

TOMÉ, LUIS (2015). "Foreword" in BASSETTI, Caterina. *Venti di indipendenza in Europa: La Catalogna, la Scozia e l'Europa delle Nazioni*. Roma: Aracne editrice.

## **FOREWORD**

**by Luis Tomé**

This book is truly important and interesting for several reasons: for the relevance and timeliness of the issues surrounding Europe's peripheral nationalisms in the context of the contemporary democratic State and the European integration process; for encouraging reflection about Europe's "Multilevel Governance"; and for the mastery and depth with which the author, Caterina Bassetti, analyses the cases of Scotland and Catalonia within this broad framework.

The sovereign State is a political creation whose origins stem from the fragmentation of medieval Christianity and the unification of certain territories into larger entities. It then came a long way, expanding and consolidating its position as the main reference among political entities, regardless of the controversies about its purposes, its intrinsic organization of power or the "principle of nationalities" and "self-determination". In this process, the State crossed with different "nations", "nationalities" and "nationalisms", with very diverse interactions: in some cases, the nation gave rise to the State, in others, the State preceded the national identity; in certain situations, the States fought and recreated themselves in an attempt to keep various nations within them, on other occasions the States acted as a political element aggregating different nations; sometimes "nationalism" was invoked on behalf of the State, while in other cases "nationalism" was brandished against the State. These multiple interactions led to the emergence of nation-States and multinational States, and also of nations extending across several States and "stateless" nations and nationalities. The equation State-Nation-Nationalism remains sensitive in Europe, and it is this precious contextualization that Caterina Bassetti does as a means to help us understand the transformation of peripheral nationalisms in the EU and the new form of regionalism in European integration.

Over the past century, the number of sovereign States has not stopped growing, and there are currently almost two hundred - curiously, they are recognized States represented at the UN, an organization whose name refers to the United "Nations" and not to "States"! For decades, the international community was a real "state production machine", largely resulting, at first, from the dismantling of the continental European empires, later from the decolonization process and, more recently, from the implosion of some States. Paradoxically, it is when it has reached its quantitative peak that the role of the sovereign State as a political, legal and representative body is questioned again, due to the impacts befalling it, which have a real dual pressure

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effect: on the one hand, there is the acceleration of "globalization" and the processes of "regional integration"; on the other stand the forces leading to the "fragmentation" of the national State. These forces arising from this double clash exert pressure on the sovereign State from "above", "below" and "within".

More than ever, the sovereign State coexists with many other domestic, transnational and international actors competing for allegiances and also contesting its regulatory capacity even within its borders, ranging from the tribes, clans and cultural nations to international organizations or NGOs, and including companies and multinational conglomerates, organized crime or terrorist groups. On the other hand, in addition to not being the only actor or decision maker, the State is finding it increasingly difficult to control and regulate various factors that affect it, involve it and limit it both internally and externally, namely flows of people, products, ideas, public opinions, individual and regional aspirations, new legislation or abstract "market" forces. Consequently, in many areas related to its traditional remit, such as security, justice and collective wellbeing, the State seems small and inadequate in face of the range of challenges, looking for answers and solutions at a wider, regional or global scale. At the same time, confronted with certain realities and local aspirations, the State seems too big and insufficient, responding with transfer of its powers to subordinate levels.

Accordingly, the national State, particularly in Europe, has become a kind of intermediate authority between local and European levels. The paradox is that, despite the number of States, which has never been so high, and the strong constraints and shortcomings the sovereign State is facing, there are still many people, "nationalities" and "nations" left which dream of becoming a sovereign State - even within the European Union, as Scotland and Catalonia, the central topics of this book.

Faced with various pressures, some States falter, only subsisting formally in a way today called "fragile", "failed" or "collapsed", leading the international community and the UN in particular to act as a true "hospital for dying States". In other situations, States and the international community are faced with radical nationalisms that degenerate into violence, conflict or terrorism. Fortunately, there are cases where the debate on the State and the nation, sovereign prerogatives and the accommodation of some "nationalisms" takes place within a democratic framework. As a rule, this is what happens today in the EU.

