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KATALOŃSKIE REFERENDUM NIEPODLEGŁOŚCIOWE: PODSTAWA POLITYCZNA I SPOŁECZNA

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Adnotacja. Celem badania jest analiza politycznej i społecznej konfrontacji dwóch koncepcji kształtowania przyszłości Hiszpanii – unionizmu i independizmu. Z jednej strony analizowane są działania zwolenników niepodległości dotyczące przeprowadzenia legalnego referendum w sprawie niepodległości Katalonii i utworzenia własnego państwa, a z drugiej – opór wobec takiego scenariusza ze strony zwolenników jednego państwa – unionistów. Sprzeczność między tymi dwoma pojęciami istnieje nie tylko w życiu politycznym, ale także w życiu publicznym Królestwa Hiszpanii, odzwierciedlając ogólne tendencje do istnienia dialogu na temat przyszłości kraju jako całości. Uzasadnione jest znaczenie pełnego zrozumienia wewnętrznej sytuacji politycznej w Hiszpanii i znaczenie znalezienia kompromisu między przeciwstawnymi opiniami. Powtarzające się od czasu do czasu referendum w sprawie niepodległości Katalonii i późniejsze plany jego legitymizacji po raz kolejny pokazują złożone napięcia polityczne między Madrytem a regionami Hiszpanii.

Słowa kluczowe: Katalonia, referendum, separatyzm, samostanowienie.

CATALAN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

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Abstract. The aim of research is to explore the political and social confrontation between two concepts of Spain's future – unionism and independence. On the one hand, the activities of supporters of independence regarding the holding of a legitimate referendum on the independence of Catalonia and the creation of its own state are analyzed, and on the other hand, the opposition to such a scenario by supporters of a single state – unionists. The dispute between the two concepts exists not only in Spain's political life but also in Spain's society, which reflects the general trends of the existence of a dialogue about the future of the Kingdom of Spain. The importance of fully understanding the internal political situation in Spain and finding a compromise between opposing opinions is substantiated. The repeated referendum on independence in Catalonia and subsequent plans for its legitimization prove the political tense between Madrid and the regions.

Key words: Catalonia, referendum, separatism, self-determination.

КАТАЛОНСЬКИЙ РЕФЕРЕНДУМ ПРО НЕЗАЛЕЖНІСТЬ: ПОЛІТИЧНЕ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНЕ ПІДҐРУНТЯ

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Анотація. Метою дослідження є аналіз політичного та соціального протистояння двох концепцій формування майбутнього Іспанії – юніонізму та індепендизму. З одного боку, аналізується діяльність прихильників незалежності щодо проведення легітимного референдуму про незалежність Каталонії та створення власної держави, а з іншого – спротив такому сценарію з боку прихильників єдиної держави – юніоністів. Протиріччя між двома концепціями існує не лише в політичному житті, а також в суспільному житті Королівства Іспанія, що відображає загальні тенденції існування діалогу про майбутнє країни в цілому. Обґрунтовано важливість повного розуміння внутрішньополітичної ситуації в Іспанії та важливість пошуку компромісу між протилежними думками. Повторюваний час від часу референдум про незалежність Каталонії та подальші плани його легітимізації ще раз демонструють складну політичну напругу між Мадридом та регіонами Іспанії.

Ключові слова: Каталонія, референдум, сепаратизм, самовизначення.

Introduction. In the modern world, the ideas of separatism are becoming popular again and causes the internal political instability in some states. The Kingdom of Spain is a vivid example where the influence of such ideas on the political life has a decisive effect. For quite a long time, one of the Spain's regions – Catalonia – has been striving for independence from its metropolis. Catalonia manifests such aspirations in the form of a referendum on independence and in further political steps to legitimize it.

The referendum, as one of the legitimate tools for obtaining one's own state, has significant impact on the social and political life of Catalonia. The nationalist parties of Catalonia, which are the majority in its parliament, define the autonomy and independence of the region as their main goals. In political science, such people are called independents. Instead, representatives of the central government (unionists) advocate the unity of the state in the current form of the monarchy. The modern political life of Catalonia is built on the opposition of these two trends – independence and unionism. Official Madrid is trying in every possible way to oppose the nationalists in the regions, using various methods.

