

Basque nationhood and sovereignty:

Abstracts

The violent conflict: Actors, history, models and discourses of conflict resolution on the road to sovereignty

Francisco Letamendia (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

This paper first describes the changes brought about by the creation of ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasun*) in the 1950s, i.e. the incorporation of anti-imperialist and Marxist ideologies, the polarization of identity (friend-enemy), the creation of the Patriotic Left (*Izquierda Abertzale*) as a civil society, and the emergence of a triple field of political violence (that of ETA, that of the state through penal law, and that of the 'dirty war' of the Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups, GAL). Changes in governance practices determined the successive strategies of ETA; the revolutionary war and the action-repression-action spiral during the Franco regime, and the strategy of 'resisting is winning' in the first transition period. Global trends started to impact the conflict more strongly in the 1990s. The peace process in Northern Ireland inspired new ideas of an inclusive Basque sovereignty linked to the resolution of conflict. Together with the terror produced by fundamentalist attacks such as 9/11, the Patriotic Left opted for a dual path of exclusively peaceful methods and internationalization of conflict resolution, as expressed in the Aiete Declaration of October 2011, followed by ETA's declaration of its abandonment of violence. However, the peace process is now blocked by the Spanish state which ignores the Aiete Declaration, denies the existence of conflict, and maintains its emergency legislation. In response, the Basque government and parliament have opened up an alternative or complementary path of micro-agreements within the Basque country. In parallel, widely diffused lip dubs on issues relating to social conflicts (*kukutza*) and Basque prisoners (*herrira*) are inspired by a colorful and participatory theatricality which shows how the new inclusive and optimistic horizon of sovereignty is lived and practiced, and not only theorized. This paper analyzes new expressions adopted in collective action and inscribed in the pro-sovereignty process linked to conflict resolution, and explores their potential for redirecting the peace process.

Legacies of the past and Basque identity after the transition towards democracy

Henar Criado (Complutense University, Madrid)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the influence of political identities crystalized in the 1930s on the conflict of sovereignty in the Basque Country. The main argument is that the political identities formed during the democratic period of the Second Republic survived, to a certain extent, through the four decades of the Francoist dictatorship into the new democratic period beginning in the 1970s. This paper analyzes, firstly, whether these identities have survived, and secondly, which factors – such as immigration and economic modernization – explain the variation in the survival of these identities across different communities. This addresses two relevant lines of research in the social sciences: the analysis of origins of ethnic identity and the analysis of transmission of beliefs and preferences across generations. The methodology includes both a quantitative and a qualitative approach. The quantitative part analyzes variation across villages in the Basque Country of votes for nationalist and non-nationalist parties, used as a proxy for mobilized identities, and investigates correlations between identities in the 1930s, the 1970s, and today. To avoid endogeneity problems, the quantitative model will control for relevant variables both in the 1930s and 1970s. The qualitative part will focus on an in-depth analysis of specific cases (villages), addressing the mechanisms of identity transmission and identity relations uncovered in the quantitative analysis.

Changing perceptions of sovereignty: Constructing the national self in the Basque Country from violence to peace (1959-2011)

Daniele Conversi (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

This paper tracks the development of grassroots concepts of Basque national sovereignty since the foundation in 1959 of ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasun*), through the democratic transition (1975-1980) and up to the current peace process (starting in 2011). Notions of sovereignty have been articulated in the context of a process of falling state legitimacy and mounting popular mobilizations. The paper argues that changing practices of governance were reflected in shifting perceptions and discourses of sovereignty, from the transition to the peace process, culminating in the 2011 international conference of Aiete (San Sebastian/Donostia), which consecrated the end of ETA's violence. These changes included the way sovereignty and territoriality were imagined and debated through evolving visions of political legitimacy and political representation. The main argument of this paper is that notions of 'culture' as defined by the mobilized actors and protagonists articulate discourses on national sovereignty. In short, the paper argues that understanding the role of culture, including cultural loss and revival, is an important, and often lost, dimension needed to explain the dynamics of ethnic conflict de-escalation, political settlement, the establishment of peace and long term stability. Cultural variables therefore count amongst the main determinants in violent – or non-violent – strategy choices in sovereignty disputes.

