



Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on December 18, 2017

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Catalonian Independence & the EU

On October 30, a small band of fugitive politicians arrived in Brussels, Belgium, seeking support from the European Union for their dramatic bid to form a new European state. Carles Puigdemont and several of his political allies were fleeing the Spanish government, which was determined to quash the independence bid of Catalonia. A prosperous region of northeastern Spain, Catalonia's government, led by the fiery Puigdemont, had just declared independence after a centuries-long union with Spain forged by Ferdinand and Isabella.



Pro-independence sentiment has been simmering in Catalonia for decades. Until recently, though, the Catalans have been largely placated by Spain's agreement to grant them a measure of autonomy under the Generalitat, a regional government that has for nearly 40 years discharged most of the functions of an independent state.

But now, the partnership with Spain has frayed. Many Catalans have come to believe, with more than a little justification, that Spain wants to keep control of prosperous Catalonia in the wake of Spain's crippling financial crisis because of a desperate need for tax revenues.

Catalonia's Puigdemont, erstwhile president and independence leader, was on the run from Spanish authorities, who have effectively imposed martial law on Catalonia and sought to arrest all of Catalonia's political leadership. He expected to find a sympathetic audience in Brussels, seat of the European Union. The EU, after all, supposedly represents the values of open, democratic society traditionally espoused by the West. The right to self-determination, vindicated in recent centuries by the likes of the Americans, the Irish, and the former Eastern Bloc nations at the end of the Cold War, is surely among the most fundamental of those values.

But Puigdemont and his compadres have found no sympathetic ears in Brussels — or anywhere else, for that matter. Instead, the Catalan leaders have been subjected to a storm of condemnation, not only from other EU governments, but even from that supposed champion of national self-determination, Washington, D.C. Despite early signals that the Trump administration would respect whatever outcome was decided upon among the Spanish and Catalans, President Trump eventually announced his support for a unified Spain. "I think Spain is a great country, and it should remain united," the president opined in late September — with Spanish president Mariano Rajoy standing beside him on the White House lawn. Through the separatist turmoil that has continued to roil Spain, the Trump administration has continued to back Rajoy.

In Brussels, meanwhile, the Belgian authorities initially offered asylum to Puigdemont and the other fugitive politicians. But on November 2, the Spanish government issued a European Arrest Warrant for Puigdemont and four other Catalan politicians in Belgium. Two days later, the five surrendered to Belgian authorities, and (as of this writing) they are awaiting the outcome of extradition negotiations



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with Spain. By all appearances, Catalonia's long-sought independence has been quashed, not only by the Spanish government, but also by the EU in lock-step with the government of every other major Western country, including our own.

Lost Autonomy

Historically, Catalonia was associated with the kingdom of Aragon, which was united with Spain into one country when Ferdinand II of Aragon was married to Isabella I of Castile in 1474. But despite the passage of more than 500 years, Catalonia has always maintained a separate geographical, cultural, and linguistic identity.

Catalonia includes Spain's second-largest city, Barcelona, as well as a number of other sizable cities, such as Gerona, Tarragona, and Lerida, which are some of Spain's most economically productive areas. It is a picturesque region of rugged coastlines (the so-called Costa Brava) made famous in the art of Salvador Dali, and has produced many of Spain's best-known creative minds, including both Dali and Picasso, the writer Josep Pla, the medieval philosopher and theologian Raymond Lully (or Llull), and cellist Pablo Casals. To the north, Catalonia forms part of Spain's border with France along the Pyrenees Mountains. The language of Catalonia, Catalan, is spoken by as many as nine million speakers, not only across Catalonia but also as the official language of Andorra, a tiny country in the Pyrenees; in south-central France; in the Balearic Islands; in the area of Valencia and Alicante along Spain's southeastern coast; and even in a small part of Sardinia. Once upon a time, Catalonia was one of medieval Europe's power brokers, with the "Catalan Company," a group of mercenaries led by Roger de Flor, wreaking havoc as far away as Greece in the eastern Mediterranean. With the union of Aragon and Castile to form Spain, Catalonia surrendered full autonomy but remained fiercely proud of its rich heritage.