The dualism of state-building ideas often hinders its stability and strategic planning for the future. Moreover, the lack of dialogue and search for compromises only deepens the gap between representatives of different political elites. An analysis of the ideas and actions of representatives of unionism and independence allows us better understand the positions of both sides and to determine the prospects of such a confrontation for the Kingdom of Spain.

Foreign studies on the consequences of the referendum for Catalonia are highlighted in the works of: M. Hilberna, I. Serrano, H. Cuadres-Morato, I. Bernat, etc. Most of the foreign works analyze the formation of a special identity in Catalonia and its modern manifestations in Spain's public life. The most prominent researchers on this topic are: H. Nogue, L. Moreno, J. Colomer, S. Muller, etc. Studying the trends of the "Catalan crisis", it is often forgotten to take into account the existence of ideological dualism in the formation of public policy in Spain between the center and the regions. Such an ideological dualism is represented by unionism and independence, which oppose each other not only exclusively in political life, but are clearly defined in the public opinion of various strata of the population and influence the formation of both the internal and foreign policy of Spain at the current stage.

Main part. The purpose of the article is to analyze the political formation of ideas for holding a referendum on independence in Catalonia and to characterize the tendencies of public opinion regarding the existence of Spain in the form of the kingdom.

Materials and methods. The following theoretical research methods were used to solve certain problems: comparison, analysis, synthesis, generalization and systematization of scientific literature. We also use some special scientific methods for a deeper research: behavioral method, event analysis and method of political mapping.

Results and Discussion. Catalonia's desire for independence has long been no surprise to anyone. Moreover, it can be noted that the issue of independence and autonomy of Catalonia divides people exactly into two camps – those who support the right of their people to self-determination and those who do not support it and stands for the state's integrity. At the first glance, everything looks very easy, but is it really so?

In political science, it is customary to divide such people according to their views into independents and unionists. Independents (from Latin "independents") is a political trend that dates back to the time of the English bourgeois

revolution in the 17th century, the main goal of which is to advocate for full autonomy and independent management of one's own community ("Independent", n.d.). Thus, supporters of the independence and secession of Catalonia are called independents. Unionists are completely opposite to them in political views. Unionists is a general name for parties and political movements that advocate union or unification with certain institutions. Unionists first became popular also in Great Britain from the beginning of the 17th century (Wikipedia contributors, 2022). However, modern political scientists single out the concept of "Spanish unionism", which is directly related to the internal political situation in the Kingdom of Spain.

Spanish unionism is a term used in the context Basque nationalism and the Catalan independence movement; political opposition to separatism or secession and favors the existence of the Kingdom of Spain as the united state with the single nation (País, 2017). There is a fierce confrontation between the independents and the unionists in the political and social life of Spain and in this way a significant influence is exerted on the internal and foreign policy of the country.

The idea of holding Catalonia's referendum on the independence is always on the agenda of both its supporters and its opponents. The first ideas about secession and a referendum arose back in the 2000s and already in 2014 the first attempts to hold it took place. Shortly before that, on January 23, 2013, the Parliament of Catalonia voted by 85 votes "for" and 41 "against" for the "Declaration on Sovereignty and on the Right of the Catalan People to Self-Determination" (Declaration of Sovereignty and of the Right to Decide of the Catalan Nation, n.d.). This document states that "the people of Catalonia must, through democratic legitimacy, become a sovereign political and juridical subject". The declaration includes the following main principles: sovereignty, legitimacy, transparency, dialogue, social cohesion, Europeanism, the role of the Catalan Parliament and its participation in political and social processes (Ara.cat, 2013). However, this document was never recognized by the central government of Spain, moreover, on May 8, 2013, the Constitutional Court of Spain suspended its effect (BBC News, 2013).

