THE ROLE OF THE STATE OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGIONS: NATION-BUILDER OR NATION-DEMOLISHER?

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Abstract
This study focuses on the Statute-related parliamentary debates of the Catalan and Valencian autonomous regions and analyses the conceptions of the political communities defended by the political parties, both of Spain and of the autonomous region in question and the relationship between them. The goal is to analyse the differences over time and across the ideological spectrum of the identification patterns and the preferences with regards to the territorial organisation of the Spanish state and the arguments used to legitimise these positions. The investigation shows that the current conflict over the rise of secessionism in Catalonia is reflected in many different aspects, which is not surprising, but it also shows indications of conflict or at least of highly sensitive areas with conflict potential as early as 1979. Furthermore there are significant differences in the ways the political parties act in Valencia and Catalonia, respectively. Despite the complex dynamics, the results suggest that the inauguration of the Estado de las Autonomías did not decrease the conflict potential around the territorial organisation of Spain.

Keywords
Territorial Organisation of the Spanish State, national identification, Estado de las Autonomías, Catalonia, Valencia
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Political and territorial construction of regional and national identities in Spain since 1978. The parliamentary debates on the Statutes of Autonomy, Catalonia and Valencia in comparison.

Introduction

That the politico-administrative territorial organization of the Spanish State as well as the sentiments of belonging accompanying it as a multi-layered political community is under stress at the moment hardly comes a surprise to anybody. The surge of secessionism in Catalonia over the last 4-5 years has fomented a shared conscience among the Spaniards that is going to be difficult to solve.

A majority of Catalans thus regards Catalonia to be a nation and a significant percentage of them would prefer that nation to become an independent State even though this obviously collides with the current constitutional set-up. But this was not the case in 1979 when Catalan politicians elaborated the first Autonomy Statute and the inhabitants of Catalonia voted it with an overwhelming majority (92 %). In that text the self-conception of the Autonomous Catalan Community was clearly that of “nationality” as stated in §1 of the Statute: “Catalonia, as a nationality and in order to accede to self-government, constitutes itself as an Autonomous Community.”2 Claims that could not legitimately be made in 1979 are thus much more widely accepted today.

Actually the discontent with the decentralisation into self-governing regions – Autonomías – has been spreading to the Spanish population in general over the last seven-eight years after a long period during which the “Estado de las Autonomías” met with increasing support from the Spanish population. In many Spaniards the crisis – both the economic crisis and the one sparked by the rise of secessionism in Catalonia – has slowly sedimented into a loss of faith in the “Estado de las Autonomías” as an efficient way to organize Spain and solve the problems of the country. When before it was perceived to have served to decrease tensions (Newton and Donaghy 1997: 143), they now seem to be increasing precisely as a result of deficiencies of the Estado de las Autonomías. So from being seen as a solution to the tensions inherent to Spanish society it has come to be perceived as a part of the problem.

1 A political community is here understood as the fact of belonging to and participating in the same political system, but which also has a more or less profound affective dimension of identifying with the other members of the community.


3 The support for the present State model of Autonomous Regions had been increasing slowly but steadily since the mid-1980s until 2007 when as many as 57.4 % preferred it over other models (Jiménez and Navarro, 2015, pp. 5-6).
Socio-demographic evidence together with the development of the secessionist crisis in Catalonia since 2012 thus seem to suggest that only recent changes have caused the edifice of the Estado de las Autonomías to begin to crumble. But was it really that solid or were there built-in weaknesses? Did the different parts of the State take developments within the Estado de las Autonomías in each their different direction that would eventually begin to weaken it?

In this paper I want to help shed light on these questions by investigating the discourse of the political parties in the Statute-related parliamentary debates of two of the autonomous regions in Spain: Catalonia and Valencia. The focus will be on the conceptualizations of the involved political communities which in both cases are a pair consisting of Spain and the autonomous region in question and how they are related. The goal is to investigate how these changing claims were legitimised by politicians vis-à-vis the population to make it adhere to the new preferences and which arguments were used. Even if the dynamics involved in shaping these preferences and conceptions are very complex, the hope is that the investigation will shed light on where to look for the origins of the present crisis and in particular whether the way the decentralization was organized helped diminish and channel interterritorial and political tensions between preferences for symmetry and asymmetry, as the general discourse about the transition to democracy and decentralization wants us to believe, or whether the growing satisfaction with the Estado de las Autonomías over many years was the result of something else.

Academic rationale and methodology

The 2006-reform of the Catalan Statute, origin of the secessionist crisis of Catalonia, has already been the object of quite a lot of scientific works from a range of disciplines, but they often rely a lot on the press as source material which is a secondary source with its own interests and its own ideological agenda. Advantages can therefore be obtained investigating the primary sources directly and Ferri (2013) actually analyses the conception of the political community in the legislative texts of the 2006 Statute reform of Catalonia, but does not use the debates and does not compare with other reform processes or the development between original statute and reformed statute. So far the other Statute reforms have not been studied in any systematic way despite the fact that the legislative processes surrounding the Statutes of Autonomy of the seventeen Spanish regions and their subsequent reforms contain obvious potential for comparative analysis across the political geography of the Spanish state as well as for studies of the temporal evolution of the dynamics behind the reforms.