Multinational state-building in contemporary Spain from transition to recentralization and new imagined sovereignties: Chronicle of a death foretold?

Rafael Grasa (International Catalan Institute of Peace)

Abstract

Focusing on the different but parallel evolution of the cases of the Basque Country (*Euskadi*) and Catalonia (*Catalunya*), this paper examines how, from the transition up to the present, the creation of the politico-institutional network of a democratic, multi-national Spanish state has evolved in parallel with perceptions of the sovereignty of the two principal nationalities with secular perceptions of identity and imagined sovereignty. Why did the system of autonomous regions, created during the transition to accommodate specifically the autonomy of the national identities of turn into a source of complete discomfort for these two nationalities by the 2010s? A discomfort, furthermore, that has resulted in two clear proposals to reconsider the relationship with Spain in order to be independent nations, albeit with distinctive rhythms, proposals and procedures in the Basque and Catalan case. To explain this paradox, the point of departure will be the multi-national state-building in Spain and its evolution from 1975 until the present, analyzed through political science and social science approaches. The paper investigates similarities and differences in the current re-conceptualization of the 'idea of Spain', comparing the Basque case – the central one given that its demand for sovereignty is more institutionalized – and the Catalan case, the pace of which has recently strongly accelerated. The paper describes and analyzes the driving forces behind the evolution of the autonomy framework that occurred in the 1980s and 1990s, through a methodology that combines public opinion, political, economic, and social movement analysis, as well as investigation of identity construction. It further traces socio-political and economical changes occurring after the turn of the millennium, particularly from 2008 onwards. In conclusion, it argues that one can speak of 'a chronicle of a death foretold' because of the combined impact of the crisis of the model of autonomous regions and a re-centralizing force, unleashed by an acceleration of imaginings of full sovereignty in the peripheries.

The concept of Basque sovereignty as coined in the socio-cultural and political context of the Basque exile (1936-1975)

Xabier Irujo (Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada, Reno)

Abstract

After the Republican army was defeated in April 1939 in Catalonia, the Spanish Civil War was over. Due to the significant support of the German regime to the Francoist forces, this war is also known as 'the war that Hitler won'. A massive Basque exile started. It is estimated that there were nearly 150,000 Basque refugees in Europe in 1938, of which 32,000 were children under the age of 17. We have to add to this group the thousands of Basques confined in Spanish prisons – hundreds of them sentenced to death – and in French concentration camps. Their situation was desperate. The collapse of the Spanish Republic left this population unprotected and vulnerable. Moreover, in virtue of the Law of Political Responsibilities, the Francoist government withdrew their citizen rights and legal documents and therefore, the exiles could not possibly make their way to the Americas. The only hope of the refugees was the Basque government acting as an independent institution, negotiating new legal documents, employment permits and entrance visas to countries in South America. It was in the Basque centers in the Americas and in the refugee camps and hospitals in Europe that the demand for an independent Basque government was ignited. This happened in light of the dire circumstances of the refugee population and not by virtue of a theoretical program. Indeed, the Basque Government did not have a theoretical political program on independence. It is important to stress that the Basque discourse on sovereignty was constructed and contested *in practice*, that is, it was a discourse generated in light of the daily experiences and concerns of thousands of Basque exiles, refugees, and prisoners. The demand for sovereignty and independence was not originally generated nor was it later developed from an abstract and theoretical approach. This paper discusses the active role in the Basque nation-building project that has been played by associations and cultural societies in Basque centers all over the Americas.