One way or another, the attempts of the independents did not stop and already on December 12, 2013, the government of Catalonia (especially nationalist parties) had determined the date and formulated the main question that should be put to a referendum. The date was chosen for November 9, 2014, and only two questions were asked: "Do you want Catalonia to become a state?" and "If Yes, do you want this state to become independent?" (Casulleras, 2017). However, this "expression of will" was again blocked by the Spanish government and the Prime Minister of Spain, Mariano Rajoy, said that "such a referendum will be declared illegal and this decision is not subject for any discussion". Later, the Supreme Court of Spain again banned such a "show of will", but the vote, nevertheless, took place. 81% of respondents voted for independence, but the turnout of these respondents was only (Perez, 2014). This result shows us that the majority of Catalans are against both gaining independence and holding a referendum on independence as a tool to achieve their goals. It is worth noting that criminal cases were initiated against the organizers of the referendum. First of all, it concerned the president of Catalonia, Artur Mas, who ruled the autonomous region from 2010 to 2016 (Staff, 2014). In 2016, Mas was succeeded by Carlos Puigdemont.

The period between the 2014 referendum and the 2017 referendum cannot be called calm. During this period, various political debates between unionists and independents took place, reinforced by street protests in various cities: Barcelona, Bersa, Lleida, Salta and Tarragona. The government of the Generalitat did not stop trying to hold a referendum and already in 2017, another such referendum was held, but the consequences of this vote had a significant impact on Catalonia's future.

The starting point of those events was September 2016, when Carlos Puigdemont announced that Catalonia would hold a referendum on self-determination and independence with or without the consent of the Spanish government (Berwick, 2016). Puigdemont's associate Oriol Junqueras made a statement in which he noted the following: "We, Catalans, want our own state; to be another state within the EU. Many countries in Europe were formed after a referendum on independence. We want to do the same as many Europeans – to vote freely for our freedom" (Documentary.net staff, 2017). The same question was put to the vote: "Would you like Spain to become an independent state in the form of a republic?" After that, the Spanish central government again responded to such attempts – "this referendum will not take place, as it is illegal" (O. F. Staff, 2017).

Anyway, the referendum took place on October 1, 2017, although it was banned by the Spanish Supreme Court. On the eve of the referendum, in order to stop the vote, the central Spanish authorities seized ballots, conducted searches, detained dissenting protesters and used force (Spain Police Used Excessive Force in Catalonia, 2020). Such actions provoked a furious protest among citizens of other countries and human rights organizations. In particular, former Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michael called on the parties to stop violence and return to dialogue (Charles Michael Twitter, 2017).

According to the data provided by the Catalan authorities, 90% of respondents voted "for" independence, while the turnout was only 43% (BBC News, 2017). This result once again emphasized that not all residents of Catalonia dream of independence and most of them are skeptical even of attempts to declare a separate state or hold such referendums. The day after the referendum, Carlos Puigdemont announces its obvious result – the creation of an independent state of Catalonia.

However, the reaction of the central authorities did not take long and on October 14, 2019, the Supreme Court of Spain sentenced nine of the twelve defendants in the case of "overthrow of the state regime and attempts coup", including Carlos Puigdemont and his associates. Puigdemont fled from the justice to Belgium, where he sought political asylum and he declares his government a "government in exile" (GUILTY, 2019).

It is worth noting that the reaction of other Spain's regions to the referendum on independence, which in one way or another strive for independence, also seems to be rather ambiguous. The main support for the referendum came

