

**The Nationalism of the Rich:  
Discourses and Strategies of Separatist Parties  
in Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland and Padania**

**THESIS**

submitted at the Graduate Institute  
in fulfilment of the requirements of the  
PhD degree in International Studies,  
Specialisation in International History and Politics

by

**Emmanuel DALLE MULLE**

Thesis N° 1119

**Geneva  
2015**



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INSTITUT DE HAUTES ETUDES INTERNATIONALES ET DU DEVELOPPEMENT  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

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## **Emmanuel DALLE MULLE**

Sur le préavis de M. Andre LIEBICH, professeur honoraire de l'Institut et directeur de thèse, de Mme Annabelle LITTOZ-MONNET, professeur adjoint à l'Institut et membre interne du jury, et de Ms Anwen ELIAS, Senior Lecturer, Department of International Politics, Aberystwyth University, UK et expert extérieur, le directeur de l'Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement autorise l'impression de la présente thèse sans exprimer par là d'opinion sur son contenu.

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Genève, le 1<sup>er</sup> octobre 2015

Philippe Burrin  
Directeur

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## **RESUME / ABSTRACT**

**(1700 caractères maximum espaces compris)**

Titre de la thèse / Title of thesis : Le nationalisme des riches: discours et stratégies des partis séparatistes en Catalogne, Flandres, Ecosse et Padanie / The Nationalism of the Rich: Discourses and Strategies of Separatist Parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Scotland and Padania

Cette thèse examine le "nationalisme des riches", c'est-à-dire un type de discours nationaliste qui vise à mettre fin à l'exploitation d'une "nation riche" par des régions plus pauvres et/ou par des structures d'état inefficientes. Elle consiste en une étude comparative du discours de cinq partis séparatistes d'Europe occidentale. Elle a pour objectif de: démontrer que le nationalisme des riches est une nouveauté dans l'histoire du nationalisme; examiner comment il a été formulé par les partis analysés; identifier quels facteurs ont favorisé son développement et son succès. L'étude se base sur une méthode des "systèmes les plus différents" selon laquelle le nationalisme des riches serait la principale variable partagée par tous les cas d'étude. En décortiquant le discours de ces partis, la thèse cherche donc à trouver des facteurs explicatifs communs. Elle identifie trois stratégies rhétoriques principales: un argumentaire instrumental en faveur de l'indépendance, une approche gradualiste à la sécession et une explication du développement socio-économique basée sur un déterminisme culturel. Dans la longue durée, elle souligne le rôle joué par la création des formes substantielles de redistribution automatique et les circonstances économiques exceptionnelles de leur mise en place, qui en ont considérablement réduit les coûts politiques. Le nationalisme des riches serait donc la conséquence de la fin des Trente Glorieuses, même si elle se limite à la présence d'une fracture nationale sub-étatique coïncidant avec des déséquilibres majeurs entre les performances économiques de différentes zones du même pays et avec des cas importants de faillite des politiques publiques.

This thesis inquires into 'the nationalism of the rich', i.e., a form of nationalist discourse that aims to put an end to the exploitation of a 'wealthy nation' on the part of poorer regions and/or inefficient state structures. It consists of a comparative analysis of the discourse of five separatist parties in some Western European regions and aims to: show that the nationalism of the rich is a novelty in the history of nationalism; examine in details how it has been formulated by the parties analysed; identify what factors have favoured its development and success. The study relies on a most different systems design whereby the nationalism of the rich is the main variable shared across the sample. By dissecting this narrative it thus seeks to find common explanatory factors. The thesis identifies three main rhetorical strategies successfully used by the parties analysed: an instrumental argument for independence, a gradualist approach to secession and a cultural-determinist explanation of socio-economic development. In a longer historical perspective, it underlines the role played across all the cases by the foundation of extensive forms of automatic redistribution and the exceptional economic conditions under which they were established that greatly reduced the political costs of their creation. The nationalism of the rich would therefore be a consequence of the end of the Glorious Thirties, although limited to a context in which there is a sub-state national cleavage that coincides with clear imbalances in economic performances between areas of the same country and cases of major public policy failure enabling the framing of fiscal protest in national terms.

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## List of Acronyms

ABAFIM: *Administratie Budgettering, Accounting en Financieel Management* (Budget, Accounting and Financial Management Administration, Flemish Community).

AN: *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance, Italy).

BHV: *Brussel-Hal-Vilvoorde* (Belgian electoral arrondissement).

CDC: *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (Democratic Convergence of Catalonia).

CD&V: *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* (Christian-Democrats and Flemish).

CEO: *Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió* (Centre of Opinion Studies, Barcelona).

CiU: *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union, Catalonia).

CFFP: Council of Fiscal and Financial Policy (Spain).

CRP: *Partit Republicà Català* (Catalan Republican Party).

CSU: *Christlich Soziale Union in Bayern* (Christian Social Union in Bavaria).

CUP: *Candidatura d'Unitat Popular* (Popular Unity Candidates, Catalonia).

DC: *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, Italy).

DIRV Programme: *Derde Industriële Revolutie in Vlaanderen* (Third Industrial Revolution in Flanders Program).

EEC: European Economic Community.

EFTA: European Free Trade Association.

ERC: *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia).

ERDF: European Regional Development Fund.

ETA: *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque Country and Freedom).

EU: European Union.

FI: *Forza Italia* (Go Italy).

GDHI: Gross Disposable Household Income.

GESOP: *Gabinet d'Estudis Socials i Opinió Pública* (Centre of Public Opinion and Social Studies)

GDP: Gross Domestic Product.

GVA: Gross Value Added.

ICPS: *Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials* (Institute of Political and Social Sciences, Barcelona).

ICV: *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (Initiative for Catalonia Greens).

IDESCAT: *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya* (Statistical Institute of Catalonia).

IMF: International Monetary Fund.

INE: *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (National Statistical Institute, Spain).

ISPO: *Instituut voor Sociaal en Politiek Opinieonderzoek* (Institute for Social and Political Opinion Research, Catholic University of Leuven).

ISTAT: *Istituto nazionale di statistica* (National Statistical Institute, Italy).

ITANES: Italian National Election Studies.

LN: *Lega Nord* (Northern League, Italy).

LOAPA: *Ley Orgánica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico* (Organic law of harmonisation of the process of autonomy, Spain)

LOFCA: *Ley Orgánica de Financiación de las Comunidades Autónomas* (Organic law on the funding of the autonomous communities, Spain).

MCP: Member of the Catalan Parliament.

MEP: Member of the European Parliament.

MP: Member of (national) Parliament.

N-VA: *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (New-Flemish Alliance).

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement.

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

NHS: National Health Service (United Kingdom).

NLS: National Library of Scotland.

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

ONS: Office of National Statistics (United Kingdom).

Open VLD: *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats).

PCI: *Partito comunista italiano* (Italian Communist Party).

PdL: *Popolo della Libertà* (People of Freedom, Italy).

PDS: *Partito democratico della sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left, Italy).

PER: *Plan de Empleo Rural* (Plan of Rural Employment, Spain).

PP: *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, Spain).

PS: *Parti socialiste* (Wallonia).

PSAN: *Partit Socialista d'Alliberament Nacional* (Socialist Party of National Liberation, Catalonia).

PSC: *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (Socialist Party of Catalonia).

PSI: *Partito socialista italiano* (Italian Socialist Party).

PSOE: *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Socialist Labour Spanish Party).

PTE: *Partit del Trebal Espanyol* (Spanish Labour Party).

RAD: *Respect voor Arbeid en Democratie* (Respect for Work and Democracy, Flanders).