The contested transnational mirror of the Basque Country: Playing homeland politics with the diaspora

Pedro J. Oiarzabal and Pedro Arrupe (Human Rights Institute, University of Deusto)

Abstract

This paper presents the results of an interdisciplinary study of the relationship between non-state homelands and their diasporas, and the two-way engagement in their respective affairs through an in-depth exploration and analysis of the complex relationship between the Basque diaspora — with an institutional presence, centennial in some cases, in over twenty countries — and its homeland, *Euskal Herria* (the Basque Country). Though the homeland is currently divided into three political administrations under France and Spain, the government of the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC) has assumed much (if not all) the institutional representation with the diaspora since the return to democracy in Spain in 1978. The BAC government (hereafter Basque government) has undeniably been the main homeland institutional reference for the Basque diaspora for the last decades, just as it was during the period of the Basque government-in-exile (1937-1978). Based on in-depth interviews with Basque policy makers and diaspora leaders, surveys exploring the institutional relationship between the Basque government and the Basque diaspora worldwide since the 1980s, and participant observation in diaspora community events and activities, this study analyzes the complex relationships between the Basque diaspora and its non-state homeland. The study illustrates the complexity and multi-directionality of diaspora-homeland relationships, the irregular impact of the diaspora on homeland affairs and uneven commitment of homelands to the diaspora. In sum, it sheds light on the role that diaspora communities play in the daily reconstruction and renegotiation of ideas of nationhood and homeland, embedded in local as well as transnational practices, by exploring the ways that diaspora communities and their institutions live, experience, imagine and deal with the highly contested meanings of identity, nationhood and homeland.

From the margins to the center: Emergence of the territory of the Basque Country in France

Igor Ahedo Gurrutxaga (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

In order to be viable, any state- or nation-building process needs citizens to have a self-recognition dynamic that makes them feel as an 'imagined community' (i.e. a sense of commonality). That is, all sovereignty, or every expectation of sovereignty being recognized, is apprehended on the basis of practice and experience. That being said, one of the features that form the backbone of any national community is the territory. This paper examines the practices and mechanisms that evolved out of the French 19th century state-building process and led to the 'disappearance' of the Basque territory in France as a distinct reality in the eyes of its inhabitants, and later to its re-emergence well into the 20th century – which also explains the Basque identity crisis in *Iparralde* (the French Basque country) today. The Basque nationalism that re-emerged in *Iparralde* in the 1970s is currently occupying center stage in local political life. Once again, the explanation lies in the practical consequences – in the experiences that bring the citizenry to engage in nationalist actions, characterized by their ability to 1) fit nationalist actions into the structural frameworks of a society based on post-material values (using flexible sovereignty proposals); 2) adroitly seize a series of opportunities not directly connected with nationalism (the emergence of local governance networks on the state's initiative, failure of local development policies), as well as opportunities directly connected with it (cessation of political violence or terrorism in *Iparralde*); and 3) successfully position the territory at the center of a process of nationalist socialization of sectors that until recent times were unconnected with Basque identity. This paper will describe in-depth the nationalists' proposals for the territory (the demand for a *département*, sovereignty proposals); and examine in detail the way in which their practice heralds to the citizenry the sovereignty to which they aspire. To put it another way, it will describe how the practice of nationalism in the fields of rural and economic development, in music, and in moves to combat climate change, symbolically fills with content the aspiration for a territory that stands for inclusive local sovereignty (linking the coast with the inland areas; farming with tourism; the traditional with the modern; the elderly with the young; the local with the global). In a nutshell, we shall look into the territory's performative character as a way of explaining the evolution of Basque identity and nationalism in *Iparralde*.

