of Spain.

The Catalan nationalist movement has always been, for the most part, peaceful. The only notable exception is the Terra Lliure group, which was active between 1978 and 1995. The Catalan national extremists faced a shortage of human and economic resources and quickly left the political scene. The Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez granted amnesty to those members of the organization who did not participate in terrorist acts.

In 2005–2006 the political and legal struggle around the new autonomous Charter of Catalonia was at the epicenter of the social and political life in Spain. Some provisions of the draft new document violated the Constitution of Spain or were contrary to the

constitutional norms. The most heated discussion was caused by the intention of the drafters of the new Charter to define Catalonia as a “nation” [Khenkin 2015: 127].

So, in September 2005, a proposal for a new Autonomy Charter was officially submitted to the Parliament of Catalonia. And, on February 18, 2006 a big demonstration took place under the slogan “We are a separate nation and we have the right to make decisions ourselves”.

On June 18, 2006 the citizens of Catalonia adopted a new Charter by voting in a referendum, which replaced the previous one, adopted in 1979. It should be noted that only 49% of voters participated in the referendum.

The Charter of the autonomous community has become the initial institutional norm of this political entity and the basis of its self-government. The Charter of Catalonia of 2006 is an attempt to change the relationship between the political institutions of Catalonia and the central government of Spain, as well as to find the best way to determine the national identity of the Catalans within the Spanish state.

The new text contained significant changes compared with the Charter of 1979, first of all, it concerned the civil rights, institutional structure, distribution of powers between the center and Catalonia, financial issues. The goal of the Catalan politicians was to overcome the limitations arising from the previous Charter, to expand the powers and scope of decision-making, to improve the financing of the government institutions in Catalonia. In addition, the amendment process was used to streamline the regulation of the institutional system of the Generality.

The discussion of the Charter provoked a mixed reaction in Spain. According to various surveys, approximately half of the population believed that they should agree with the desire of the majority of Catalans to determine their own future, and the other half perceived the Charter as undermining the unity of Spain.

The Charter contains moments that allow us to talk about Catalonia as a political nation. During the adoption of the document, a controversy raged around the ruling of the Constitutional Court of Spain, which states that “they have no interpretative legal content in the preamble of the Charter of references to Catalonia as a nation”. A survey of the sociological center Metroscopia showed that for 61% of Catalans the verdict is insulting, but 55% of Spaniards did not see humiliation in this. Another survey of the same agency showed that 79% of Spaniards do not recognize Catalonia’s right to be called a nation. However, 54% of Catalans consider themselves to be a nation, and 42% reject this concept [Tamarovich 2013].

In June 2010, the Constitutional Court of Spain declared the 14 articles of the Charter partially or completely unconstitutional. So, the judges were not satisfied with the article, according to which the inhabitants of the autonomy are called Catalans, not Spaniards. The article that endowed the Catalan language with a higher status than the national Spanish (Castilian) also provoked rejection. Of fundamental importance was the statement according to which there is no legal reason to consider the inhabitants of Catalonia a separate nation. “The references to the “Catalonia as a nation” and the “national reality of Catalonia” contained in the preamble of the Statute of Catalonia have no interpretative legal value”, the Constitutional Court ruling said [Khenkin 2015: 129].

The events around the Charter exacerbated the difficult situation around the region. Since 2009 a series of informal referenda on independence organized by the separatist organizations have taken place in a number of cities [Tamarovich 2013].

These referenda did not have legal force, but seriously influenced the public sentiment. A manifestation of protest activity that had never been seen before was

the manifestation of September 11, 2012, on the National Day of Catalonia in Barcelona, which was attended by about one and a half million people who demanded independence from Spain under the slogan “Catalonia - a new state in Europe”.

After the regional elections held in November 2012, as a result of which the absolute majority in the parliament was made by deputies of the parties that support independence, in January 2013, the Parliament proclaimed the Declaration of Sovereignty (“Catalonia is a sovereign political and legal entity within Spain”), and in 2014, a referendum on secession was planned, at which it was necessary to answer the questions “Should Catalonia become a state?” and if the answer is yes, “Should the state of Catalonia be independent?” [Resolució 17/X del Parlament de Catalunya 2013].

The Spanish government opposed the referendum. As a result, by a decision of the Spanish Parliament of April 13, 2014 and the Constitutional Court of Spain of September 27, 2014 and the subsequent decision of the Catalan government of October 14, 2014, the referendum was frozen, and a political future poll was conducted on November 9, 2014 Catalonia, which has no legal force, in which 80.8% of the voters voted for independence, with a turnout of 2.25 million people.

On September 27, 2015, Catalonia held early parliamentary elections. The majority of the votes went to the ruling Catalan coalition “Together for “Yes“” (Junts pel Sí), which advocated the independence of Catalonia. On October 27, 2015 this coalition and the “Candidates for National Unity” agreed on a draft parliamentary resolution on independence. The document announced “the beginning of the process of creating an independent state of Catalonia in the form of a republic” [Resolució 1/XI del Parlament de Catalunya 2015].

