

Sacred Power of Fading Borders: a Peaceful Coexistence of Europeanism and Secessionism

Fedor Popov, PhD

Lomonosov Moscow State University

Faculty of Geography

Department of Socio-Economic Geography of Foreign Countries

This paper is concerned with the paradoxical duality of modern state borders in Western Europe. Although constantly losing their actual power due to the growing Europeanization they still hold positions in the field of national identity evolving into essential symbols of sovereignty. This is reflected in high secessionist activity throughout European countries. It is notable that the most of independentist movements aim to incorporate would-be states into the EU. In fact they fight for drawing new borders in order to immediately leave them to fade. It shows the real coexistence of two opposing trends in the transformation of political space of Western Europe. These trends do not cause a contradiction because of belonging to different fields. Processes of European integration reflect the actual needs of region's population. It is a category of *realpolitik*. On the contrary, state border has become a category of belief. It doesn't matter now what does the border really divide, the point is if the border officially exists. So we can imagine a continuous political and economic space of Western Europe but shouldn't expect it to be represented at a single-colour political map.

* * *

It has become traditional to consider the West as a principally distinct part of the world. Everybody knows classic East-West dichotomy as well as more modern idiom of "the West and the Rest", everybody heard the about the concepts of "Westernization", "Western world" or "Western civilization". More specifically we talk about "Western cuisine", "Western medicine" and "Western nationalism". Secessionism doesn't make an exception here: the image of "Western secessionism" has already become an element of a common political worldview now.

Secessionism is a political movement aimed at *de jure* secession of some territory that can result both in the establishment of a new sovereign state (independentism) and in the incorporation of breakaway region into any other state (irredentism). Secessionist movements may be presented by NGOs, political parties, local authorities, militant groups etc. There are different approaches to distinguish secessionism as a political movement from secessionism as a speculative project or a pure idea expressed by some individuals or groups. Secessionists generally act as the voice of some group of different (usually mixed) nature – among the factors that contribute to the formation of secessionist group identity there may be linguistic, tribal,

religious unity, administrative status or isolation of the territory it associates with, certain economic and historical factors etc.

The image of Western secessionist movements has some prominent distinct features.

- Western secessionists generally act within the legal framework and tend to get into a constructive dialogue with the government. Typical western secessionist movement is formed by political party that takes part in local or regional elections and tries to achieve success by observing the “rules of game” established by the central government. Another type is a rather powerful NGO that strives to attract attention from influential international or supranational organizations as well as from global community in whole. They are also aimed to maintain a constant dialogue with the government bodies.
- Western secessionists usually focus extensively on developing their ideology and give much attention to its publicity. Even the weakest movement provides elaborated arguments to prove its claims on sovereignty. Ideology is based mainly on concepts of civic nation but at the same time secessionists actively use traditional arguments of “ethnic” kind even if it looks almost grotesque (such as search for Gallic origins among the inhabitants of Northern Italy).
- On the whole Western secessionists have fair chances of success. Although in recent times new sovereign states emerge outside the West, the cases of Scotland in 2014, Nevis in 1998 or Quebec in 1995 show how close independentists may come to de jure secession. The examples of the Faroe Islands, Greenland and even of New Caledonia prove us that future of Western secessionism may also be quite optimistic.

Despite some uncertainties about the exact spatial limits of the West everybody agrees that its core is made of Northern America and Western Europe; sometimes it also covers Latin America with the Caribbean Islands and numerous overseas territories of European states. From this point onward we will discuss only the movements in Western Europe that in general differ nothing from the ones in Northern America.

Western Europe is the only part of world political space that is heavily influenced by the processes of growing integration – so-called Europeanization. If the expansion of European Union has slowed down or even stopped, the processes of consolidation of its constituencies are intensifying. The institutions that provide integration keep strengthening. Without getting into details we just conclude that today the EU stands half-way between simple economic union and de facto superstate. The number of cross-border projects realized throughout the EU once again proves this thesis. It is fair to assume that in future we will witness the transformation of the EU into the United States of Europe, a concept popularized by such different thinkers as Giuseppe Mazzini, Victor Hugo, Mikhail Bakunin, Leon Trotsky, Winston Churchill and others.

It seems obvious that today secessionist movements form a significant political background of Western Europe. Everybody knows Euskadi Ta Askatasuna in Spain, Irish Republican Army and Scottish National Party in the United Kingdom, Lega Nord in Italy and many other influential European political actors with predominantly secessionist aims. According to the research there're about 38 secessionist movements being active in any period from 2001 till 2012 year at the territory of the EU members (49 if you count overseas territories) (Table 1).