Multiple sovereignties? Civil society mobilization and territorial construction in the French Basque Country

Xabier Itçaina (Centre Emile Durkheim, Sciences Po Bordeaux)

Abstract

Literature on peripheral nationalism generally presents the French Basque Country (*Iparralde*) as a case of 'failed' political nationalism, in contrast with the 'success' of its southern counterpart. This paper argues that such a statement reduces identity politics to its electoral, party political, and 'non-conventional' (i.e. violent) expressions. In particular, this view excludes a considerable subset of civil society mobilizations which are more or less distant from the sphere of electoral politics. In particular, mobilizations concerning Basque language and culture, sustainable farming and social and solidarity-based economic activity, have contributed, since the 1970s, to generating social capital and to legitimizing the idea of a shared territorial destiny in *Iparralde*. However, as these mobilizations do not operate according to a unified ideological pattern, they should not be considered as constituting the mere cultural, social or economic aspects of Basque political nationalism. This paper argues that, in a Europeanized and globalized context, territorial *and* sectorial dimensions generate specific sets of constraints and resources for each of these mobilizations. In concrete terms, each one of the above mentioned sectors (language and culture, sustainable farming, social and solidarity-based economy) are subject to different (macro, meso and micro) scales of governance. Therefore, their daily experiences of sovereignty will vary according to the way each sector is governed. This paper assumes that a reinforced territorial autonomy of *Iparralde* would be crucial for the social movement promoting Basque language and culture, while it might have little consequences, for instance, for milk producers depending on EU policy-making and global markets. Other small farmers, in turn, will be claiming for specific institutions for Basque farming, thus trying to establish horizontal alliances with consumers and environmentalists. Similarly, activists of the social and solidarity-based economy will develop social innovations (such as the *Eusko* local currency) in order to generate small-scale economic spaces and networks and a circulation of goods *within* the boundaries of *Iparralde*. Case studies will allow us to address the way multiple conceptions of sovereignty are experienced in the daily life of citizens of the Basque Country in France, in their respective sectors and 'infra-territories'. The argument will unfold following a historical sequential approach by distinguishing (a) the relative match of political, cultural and economic protest movements in the 1970s and 1980s; (b) the partial institutionalization of civil society mobilizations within the new territorial governance of the French Basque Country in the 1990s; and (c) the current multiplicity of 'imagined sovereignties' at work within the pluralistic civil society mobilizations involving cultural and socio-economic affairs.

The ethno-linguistic movement in the Basque Country: Conflict and strategies of change towards linguistic sovereignty

Ane Larrinaga Renteria and Mila Amurrio Velez (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

The Basque language has been one of the nuclear elements of Basque identity since the hegemonic discourse of Basque nationalism – renovated from the 1960s onwards – defined language as an integrating and differentiating element of the Basque nation. In the historical process of building the Basque nation, a dynamic cultural proto-elite initiated activities of symbolic production, cultural revitalization, and linguistic recovery of the ‘minoritized’ language in the first nationalist movement at the end of the 19th century. During the 20th century and up to the present day, these activities were continued and subsequently updated by a highly active ethno-linguistic movement with a wide social impact. With the passage of time, this movement acquired relative autonomy from the nationalist movement. For a long period, the ethno-linguistic movement fed the Basque nationalist discourse ideologically and intellectually in its symbolic struggles with other national identities that coexisted in the Basque Country – Spanish identity and French identity in particular. From the 1980s onwards, an autonomous institutionalization developed in Spain. The protracted management of autonomous power by a Basque nationalist force and their consequent development of linguistic policies brought about a crisis in the movement and posed the need for it to adapt to new political and social scenarios. In this new context the organizations of the movement diversified. Thus, in recent years, together with the politicized and assertive action of some collectives directed against the restrictions of the juridical framework in force, we find other organizations taking action to intervene in everyday communitarian life. In a progressive manner, and to the extent that autonomous power has assumed linguistic power in the more formal spheres of society (especially administration and education), the weight of the movement’s action has been aimed at promoting the communicative functions of the ‘minoritized’ language in the reproduction of everyday life. This can be seen as an attempt to widen the space of linguistic sovereignty beyond the juridical field and into the field of social practice.