Although many studies on politics and public opinion have investigated preferences regarding the territorial organization of the state, as well as patterns of identification of the population, we know little about how they changed over time, as well as the arguments were used to justify these changes. One way to
investigate this changing reality is through longitudinal designs that allow for monitoring the change itself, as well as the arguments with which the actors give meaning to and legitimise such changes. This requires an instrument that is sufficiently sensitive as to detect change over time but which at the same time is sufficiently standardised so that the changes measured are the results of real change and not artifacts caused by differences in the ways the data are obtained for each observation. The planned protocol of codification of the Statute-related parliamentary debates will achieve this thus facilitating the study of the intersection between politics and collective identities.

The added value of this investigation is first and foremostly to produce a series of systematic, longitudinal and comparable empirical data on the processes of statutory reforms to compare the changes of the definition of the twin political communities involved, and the arguments that legitimise them. The study thus permits comparison along both ideological (political parties), spatial (Catalonia – Valencia) and temporal axes.

The first design decision regards the selection of cases. The inclusion of Catalonia in this study is an obvious choice due to the aforementioned reasons and to some degree, Valencia serves as an example of the ‘rest of Spain’, but the selection can be justified through a classification of the Spanish region based on opinion poll data on the nature of Spanish nationalism of its inhabitants. Crossing the territorial identification of citizens (Spain vs. Autonomous Community) with nationalist sentiment (Spanish nationalist vs. regionalist peripheral nationalist) results in five groups of regions of which Catalonia and Valencia almost fall in the extreme opposites: regions characterized by low territorial identification with Spain and prevalence of other nationalist sentiments (Catalonia) and regions where territorial identification with the region and Spain coexist and where the Spanish nationalist sentiments predominate over regionalist or peripheral nationalist (Valencia)4. But the southern border region to Catalonia is also interesting precisely for its complex relationship with Catalan nationalism. As the Valencian language linguistically speaking is a dialectical variant of Catalan combined with the fact that certain brands of Catalan nationalism speak loosely about ‘Catalan countries’ [països catalans] that at the very least implies some kind of open door to the Catalan nation for Catalan-speaking citizens of other regions and countries, Valencian nationalists have developed a high sensitivity towards any pan-Catalan pretentions on the part of Catalan nationalists.

4 The criteria have been developed for the research project NACESPAÑOL for the selection of regions where interviews of focus groups were to take place. The theme of the interviews were issues related to Spanish nationalism and therefore apply to this investigation as well. For the criteria, see M. Jimenez: "Diseño de la Investigación (Criterios de Selección de CCAA y Perfil de Integrantes de los Grupos)"; accessible at http://www.upo.es/proyectos/export/sites/proyectos/nacionalismo_esp/carpetadescar/xWEB_Estudio_previo.Grupos.d e_discusixn.pdf (consulted 5 November 2015). Particularly, the graphic representation on page 4 is indicative if the grouping of regions.
The second design decision regards the temporal spread. The original Catalan Statute was passed in 1979 and has only been reformed once, in 2006. The Valencian Statute dates from 1982 and it has been reformed three times: in 1991, in 1994 and in 2006. Since the two reforms of the 1990s were minor reforms, these two reforms have been eliminated in this study to make the two cases more comparable. Our study thus comprises four legislative processes and since what is of interest here is the political discourse more than the details of the legislative process we focus exclusively on the parliamentary debates of these four legislative processes. In total the analysis comprises 32 parliamentary debates amounting to approximately 1450 pages of transcribed debates.

Normally the conception of one’s own nation, region etc. is taken for granted in most situations and therefore not specified or spoken out. But since each Statute begins with specifying the nature of the Autonomous Region as well as its relationship to Spain, the political parties have to define and explicitly defend their conceptions of Spain and the region in question vis-à-vis the other parties when they engage in the legislative debates. Therefore the parliamentary proceedings surrounding the Statutes and their reforms constitute an adequate, possibly the best, primary source for investigating these conceptions and how they change over time. Furthermore the debates allow us to access the arguments used to construct the political communities as in- and out-groups.

A third design decision is linked to the unit of observation or analysis. As meaning is conveyed not by single words but by phrases and often several phrases participate in transmitting the same idea, it was decided that the most appropriate unit of analysis was whole paragraphs. Although the analysis is fundamentally a qualitative analysis of content, we use graphics and frequencies as the best way to summarize and compare. Furthermore, as the reforms do not contain the same number of debates, and as the debates are not equally long, we have included a corrective index based on the number of documents and pages per document for each of the reforms in all the graphs and interpretations we make of frequencies.

The protocol applied to the debates generated in the 4 legislative processes under analysis was developed in order to translate the general and specific objectives of the research into research questions and concepts. The adjustment between theoretical concepts and their empirical manifestation to make sure

5 Two factors add important information on the reform processes and the use of arguments and characterizations: the number of parliamentary debates that a particular reform has required and the extension of the debates, in this case the number of pages of transcribed debate. We have chosen to construct a corrective index applied to each reform: total number of pages of debate of reform X / number of parliamentary debates of the reform X. The aim is to obtain a more balanced and comparable picture of the density of use of certain argument or a certain characterization between the different reforms.
that instrument was sufficiently sensitive was done through an iterative process between induction and deduction.