RTBF: *Radio Télévision Belge Francophone*.

SME(s): Small and medium-sized enterprise(s).

SNP: Scottish National Party.

UCD: *Unio de Centro Democratico* (Union of the Democratic Centre, Spain).

UK: United Kingdom.

US: United States.

USSR: Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

VAT: value-added tax.

VB: *Vlaams Blok* (Flemish Bloc)/*Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest).

Verdinaso: *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal-Solidaristen* (Union of 'Greater Dutch' National-Solidarists, Flanders).

VNP: *Vlaamse Nationale Partij* (Flemish National Party).

VNV: *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National League).

VU: *Volksunie* (People's Union, Flanders).

VVP: *Vlaamse Volkspartij* (Flemish People's Party).





## Introduction

‘Every generation has its own preoccupations and concerns and therefore looks for new things in the past and asks different questions’.<sup>1</sup> Academic interest in specific subjects comes and goes, influenced by those events that shape our present and urge us to seek explanations. Nationalism is no exception.

After a period of neglect, due to a prevalence of Marxist approaches predicting the disappearance of nationalist conflicts, research on nationalism has experienced a burgeoning revival. The demise of the Soviet Union, followed by an outburst of nationalist sentiments in many of its former republics, mainly accounts for such a renewed interest. The end of the Cold War inevitably caused shifts in the balance of power among and within existing states, sometimes leading to the redefinition of state borders. It is in this context, marked by gruesome conflicts in former-Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Nagorno-Karabakh and Georgia, among others, that the literature on nationalism, whose premises had last been laid down at the beginning of the 1980s, exploded. While focusing mainly on the spread of nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, scholars also began taking into serious account those stateless nationalist movements that, since the end of the 1960s, had begun voicing their calls for self-determination in Western Europe. Here, the resurgence of nationalism was much more challenging from a theoretical perspective because, in the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism in Western Europe seemed an exhausted force. During the process of decolonisation, Western Europeans could look at nationalist conflicts in Africa and Asia as outbreaks of chauvinism and irrational violence endemic to backward societies. Eastern Europe posed more of a problem, since socialism had been looked at by a number of Western scholars as an attractive alternative to liberal capitalism. But, after its demise in the early 1990s, one could point to the chaos triggered by the fall of the USSR and the so-called ‘return of the repressed’<sup>2</sup> in order to explain nationalism’s resurgence in the area. The growth of nationalism in the ‘advanced West’, however, was totally unexpected.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, in the time span going from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, nationalist parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy, and Scotland gathered momentum. Their rhetoric was one of economic and cultural victimisation. Centralising states were accused of financially overburdening them to the advantage of a lazy bureaucracy and of poorer regions. They also referred to the incipient process of globalisation in order to make their arguments more solid. They saw globalisation as a new stage of modernisation in which advanced regions compete with each other beyond and regardless of state borders and in which economically dynamic nations cannot afford to be hampered by inefficient state structures and by underdeveloped areas. Perceptions of increasing economic power and political marginalisation went hand in hand, setting the ground for what we have called the ‘nationalism of the rich’. We believe this to be a new phenomenon in Western Europe,

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<sup>1</sup> MACMILLAN, MARGARET (2009) *The Uses and Abuse of History* (London: Profile Books) p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> See: BRUBAKER, ROGERS (1998) ‘Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism’, in JOHN,

<sup>2</sup> See: BRUBAKER, ROGERS (1998) ‘Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism’, in JOHN, HALL (ed.) *The State of the Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 272-306.

<sup>3</sup> ICHIJO, ATSUKO (2004) *Scottish Nationalism and the Idea of Europe: Concepts of Europe and the Nation* (London: Routledge) p. 43.

peculiar to societies that have set in place complex systems of national redistribution and have adopted economic growth as the main principle of government legitimacy.

The nationalism of the rich is the subject of this dissertation. We define it as a type of nationalist discourse that aims to put an end to the economic ‘exploitation’ suffered by a group of people represented as a wealthy nation<sup>4</sup> and supposedly carried out by the populations of poorer regions and/or by inefficient state administrations. The core elements of this rhetoric are first a claim of economic victimisation, according to which a backward core area holds back a more advanced periphery, and second a denunciation of political marginalisation. Here, the term marginalisation points to the fact that, despite sometimes indulging in colonial metaphors and statements about foreign occupation, its purveyors, in fact, more consistently point to subtler forms of subordination – often with reference to flaws in the mechanisms of representative democracy – linked to: a mismatch between the economic power of the community and its actual political representation (for example Northern Italy); the strings imposed by a consociational system over the political latitude of a demographic majority (for example Flanders); the neglect felt by a demographic minority as a consequence of the economic and social policies implemented by its senior partner in a majoritarian union state (for example Scotland); the lack of recognition of its special status as a nation (for example Catalonia). We do not argue at all that the nationalism of the rich is only about the economy. On the contrary, cultural and political arguments are fundamental, but, as we will try to show, compared to the bulk of the nationalist propaganda of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the economic dimension has acquired an unprecedented primacy, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. In this connection, a remarkable feature is that the ‘economic prowess’ of the members of the nation has not only become a source of national pride, but also a marker of the national identity setting it apart from the other groups inhabiting the parent state. Apart from the, to some extent, deviant case of the Scottish National Party, the rhetoric of the other parties analysed in this study features a focus on the entrepreneurial spirit and hard-working ethos of the national community and its small and medium-sized enterprises; this rhetoric could also be dubbed ‘the nationalism of the producing people’. But, above all, the nationalism of the rich is peculiar because the claim of economic exploitation is framed as coming from a privileged – both in objective and subjective terms – community. In this connection, it should immediately be made clear that the adjective ‘rich’ in the title of this dissertation does not refer to individual citizens, but rather to the collective level of the nation as a whole. In other words, it is a discourse that deals first and foremost with the sociotropic plane of the national community.<sup>5</sup>

What lies at the core of this ideology is the willingness to disengage from the system of national solidarity of the parent state. The nationalism of the rich thus involves a redefinition of power relations between centre and periphery. Although it is not necessarily a separatist phenomenon, we will be focusing on separatist parties.<sup>6</sup> This entails a redefinition of the national community, even its outright invention, as the unique bearer of sovereignty in a context in which dual national identity and the idea that

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of the nation as wealthy is first and foremost based on the self-understanding of the community developed by the parties themselves, which, as we will see later, take pride in the prosperity of the community. They however do not limit themselves to the economic dimension, but include other variables in defining the nation as advanced.

<sup>5</sup> On the concept of sociotropic politics see: KINDER, DONALD and KLEWIET, RODERICK (1981) ‘Sociotropic Politics: The American Case’, *Journal of Political Science*, 11(2), pp. 129-161.

<sup>6</sup> We will explain why in section 1.1.3.

membership of the parent state is compatible with the nation's interest have been for long a reality. It also implies considering nationalism as an ideology of political legitimacy.

This research thus has three main objectives that coincide with three main research questions. First, to show that the nationalism of the rich represents a novelty in the history of nationalist discourse. Second, to write a comparative history of the evolution of the nationalism of the rich as formulated by the parties analysed in the case studies. Third, to advance an explanatory hypothesis for its appearance and evolution. These goals essentially answer the following research questions: How and why is the nationalism of the rich a new phenomenon? How has the nationalism of the rich been formulated? What socio-economic conditions have favoured its formation and development?