National identities in the Basque Country: Present and future trends

Julen Zabalo and Txoli Mateos (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

Given that the Basque Country is part of two different states and due to the influence of Basque nationalism, nowadays, the Basque have not one but three national identities: the Spanish or Basque-Spanish identity, the French or Basque-French identity and the Basque identity which aims at dominating throughout Basque territory. Traditionally, none of the different nationalist proposals have contemplated the fact that there could be national identities other than their own within the Basque territory. It is precisely this self-imposed need to assimilate territory with national identity that closes all doors to a solution to the conflict. The demand for a given political organization of the territory (independence, federalism, autonomy) is legitimate and there ought to be some way based on the will of the people to achieve it. However, a political organization which is 'monochromatic' is not only impossible to achieve, but is an obstacle to mutual understanding, as it is based on the negation of the identity of others. Only by combining and not assimilating the political point of view relating to territory (objective) with the subjective point of view relating to identity can a satisfactory solution be found. In other words a collective option linked to territory and based on self-determination has to be combined with another option linked to national identity and based on the voluntary endorsement of each citizen. Therefore, as familiarity with the sentiments of the Basque citizens themselves is considered necessary, it is concluded that the organization of diverse focus groups centered on the aforementioned subjective perceptions of identity would provide more accurate data on the subject of self-determination.

Legal limits of decentralization in Spain: Between accommodation and secession

Iñigo Urrutia and Zelai Nikolas (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

The decentralized institutional scene in Spain has changed over the years. Since the autonomous communities were established, demands for self-government were redressed through the system of political autonomy based on political bilateral settlements adopted in the early 1980s embodied in the Statutes of Autonomy. During the last thirty years, tensions between the central and regional powers, though inherent in any system of distribution of powers, have led to the strengthening of decentralization and self-government through reforms of the statutes of autonomy of the 'historical nationalities' in the Basque Country and Catalonia. This gave rise to demands for deepening the decentralization by way of a (con)federal system in the case of the Basque Country and a symmetrical federal model in the case of Catalonia. However, these ideas tending towards federalizing the Spanish state were rejected by the central authorities and the Constitutional Court. The response of the Spanish Constitutional Court has been clear. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 does not allow a federal turn of the autonomy system without a prior constitutional reform. The Constitutional Court thereby establishes the need for a reform of the constitution in order to address the political expectations of the Basque Country and Catalonia. The constitution itself thus acts as a limit to political bilateralism. After the Constitutional Court's ruling (31/2010) the central powers of the Spanish state have taken a re-centralization approach to power distribution with increasingly severe impacts on the quality of the autonomy of the Basque Country and Catalonia. While the Basque and Catalan autonomous communities have begun to question why the current model cannot adapt to some of the more ambitious expectations of self-government, in the Spanish state the present model of decentralization has been questioned precisely on the grounds that political decentralization has now gone too far. The most recent legislation passed by the central state of Spain affects not only the financial autonomy of the autonomous communities, but also their political autonomy, limiting their competences and powers of self-organization. This has led to a crisis of territorial organization in Spain, where several scenarios arise. Facing this complex panorama, there are three different views of the future political system in Spanish, ranging from constitutional reform aimed in a federalist direction to support for secession of the Basque Country and Catalonia on the basis of the 'right to decide'. All in all, there are different political options. Firstly, some legal scholars favor a constitutional reform in order to centralize *de iure* the Spanish state, arguing that the distribution of powers between the state and the autonomous communities is inefficient and inadequate. These scholars suggest a rethinking of the relationship between the state and the autonomous communities, questioning the legislative power of the autonomous communities and proposing to privilege the state through harmonization laws. Secondly, there is a more nuanced position, maintaining that the decentralized system has worked reasonably well, serving to both encourage political participation and foster the development of each region in Spain. A third view is characterized by dissatisfaction with the current framework for autonomy and proposals for breaking the constitutional agreement. These three positions are becoming increasingly distant from each other, making it difficult to achieve a new constitutional consensus.