The protocol is divided into two parts. The first contains the formal codes that help describe the sample with respect to territorial, ideological and temporal origin of the discourse. These three dimensions are at the same time the three explanatory factors that are managed to understand the change. The second part contains the substantive codes, whose meaning is to measure precisely the change, the dependent variable of this study: both in terms of the definition of political communities (in its dual political-administrative and identity dimension) as well as in terms of the legitimizing arguments.
The Catalan “problem”

Catalonia and the concession of some kind of regional autonomy to the region as a reparation of the historical injustice inflicted on the Catalans by the Francoist repression constituted a particular problem during the transition of which the entire Spanish political elite was aware. The Catalans on their side showed able to mobilize the largest crowds in all of Spain in favour of their demands during the transition, but generally speaking it was not a subversive mobilization. More than anything it was meant to support and push the developments towards democracy as quickly as possible and to remind the political elites of the specificities of the Catalan case rather than on specific contents of the autonomy deal to be established. A functioning democracy was thus believed by practically everybody to be dependent upon satisfying Catalan wishes for self-government to a significant extent, but this had to be balanced against the widespread fears among right-wing and military circles that allowing the Catalans (and the Basques) extensive autonomy would lead to the break-up of Spain.

With respect to the timing it was a problem that democracy works relatively slowly. The Catalan society and political establishment could not wait for a proper democracy to be installed after drafting up and debating first a Constitution and then an autonomy statute. It was clear to most politicians that significant concessions had to be granted more quickly. Prime Minister Suárez thus in a rather audacious move immediately after the first democratic elections began negotiating with the head of the Catalan regional government in exile, Josep Tarradellas, and as a result invited him to return to Spain in October 1977. By means of a number of decrees a preliminary pre-autonomous regime under Tarradella’s leadership was established while waiting for the definitive regional autonomy to be installed after approval of the Constitution and an autonomy statute. This happened as the Constitution was only beginning to be drafted.

Despite the fact that the original plan only foresaw pre-autonomy regimes for Catalonia and the Basque Country and perhaps Galicia, it very quickly became a demand by many other regions. The rush began already in late 1977 and the process to some extent got out of hand from very early on. This pressure, however, provided the executive with a solution to the balancing problem mentioned above by extending autonomy to virtually all would-be regions long before the Constitution was passed. The ‘pre-autonomous’

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6 A lot of what is said about Catalonia in this article is also true for the Basque Country. During the transition to democracy the two regions together constituted a complex problem with implications for the territorial organization of the Spanish State, but as this chapter deals with a comparison between Catalonia and Valencia, I shall only refer to the Catalan part of the problem.

7 Since the civil war, Catalan elites had maintained a representation of the former Catalan regional government in the exile, which in 1954 had recognized Tarradellas as the representative head of the government in exile.
regimes were thus extended to many more regions in 1978 than originally foreseen by decision of the Minister of Territorial Administration, Manuel Clavero.8

This generalization of the autonomy process was of course a symmetrical measure that served as a way to limit the special status of particularly Catalonia and the Basque Country. Initially, they were the only recognized 'historical nationalities', which as such were allowed to accede to autonomy via the so-called 'quick lane' of the Constitution’s §151. This meant that not only did they develop the autonomy statutes much more swiftly and at a very early stage of this whole process, they also did so through a different procedure where the direct role of the national Parliament in Madrid was reduced to simple ratification of a statute previously accorded at regional level.

From the Kingdom of Valencia to the Autonomous Community of Valencia

The Valencian region was destined to develop its autonomy in the shadow of the Catalan process, although the region had almost as many arguments in favour of being considered a historical nationality like Catalonia and the Basque Country, except for one, important thing: The fact that the region did not succeed in establishing regional autonomy during the Second Republic. The Valencians also mobilized in favour of democracy and autonomy with huge demonstrations as early as October 1977 and the mayors of the practical totality of municipalities of the region signed a manifesto in order to achieve full autonomy through the ‘quick’ lane as a historical nationality. In the end, however, the Levantine region was not allowed to accede to autonomy via §151. A change of tactics, particularly within the governing Union of the Democratic Centre (hereafter UCD), to restrict access to the ‘rapid’ lane in order to control the right-wing and military discontents forced the UCD’s political allies and institutions in the region to drop the claim for a §151 autonomy and accept the so-called ‘general regime’ of §143. In November 1980 the regional leaders of the UCD – Enrique Monsonis – and of the Socialist Party (hereafter PSOE) – Joan Lerma – came to an accord on applying for autonomy through the ‘slow lane’ or general regime. From then on the central question became how to secure a level of autonomy equal to that of the ‘historic nationalities’ without being recognised as one. In the debates on the Autonomy Statute of Valencia in 1982, there was some background resentment for being ousted from the group of ‘nationalities’. But as the draft statute arrived

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8 By September 1978 the ‘pre-autonomous’ regime had been extended to Galicia, Aragon, Valencia, Canary Islands, Andalusia, Extremadura, Castile and León and Castile-La Mancha (Gibbons 1999: 17).
9 The Constitution established two ‘routes’ of access to autonomy: the ‘rapid lane’ or special access of §151 and the ‘slow lane’ or general regime of §143. The former was designed to accommodate the “historical nationalities”, Catalonia and the Basque Country, and gave immediate access to autonomy. The main exception was Andalucía that rebelled against government directions because it was one of the few regions where the UCD didn’t control the regional Assembly. Through the celebration of a regional referendum on a draft statute on 28 February 1981, the region forced the Government to accept its status as a “historical nationality.”
in Madrid with the basic consensus of the large parties (the UCD and the PSOE) it remained mostly a distant ‘rumble’. Particularly issues related to the official name of the region, the Valencian language and the symbols of the region. In short these conflicts were about balancing the historical and linguistic claims to a proper identity that the politicians of the Valencian region nourished against the political necessities (accepted by a majority but not by all) of being granted access to autonomy only via the so-called ‘general regime’ of §143.