Many studies on nationalism have focused on nations as units of analysis in themselves. Although most of these works are nuanced examinations of the complex processes that have contributed to the formation of different national self-understandings and that still influence their evolution, using nations as such as the main prism through which to research specific forms of nationalist discourse risks reifying them in the first place. What instead should be sought, in our opinion, is a focus on specific actors, which contribute to the creation and spread of specific national self-understandings and narratives. This does not mean that we see nations as artificial creations of a few skilled manipulators, as in a superficial ethnic-entrepreneur approach. On the contrary, we think that such actors are a product of the social context in which they arise and use materials available in the wider society in order to convince people of the rightfulness of their ideas. Yet, at the same time, they can use such ideas as frames to understand and give meaning to reality and propose their use to other members of the relevant community. Without accounting for the agency behind the creation and spread of ideas, one risks falling into the opposite equivalent of structural functionalism, that is, ideological functionalism, whereby ideas originate at some point in time from other ideas and the retrospective look of the historian make them necessary without accounting for alternatives, inconsistencies and variation. It is with this concern for agency that we have decided to focus on specific actors. But what actors? While intellectuals, on the one hand, and institutions, on the other, are often singled out as the main subjects of these kinds of inquiries, we have preferred to use the meso-level of political parties, as we deem it to be the most fertile ground to account for both the formation and spread of nationalist discourses. Indeed, in a hypothetical scheme of the production (mostly, taken care of by intellectuals) and implementation (mostly, within regional or state institutions) of ideas, political parties bridge the two levels, borrowing heavily on the intellectual side in order to devise ideological arguments underpinning specific policy proposals that they will later try to implement within existing, or through the establishment of new, institutions. This does not mean that political parties are the only actors contributing to the formation and spread of ideas, but only that they can be the most suitable ones for our specific purpose.

The discourse of the nationalism of the rich is thus analysed by means of a case study approach, in which five separatist parties have been selected after a preliminary analysis of a wider pool of nationalist movements voicing serious economic grievances in Western Europe. As we believe that nationalism is a complex phenomenon that requires an in-depth contextual analysis, we have preferred to limit the units in order to favour thick description and accuracy over generalisation, hoping that our conclusions can provide insights to be applied to other contexts.

All this is carried out in the next seven chapters according to the following structure. Chapter one discusses some of the theoretical premises of this research and explains in detail the approach, methodology and sources used. Chapter two provides a historical survey of nationalist discourses in the nineteenth and twentieth century in order to look for precedents of the nationalism of the rich. It finds two pioneering cases in the nationalist rhetoric formulated in Catalonia and the Basque Country between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but still in an inchoate form as compared to that realised later in the twentieth century. Chapters three to six present the case-study analysis, each focusing on a single party except for the fourth, which treats the *Vlaams Belang* (Flemish Interest) and the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (New Flemish Alliance) together on account of their common social, economic and political context. Finally, chapter seven draws together the main findings of each case study and discusses them in a systematic comparative fashion looking at: the commonalities and differences of the discourses of the parties analysed; the common factors that have contributed to the formation of the nationalism of the rich in the areas under study; the evolution of support for independence in these regions and the electoral results of the case-study parties, as well as the relationship between these two and the conditions that have favoured the rise of the nationalism of the rich. This chapter also provides a wider comparative framework, bringing illustrative examples from other contexts not covered in the case-study analysis, along with a more in-depth examination of external processes such as globalisation and European integration, which hover in the background of the central chapters.

As should be clear from the brief outline provided here, this project does not aim at explaining why nationalism, in general, has regained life in the last quarter of the twentieth century in Western Europe, but it rather aims at inquiring into the sources of a specific nationalist self-understanding that developed during the same period. Yet, when looking at Europe since the mid-1970s, with the only exception of similar forces in the Basque Country and, perhaps, Northern Ireland, the separatist parties analysed here have been the most active and successful in the entire continent, while a subset of them – *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* and the Scottish National Party – have been leading, in the most recent years, one of the most formidable challenges to state integrity in the history of Western Europe since the end of the Second World War.



# 1 Premises

In this introductory chapter, we lay down the theoretical premises of the dissertation. We first provide some definitions of the basic concepts that will be used throughout the dissertation. We then critically examine the existing literature and, on the basis of the considerations made in the first two sections, we explain the approach and methodology adopted.

## 1.1 Definitions

Nationalism has been defined in many different ways. Probably the most famous formulation has been Ernest Gellner's statement that 'nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent'.<sup>7</sup> As he himself recognised, such definition is 'parasitic' on the term 'nation'. Thus, later in the same text he offered two definitions of the word: the first is cultural, 'two men are of the same nation if and only if they share the same culture'; the second 'voluntaristic', 'two men are of the same nation if and only if they *recognize* [emphasis in the original, EDM] each other as belonging to the same nation'. He concluded, though, that the voluntaristic version is possible only in a context where a 'high-culture' is imposed, by nationalism, over an entire society. This clarification, unfortunately, does not explain what is a nation and rather switches the core of the definition to the unspecified concept of high-culture.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, identifying the necessary coincidence between the national and the political units, i.e. the pursuit of state power, it fails to explain the existence of nationalist movements that do not pursue such a goal. However, Gellner's definition introduces some important elements. First, it stresses that the nation is not a primordial natural given, but rather a socially constructed phenomenon. Second, it points to its role as an ideology of political legitimacy. And, third, it correctly suggests that state power is often the main goal of nationalist movements.

Benedict Anderson does not directly define nationalism but rather focuses on the concept of the nation. He argues that the nation is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.<sup>9</sup> Again, the socially constructed nature of the nation is further stressed, although, as the author makes very clear, its 'imagined' quality does not make it any less real. Furthermore, he mentions the element of sovereignty, which, as we will suggest later, is much more useful than a narrow focus on statehood. Yet, Anderson's definition is somewhat vague in the sense that it does not

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<sup>7</sup> GELLNER, ERNEST (1983) *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca/New York: Cornell University Press) p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, for Gellner, a high-culture is not something that existed before nationalism, but something that is created by nationalism, precisely as nations are. Thus, nations and high-cultures become synonyms and that is why his definition is tautologic. Somewhere in the text Gellner provided a synthetic definition of high-cultures as 'standardized, literacy- and education-based systems of communication'. Ibidem, p. 54. Yet, as standardised literacy and education systems are mostly the prerogatives of modern state institutions, the definition seems rather weak in explaining sub-state nationalism. We will come back on Gellner's theory of nationalism more in detail when analysing the relevant literature in section 1.2. Suffice it to say here that his model is too functional and mechanical and will not be used in our analyses.

<sup>9</sup> ANDERSON, BENEDICT (1983) *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso) p. 15.

specify why other ‘imagined communities’, such as, for instance, a social class, could not fit his definition.

Anthony Smith would answer that a nation is ‘a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members’, while nationalism is ‘an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining identity, unity and autonomy of a social group some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential nation’.<sup>10</sup> Yet, there is a tension between the two formulations proposed by Smith. While with the first he seems to imply that there is a list of objective criteria that we can use to classify a group as a nation, the second underlines an inherently subjective reality (‘whose members deem it to constitute’). Such tension lies at the core of Smith’s theory of nationalism that, as we will see later, stresses the *longue durée* of the process of nation formation involving the permanence of pre-modern features into modern national identities. Although it is clear that the presence of pre-existing cultural elements such as languages (literary or vernacular), myths, histories, territories and institutions easily associable with a specific human community can certainly have decisive influence on the formation of a national identity, there is nothing inherent in those elements that could help predict beforehand their transformation into the pillars of any specific national identity. The process is always an historical one and nationalism, as Smith himself recognises, is the force that produces it. Therefore, drawing lists of objective criteria is a somewhat pointless exercise.