On November 9, 2015 the Catalan parliament voted in favour of a resolution to secede from Spain (73 votes “pro”, 62 “con”). The adoption of the resolution was preceded by a decision of the plenum of the Constitutional Court of Catalonia, which allowed the parliament to do so. The decision was made unanimously by 11 judges. After summing up the election results, the leaders of the victorious parties announced that they had received a “clear mandate for independence” and announced that they were planning to implement a roadmap for the region to become independent. The document provided that within 18 months the state structures should be formed and the text of the new constitution of Catalonia should be drawn up [Resolució 1/XI del Parlament de Catalunya 2015]. On December 2, 2015 the Constitutional Court of Spain declared the resolution on the independence of Catalonia unconstitutional.

In January 2016, the Generality of Catalonia was led by Carles Puigdemon, who supported the independence of the region from Spain and was actively involved in the secession process.

On October 6, 2016 the Parliament of Catalonia approved a resolution in which the Catalan government was recommended to hold a mandatory referendum on the independence of Catalonia no later than September 2017. And already on June 9, 2017 a referendum on the independence of Catalonia was announced on October 1, 2017. The following question was put to the referendum: “Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state in the form of a republic?”

On October 1, 2017 the autonomy authorities unilaterally held a referendum in which 90% of the participants (out of 43% of the voters who took part in the vote) voted for the separation of Catalonia [El País, 6.10.2017].

As a result of attempts by the Spanish government to prevent voting in Catalonia by the use of brute force by the Spanish police against the voters at polling stations, on

October 3, 2017, the Catalan unions organized a general strike, paralyzing the social and economic life of the region.

The popular Spanish newspaper “El Pais” called the events of October 1 in Catalonia the failure of Spain. “What happened yesterday is the failure of our country, the interests and rights of all the citizens of Spain are harmed”. The newspaper believes that the Catalan government and parliament are responsible for the “gigantic harm”, however, the article says, nothing can justify the passivity and negligence of Prime Minister Rajoy [El Pais, 2.10.2017].

Marius Carol, editor-in-chief of the daily Barcelona newspaper “La Vanguardia”, described the incident as the collapse of the politicians. “The politicians exist to solve problems, not create them”, he said in his column, adding that failure to prevent a crisis is a common fiasco [La Vanguardia, 02.10.2017].

The conservative publication “La Razon” called for a tough response to the “blow” from the authorities of Catalonia. And also stood up for the defense of the national police and the civil guard that was sent to Catalonia on the eve of the referendum. The police, as La Razon writes, “acted with their inherent professionalism and proportionally reacted to the aggressiveness of the radicals” [La Razon, 02.10.2017].

“Spain is a country that cannot be humiliated by treacherous and traitorous nationalism,” said another conservative newspaper, “ABC”, in a column entitled “For Spain’s Unity”. “Today is one of those days when we can appreciate the real power of the state”, the newspaper emphasized [ABC, 01.10.2017].

“El Mundo” wrote that October 1 will be remembered as an ominous day when the irresponsibility of the Catalan authorities on the one hand and the indecision of the Spanish government on the other caused chaos. The newspaper urged the authorities to act immediately: “There is no time for a policy of containment and polite invitations to a dialogue”, - the publication said [El Mundo, 1.10.2017].

On October 27, 2017 the independence of Catalonia was declared in the region’s parliament. In response, the Senate of Spain voted by majority vote to apply the 155th article of the Constitution, which allowed the regional authorities of Catalonia to be removed from the government, to introduce direct control from Madrid, and to announce early parliamentary elections in Catalonia. During the vote in the upper house of the Spanish parliament, 214 senators voted “pro”, 47 voted “con”, one abstained.

On November 3, 2017 eight members of the Catalan government were arrested by the Spanish authorities, the next day an international arrest warrant was issued for the President of the Generality of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemon.

On December 21, 2017 early elections to the Catalan parliament announced by the central authorities of Spain were held, as a result of which an absolute majority remained with the block of the supporters of independence of the region (47.5% of the vote and 70 out of 135 seats). C. Puigdemon, who fled after the referendum in Brussels, called the voting results a victory for the Catalan Republic over the Spanish authorities.

Due to the uncertainty that prevailed in Catalonia in the first weeks after the referendum, more than 2000 companies said they were moving offices to other regions of Spain. Instability and street protests forced some tourists to refuse to travel to Barcelona. The economists sounded the alarm, talking about potential losses of 2.5% of GDP growth if the crisis dragged on. However, the negative forecasts did not materialize. After the December elections in Catalonia the economy stabilized - and losses amounted to only 0.1% of GDP.