At the same time a huge sensitivity towards anything which could be considered pan-Catalanist pretensions towards the Valencian region and its status was evident in the debates. It was felt particularly strongly in the debates surrounding the language issue but also in other questions such as the name of the region and the dispute about the official flag. The struggle for the Valencian politicians to find a proper identity – distinct from any Catalan identity – and a proper place for their region in the concert of Autonomous Regions in Spain proved rather difficult, but also hugely important to all involved.

This development towards the Valencian Autonomy Statute, which at first had been characterised by illusion ended in a disappointment and social disenchantment. Largely against their will, the elites of the dominant Valencian political parties were turned into subalterns of their respective national party leaderships. The result – the final Statute – did not really arouse passion in any of the participating parties; the concessions they had all agreed to in order to arrive at the final result were simply too important. It was called “the possible Statute” by various members, like here by the regional leader of the Socialist party, Lerma: “we have done exactly what History demanded of us, to say yes to this Statute, because it was the possible Statute.”\(^{10}\) It was basically seen as a starting point for an autonomy settlement that, once implemented, would have to develop further in order to deepen the autonomy\(^{11}\). Satisfaction was postponed and thus subject to future developments\(^{12}\).

\(^{10}\) Original: “nosotros hemos hecho exactamente lo que la Historia nos demandaba, decir que sí a este Estatuto, porque era el Estatuto posible.” Intervention by Lerma (PSOE), in Diario de Sesiones del Congreso de los Diputados (hereafter DdSC) 28 April 1982, p. 13707.

\(^{11}\) To achieve a level of competencies comparable to that of the historic nationalities the Statute was complemented through a Transitional Disposition and a contemporary Organic Law on transfer of competence, although both measures precisely were conceived of as temporary.

\(^{12}\) For accounts of the peculiar Valencian road towards the Autonomy Statute, see Mainar (2010) and Ruiz (2003).
**Intertwined conceptions of the political communities in comparison**

In the following I will analyse the conceptions of the twin political communities involved in Autonomy Statutes: the ‘superior’ political community and the ‘inferior’, or ‘big’ and ‘small’ as is implied in the Spanish saying: “la Patria grande y la Patria chica”. The interest is focused on how the political communities involved are characterised and related in the discourse and how these definitions change over time across the ideological spectrum. As stated above there is always a correspondence between the definitions of the larger and the smaller political communities; the logic by which their conception is linked might not be the same, but the two communities will always be conceived of together in some kind of relationship, the analysis of which is very interesting for what it says about the underlying conceptualisations of Spain and its parts and the conflicts with other conceptions.

**Valencia**

Between the debates on the original Valencian statute in 1982 and the reform in 2006 we see a clear shift in how the community is described especially among the right-wing and the peripheral nationalists. In 1982 Valencia was described as both a “region” and a “nationality” in an approximately equal number of cases (44% and 56% of the total, respectively), but it was only defined as a “region” by the right-wing parties, the UCD and the Popular Alliance (hereafter AP), whereas the rest of the political parties preferred to define the community as a “nationality”. At the time the characterisation of the Valencian region as a “nation” was entirely absent.

But in 2006 the characterisation preferred by the vast majority was “nationality” and “region” shifted to a third place behind “nation” (76%, 10%, and 14% of the total, respectively). Instead of only as a “region”, the right-wing began referring preferentially to Valencia as a “nationality”, and likewise the left-wing, especially the United Left (hereafter IU), preferred “nationality”.

If we look at the arguments used by the different political parties to defend the conceptions, the right-wing did not dramatically change its palette of arguments. The most important arguments used in conjunction both with defining Valencia as a “region” in 1982 and as a “nationality” in 2006 were concerned with justice, the Constitution and democracy, on the one hand, and the history, culture and tradition of the Valencian region, on the other. But there are nuances, nevertheless, which are revealing for the context and the general conceptualisation of the Spanish state: in 1982 quite a lot of reference is made to the conflictual process of coming into being of the Statute referred to above. The preference for a conception as a region is defended among other through opposition to the nationalist attitude of other political parties, as when Fernando Abril, Vice-President of the UCD-Government, argued in favour of a “healthy regionalism” of Valencia as opposed to nationalism:
"We do not want nationalist contradictions to get involved in this, and our position, in the end, only consists in recuperating some signs of identity that testify to the fact that our Autonomous Community is going to be constituted in the form of a healthy regionalism that coexists pacifically, harmoniously and enthusiastically with the rest of Spain."\(^{13}\)

The predominant description of Valencia as a “region” was combined with the then dominant conceptualisation of Spain as a “nation” among right-wing parties in 1982 in Valencia as can be seen in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 Characterisations of Spain by right-wing parties (Valencia)**

[Source: own elaboration]

The Statute’s §1 actually reproduced large parts of the text of §2 of the Constitution defining Valencia as a nationality “within the unity of the Spanish Nation”\(^{14}\), which was of course agreed to by all parties as here by the UCD:

“*in the text […] appears the concept of ‘nationality,’ and it is contextualised within the meaning of the profound unity of the Spanish nation.*”\(^{15}\)

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13 Original: “No queremos que se mezclen contradicciones nacionalistas, y toda nuestra posición, en definitiva, no consiste más que en recuperar unas señas de identidad que acreditan que nuestra Comunidad Autónoma se va a constituir en forma de un sano regionalismo que convive pacífica, armónicamente y entusiásticamente con el resto de España.” Intervention by Abril (UCD), in *DdSC* 29 December 1981, p. 2735.