Basque sovereignty and contention: Evolution of mechanisms and processes of nationalist collective action in the Basque Country

Mario Zubiaga (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

In contrast to other historical situations, the Basque nationalist demand for sovereignty from the late 20th century onwards was made in a relatively democratic context. The demand for self-government in the Basque territories under Spanish administration in particular coincided with a democratization process begun after the end of Franco's authoritarian regime. In positioning themselves to the transition of Spain to democracy, Basque nationalists were not homogeneous. While the moderate faction, articulated around the Basque Nationalist Party, opted to negotiate an autonomous institutional framework within the Spanish constitutional system established in 1978, the more radical sectors, headed by the *Abertzale* (patriotic Basque) Left, rejected this autonomy model and advocated a break-away stance backed by the armed action of ETA (*Euskadi Ta Askatasun*). This strategic divergence within Basque nationalism meant that the demands for sovereignty made by the two great *Abertzale* 'families' were configured differently. The speeches that upheld those demands, their scope, the specific proposals linked with them and the ways of manifesting them both through institutional action and through collective mobilization, have been largely at cross-purposes with one another. Thus, the nationalist contention was played out on a dual stage. On the one hand, the Basque political assertion in both its manifestations – institutional and anti-system – confronted the agents of the Spanish political system. On the other hand, on the internal stage, the two ways of making the demand for sovereignty interacted with one another contentiously. On the first stage and with regard to the main state agents, no changes of note are apparent in the conceptualization of sovereignty. However, from the early 1990s onwards, the evolution in theoretical terms that has taken place in the concept of sovereignty and in stateless nations' ways of asserting it, and the emergence of opportunities and threats in both the international and national contexts, have favoured a certain process of discursive convergence on the internal stage, always mediated by certain actors/brokers and conditioned by the party political competence existing within Basque nationalism. This strategic convergence, even though relative and fluctuating, can be understood as a manifestation consistent with the logic of the internal democratization process, insofar as the contemporary Basque nationalist contention is inseparable from that process – so much so that there is an actual overlap between state-, nation- and democracy-building in the Basque sphere.

The Basque secessionist project in a European comparative perspective: The issue of Navarre

Asier Blas Mendoza (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

This paper will give a brief insight into the secession processes in Europe carried out during the last decades and processes expected to take place in the near future, and compare them to the Basque case. This analytical framework will be used to explain the Basque secessionist project, focusing on the main obstacles to its development, especially the complexity of the Basque identity and the heterogeneous territorial reality. The latter will be analysed in depth by presenting the case of Navarre, as the territorial unity issue is the main impediment to the endorsement of the secessionist process. The discussion about the subject of self-determination (or in its new wording, the 'right to decide') should in fact be a discussion about the disproportionate numbers of Basque nationalists in different territories. The case of Navarre plays a particularly important role here as the largest territory claimed by the Basque secessionists. Parallels are often drawn between the political conflicts in Navarre and Northern Ireland, which is why Martin Blinkhorn called Navarre the 'Basque Ulster' in 1974. The main part of this paper will focus on the complexity of the political status and identity of Navarre. For this purpose, the different national (and regional) identities living in the territory and their electoral expressions will be studied and compared to the situation in the Basque Autonomous Community and French Basque Country. Finally, the article will approach potential solutions to the conflict in this province by using the scheme of liberal consociationalism, an adaptation of Arend Lijphart's scheme originally proposed by McGarry and O'Leary for Northern Ireland.