Photo: AP Images

In the early 20th century, when the leftist upheavals that had been convulsing Europe since the French Revolution finally arrived in conservative Catholic Spain, a movement for Catalan independence, allied with radical socialists, united with Spanish leftists to form the Second Spanish Republic. An autonomous Catalan republic, constituted by a movement known as the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (Republican Left of Catalonia, or ERC), was formed within the socialist Second Spanish Republic and supported the programs of the Spanish Left, which included not only the disestablishment of the Catholic Church but also systematic persecution and harassment of Catholics. As such, the leftist Catalan independence movement found itself on the losing side of the Spanish Civil War that ensued with General Francisco Franco and his conservative, anti-leftist forces representing traditional Catholic Spain.

When Franco and his allies won the war, Catalans became marginalized and persecuted. Franco revoked Catalan autonomy and cracked down on the use of the Catalan language, although it continued to be spoken in rural areas.

After Franco's death, a new Spanish constitution, which restored Catalonia's autonomy but denied it the right of outright secession, was promulgated in 1978. Because the new "democratic" government in Spain was also socialist, Catalonia set aside its demands for independence and was content for several decades to govern itself via its own government, the Generalitat. The Catalan language reappeared in



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street signs, newspapers, television, schools, and halls of parliament.

In 2006, the Statute of Autonomy spelling out the conditions for Catalan autonomy within Spain, which had been approved by referendum in 1979 and included in the constitution, was modified and again approved by referendum, as well as the Spanish Parliament. But in 2010, the Spanish Constitutional Court imposed restrictions and modifications on the statute, leading to widespread demonstrations in Catalonia and the resurgence of pro-independence sympathies.

Since 2010, the independence movement has been driven primarily by the old Catalan Left, including the ERC and the Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (Popular Unity Candidacy, or CUP), whose platform calls for "an assembly-based political organization spread throughout the Catalan Countries that works for a country that's independent, socialist, environmentally sustainable and free from the domination of the patriarchy."

Catalans voted in favor of independence on October 1, and the Generalitat formally declared independence from Spain on October 27, despite a massive police crackdown that tried to prevent Catalans from voting. Thousands of Spanish military police (the Guardia Civil) were deployed to Catalonia, which forced the leaders of the independence movement to flee to Belgium.

The modern Catalan independence movement has been from its inception a leftist, pro-socialist movement, most of whose ideology closely mirrors that of the "Eurocrats" at the EU. Yet their leftist ideology has earned Puigdemont and his associates no sympathy with bureaucrats in Brussels. And, we predict, any other European secessionist movement will be met with the same institutional hostility, both in Brussels and abroad, regardless of its ideology.

Another European independence movement whose time may have come is that of the Flemish, the Dutch-speaking people of Flanders, one of Belgium's two dominant regions (the other being French-speaking Wallonia). Originally part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, Belgium won its independence with the help of France in 1830 — whereupon the triumphant French and French-speaking Belgians of Wallonia immediately set about trying to suppress the Dutch language and Flemish culture, which predominated in Flanders, including major Belgian cities such as Antwerp and Ghent.

As with Catalonia in relation to the rest of Spain, Flanders is significantly wealthier than Wallonia. As a result, the Flemish effectively subsidize the French-speaking part of the country via government-sanctioned transfers of wealth. It has been estimated that as much as six percent of the Flemish GDP is transferred to Wallonia.

Many Flemish now favor either outright independence or reunification with the Netherlands, to whom they are ethnically and linguistically akin. A broad panoply of Flemish political parties now supports the bid for independence; unlike the Catalans, the Flemish pro-independence movement represents interests on both the Left and Right (with the latter, as emblemized by the New Flemish Alliance, invariably characterized as the "far right" by a news media reflexively hostile to nationalism). Belgian elections scheduled for 2019 may end up being a referendum on Flemish independence, which is no more likely to find traction with the EU than Catalonia's independence bid has.

And there are other separatist movements simmering across western Europe, which may find encouragement from the Catalan example. One of them is elsewhere in Spain, in the Basque region, whose unique language and rugged, mountainous territory have nurtured a culture and language with



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no apparent ties to any other in Europe, and which has had a history of violent advocacy for independence. Although the Basque separatist movement officially renounced violence a few years ago, the once-feared terrorist organization ETA (or Euskadi ka Askatasuna, Basque for “Basque Homeland and Freedom”) kept the Spanish government on its heels for decades with frequent attacks against the Spanish military and police. Should the Basque independence movement reignite, the Basques are unlikely to be as committed to nonviolence as the Catalans.