Table 1. Secessionist movements active at the EU member states at the 21st century

| No | Territory / Would-be State | State | Actor (non-militant) | Actor (militant) |
|----|----------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| 1 | Northern Ireland (Ulster) | United Kingdom | Sinn Féin*, Social Democratic and Labour Party, The Workers Party of Ireland, Republican Sinn Féin, 32 County Sovereignty Movement, Irish Republican Socialist Party, | Provisional Irish Republican Army, Official Irish Republican Army, Continuity Irish Republican Army, Real Irish Republican Army, Irish National Liberation Army |
| 2 | Northern Ireland (Ulster) | United Kingdom | Ulster Third Way | |
| 3 | Scotland | United Kingdom | Scottish National Party, Scottish Green Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity, Scottish Independence Party | |
| 4 | Wales | United Kingdom | Plaid Cymru, Cymru Annibynnol | |
| 5 | Isle of Man | United Kingdom | Mec Vannin | |
| 6 | Jersey | United Kingdom | local politicians | |
| 7 | Guernsey | United Kingdom | local politicians | |
| 8 | Gibraltar | United Kingdom | Progressive Democratic Party, Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party, Liberal Party of Gibraltar | |
| 9 | England | United Kingdom | Free England Party | |
| 10 | Brittany | France | Adsav, Emgann | Armee Revolutionnaire Bretonne |
| 11 | Corsica | France | Corsica Libera | Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale di a Corsica, Armata Corsa, Fronte Patriotu Corsu |
| 12 | Savoy | France | Ligue savoisienne | |
| 13 | Nice | France | Ligue pour la Restauration des Libertés Niçoises | |
| 14 | Alsace-Lorraine | France | Nationalforum Elsaß-Lothringen | |

| | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 15 | Occitania | France, Italy, Spain, Monaco | Parti de la Nation Occitane | |
| 16 | Euskadi | Spain, France | Batasuna, Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea, Eusko Alkartasuna, Aralar, Abertzaleen Batasuna | Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, Irrintzi |
| 17 | Catalonia | Spain, France, Andorra, Italy | Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, Esquerra Republicana del País Valencià, Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència, Estat Català, Candidatura d'Unitat Popular | |
| 18 | Valencia | Spain | Esquerra Nacionalista Valenciana, Estat Valencià | |
| 19 | Galicia | Spain | Frente Popular Galega, Nós- Unidade Popular | |
| 20 | Andalusia | Spain | Nación Andaluza | |
| 21 | Aragon | Spain | Estado Aragonés, Bloque Independentista de Cuchas | |
| 22 | Castilia | Spain | Izquierda Castellana | |
| 23 | Sardinia | Italy | Partito Sardo d'Azione, Indipendèntzia Repùbrica de Sardigna, Progetu Repùblica de Sardigna, Sardigna Natzione, A Manca pro s'Indipendèntzia | |
| 24 | Sicily | Italy | Movimento per l'Indipendenza della Sicilia, Fronte Nazionale Siciliano – Sicilia Indipendente | |
| 25 | Padania | Italy | Lega Nord | |
| 26 | Lombardy | Italy | Fronte Lombardia | |
| 27 | Veneto | Italy | Movimento Veneti, Veneto Serenissimo Governo, Partito Nazionale Veneto, Partito dei Veneti, Veneto Stato | |
| 28 | Liguria | Italy | Movimento Indipendentista Ligure | |
| 29 | Free Territory of Trieste | Italy, Slovenia, Croatia | Fronte Giuliano | |
| 30 | South Tyrol | Italy | Die Freiheitlichen, BürgerUnion, Süd-Tiroler Freiheit, Südtiroler Schützenbund | |
| 31 | Bavaria | Germany | Bayernpartei | |
| 32 | Flanders | Belgium | Vlaams Belang, Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie | |
| 33 | Wallonia | Belgium | Rassemblement Wallonie-France / Rassemblement Bruxelles-France | |
| 34 | Faroe Islands | Denmark | Fólkaflokkurin, Tjóðveldi, Sjálvstýrisflokkurin, Miðflokkurin | |
| 35 | Greenland | Denmark | Inuit Ataqatigiit, Siumut | |
| 36 | Skane | Sweden | Skånepartiet | |
| 37 | Aland Islands | Finland | Ålands Framtid | |