A narrower approach has been taken by John Breuilly. In his seminal *Nationalism and the State*, he defines nationalism as a form of politics. More precisely he argues that ‘nationalism is used to refer to political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such actions with nationalist arguments. A nationalist argument is a political doctrine built upon three basic assertions:

- (a) There exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character.
- (b) The interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values.
- (c) The nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires at least the attainment of political sovereignty’.<sup>11</sup>

Breuilly correctly points out the political nature of nationalism as well as the influence of state power, both as a goal and as a factor influencing the activity of nationalist movements. His approach is especially interesting for this research because it deals extensively with separatism. It suggests the need to take into account the institutional structure in which nationalist movements pursue their objectives and the contingency to which they are inevitably subjected. Yet, a logical consequence of his definition is that ‘once a nationalist, or even merely a national, opposition takes control of the state, or, more gradually, the existing state comes to lay stress upon its national credentials, then the specifically nationalist character of politics tends to diminish. Competing groups all proclaim their paramount concern with the “national interest”. In such a situation nationalism as a specific form of politics becomes meaningless’.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> SMITH, ANTHONY (1999) *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> BREUILLY, JOHN (1993) *Nationalism and the State* (Chicago: Chicago University Press) p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 256.



The problem with this approach is that it almost totally neglects not only processes of nation-building – which, incidentally, can be very useful in explaining the rise of competing nationalist movements within existing nation-states – but also the discursive and ritualised daily reiteration of the nation analysed in Michael Billig’s *Banal Nationalism*.<sup>13</sup> Breuilly is also sceptical about ‘psychological explanations’ of nationalism. He correctly suggests that despite claiming to represent the entire nation, nationalist movements often express the concerns, existential problems and interests of a minority of the population and very often we do not know much about all the rest.<sup>14</sup> All these are valuable points that we will bear in mind in this dissertation. However, the dichotomy between nationalism as a psychological phenomenon – relating to people’s identity – and a form of politics that seems to be implicit in Breuilly’s considerations need not be maintained. As our research focuses on the discursive strategies of specific political parties during the last 50 years, it can take advantage of much more reliable sources concerning people’s attitudes and the impact of nationalist rhetoric on the wider society as compared to an analysis of nationalist movements in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, as all of the parties analysed in this research have committed to a peaceful and democratic nationalist struggle, their main weapons are ideological in nature and discursive in form. They directly appeal to the interests and identities of their targeted national constituencies aiming to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of their ‘co-nationals’. Therefore, our approach aims at bridging the distinction between nationalism as a mental and a political phenomenon.

Liah Greenfeld defines nationalism as a form of consciousness that ‘locates the source of individual identity within a “people”, which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity’. ‘The “people” – she continues – is the mass of a population whose boundaries and nature are defined in various ways, but which is usually perceived as larger than any concrete community and always as fundamentally homogeneous, and only superficially divided by the lines of status, class, locality, and in some cases even ethnicity’.<sup>15</sup> This definition may seem parasitic on the term ‘people’, but the reason for the association between the two terms is historical. Historically speaking the word nation used to design an elite, while the term people referred to the plebs, with a clear derogatory meaning. Their equation signalled the transition from a society segmented into orders to one composed of, at least in principle, equal and sovereign members.<sup>16</sup> Apart from this element common to all nationalisms, each

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<sup>13</sup> BILLIG, MICHAEL (1995) *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage). In fact, Breuilly briefly discusses the problem of nation-building, although in a cursory way.

<sup>14</sup> BREUILLY, *op. cit.*, pp. 417-419.

<sup>15</sup> GREENFELD, LIAH (1993) *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> This fundamental point is shared also by Anderson, Gellner and Brubaker. Anderson wrote that ‘the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship’. Likewise, Gellner stated that ‘our general argument might be re-stated as follows. Industrialization engenders a mobile and culturally homogenous society, which consequently has egalitarian expectations and aspirations, such as has been generally lacking in the previous stable, stratified, dogmatic and absolutist agrarian societies’. Finally, talking about Polish nationalism, Brubaker pointed out that ‘the eclipse of the status-bound notion of the “gentry nation” reflected the democratization or popularization or “social deepening” of the concept of nation throughout Europe that began in the late eighteenth and continued through the nineteenth century; everywhere “nation” was reconceived in a “populist” idiom that expressly included all social classes or strata’. ANDERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 16; GELLNER (1983) *op. cit.*, p. 73; BRUBAKER, ROGERS (1996) *Nationalism Reframed, Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 85. A consequence of such a shift was that the exclusion of a large part of the population from the actual exercise of sovereignty in the form of representative government was no longer justified on account of status,

of them is very peculiar and relies on specific definitions of the nation and national identity. As mentioned above, these may use social, cultural, ethnic, political or moral elements in varying combinations that cannot be predicted or reduced to a recurring pattern. The advantages of such a definition are multiple. First, it stresses once again the modernity and socially constructed nature of national identity. Second, it explains the equation between nation and people, often taken for granted and rarely explored. Third, it enables us to analyse nationalism as a general phenomenon (the transition to an 'homogenous society of equals') without claiming to describe all of its concrete instances (the particular nationalisms mentioned above). The only way to explore specific nationalisms consists in looking at the set of ideas that compose them, i.e., looking at nationalist discourse. This research project does precisely that in a comparative fashion.

Greenfeld's definition, however, has also a disadvantage. It consists in the fact that pinpointing the fundamental elements of as large a self-understanding as national identity is a Sisyphean task, probably even an impossible one because, despite the likely existence of some degree of institutionalisation of mainstream ideas, competing understandings of the national community often co-exist and become salient at different times. Accordingly, this study focuses on the discourse of a narrow set of nationalist parties grouped together because of the specificities and commonalities of their nationalist rhetoric. It is therefore limited in scope and based on a specific range of primary sources.

Two concepts are at the core of the above definition: equality and sovereignty. While the former is quite self-explanatory, the latter requires further discussion. In a classical treatment of the subject Francis Hinsley defines sovereignty as 'the idea that there is a final and absolute political authority in the political community [...] and no final and absolute authority exists elsewhere'.<sup>17</sup> Yet, in Hinsley's as well as in other treatments of the subject, there is a tension between the assertion that, through time, the idea of popular sovereignty prevailed against principles of personal, especially royal, power and the authors' decision to analyse the subject through the perspective of the state. In other words, state sovereignty is equalled to national or popular – the two are used as synonyms in most cases – sovereignty. This is hardly surprising as such tension lies at the core of the modern concept of sovereignty itself that arose out of a process of depersonalisation of the ruler and of sharp separation between the ruler and the ruled.<sup>18</sup> According to Hideaki Shinoda, two traditions competed in the eighteenth and nineteenth century: the Anglo-Saxon constitutional tradition whereby sovereignty lay with the people but was exercised by government upon delegation and therefore did not lead to a clear identification of nation and state; and the tradition of national sovereignty, more widespread on the continent, whereby the distinction between the nation and government was rejected according to the idea that the idea that the government's exercise of sovereignty was the true expression of the will of the nation. In the long run – Shinoda argues – this latter came to prevail and led to the identification of nation and state clearly conveyed by the expression 'the nation-

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but rather on either property (i.e. an acquirable feature, hence compatible with social mobility) or rationality (especially in the case of women and the non-adult population). Furthermore, such a definition of the nation does not entail democracy, as it may be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, the nation as a collection of individuals is sovereign, thus implying that each member enjoys democratic rights; on the other, the entire nation, as a collective body, is sovereign, but this is exercised by an authoritarian leader or a few members who do it in the name of the nation.