from the same radical movements in Spain. For example, the Basque Autonomous Community and its regional parliament with a nationalist majority showed full support for the referendum and condemned the position its illegality (EITB, 2019). On September 16, residents of San Sebastian and Bilbao went to mass demonstrations to express their solidarity with people of Catalonia (Deutsche Welle, n.d.). The terrorist organization ETA also fully supported the referendum and even suggested other “free” regions to do the same (The Local.es, 2017). The Parliament of Navarre was a little more cautious and got away with only an indirect statement about “condemning the de facto absorption of Catalan decentralization by the Spanish government” (EITB, 2017). We can note that this is rather diplomatic and restrained statement without excessive radicalization, in contrast to the position expressed by the Basque Country. In contrast to Navarre, the district of Galicia was more decisive in its statements and, like the Basque Country, also went to mass demonstrations for supporting the referendum in Catalonia. About 3,000 people expressed their solidarity with the aspiration of the Catalans (Lombao, 2017). We see that among the potentially dangerous separatist districts of Spain, the reaction to the referendum on independence in Catalonia causes a different reaction and a practical unwillingness to repeat the same scenario in their districts. Calls for independence in these regions are reduced to clearly political and populist slogans.

If we talk about the EU reaction, their position is quite united and clear. The governments of Belgium, Crete, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, Portugal, Great Britain and the USA unanimously expressed the position that Spain should remain a single state and called on all parties to dialogue (The Baltic Times, n.d.). Undoubtedly, such statements indicate that the European Union is interested in preserving Spain as a single state within its internationally recognized borders and does not consider any scenario in which the secession of any district would take place.

Some time after the referendum, which the Spanish central government declared illegal, in 2020 Catalan nationalists and the Spanish government coalition agreed to hold a dialogue on Catalonia’s political future. At the same time, the main task of Catalan nationalists was the full legalization of the independence referendum which was held in 2017 (Bernhard, 2020: 762). The plan of the central government was to expend the financial and political autonomy of Catalonia, but it should remain part of the Kingdom (Merino, 2020). The 15-member contact group aimed to meet once a month and hold joint plenary sessions every six months. Although, these plans did not succeed due to the struggle of nationalist parties, which did not want to go to peace negotiations, but most likely, they want to continue promoting the idea to hold another referendum on independence (Baquéro, 2020).

All plans for a peaceful settlement of the Catalan crisis were canceled by the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily suspended this process. Nevertheless, this negotiation process is quite important progress in the Catalan crisis at this stage and during the entire period of its active phase.

However, it is clear that some radical nationalist political parties in Catalonia, such as the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT) and the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), do not want to make concessions to Madrid and are going to continue their policy of complete separation and formation of their state. These two parties even formed a joint parliamentary coalition in the Catalan generality called “Junts pel Si” or “JxSi” (from the Catalan “Together Yes”) until 2017, but after the unsuccessful, in their opinion, independence referendum in 2017, the Catalan Republican Right party decided not to participate in this coalition anymore and left it (Agencia EFE, 2022).

It is worth mentioning another odious nationalist party that quite openly promotes the secession of Catalonia – the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP). The most radical part of this party is the young wing called “Arran”. They are quite harsh in their rhetoric, namely: they have very bad attitude towards the monarchy as a form of government and the most important thing is that their demands for independence extend not only to Catalonia, but also to all the so-called “Catalan countries” – Valencia, the Balearic islands, Roussillon and Eastern Aragon (Candidatura D’Unitat Popular, n.d.).

The position of unionists in Spain regarding the separatist regions is clear and unwavering – Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Navarre and others must remain part of the Kingdom. One of the biggest supporters of this paradigm is the former Prime Minister of Spain (1996–2004) Jose Maria Asnar. In the documentary “Secret Conflict in Spain”, he clearly voices his opinion on the need for a united Spain. “It is true that the Spanish signed an agreement in 1978 according to which Spain from a centralized country becomes decentralized. However, for some politicians this is not enough. Nationalism is currently a problem for all Europe. This is the revival of old nationalist movements. They suddenly realized that they are relevant and promote politics that had not happened before. If the political situation in the country weakens, it helps such movements to revive and become popular. The Spanish nation has weakened in recent years and this is a rather unpleasant prospect” (Documentary.net staff, 2017).

Most researchers define Asnar as a supporter of strict centralization. One of the historical researchers, Alfonso Guerra, expresses the opinion that “the idea of independence in Catalonia and the Basque Country really spread during the second term of Jose Maria Asnar. The more centralized, pro-Spanish and authoritarian it became, the more nationalism flourished” (Diéz, 2014). The same opinion is held by a number researchers of the “Catalan crisis” phenomenon. Norberto Picot, former secretary of the “Podemos” (political party), notes that “democracy is a system built on respect for the law. When an illegal referendum is organized, it is disrespect for the law” (Prieto, 2019).