| | | | | |
|----|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--|--|
| 38 | Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus | Cyprus | National Unity Party | |
| 39 | <i>Bermuda**</i> | <i>United Kingdom</i> | <i>Progressive Labour Party</i> | |
| 40 | <i>Turks and Caicos Islands</i> | <i>United Kingdom</i> | <i>Progressive National Party</i> | |
| 41 | <i>Montserrat</i> | <i>United Kingdom</i> | <i>Free Montserrat United Movement</i> | |
| 42 | <i>Guadeloupe</i> | <i>France</i> | <i>Union Populaire pour la Libération de la Guadeloupe, Alyans Nasyonal Gwadeloup, Parti Communiste Guadeloupéen</i> | |
| 43 | <i>Martinique</i> | <i>France</i> | <i><u>Mouvement de l'Indépendance de la Martinique</u>, Conseil National des Comités Populaires, Parti pour la libération de la Martinique, Mouvement des démocrates et écologistes pour une Martinique souveraine</i> | |
| 44 | <i>French Guiana</i> | <i>France</i> | <i><u>Mouvement de Decolonisation et d'Emancipation Sociale</u>, Parti National Populaire Guyanais</i> | |
| 45 | <i>Sint Maarten</i> | <i>the Netherlands</i> | <i>local groups</i> | |
| 46 | <i>Canary Islands</i> | <i>Spain</i> | <i>Congreso Nacional Canario, Alternativa Nacionalista Canaria, Unidad del Pueblo</i> | |
| 47 | <i>Madeira</i> | <i>Portugal</i> | <i>local politicians</i> | |
| 48 | <i>New Caledonia</i> | <i>France</i> | <i><u>Front de Libération Nationale Kanak et Socialiste</u>, Parti travailliste, Libération Kanak Socialiste, Federation des Comité de Coordination des Indépendantistes</i> | |
| 49 | <i>French Polynesia</i> | <i>France</i> | <i>Tavini Huiraatira</i> | |

* Main actors in some cases are underlined.

** The movements being active at the overseas territories are shown in *italics*.

To be sure the number of movements on its own doesn't mean their influence. About half of them pursue secessionist aims just statistically and are absolutely powerless (i.e. Ulster Third Way, Parti de la Nation Occitane, Nación Andaluza, Fronte Giuliano, Skånepartiet, Free Montserrat United Movement etc.). Nevertheless some of the movements appear among main political actors in their regions. The most striking example refers to a Scottish independence referendum in 2014 when 44,7% voted in favour of secession. Besides that independentists

have been politically dominated for a long time in Greenland and on the Faroe Islands. Similar situation is in Flanders.

It seems to be a paradox that these movements act in the face of growing European integration. Such processes should contradict but they actually don't. The most obvious explanation is to suppose that these secessionists unambiguously reject Europeanization and struggle for preservation of system of "good old-fashioned" state borders. It should be logical for them to put an aim of cutting ties with the EU into their programs and manifestos. The point is the situation is exactly the opposite. Most independentist parties in the region (from Scottish National Party to Bavaria Party) set accession to the Union as one of their primary goals. Moreover – some movements outside the EU also strongly support joining the union. So the win of secessionists in Montenegrin independence referendum in 2006 was achieved in the name of European Montenegro. In nearby Kosovo the independentists not less energetically aspire to the Eurointegration. In other words all the secessionist movements inside and around Western Europe accept the general decaying of national borders but at the same time eagerly fight for such borders nominal appearance. What is that sacral power of fading borders?

It shouldn't be forgot, of course, that the abovementioned national border weakening sometimes has been dramatized. The EU member states remain to be sovereign, retain international personality and the membership in United Nations. But it is my belief that the main disintegration impulse goes from inside the mind of secessionists and their supporters. The symbolic line on a map becomes much more valuable then the real situation at the edges of national territories. People genuinely believe in power of the map, in the power of words like "nation state", "national sovereignty", "sovereign territory", in the titles and names. It forms their complex identity serving as a basis for self-definition.

The rise of national feelings also creates a great opportunity for political actors to gather their political capital: the easiest way of expanding the electoral base is to play a national identity card. After all the formal success of independentists doesn't always mean soon secession as the case of French Polynesia clearly demonstrates. The growing secessionism modifies the "political reality" but not necessarily in the form of political space fragmentation.

To conclude: the image of national borders shouldn't be relevant to the actual functions they perform. They belong to principally different fields. It may seem illogical but it is so. That's the point.