Political identity and sovereignty in contemporary Europe: The Basque Case

Jule Goikoetxea (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

To understand the current Basque political identity and its coupling with sovereignty demands, it is necessary to analyze what the general preconditions in 21st century Europe are for a nation to survive as a 'demos'. In other words, what is required from a Basque identity for it to survive as a political identity? This paper will show that some of the conditions are absent, and conclude that the absence of these conditions leads to sovereignty demands. It will enquire how particular institutional and political workings give concrete meaning to key terms such as 'nation,' 'identity,' 'sovereignty,' and 'democratic governance', which articulate both nationalist and democratic practices, discourses and identities, including political demands. It will further show that the *2004 Basque Project for a New Statute of Autonomy* arose not from a 19th century ethno-centric Basque nationalism, but from a 21st century federal political entity that had shaped and most effectively met the needs of its population, and hence managed to uphold its claim to the monopoly of authoritative law-making more successfully than the Spanish state itself. Through this discussion we will better understand why the main Basque political parties (representing 62 percent of the population) are insisting on laying out new constitutional futures for the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC). The main objectives of this paper are, firstly, to show the empirical connections that exist in the BAC between sovereignty, democracy and identity, and secondly, to explain why these connections take on such a highly contentious character in political communities who do not control their own state, such as the Basque community, and in states who do not include their different political communities in the governance of the polity, such as the Spanish state.

The Catalan mirror: Opportunities and challenges of Basque sovereignty contestation

Ricard Vilaregut Saez (Autonomous University of Barcelona)

Abstract

The Basque Country and Catalonia are two cases in which a section of their respective communities express dissatisfaction with their relationship to the Spanish state, as well as the explicit intention of creating a new legal and political sovereignty. At the same time, both face the challenge of building their sovereignty within the framework of a European system of multi-level governance, a global economy and an international community that may or may not recognize them. A key challenge is to imagine new institutional designs and innovative social participation, expanding on the idea of the state (or even post-state) as tailored to the needs and desires of citizens and the everyday practices of citizenship, in other words – new forms of sovereignty. While the Basque Country is assimilating the consequences of the violent manifestations of the conflict, Catalonia is in the process of building a different kind of sovereignty through a peaceful civic and democratic process. What are the features of the daily experience of its citizens that make this process Catalan? And how is citizenship and identity lived and practiced in the Basque Country? This paper aims to identify the main lessons that can be drawn from the Catalan case to help citizens of the Basque Country to explore ways to resolve the consequences of decades of political violence, and face the challenges of democratically imagining their own sovereignty in a context of globalization and increasing European economic and social integration.

Articulation of pro-sovereignty discourse in the Basque Country: Towards a democratic scenario

Pedro Ibarra Güell and Iban Gallettebeitia Gabiola (University of the Basque Country)

Abstract

This paper analyzes how the definitive end of political violence in the Basque Country has opened up a new political process of building a pro-sovereignty proposal different from the one that was articulated during the violent conflict. The articulation of this proposal is led by Basque radical nationalists but is also understood in part by other political forces and supported by social organizations and movements. It is based on a new discourse on Basque national identity, and promotes a process of exercising the pro-sovereignty affirmation which also differs from that of the previous period. In the analysis we observe the current transformation of public opinion, the ideological rigidity or flexibility of different political actors, the unstable institutional framework, the possible readjustments of alliances and, finally, the position of the Spanish state. Within the relationship of different variables in the pro-sovereignty process, we underscore the strategic complexity involved in combining the management and stability of institutional space on the one hand, and social mobilization on the other. On the basis of this analysis we attempt to establish a model in which the confluence of positions and social and political contexts could make the development of a new juridical-political framework for the Basque Country likely. Our work therefore incorporates the daily impact of sovereignty practices on the political sphere of the Basque citizenry. Using both primary and secondary sources of data, we analyze how the end of the armed conflict has channeled, catalyzed and made possible a range of practices of sovereignty that are normalized and institutionalized by political actors, and the perspective through which this is experienced by ordinary Basque citizens in their daily lives. Innovative actors have articulated new demands with the support of the majority – which in our work we call *hegemonic concrete universalizations* (HCU) – with the help of discursive reframing techniques. The citizenry has thus had an impact on the agenda that has been crystalized by political actors in support of the new consensus.