<sup>17</sup> HINSLEY, FRANCIS (1966) *Sovereignty* (New York: Basic Books) p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 1-26.

state'.<sup>19</sup> But what if state and nation do not coincide as in the cases analysed in this study? Replying to this question, Michael Keating has argued that the era of state sovereignty is over. He refers to this as 'post-sovereignty' and advocates de-linking sovereignty from the nation-state and 'formulating it as a right of self-determination'. He further explains that 'here an entity whether it be a people or a territorial unit, may be sovereign where it has the right to determine its own future. The practicalities of the world, together with their own aspirations, may mean that this does not take the form of a state, as we have already argued might be the case with nations, but this would not affect sovereignty itself'.<sup>20</sup> In the quote above Keating refrains from directly attributing sovereignty to nations, but elsewhere in the text argues that national identity differs from other group identities because it entails a normative claim of self-determination. In other words, Keating makes three major points that are relevant to our discussion. By equating sovereignty and national self-determination he implicitly agrees on the definition of the national community as a sovereign people. He stresses that sovereignty does not mean statehood, as we suggested when discussing Gellner's definition of nationalism. And he finally argues that sovereignty might be shared and divided.

Keating's arguments do not seem to disprove Hinsley's definition. After all, despite taking the state as a natural site where to locate sovereignty, Hinsley does not mention it in his formulation. Furthermore, by identifying sovereignty with an idea, he opens up the possibility that there might be contested notions of where sovereignty lies within the same political community. Keating's only criticism that frontally clashes against Hinsley's formulation is the idea that sovereignty can be shared and divided. Here, however, Keating's reasoning – mainly based on MacCormick<sup>21</sup> – is not very convincing. In the conclusion of his book on plurinational democracy, Keating writes 'I have used the term "post-sovereignty" not to indicate a world without any principles of authority and legitimacy, but to indicate that sovereignty in its traditional sense, in which it is identified exclusively with the independent state, is no more. Rather there are multiple sites of 'sovereign', in the sense of original authority'.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the book he identifies two types of such sites: supra-national regimes, such as the European Union, and the constitutive nations of multinational states, as seen above. The former cannot really be thought of as sovereign, though, in the sense of original authority, because EU law, despite being supreme, it is by definition delegated from the member states which can always opt out.<sup>23</sup> The latter is certainly more cogent when considering Keating's claim that

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<sup>19</sup> SHINODA, HIDEAKI (2000) *Re-examining Sovereignty. From Classical Theory to the Global Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) p. 21. For an amusing anecdote that clearly shows how the equation between the two is still widespread see KEATING, MICHAEL (2001) *Plurinational Democracy. Stateless Nations in a Post-Sovereignty Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 7, note 9.

<sup>20</sup> KEATING (2001) *Plurinational, op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> See MACCORMICK, NEIL (1999) *Questioning Sovereignty: Law, State and Nation in the European Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). For a criticism of McCormick suggesting that he actually replaces the legal and philosophical *monism* of state sovereignty with the *monism* of popular self-determination see LINDAHL, HANS (2001) 'Sovereignty and the Institutionalisation of Normative Order', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 21(1), pp. 165-180.

<sup>22</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL (2001) *Plurinational, op. cit.*, p. 163. Unfortunately, Keating does not define the term 'original', but it seems likely that he means where ultimate legitimate authority lies.

<sup>23</sup> In a later text, he suggests that opting out of the EU could be costly, but this does not rule out sovereignty in principle. Furthermore, the Lisbon Treaty has introduced an *ad hoc* procedure for countries that would like to leave the Union. KEATING, MICHAEL (2012) 'Rethinking Sovereignty. Independence-lite, devolution-max and national accommodation', *Revista d'estudis autonòmics i federals*, 16, pp. 9-29. On the

sovereignty should be de-linked from the state and associated with national self-determination – although it is a normative concept rather than an empirical reality. Yet, in this way, Keating does not prove that sovereignty can be shared and divided, but rather seems to move sovereignty from the state and, the national community associated with it, to every national community within the state, thus including also stateless ones. The fact that these may, and often do, decide not to turn such sovereignty into statehood is not relevant because, as he himself suggested, sovereignty is about the ‘right to choose’, it is about the possibility ‘to determine its own future’ rather than the ultimate choice made. In this perspective, it would be more correct to conclude that *power* can be divided across different layers and normative regimes, but *sovereignty*, as the ‘ultimate authority’ to decide about a community’s destiny is not really divided. It is true, however, that the question of where sovereignty really lies may never be put to the test. Ordinary politics seldom deals with sovereignty, but often with power. Sovereignty becomes salient rarely, during moments of fundamental conflict over its own location. Therefore, as Keating argues, ambivalence about the precise location of sovereignty can help manage conflict, while an obsession with nailing it down can exacerbate it.<sup>24</sup>

This brings us back to the initial definition of sovereignty as an idea. In this work we take sovereignty as an idea about the location of ultimate legitimate authority within a community. Historically speaking this idea has often been associated with the people – in the sense of a nation – of a state, yet where the definition of the nation is contested rival claims – both within the same nation and within the same state – concerning the location and exercise of sovereignty co-exist. This explains both why nationalist movements challenge the sovereignty of the state and why, at the same time, there can be diverging projects within the same nationalist movement about the exercise of national sovereignty, which range from limited forms of autonomy to confederation to statehood. The choice for a specific option within this range depends both on the definition of national identity that different people within the nationalist movement subscribe to and on constraints and strategy. As we will see in the various chapters, within Catalan, Scottish and Flemish nationalist traditions there have been consistent formulations of the idea of the nation as being compatible with membership of the respective parent state, as based for instance, on beliefs in a partnership between the national community and the other(s) nation(s) within the state. Yet, such a partnership is usually understood as a union of equals in which, despite sharing powers and temporarily accepting the rules imposed by a higher authority, the nation remains an autonomous subject providing its consent to fundamental decisions affecting the nation’s destiny. In this framework, sovereignty remains firmly in the hands of the nation. However, different ideas do not have the same influence on reality. Therefore, some movements or individuals can believe that sovereignty lies in their nation, although this might be very unlikely to be the case in practice. The need to compromise with state institutions and other groups holding differing notions about the location of sovereignty within the community can also contribute to pursuing other objectives than

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issue of EU membership and state sovereignty see PEMBERTON, JO-ANNE (2009) *Sovereignty: Interpretations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 166-187.

<sup>24</sup> KEATING (2001) *Plurinational, op. cit.*, p. 163. In the chapter on ERC, we suggest that the shuttering of an ambivalent formula about the status of Catalonia as a nation – with its implied normative meaning – is among the factors at the roots of the current crisis in Spain.

statehood. What is important is that, in this framework, such a renunciation does not contradict the original belief in the nation as a sovereign community of equals.<sup>25</sup>

The final concept that we will be using in the rest of the dissertation and that needs further clarification is the concept of discourse. Like the words ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’, discourse is a term that has been used in many different ways and often without preliminary definition. Michel Foucault is a common starting point of several treatments of the subjects, especially his *Archaeology of Knowledge*.<sup>26</sup> Yet, what Foucault is more concerned with is the concept of ‘discursive formation’, that is, a group of statements functioning according to specific rules that are determined by the relation between the statements themselves within an ‘enunciative field’. He introduces the ‘discursive formation’ to oppose traditional histories of ideas that portrays scientific disciplines as an evolutionary tale of the relationship between human consciousness and knowledge with a clear teleological character. Instead of the continuity and smoothness conveyed by these descriptions, he advocates a focus on discontinuities and proposes a new methodology – the archaeology mentioned in the title – which would look at those disciplines as collections of statements dispersed according to the principle of discourse and divide them on the basis of the different rules that regulated them in different epochs. Hence, Foucault is not interested in the specific content of such discursive formations, but rather aims at finding out their rules of existence as well as at emphasising how they limit men’s freedom and autonomy.