Then there’s Italy, cobbled together out of dozens of fractious republics and other independent Italian-speaking states during the 19th century, in a half-century project known as the Risorgimento. Inspired by the French Revolution and largely carried out by the Carbonari, a secret society of radicals dedicated to the socialist and secularist goals of the French revolutionaries, Risorgimento succeeded in uniting almost all of Italy by 1871 into the Kingdom of Italy, with Rome its capital.

But in modern Italy also, economic injustices have prompted several more prosperous regions to seek independence, most prominently Venice and Lombardy. Venice, the site of medieval Europe’s most powerful and prosperous republic, joined Italy in 1866. In 2014, in a nonbinding referendum, nearly 90 percent of Venetians voted for independence. As in Spain, Italy’s highest court has ruled all such independence bids unconstitutional.

International Socialism Predominates

The modern movement to unify Europe, which has culminated in the European Union with its various subsidiary organizations such as the European Parliament and the European Central Bank, had its genesis in the leftist revolutionary movement birthed in France in the late 1700s and continued in Italy and across Western Europe in the 1800s. The aforementioned Carbonari, the driving force during the Risorgimento, had motives of their own to press for Italian unification: It was a necessary starting point for the larger, longer-term leftist Utopian project of European unification. Far from being a modern, post-World War II movement, European unification was a key goal of the European radical revolutionary underground from the French Revolution onward. In 1848, Europe’s famous “year of revolutions,” Marxist-inspired revolutions seeking an overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of socialism across Europe convulsed France, the Italian states, the German states, Hungary, Austria, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and others. While many of these revolutions masqueraded as nationalist uprisings, their aims were identical — because they all originated with the same international communist underground movement, Marx’s “specter” that haunted the entire European continent and sought a socialist new world order.

Socialism eventually overcame every European country, whether in the guise of Marxism-Leninism in the “Eastern Bloc”; national socialism in Germany; revolutionary socialism in France and, later, Spain; or more moderate strains of socialism known variously as labor parties, social democrats, and the like. Although not all of these strains of socialism have led — so far — to death camps and bloody purges, it must be remembered that all were once widely and properly recognized for the subversive and radical secular movements that they were. European socialists of nearly every stripe have been and remain militantly secular, and have sought to diminish the influence of religion throughout the formerly staunch Christian nations of Europe. As a consequence, modern European socialism has created a homogeneous post-Christian culture and morality, and this secular cultural unity is mirrored by the political unity the European Union has imposed on the continent.



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The longer-range goal of international socialism is the creation of a single global post-Christian secular culture, enforced by a global socialist order. Thus political unification and not self-determination is the most important structural objective of all who seek this goal. The European Union is not the only regional government bloc — the African Union, NAFTA, and the Andean Community are other examples — but it is by far the most successful, from the point of view of its boosters. The organization that began life as a simple trade bloc, the Common Market, has been almost completely transformed into a continent-wide government that has managed to wrest most of the sovereignty from its formerly independent member states. The Spanish government had only to issue an international arrest warrant under EU authority to set in motion the machinery of the European superstate to bring to heel the recalcitrant Catalan leadership.

Internationalists everywhere are well aware of the danger to the nascent international order posed by separatist movements. They are well aware that, should one such movement — even a leftist movement such as the Catalan separatist one — succeed in fully breaking away from a large, important country such as Spain, other separatist movements would become emboldened. If a precedent of respecting the right of self-determination were ever set by a transnational organization such as the EU, a breakup of the organization might follow swiftly, as separatist regions and unwilling nation-states alike would renounce their entanglements in that organization. Should the EU recognize the independence of Catalonia, they would soon be confronted with Basque, Venetian, Flemish, and various other separatist demands. If such came to fruition, it would surely occur to states such as Denmark and the Netherlands — which have robust euroskeptic movements — that the principle of self-determination implied an obligation to secede from the European Union. Given the already fragile state of the EU, after years of economic turmoil, such a scenario might trigger its dissolution.

That scenario is anathema to globalists everywhere, and not only in the EU. After all, the European Union is living proof that regional governments can be assembled using trade as a pretext. Any disintegration of Europe would set the drive toward global government back generations.

For this reason, Catalans and other would-be separatists, be they left-wing, right-wing, or anything else, will be quashed by the EU. Although Catalonia's leftist separatists are resolutely socialist, and are primarily interested in being their own oppressors, they will never find any support from their fellow socialists in the EU, because the latter wish to maintain the unity of Europe above all else. Only in that way can they maintain the foundation for world order entailed by regional governments such as the EU.

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