Basque national movements and new diversity challenges in a post-violence scenario

Eduardo J. Ruiz-Vieytez (Human Rights Institute, University of Deusto)

Abstract

The Basque Country has entered a new political scenario since 2012. Indeed, the most significant change in the recent history of *Euskadi* is undoubtedly the end of the cycle of political violence. In this context, a new opportunity for debating the political status of the country has emerged, and new opportunities have arisen for the Basque nationalist movement(s). However, at the same time it is relevant to consider some profound social transformations that have taken place in the Basque Country over the past decades, particularly concerning demography and social lifestyles. A constant migration flow into the Basque Country has taken place in the last two decades, dramatically increasing the level of diversity of Basque society. In particular, the social context of cultural diversity today is significantly higher than ten years ago, when the previous proposal for a change in the political status took place. This paper argues that Basque nationalists have yet to properly face the new social realities of migration and diversity in Basque society. Moreover, the issue of diversity has not yet been considered relevant for the process towards sovereignty, missing a clear project and strategy of integration of minority groups into the Basque national idea. This lack of reflection may lead to inconsistent attitudes and policies towards diversity in the near future by the political institutions ruled by Basque nationalist parties. This paper will suggest the causes and importance of this vacuum and raise attention to the topic of diversity management as fundamental to nation-building.

Constitutional Patriotism and ‘constitutionalists’ in the Basque Country: The issue of sovereignty

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Abstract

Since 2000, the two major parties in Spain, PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) and PP (*Partido Popular*), have taken up Constitutional Patriotism as a main referent in their political programs. The idea behind this initiative is to foster a collective sense of belonging in Spain, not based on cultural features but on a broad and inclusive concept of citizenship. The Spanish Constitution, presented as the normative foundation of a political system that grants freedom and equality to all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, might become, according to this discourse, a symbol of patriotic identification for everyone within the Spanish state. This would serve to mitigate ethnic and nationalist tensions in Spain, particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country. This initiative led to an intense public debate, both academic and journalistic, especially in the Basque Country. Some critical voices in the Basque Country, often supportive of Basque nationalism, claimed that there were significant differences between what the two major Spanish parties advocated and genuine Constitutional Patriotism as formulated by its principal theorists (notably Jürgen Habermas). Those who proposed a Spanish Constitutional Patriotism were frequently accused of aiming to impede further decentralization, and to safeguard the principle of the indissolubility of the Spanish nation, contained in Article 2 of the Constitution, thus denying any possibility of recognition of a specific Basque sovereignty. Even though references to Constitutional Patriotism are no longer frequent, this debate may be related to a very significant development in Basque public life. Since 2000 there has been a widespread tendency among those in the Basque Country who do not identify as Basque nationalists to define themselves as ‘constitutionalists’. This tendency had its heyday in the 2009 Basque elections, which resulted in a non-Basque nationalist, or ‘constitutionalist’ government, a coalition of PSE (*Partido Socialista de Euskadi*), PP (*Partido Popular*) and UPyD (*Unión, Progreso y Democracia*). Being a ‘constitutionalist’ means, according to those who ascribe to that definition, defending a political and public life in which all different cultures are accepted, within the common political frame of the Spanish state and its constitution. The basic ideas of Constitutional Patriotism are thus present in this definition, and are thus allegedly present in the political model defended by a significant part of Basque society, with clear implications for their idea of sovereignty. The development of ‘constitutionalism’ as a political point of reference can have further implications, which this paper will discuss. A self-definition centered on the Constitution may have had the effect of changing on a collective level the content of the Spanish national identity in the Basque country, which would put more the stress on political values and less on cultural features than what is the case in the rest of Spain. Also, the fact that individuals who do not consider themselves Basque nationalist (we include here PSE, PP and UPyD sympathizers) have a tendency to place themselves under the shared label of ‘constitutionalists’. This may have the effect of blurring ideological differences among them in terms of a left-right cleavage. As compared with the rest of Spain, Basque ‘constitutionalists’ may also feel closer to each other due to the fact that they share a set of ‘constitutional’ political values including a similar conception of sovereignty and the right of self-determination.