What has made Foucault’s concept of discourse echo in later works on nationalism, however, is rather a post-structuralist reading of it, whereby discourse is the framework through which human beings make sense of the world. Umut Özkirimli, for instance, quotes *The Archaeology of Knowledge* where one reads that ‘discourses are what make objects and events appear to us to be real’.<sup>27</sup> Özkirimli thus defines discourse as a force that shapes people’s minds, influences their view of the world and ultimately contributes to the social construction of reality. Quoting Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, he suggests that ‘an earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of “natural phenomena” or “expressions of the wrath of

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<sup>25</sup> The fact that we recognise the possibility that nationalist movements defend the sovereignty of their nation without seeking statehood, while, at the same time, in this research we focus on separatist parties, which do want an independent state, is not contradictory, but rather justified on account of practical reasons explained in section 1.3. Similarly, our agreement with Keating’s perspective on the need to dissociate sovereignty and statehood does not contradict our disagreement with him on the possibility of shared sovereignty, as we define sovereignty essentially as a right to choose one’s future, whereby being part of a plurinational state is one of the possible choices.

<sup>26</sup> Towards the end of the book, however, he clearly writes that ‘in no way could I be said to have “covered”, let alone analysed, the immense domain of discourse’. FOUCAULT, MICHEL (2010) *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Vintage Books) firsts published in 1969, kindle edition, loc. 3083.

<sup>27</sup> ÖZKIRIMLI, UMUT (2010) *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) II edition, p. 206. According to Foucault, though, discourse is something external to human consciousness and in no way represents its expression, but rather the result of the rules of each specific discursive formation, which are autonomous from any individual. Furthermore, he fundamentally stresses the ‘limiting’ rather than the ‘creative’ power of discourse, in the sense that he focuses more on the position of the subject as subaltern to the external rules of discourse. On this see also: WHITE, HAYDEN (1978) *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press) pp. 230-260; PURVIS, TREVOR and HUNT, ALAN (1993) ‘Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology...’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 44(3), pp. 489-491.

God” depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence’.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the specific relationship between discourse and nationalism, we suggest distinguishing between the discursive production of nationalism as a general phenomenon – as the idea of national societies as sovereign communities of equals – and the construction of particularistic understandings of a specific national community.<sup>29</sup> While the former can be identified with a discourse that operates at a more general and abstract level – as pointed out in the above quote from Laclau and Mouffe – the latter is a much more contested and plural entity. It would then be better to talk about it in the plural – as in the title of this dissertation. Here, therefore, we rather deal with discourses intended as ‘ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the “mental world” of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world’.<sup>30</sup> Different actors beget different discourses that reflect and shape their positions within society and relations with other members. Hence, ‘discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions [...] discourses constitute part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another’.<sup>31</sup>

In this meaning, however, discourse could be identified as coinciding with the concept of ideology. There are two main understandings of this term that are relevant to this analysis. The first stems from, although it cannot be reduced to, Marx’s definition of ideology as ‘false consciousness’, as a distorted perception of the social world that preserves relations of domination. Here, there is a clear distinction between truth and falsity, as well as the belief that the true interest of a social class can be objectively identified. The second instead rejects the truth/falsity polarity and admits the coexistence of multiple ideologies that fight for primacy in the social arena. Although ideologies represent the positions and interests of specific groups, the second interpretation does not imply a univocal relation between each class and a specific ideology. It is in this second meaning that ideology and discourse tend to overlap. This is quite clear when reading Laclau and Mouffe who argue that ‘any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of difference, to construct a centre’,<sup>32</sup> which recalls Gramsci’s notions of ‘hegemony’ and ‘common sense’ whereby groups wield ideologies as weapons in order to make them universally accepted, to turn ideology into common sense. A useful way of disentangling the two concepts consists of considering discourse as the process whereby ideology attempts to become the dominant way of

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<sup>28</sup> ÖZKIRIMLI (2010) *op. cit.* p. 208. See LACLAU, ERNESTO and MOUFFE, CHANTAL (1993) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso) first published in 1985.

<sup>29</sup> See also Calhoun for this line of argument. CALHOUN, CRAIG (1997) *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> FAIRCLOUGH, NORMAN (2003) *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge) p. 124.

<sup>31</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>32</sup> LACLAU and MOUFFE, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

thinking, the common sense, within a specific social body. Discourse thus has an ideological effect.<sup>33</sup>

Two points, however, should be made. The ideological effect of discourse is often justified on account of the preservation of relations of domination or oppression.<sup>34</sup> Yet, on the one hand, this seems to reproduce the truth/falsity dichotomy at the core of the first definition of ideology above, whereby one can always clearly establish the objective interest of a class or a group and, therefore, deliver an unproblematic judgment on patterns of oppression and domination. Also, it fits uneasily with the existence, and success, of 'ideologies of resistance'. On the other, it seems to rely too much on a conception of ideology as the result of the 'rational calculation' of a group of individuals pursuing their material interest. It seems not to take into account that interest is not a concept that exists in a void, but that it rather relates to the wider social context and must necessarily be evaluated against the background of 'the felt advantage of an individual or group of individuals and to the objective structure of opportunity within which an individual moves'.<sup>35</sup> It thus requires taking into account psychological considerations concerning anxiety, perceptions of status, aspirations and the wider integration of the individual within society as well. In other words, while considerations of power are extremely important in order to account for the ideological struggle among competing discourses, such struggle should be, as far as possible, apprehended in all its complexity.

Finally, discourse is not only about text and the production of ideas, but also about its inter-subjective and inter-discursive nature. Discourse is not limited to 'what is being said', but extends to who speaks, when, where, how and how the ideas contained in speech events are reshaped by other actors and by their dialogue. This approach, that has recently become dominant in discourse analysis and discursive institutionalism, correctly emphasises the dynamic nature of discourse.<sup>36</sup> However, for obvious methodological reasons, these works usually focus on limited bodies of sources in order to account for the entire process 'from thought to word to deed'.<sup>37</sup> In this study, unfortunately, we cannot apply the same methodological focus on the micro-level. Our concern rather is with an analysis of the construction and evolution of the nationalist arguments of our case-study parties over an extended period of time and, therefore, rather involves a macro-analysis of their discourse. Hence, we cannot but focus on their textual production, arguing that, despite not being necessarily the way in which ideas come to be perceived, understood and implemented in the wider social body, our sources still represent the blueprint of their ideology and thus allow us to draw relevant – albeit necessarily approximate – conclusions on their impact. A micro-study, or better a series of micro-studies, of specific texts, their circulation, discussion and eventual impact on the wider social and political context is certainly something that should be carried out in future works on the subject.

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<sup>33</sup> On this see FAIRCLOUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 9; and PURVIS and HUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 496-498.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> GEERTZ, CLIFFORD (1964) 'Ideology as a cultural system', in DAVID E., APTER (ed.) *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: USA) pp. 47-76, available online at <http://www.gongfa.com/geertz1.htm> (accessed on 17 May 2014).