As a pair, the two political communities Spain and Valencia were thus conceptualised together as “nation” and “region”, respectively, in a rather classical way. This points to the fact that the right-wing was behind the agreement to prohibit Valencia access to autonomy via the ‘rapid’ §151 and that it was internalised by their politicians.

By 2006 the focus of the right-wing had changed from defending regionalism as a way of securing a harmonious relationship between the political communities in Spain to defending symmetrizing amendments to the autonomy system. This meant that the definition of Valencia as a “region” was almost dropped in favour of a conception of Valencia as a “nationality” to level it with the Autonomous Communities with the highest level of self-government, notably Catalonia and the Basque Country. Therefore the argument of compensating injustices was used for the first time by right-wing politicians, not to defend preferential treatment due to injustices suffered during Francoism, but to repair the unjust favouritism of particularly the two aforementioned regions. As when the conservative representative of the Valencian regional parliament, Serafín Castellano, defended the reform in Madrid:

“this is what inspires our reform: that there are no first class and second class communities, nor unjust privileges of certain communities over others. One thing is plurality or the differentiating traits and quite another political discrimination.”16

In fact in the 2006-reform, it was the Popular Party (hereafter PP) which used this argument more than any other political party after not having used it at all during the first 24 years of the Statute. In 2006, the conservative party totaled 39 % of the use of that particular argument. By contrast, in the debates on the original Statute it was above all the left-wing parties that used it, the PSOE and the Spanish Communist Party totalling 60 % of its use.17 The left-wing parties thereby showed their dissatisfaction with the fact that Valencia was not allowed to accede to autonomy as a “historical nationality” as Catalonia and the Basque Country.

In contrast to the right-wing, the left-wing parties did not alter their way of conceiving of the Valencian political community between 1982 and 2006: to their politicians Valencia was above all a “nationality” in 1982 and continued to be so in the debates on the reform in 2006 as can be seen in Figure 2 below. Even if the frequency with which the term was employed increased between 1982 and 2006, its predominance

17 In the two reforms of the 1990s it was above all the Valencian nationalist parties that stated the need to compensate injustices; the two nationalist parties totalled 63% of the total use in those two reform processes.
over the two other terms was the same. Both “nation” and “region” remained residual among left-wing politicians both in 1982 and in 2006.

**Figure 2 Characterisations of Valencia by left-wing parties (Valencia)**

![Graph showing characterisations of Valencia by left-wing parties](Source: own elaboration)

In 1982 there was quite a lot of resentment, particularly among the left-wing, about the fact that the Valencian region had not been allowed to apply for autonomy via the ‘rapid’ way. In this context the denomination as “nationality” was seen as a reparation of this injustice, as expressed by the Socialist senator Bevia:

> “it facilitates, in short, the recovery of the collective personality of our people, which an officially sponsored centralist attitude had tried to eliminate.”

This corresponds with the arguments that were used by the left-wing parties in the 1982-debates. Arguments concerned with justice, the Constitution and democracy were the most common and were used by practically every left-wing politician, but in second place came arguments related to the compensation of injustices, which were used by approximately two thirds of the left-wing politicians. The injustices referred to always related to the mismatch between the historical roots of the Valencian region as an independent entity and the fact that it was forced to apply for autonomy through the so-called general regime.

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18 Original: “nos facilita, en suma, la recuperación de la personalidad colectiva de nuestro pueblo, que una fomentada actitud sucursalista había tratado de anular.” Intervention by Bevia Pastor (PSOE), *Diario de Sesiones del Senado* (Hereafter DdSS), 14 June 1982, p. 7949.
In 2006, the focus shifted away from arguments about compensating injustices and even justice, the Constitution and democracy in favour of arguments concerned with history, culture and tradition. These argument were precisely related to the full recognition as “historical nationality”, which was implemented in the 2006-reform as can be seen in the words of the Socialist politician from the Valencian regional Parliament Ciprià Císcar:

“We are faced with a proposal for comprehensive reform [...] that reflects the will to move forward and regain the ground that it was impossible to reach at the beginning of the 1980s, when the vast majority of municipalities of Valencia, Alicante and Castelló expressed the desire and request for full autonomy.”19

The reform thus put an end to the special situation of Valencia with an average Statute supplemented by a special organic law on transfers of competences by fusioning the latter into the Statute. It thereby acquired a character very close to that of the ‘real’ historical nationalities, without changing the fact, of course, that Valencia had not been allowed to apply via §151. But in 2006, the recognition of the status as ‘historical nationality’ played a large role in the arguments used to argue for and against the agreement behind the Statute reform.

The nationalists and regionalist parties of Catalonia and other regions, on the other hand, in the 2006-reform began showing a marked preference for explicitly characterising Valencia as a “nation”, where they in 1982 generally had eluded defining the Autonomous Community. This change was consistent, however, with the increasingly dominant conception among these parties of Spain as a plurinational State.