The EU is neither a State nor a nation, although it has State characteristics and despite the much effort made to create a "European identity". And it is not a sovereign entity either:

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although it has legal personality, its own international representation and "exclusive" competence over certain matters, sovereignty lies in its member States - albeit in a "shared" and/or "divisible" way. The result of its *sui generis* evolution, combining supranationalism and intergovernmentalism, and including characteristics of a federal state, confederation and international/regional organization, the EU is what a former President of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, dubbed "Unidentified Political Object".

In this original creation, the Union consists not only of States but also of nations, regions and citizens. Therefore, in the name of principles such as "subsidiarity" and "proximity", the EU envisages representation and participation frameworks and mechanisms of both citizens and regions in the European institutional and decision-making context that act directly, i.e. surpassing the state/national level. The "Committee of the Regions" (CoR), established over two decades ago as the voice of regions and municipalities in the EU, currently with 353 representatives elected at local and regional level in 28 EU countries, is an example of this. In April 2014, the CoR adopted the "Charter for Multilevel Governance in Europe", a guideline that was first adopted in the EU Cohesion Policy for 2014-2020. In theory, the so-called four levels of government - EU, national, regional and local - work together closely to ensure good European governance. In practice, they do not prevent criticism of "democratic deficit" in the EU and raise additional "governance" dilemmas both within Member States and the EU as a whole.

The truth is that in recent years, European nationalisms and peripheral regionalisms have become increasingly more dynamic due to the combination of three key factors: i) institutional reforms within some European States, strengthening the powers and autonomy of a few parts of their territories, often coinciding with regional "identities" or even pre-existing "nationalisms"- as happened in the UK regarding Scotland or in Spain with Catalonia; ii) the deepening of European integration, leading to the continued erosion of traditional State sovereignty in favour of European institutions, encouraging, at the same time, the transfer of powers from the states to sub-state levels, such as regions – leading to the so-called Multilevel Governance; and iii) the economic and financial crisis that hit the EU and its member States, generating new arguments put forward by those who are calling for more autonomy or even full independence of certain autonomous territorial entities from the States they are part of - as did the Scottish and Catalan nationalists.

The year of 2014 was the apogee of this trend, with the referendum in Scotland in September, and the "popular consultation" in Catalonia in November. Apparently, we were in the presence

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of two similar acts that democratically questioned their constituencies about a possible change in the political status of the communities they are part of. However, in legal-constitutional and political terms, the two cases are quite different: while in Scotland the referendum was held within the UK legal framework, after having been agreed with London, in Catalonia there was only a "popular consultation" without any legal validity and with Madrid's opposition; while the Scots said "no" to independence, the Catalans responded "yes"; and whereas Scotland's "nationalism" seems to have come out strengthened in the process, Catalonia's "nationalism" appears to have been worn as a result of that consultation. Interestingly, all the opinion polls made in Scotland and Catalonia show the intention of both Scots and Catalans to remain in the EU. The point is that, whether they want to belong to the EU or not, the new sovereign States emerging from EU member states will always present the EU with new dilemmas.

This means that Europe's peripheral "nationalisms" need to be analysed and understood in conjunction with the evolution of States and also the EU. This is precisely another of the merits of this book: in addition to explaining the origins and the historical-political-cultural evolution of Scottish and Catalan nationalism, Caterina Bassetti addresses and compares the two cases both in the light of their development in the UK and Spain and in terms of regional policy and EU governance, thus helping us to better understand the secessionist projects and processes of Scotland and Catalonia, as well as their differences and affinities. Due to the research that underlies it and the awareness of a dimension of European integration that is rarely perceived and discussed, this work is a valuable contribution to our knowledge and reflection on the "winds of independence" in Europe. For this reason too, Caterina Bassetti's book deserves our attention and recognition.

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