<sup>36</sup> See: WODAK, RUTH (2008) 'Introduction: Discourse Studies – Important Concepts and Terms', in RUTH, WODAK and MICHAL, KRYZANOVSKI (eds.) *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave) pp. 1-29; SCHMIDT, VIVIEN A. (2008) 'Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, pp. 303-326; FAIRCLOUGH, *op. cit.*;

<sup>37</sup> SCHMIDT (2008) *op. cit.*, p. 309.

## 1.2 Literature Review

There are three main bodies of academic literature that are directly relevant for the subject of this research. The first concerns the general theoretical literature on nationalism, the second is composed of comparative works on stateless nationalism and regionalism in ‘advanced countries’,<sup>38</sup> and the third has to do with monographic works on the specific case studies. As this last one is too vast and specific to be dealt with here, we will directly engage with it in the chapters devoted to the case studies<sup>39</sup> and focus in this section on the first two sets of works. In addition, as Quebec is the most relevant and well-studied case of peaceful attempts at secession – or more precisely ‘sovereignty-association’ – in a consolidated democracy, at the end of this section we will also briefly deal with the literature on support for ‘sovereignty’ in the province in order to draw some useful conclusions to be used in our case studies.

A traditional organisation of the main schools of thought in the field of nationalism divides them into primordialist, modernist and ethno-symbolist approaches.<sup>40</sup> According to this division, primordialists believe that nations are natural communities that have lived through the ages substantially unchanged. Modernists, instead, stress that nation are very recent constructs stemming from the economic, political and/or socio-cultural developments usually grouped under the ‘umbrella’ concept of modernity. Ethno-symbolists seek a common ground between the previous two positions. On the one hand, they recognise the modernity of nationalism, but, on the other, they emphasise the persistence of pre-modern elements into modern national identities and the *long durée* of their formation, which would stretch many centuries back in history.

The primordialist strand features few outstanding academics<sup>41</sup>, but its claims about the eternity of nations are eagerly upheld by nationalist leaders and well rooted in the collective imagination of nations. The argument has been later refined by some authors, often called perennialists, who agree with modernists that nations do not stem from the ‘natural order of things’, but argue that they are the result of long-lasting processes begun well before the age of nationalism.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The concept of ‘advanced countries’ is of course problematic. Unfortunately, a proper discussion is beyond the scope of this research. For the purpose of this review suffice it to say that most of the literature uses it as a synonym of ‘Western countries’.

<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, we will not provide a comprehensive literature review for reasons of scope, but rather critically discuss arguments proposed by authors who have extensively worked on the specific parties and regions studied.

<sup>40</sup> This brief review of the literature on nationalism does not aim in any way to be exhaustive. It rather deals with the main theories in the field and insofar as they are relevant to the cases examined and the approach followed.

<sup>41</sup> Clifford Geertz has for long been considered one of them, but this mainly stemmed from a misinterpretation of his works. See GEERTZ, CLIFFORD (1973) ‘The Integrative Revolution’, in CLIFFORD, GEERTZ (ed.) *Old Societies and New States* (New York: Free Press); ÖZKIRIMLI, UMUT (2000) *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press) p. 74. A primordialist academic author is VAN DEN BERGHE, PIERRE (1979) *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York: Elsevier).

<sup>42</sup> Some consider the following authors as being part of the perennialist current, although other place them among the ethno-symbolists: ARMSTRONG, JOHN (1995) *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press); HASTINGS, ADRIAN (1997) *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); SETON-WATSON, HUGH (1977) *Nations and States* (London: Methuen).



The modernists have often been described as a homogenous group, while, apart from the belief that nationalism is an offshoot of modernity, they have very little in common. The first ones to introduce such an approach have been Ernest Gellner<sup>43</sup> and Frederik Barth<sup>44</sup> in the late 1960s, although Gellner's most complete work – *Nations and Nationalism* – was published much later, in 1983. In the words of Gellner, 'nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'<sup>45</sup>. Gellner denies that nationalism is either a forgettable step in the march towards world unity, as Marxists and liberals alike have argued, or a fall back into the primordial instincts of mankind. He rather sees it as a natural consequence of modernisation and industrialisation, as the principle assuring people's solidarity in industrial societies.<sup>46</sup> The functionalism of his theory is clear from the following quote:

'these thinkers [nationalist thinkers EDM] did not really make much difference. If one of them had fallen, others would have stepped into his place [...] no-one was indispensable. The quality of nationalist thought would hardly have been affected much by such substitutions. Their precise doctrines are hardly worth analysing. We seem to be in the presence of a phenomenon which springs directly and inevitably from basic changes in our shared social condition, from changes in the overall relation between society, culture and polity'.<sup>47</sup>

Although he is talking about the emergence of nationalism as a general phenomenon, this is tantamount to arguing that the details of the ideas of Hitler and, say, Gandhi 'did not make much difference'. Such an understanding is quite surprising when considering Gellner's claim that nationalism is not a natural phenomenon as the primordialists would have it. He clearly falls prey to a deterministic interpretation of modernity in which there is no place for human agency. Man has gone from certain social conditions to new ones without having anything to say about it. Nationalism inevitably descends from industrialism and there is no need to prove it. On the contrary, as Kenneth Minogue correctly points out 'individuals respond rationally – and also variably – to their situation in terms of the understanding they have of it'.<sup>48</sup> Ideas and human agency therefore play a non-negligible role. Precisely because it influences identity, not only should nationalist discourse be taken seriously, but it is by analysing it that one can try to understand how nations are created, why and how this invention becomes meaningful, or not, to populations larger than the group of individuals who devise it.

A move in this direction was taken by two other prominent members of the modernist trend. In the early 1980s, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger published *The Invention of Tradition*, while Benedict Anderson wrote *Imagined Communities*.<sup>49</sup> The focus of both works is the social construction of national identities, although the approach of the authors

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<sup>43</sup> GELLNER, ERNEST (1964) *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson).

<sup>44</sup> BARTH, FREDRIK (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference* (Bergen/Oslo/London: Universitets-forlaget/George Allen).

<sup>45</sup> GELLNER (1964), op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>46</sup> GELLNER (1983), op. cit.

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 124.

<sup>48</sup> MINOGUE, KENNETH (1996) 'Ernest Gellner and the Dangers of Theorising Nationalism', in JOHN A., HALL and IAN, JARVIE (eds.) *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner* (Amsterdam: Rodopi) p. 117.

<sup>49</sup> ANDERSON, op. cit.; HOBBSAWM, ERIC and RANGER, TERENCE (1983) (eds.) *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

is quite different.<sup>50</sup> In the introduction of the abovementioned volume, Hobsbawm defines traditions as ‘a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’.<sup>51</sup> Although he recognises the existence of different types of traditions serving varied societal purposes, he argues that they are especially relevant with regard to the historically recent ‘innovation’ of the nation. He thus concludes that ‘just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern “nation” consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as “national history”), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the “invention of tradition”’.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Anderson states that his ‘point of departure is that nationality [...] as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being’.<sup>53</sup> Anderson does not pretend to juxtapose ‘imagined communities’ to ‘natural communities’. As he makes clear, ‘all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’.<sup>54</sup>

Both Anderson and Hobsbawm wants to show that at the core of nation-building lies a specific representation of a human community spread through different channels and aimed at imposing a unique self-understanding of that community.<sup>55</sup> Yet, while Anderson does not question the ‘reality’ of such an imagined community for the people who deem to be part of it, Hobsbawm is ambiguous about it. In the conclusion of his and Ranger’s book he ponders upon the falsity/reality dichotomy: ‘the final aspect – he said – is the relation between “invention” and “spontaneous generation”, planning and growth. This is something which constantly puzzles observers in modern mass societies. “Invented traditions” have significant social and political functions, and would neither come into existence nor establish themselves if they could not acquire them. Yet how far are they manipulable? The intention to use, indeed often to invent, them for manipulation is evident; both appear in politics, the first mainly (in capitalist societies) in business. To this extent conspiracy theorists opposed to such manipulation have not only plausibility but evidence on their side. Yet it also seems clear that the most successful examples of manipulation are those which exploit practices which clearly meet a felt – not necessarily a clearly understood – need among particular bodies of people’.<sup>56</sup>

Surprisingly, a similar scepticism regarding the ‘felt reality’ of ‘imagined communities’, although diametrically opposed, is shown by Anthony Smith. Rejecting the manipulative

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<sup>50</sup> VERMEULEN, HANS and GOVERS, CORA (1997) (eds.) ‘From Political Mobilization to the Politics of Consciousness’, in *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness* (Basingstoke/London: Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 1-14.