**Catalonia**

The characterization of Catalonia changed even more dramatically from the debates on its original Statute in 1979 when it was predominantly seen as a “nationality” by all political forces in accordance with the Constitution, and only by a minority as either a “nation” or a “region” (75%, 18% and 7%, respectively). In 2006, it was predominantly considered to be a “nation” particularly by the Catalan nationalists as well as by the national left-wing parties - the PSOE and the IU - and only secondly to be “nationality” (82% and 16%, respectively). The characterisation as “region” had practically disappeared and only accounted for 2%. The only party not subscribing to the change at all was the PP, which instead increasingly, with respect to 1979, accepted to characterize Catalonia as a “nationality”. This is not surprising given the fact that it was the PP,

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19 Original: “Nos encontramos ante una propuesta de reforma amplia(…) que refleja la voluntad de avanzar y recuperar el terreno que no fue posible alcanzar al principio de los años ochenta, después de que la inmensa mayoría de los Ayuntamientos de Valencia, Alacant y Castelló se pronunciaran expresando el deseo y la solicitud de una autonomía plena.” Intervention by Císcar (PSOE), DdSC, 9 February 2006, p. 7456.
which afterwards took the new Catalan Statute to the Constitutional Court among other due to the definition of Catalonia as a nation.

The left-wing parties, as stated above, changed their way of conceiving of the Catalan political community between 1979 and 2006: from being conceived of as fundamentally a “nationality” in 1979, the predominant characterisation in 2006 had become a “nation” as can be seen below in Figure 3:

Figure 3 Characterisations of Catalonia by left-wing parties (Catalonia)

[Source: own elaboration; parties included: PSOE, PSC, PCE, PSUC, IU, ICV, EUiA]

Neither in 1979 nor in 2006 was there any significant difference of conception among the different left-wing parties: They all experienced the same change in the way of conceiving of Catalonia from a “nationality” to a “nation”. The same is true for the arguments that the left-wing parties used to legitimise their conceptions of the political community: in all cases – in both left-wing and centre-left-wing and in both 1979 and 2006 – the most commonly used argument circled around justice and the Constitution and the second most common mentioned history, culture and tradition. Only in the third place did a difference appear between 1979, when the argument about compensating injustices was used particularly by the Socialists, and 2006 when that argument disappeared completely to be substituted by arguments about citizens’ demand.

But if we look at how the left-wing parties characterised the large political community, Spain, a difference appears between the centre-left-wing and the left-wing parties. In 1979 the centre-left-wing practically only characterised Spain in the vague terms of either “a state” or “Spain”, which reveals nothing about the attitude towards the national question, and in the debates on the 2006-reform the relative weight of these
imprecise characterisations only increased as can be seen below in Figure 4. But the principal change regards the appearance of the by then newly endorsed term of “nation of nations”, which became the second-most popular way of characterising Spain among the Socialists. The centre-left-wing conception of the pair of political communities thus changed from conceiving of Catalonia as a “nationality” and Spain mostly in imprecise terms of “Spain” in 1979 to conceiving of Catalonia as a “nation” and Spain as a “nation of nations” to a high degree; that is Catalonia as one the lower level nations of that conceptualization and Spain as the superior level nation.

**Figure 4 Characterisations of Spain by Socialist parties (Catalonia)**

![Bar chart showing characterisations of Spain by Socialist parties in 1979 and 2006.]

[Source: own elaboration; parties included: PSOE and PSC]

In 1979 the left-wing parties to a large extent avoided characterising Spain but when they did, they basically conceived of Spain in the same terms as the centre-left-wing as either a “state” or simply as “Spain”. But in contrast to the centre-left-wing, in 2006 only relatively few used the Socialist concept of “nation of nations” and instead opted predominantly for conceiving Spain as a “state” or a “plurinational state”, as can be seen below in Figure 5. These ways of conceiving of Spain thus differed from those of the Socialists in so far as they relied on seeing Spain as mainly a “state” and contemporaneously conceiving of Catalonia as a “nation”.

![Bar chart showing characterisations of Spain in 1979 and 2006.]

[Source: own elaboration; parties included: PSOE and PSC]
The right-wing parties, on the other hand, did not change their way of conceiving of the Catalan political community between 1979 and 2006: It was conceived of as a “nationality” and a “region” in approximately the same proportion in the two legislative processes as can be seen in Figure 6 below. But in 2006 a new, negative way of characterising Catalonia appeared as a reaction to the conception of Catalonia as a “nation” that was predominant among other parties during the reform process. The negative conception – that was almost only found among politicians of the PP – simply stated that Catalonia “is not a nation” without specifying what they believed it to be. The arguments linked to legitimising the conceptions of Catalonia were not affected though by this new negative way of conceiving of the political community; the most commonly used arguments remained the same between 1979 and 2006; most important were arguments linked to the Constitution and ideas of justice and democracy and secondly arguments linked to history, culture and tradition.

[Source: own elaboration; parties included in 1979: PCE, PSUC and in 2006: EUiA, ICV and IU]
If we check the corresponding conception of Spain of the right-wing, there is a clear correlation with the advent of the negative “Not a nation”-conception of Catalonia in 2006. When Spain was characterised contemporaneously with the “Not a nation”-view of Catalonia, it was nearly always as a “nation”. These characterisations were thus linked directly to the conflict over the conception of Catalonia in the new Statute and corresponded to a significant change in the way the right-wing conceived of Spain in the same legislative procedures. In 1979 during the debates on the original Statute the term “nation” was practically not used by any party, not even the right-wing, as can be seen in Figure 7.
But in 2006, it was used massively by the PP (81% of the total mentions correspond to this party) despite being only the 5th most popular way of characterising Spain. It became the right-wing’s most common way of describing the Spanish political community. This evidences the conflict between the PP and almost all the other parties that in 2006 reserved the category of “nation” to Catalonia (see above) preferring other ways of characterizing Spain. Despite being presented as fundamentally an unaltered way of conceiving the pair of political communities, the conception of them in the right-wing’s discourse actually changed from conceiving of Catalonia in 1979 as a “nationality” or “region” and Spain mostly in imprecise terms of “Spain” or a “state” to conceiving of Catalonia as a “not a nation” and Spain explicitly as a “nation” in 2006.