The European Commission has recognized the referendum on independence, held in Catalonia, illegal. The European Council President Donald Tusk said the decision of the Catalan parliament is changing nothing in the EU: Spain remains the only negotiating party. At the same time Tusk called on Madrid to dialogue.

On March 24, 2018 the Supreme Court of Spain began criminal proceedings against C. Puigdemont and 12 other politicians and activists who advocated for the independence of the region. The Parliament of Catalonia on May 14, 2018 elected Kim Torra the new head of the regional government and on June 2 the new government began its work, putting an end to the application of Article 155 of the Constitution of Spain.

The first trial of the case of the Catalan separatists began on December 18, 2018 in the Supreme Court of Spain in Madrid. And from February 12 to June 12, 2019 the second process lasted. Nine former Catalan officials, including the former vice president of Catalonia, Oriol Junqueras, are accused of organizing an uprising. O. Junqueras faces up to 25 years in prison. Three more face imprisonment for less stringent articles - disobedience and misuse of the public funds. More than 500 witnesses were called to testify in court, including the former Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. The former head of Catalonia, C. Puigdemont, said that the process, in his opinion, was "not an act of justice, but revenge" of Madrid and "a shame for Europe".

The announcement of the verdict is scheduled for October 14, 2019. It will be the most important in the democratic history of Spain. To a large extent, the resolution will determine the state's relations with Catalonia and will serve as a firewall for future attempts to gain independence unilaterally.

The court ruling will not solve the political problem of challenging the independence of Catalonia, but it is very likely that the former members of the government will be unable to hold any public office in the coming years.

The content of the verdict will depend on whether the court defines the attempt to gain independence of Catalonia as a crime against the constitutional order (the position of the prosecutor of the Supreme Court), or as a crime against the public order. The resolution will also have to determine whether the challenge of independence raised by the former leaders of the Generality was carried out at the expense of the state funds. No less important point will be the decision regarding the role of the Catalan police in the referendum.

To explain the rise of separatism in the Catalan society and the transition of the conflict between Catalonia and the Spanish state in the active phase, three main factors can be distinguished. Firstly, the government of J. Maria Aznar (2000-2004) did not respond to the demands for greater autonomy for Catalonia, at a time when the separation was not even mentioned. Secondly, the legal contestation of the Autonomy Charter of 2006 and its subsequent rejection by the Spanish Congress and the Senate after it was authorized by the Parliament of Catalonia, as well as by the Catalan people in a referendum. Thirdly, raising awareness of the impact of the accumulation of an annual deficit of 8% of Catalonia's GDP in connection with the financial arrangements established by the Spanish state [Guibernau 2013].

CONCLUSIONS

The Catalan initiative made important legal and political mistakes that were decisive for its failure. In the field of legality and in order to avoid the Spanish law, the

separatists wanted to impose an interpretation of the right of peoples to self-determination contrary to what is established by the international norms and practice of the states. In the field of the international politics, they based their external forecast on a combination of propaganda in the media and public diplomacy to put pressure on the governments of great powers and European institutions, underestimating the importance of the obligations and interests established with the Spanish state. Finally, they tried to justify the separatist aspirations at the international level by resorting to democratic legitimacy, which the political reality of Catalonia does not electorally support. The separatists were not ready for a long and dangerous path to success, and they had no arguments for consensus. There is not even overwhelming support in Catalonia itself. And they have already gone too far in the confrontation with Madrid to successfully bargain with it about wide autonomy. The very desire to secession of the region is nothing more than a product propagated for its own purposes by the authorities of the region, and which is becoming more and more popular every year among the population. The real attitude of the population of the region and all the Spaniards towards this aspiration is very different, but the understanding that Catalonia depends on Spain, and Spain depends on Catalonia, and the separation carries with it more and more disadvantages than pluses, remains decisive.

The independence of Catalonia would mean that it would automatically be outside the European Union. Moreover, the subsequent entry of Catalonia into the European Union would take a long time, and perhaps it would not have happened at all for the reason that the only one has the right to block the candidate from joining the EU. After independence, Catalonia would also gain state borders, which would automatically entail the introduction of indefinite customs and tariff barriers from the neighboring and other EU member states. The independence of Catalonia would be associated with its withdrawal from the euro zone, it would be deprived of the right to participate in the development of the monetary policy of the European Union. Most likely, the Catalan elites did not have the task of gaining real independence. Perhaps they wanted only a few economic preferences, to participate in the general Spanish budget, since they rightly believe that they form a rather serious part of it. Since the illegality of their actions the authorities of Catalonia cannot but understand.

The result was the failure of the separatist process that led to an increased social tension and political instability in Spain and Catalonia, which exacerbated the solution to the political problem. Only a political agreement can guide and provide a stable solution. In the end, the formulation of a political pact is also the result of history and is legally ordered, but it requires the ability and willingness to create the conditions for establishing a new relationship between Spain and Catalonia.

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