Analyzing such statements, we can draw conclusions that violent centralization and harsh suppression of national minorities may, sooner or later, lead to a social explosion and threaten its national security. Jaime Pastor, a professor of political theory at the National University of Distance Education in Madrid, that “nationalistic feeling cannot be easily removed, you can only try to respect the feelings of other nationalities; the majority of the world’s population has some nationalistic feelings” (Pastor, 1991). We cannot deny the fact that any multinational state, such as Spain, will always face the struggle of national minorities for their rights on the one hand and a central government seeking

to centralize its power on the other. The main task will remain only the choice of each citizen and the policy regarding some balance of interests among different positions.

The division of Spaniards into unionists and independents does not consist only in the political positions of the parties and their officials, but also by following the trends of public opinion in different parts of the Kingdom. We see rather opposite opinions in the documentary film “Secret Conflict in Spain”, where people are asked their personal opinion about the unity of the state or its possible division based on national characteristics. The author of the film conducts survey in Barcelona and Madrid before football matches. It is worth noting that the football teams “Barcelona” (Barcelona) and “Real” (Madrid) are also some element of opposing political positions, because their fans quite often do not like and do not accept each other. In some places, these two clubs are called an unofficial symbol of struggle between the center and the regions or between unity and separation.

The opinions expressed by the people of Madrid about Catalonia in this documentary are mostly like this: “These people are not Spanish. They are Catalans and that’s all”, “A person is only Catalan or Spanish, but not both at the same time”, “Catalonia is not Spain. This is Catalonia’s problem because they want to be independent”, “In Barcelona they burnt the Spanish flag because they don’t like Spain. That’s why we call them “los polacos” (from the Spanish “sincere supporters of Catalonia, who are quite biased toward it”)), “Spain today is a puppet in the hands of Catalonia and the Basque Country”, etc. Moreover, many Spaniards, who are supporters of the idea of unionism, consider the period of Franco’s rule as positive, because any national ideas were undermined and there was complete unity of the country. A 60-year-old woman says: “Franko did a lot. Spain is united and blessed by God. One Spain is great and free!” (Documentary.net staff, 2017).

The ambiguity of such opinions once again emphasizes the problem of sharp opposition between unionists and independents. Catalan independence is a desire for independence and creation of its own state, which is manifested not only in the individual ideas of right-wing radical parties, but is supported by concrete actions to achieve it.

Conclusions. The term “Catalan independence referendum” can describe the entire political life of Catalonia and, simultaneously, one of the biggest problems of modern Spain. Such a “referendum” has already become a symbol of the struggle between unionists and independents, between the desire for self-determination and the desire to live in a single state. The polarity of opinion in Spanish society suggests that the struggle of national minorities for their own “referendums” will not end soon. The problem is only about the presence of a “special” opinion in Catalonia or in Madrid, the main obstacle for Spain’s future is the lack of concrete dialogue on such issues. It seems that the regions do not hear each other or they do not want to seek a compromise. Unscrupulous politicians often play on the national feelings of various minorities, using them for their own purposes and fanning the flames of hatred between them.

Spain is a country with a long and ambiguous history and its political life is even more ambiguous. There have always been national contradictions. Catalan referendums on independence are just gaining momentum and we will definitely see some attempts to hold such a referendum again in the future and, finally, get what they want. At the moment, the future of Spain as a unified state is under threat, which rarely anyone can notice and react to it in time. The lack of a nationwide dialogue and a well-thought-out strategy for existing the “Catalan crisis” deepens the gap between unionists and independents. Further contradictions of national minorities with the center will only deepen this gap and the only way out of it should be the search for a compromise. Nowadays, the integration of public opinion and the interests of the state is the way out of “Catalan crisis”.

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