Is El Estado de las Autonomías the “Patria grande” or is it “not a Patria”?

With regards to how the relationship between the “Patria grande”, Spain, and the “Patria chica”, Catalonia or Valencia in our case – is conceived of, the various kinds of relationships permitted by the Constitution are all confirmed, but we also observe developments towards conceptions that ‘stretch’ the meaning of the Magna Carta or go beyond what is constitutionally admissible. The explicit definition of Spain as a “nation,” as the country is in fact defined in §2 of the Constitution, was dominant only among right-wing politicians in both regions and not at all times, whereas politicians from other parties usually preferred other ways of referring to Spain.

In this respect it is interesting that in 1979 during the debates on the original Catalan Statute the term “nation” was practically not used at all by any party, not even by the right-wing. Even if the most accepted way to define Catalonia at the time was as a “nationality”, as it was in fact the intention of the Constitution, the corresponding term for Spain – a “nation” – was not used, which both seems to indicate a conflict already then and a will to avoid this conflict. For some politicians a lot effort was invested in avoiding the term as did for example the Socialist senator Morán López who changed the wording of what was clearly a citation of the famous §2 of the Constitution so as to avoid using the term “nation” about Spain:

“The text develops the difficult relationship between the diversity of the peoples of Spain and the indissoluble unity of its legal and political expression, which is the Spanish state”

The almost total absence of this definition of Spain is only more striking when compared with its use during the reform process of 2006 where the right-wing party, PP, used the definition as a “nation” massively about Spain, which is an indication of the absence of any intention to avoid conflict. On the contrary, to use

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20 Original: “El texto desarrolla la difícil relación entre la diversidad de los pueblos de España y la unidad indisoluble de su expresión jurídico-política que es el Estado español.” Intervention by senator Morán López (PSOE), DdSS, 12 December 1979, p. 1425.
“nation” about Spain in the context of the 2006 Catalan statute negotiations was a clear sign of conflict, even it was a constitutionally correct characterisation.

Another constitutionally correct characterisation of Spain is to define it as a “state”, but it is also one of the ways of eluding the difficult question of defining the nation; hence the interest in monitoring the development in its use. Its usage increased significantly in both Catalonia and Valencia between 1979/82 and 2006 and it was used by all parties as can be seen in Figures 8 and 9. From a 2nd and 3rd place, respectively, it became the most popular way of defining Spain in 2006 in both regions, which is interesting because it seems related to the problems with defining Spain as more than simply a state.

**Figures 8 & 9 Characterisations of Spain as a “State” by region**

[Source: own elaboration]

The differences between the dominant national parties (the PP and the PSOE) and the rest of the political parties become clearer when we look at the other imprecise characterisations of Spain such as “nation of nations” or simply as “Spain”. The concept of “nation of nations” was inexistent in the transition, but during the Zapatero period it became the preferred definition of the “plural Spain” of the Socialists. In the 2006 reform in Valencia it was thus used exclusively by the PSOE and the Socialists were also the ones who used it most in the 2006 reform of Catalonia, but in the latter case all the other parties actually also used the term or similarly imprecise definitions of plurality within Spain.
The characterisation of Spain simply as “Spain” more or less consistently was the 2\textsuperscript{nd} most popular way of characterising Spain and in the case of the debates on the original Statute in Catalonia it held a 1\textsuperscript{st} place. In both regions its use by the PP and the PSOE increased significantly from the time of the transition to the 2006-reforms, by which time the two parties totalled between 72 and 83\% of the use of this characterisation. By contrast, the rest of the political parties did not increase their use of this way of defining Spain, remaining basically at the same level as in 1979/82 as can be observed in Figures 10 and 11:

**Figures 10 & 11 Characterisations of Spain as "Spain" by region**

![Graph of characterisations](image)

[Source: own elaboration]

The difference is equally clear, although in the reverse way, with the anti-constitutional characterisation of Spain as a “plurinational state”. The term is not imprecise in the same way as the definition of Spain as “Spain” or a “state” in that it clearly defines Spain as a state that is made up of various nations, although the exact number and names of these always remain in the unclear. Furthermore, this definition also clearly expresses that Spain itself is not a nation. This is where the difference between Valencia and Catalonia becomes clearest. In Valencia this term was never really used\textsuperscript{21}, but in Catalonia it was used,

\textsuperscript{21} It was not even used by the Valencian nationalists – Unió Valenciana and Esquerra Nacionalista de Valencia – who in the mid-1990s, when they still existed, defended the idea of Valencia as a nation. In 2006 they had disappeared completely in the parliamentary panorama.
especially in the 2006 reform. From virtually inexistent in 1979, in 2006 the PP and the PSOE continued to avoid using this definition, whereas all the other political parties – both the national left-wing parties, the Catalan nationalist parties and other nationalist and regionalist parties – turned to this definition as can be seen in Figure 12, where the evolution of PP’s and PSOE’s use of the term is flat as opposed to that of all the other parties.

**Figure 12 Use of the term “plurinational State” in 2006 Catalan reform**

![Graph showing use of term “plurinational State”](image)

[Source: own elaboration]

The use of the characterisation even became so popular that it was the 3rd most common way of characterising Spain after “Spain” and “state” as can be seen in this typical example from an MP of the Catalan nationalist party, Convergence and Union (hereafter CiU):

“CiU […] backs a recognition of the plurinational, plurilingual and pluricultural reality of the Spanish state”

This is also one of the places where the differences between the centre-left-wing, the Socialists, and the left-wing become clearest: Even if both backed the Catalan reform since its very formulation, their definitions of Spain were clearly distinct, the IU and other left-wing associate parties clearly favouring a view of Spain as mainly a state and to many even a plurinational state and the Socialists generally avoiding to define Spain of favouring imprecise terms.

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It is also interesting, however, that the Catalan nationalists and the national left-wing parties use “plurinational state” about Spain in context of the Catalan 2006-reform but not in the Valencian contemporaneous reform. This once again evidences the conflict that arose around the definition of Catalonia as a “nation” in the 2006 statute reform, a definition which of course had implications for how Spain could be conceived of. The IU, the Catalan nationalists and the other nationalists and regionalists consequently chose to conceive of Spain as mainly a “plurinational state”, whereas the Socialists, who also defended the conception of Catalonia as a nation – preferred their ‘homegrown’ term of “nation of nations”. The PP resisted this tendency altogether and continued to conceive of Catalonia as a “nationality” and Spain as a “nation” (in contrast with how they had defined the country in 1979).

Conclusions

Unsurprisingly, in this investigation we see the conflict over the Catalan Statute reflected in many ways, both in the conceptions of Spain as well as in the conceptions of Catalan political community and in the relationship between them. The wish among the Catalan political elite that Catalonia be considered a “nation” sparked a conflict that did not go away even if the statute negotiations left only one reference to the wish in the preamble of the law and eliminated all the rest. As a reaction the PP insisted on using the term “nation” about Spain indicating the conflict between the conservative party and all the other political parties.

But just as interesting, the investigation also shows a hidden conflict already in 1979 in the absence of the use of “nation” about Spain, even if that was a constitutionally sanctioned conception. By contrast, in the 1982 debates on the Valencian Statute, the term “nation” was not avoided even if other more imprecise definitions of Spain prevailed. The fact that that the definition of Spain as a “nation” was avoided in 1979 in the Catalan context is interesting, particularly as the corresponding definition of Catalonia as a “nationality” was widely used. It thus seems that the issue of defining Spain too clearly as nation was a sensitive issue even then despite the high level of acceptance of the Autonomy Statute. A general environment guided by avoiding hurting sensibilities seems to have been dominant and it was respected by the right-wing parties in contrast to 2006 when the PP did not show any interest in avoiding the conflict by not using the term “nation” about Spain. This corresponds to the difference between the negotiations in 1979, when the UCD was part of the compromise behind the Statute, and in 2006, when the PP was not part of the political compromise behind the reform. Nevertheless, in 1979 the AP actually maintained a critical stance towards
the Statute and abstained in the final vote in both chambers of Parliament\textsuperscript{23}, but even so its politicians almost did not use “nation” about Spain at all.

Similar cautions and/or problems with defining Spain in terms of identification are likely to be behind the increased use of terms that avoid defining Spain as nation which were very common already in the transition years and have only grown in popularity since then. Far from becoming less complicated since the inauguration of the \textit{Estado de las Autonomías}, the problems with defining Spain in national terms as something other than simply a state thus seems to have increased.

Not only the dominant national parties, however, are cautious; at certain times also even the secessionist parties are more cautious than at other times. The fact that the Catalan nationalists and the national left-wing parties used “plurinational state” about Spain very often in the context of the Catalan 2006-reform but not in the Valencian contemporaneous statute reform seems to imply that such strongly anti-constitutional conceptions are only used explicitly when the circumstances demand it. In the Valencian reform there was nothing to trigger such conflict around defining the political communities and the relationship between them, which meant that the political parties otherwise favouring conceptualisations bordering or trespassing the constitutionally permissible such as the IU or the Catalan and Basque nationalists refrained from using a conflictual term as “plurinational State”.

The dynamics at play here are very complex and this investigation has only focused on a very limited area of the total forces involved. Furthermore, the results presented here are but the first results of much more comprehensive analysis which we are only undertaking as this is being written. Nevertheless, the investigation clearly indicates that the opposed symmetrising and asymmetrising forces in the Estado de las Autonomías were working against each other without reaching the fundamental compromise-solutions that would have been necessary to secure the survival of the system. Since the very beginning, the functioning of the decentralised \textit{Estado de las Autonomías} thus seems to have been guided by the pacts and deals between the principal political parties or their absence rather than by any power or intelligence of the institutional setup itself. Even if it for a long time seemed that the institutional setup had helped solve or at least channel the territorial tensions within the Spanish state, it is highly questionable whether that is really the case. Conflict was lurking below the surface of even the very first Statutes of Autonomy to be passed, and three decades of functioning and deal-making did not make the conflicts go away or even diminish the tensions between the fundamental differences.

\textsuperscript{23} See the intervention by the leader of the AP, Manuel Fraga, in \textit{DdSC}, 29 November 1979, pp. 3184-3185, and the interventions by the senators Bosque and Matutes, in \textit{DdSS}, 12 December 1979, pp. 1428-1431.
References