<sup>51</sup> HOBSBAWM, ERIC (1983) ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in HOBSBAWM and RANGER, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> ANDERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> DUARA, PRASENJIT (1996) ‘Historicizing National Identity, or Who Imagines What and When’, in GEOFF, ELEY and RONALD, GRIGOR SUNY (eds.) *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp. 168-169.

<sup>56</sup> HOBSBAWM, ERIC (1983) ‘Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914’, in HOBSBAWM and RANGER, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

function of national myths and memories inferred by Hobsbawm, Smith justifies their emotional power by referring to their ancient origin. Smith's starting assumption is that if national identity is just a recent invention, why do people die for their nation? He thus suggests that there must be a more solid basis for the bond of solidarity between an individual and a national community and this would lie in the *longue durée* of the process of nation-formation in which nations have been preceded by ethnic communities and, even earlier, ethnic categories.<sup>57</sup> Yet, one may wonder why ancient memories should necessarily be more effective than recent ones? If myths and memories are transmitted through a process of symbolic communication, the modalities of the process itself and their cognitive appeal for the recipients are likely to be more relevant for the final outcome than the length of the process of transmission, although it is probable that a few generations would be necessary to make it institutionalised. This does not mean that any kind of myths and memories will be successful. Time is not as 'plastic' as some modernists have suggested and social processes are not as mechanical. But antiquity is not necessarily the most important element. As Etienne Balibar cogently argues the past 'consists of a multiplicity of qualitatively distinct events spread out over time, none of which implies any subsequent event. Secondly, these events do not of their nature belong to the history of one determinate nation. They have occurred within the framework of other political units from those which seem to us today endowed with an original ethical personality'.<sup>58</sup>

An alternative to the triadic distinction of the literature used until now consists in dividing scholars between constructivist and essentialist. In such a scheme, essentialism 'refers to a reduction of the diversity in a population to some single criterion held to constitute its defining "essence" and most crucial character', while constructivism stresses 'the inter-subjective character of the process of ethnic/national identity-formation'.<sup>59</sup> Despite being somewhat vague and putting together authors even more diverse than the modernist category, this distinction allows us to classify otherwise problematic researchers such as Liah Greenfeld. Greenfeld agrees on the modernity of nationalism, but goes further than the modernists by arguing that nationalism itself brought about modernity, rather than the other way around, as commonly assumed in most treatments of the subject. A thorough examination of Greenfeld's conclusions is beyond the scope of this study. However, her work is relevant for two reasons. The first concerns her definition of nationalism that has already been discussed in the previous section. The second is methodological. Greenfeld subscribes to a sociological tradition that considers the individual mind as the site where structure and culture are reconciled, reproduced and/or modified. Structure (intended as the set of constraints imposed on the individual by wider material and social processes) and culture (as the general process of symbolic communication) are always interpreted by individuals, sometimes in similar ways, sometimes differently. This is why an analysis of human agency is important. As human beings react creatively to external stimuli, one has to look at the individuals themselves, their ideas and the motivation behind their production, rather than drawing conclusions directly from larger social phenomena.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> SMITH (1999) *op. cit.*, pp. 3-28.

<sup>58</sup> BALIBAR, ETIENNE (1990) 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 13(3), p. 340.

<sup>59</sup> OZKIRIMLY (2000), *op. cit.*, pp. 215-217.

<sup>60</sup> GREENFELD, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-21.

This research project is based on a similar concern for human agency. However, most of the discursive production of the nationalism of the rich has been carried out by individuals acting in the context of a wider collective subject, that is, their particular nationalist party. As a consequence, the ideas analysed in this work mostly come from party sources, although the direct influence of individual party members – especially leaders – will be emphasised whenever possible. As argued in the introduction, there is also another reason warranting a focus on political parties. Political parties are not only primary actors in the production of ideas, but also in their dissemination to a wider audience and in their implementation once, if ever, in power. They, therefore, are a natural candidate for an analysis of the creation, eventual spread and institutionalisation of a specific idea of the nation.

To a large extent, the most recent literature on nationalism has abandoned the concerns with the origins and causes of nationalism that preoccupied previous authors and has rather focused on specific, and until then neglected, aspects such as the role of gender,<sup>61</sup> post-colonial nationalism<sup>62</sup> and the every-day ‘banal’ reiteration of national identity.<sup>63</sup> Two common features that are relevant for our study can be highlighted: a focus on social constructivism, which somehow departs from the functionalism of most modernist authors and often entails an analysis of discourse; and, coherently, a scepticism of grand theories explaining nationalism with reference to a single ‘master variable’.

In *Ethnicity without Groups*, Rogers Brubaker stresses that ‘constructivism has become the epitome of academic respectability, even orthodoxy’. He however also attacks a certain ‘complacent and clichéd constructivism’, complaining that ‘one often finds constructivist and groupist language casually conjoined’.<sup>64</sup> With the term groupism he means ‘the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis [...] the tendency to treat ethnic groups, nations, and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed’.<sup>65</sup> Brubaker does not mean that nationality, ethnicity and race do not exist as such or cannot be extremely powerful. He rather argues that, on the analytical level, one should focus on how they shape people’s views and behaviours rather than uncritically reify them. In other words, instead of taking nations, ethnic groups and races ‘as things in the world’ one should understand them as ‘ways of seeing the world’.<sup>66</sup> Brubaker’s advice is fully consistent with our decision to focus on separatist parties and nationalist discourse. Although they claim to represent the entire nation as a homogenous entity with a specific self-understanding, most of the parties analysed here have been a minority phenomenon for much of their history and, even when they have managed to rally larger constituencies, voters only in part have shared the main nationalist items of the parties’ agenda.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> YUVAL-DAVIS, NIRA (1997) *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage).

<sup>62</sup> BHABHA, HOMI (ed.) *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge); CHATTERJEE, PARTHA (1993) *The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

<sup>63</sup> BILLIG, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> BRUBAKER, ROGERS (2004) *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press) p. 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 78-81.

<sup>67</sup> However, as shown by Brubaker’s texts in the first place, avoiding referring to nations and ethnic groups as actors without ending up in obscure periphrases is sometimes very hard.

With regard to the growing scepticism on the explanatory power of ‘master variables’, Craig Calhoun argues that, since nationalism is a discursive formation, one can only account for the ‘conditions’ that set the ground exploited by specific actors to create such a narrative. Furthermore, grievances are often used, but cannot by themselves produce such a discourse. He therefore calls for a historical approach looking at the specific local contexts. As he stated, ‘why nationalism comes to dominate in those settings where it does – or for some people and not others within an ostensibly national population – are questions that by and large can be answered only within specific contexts, with knowledge of local history, of the nature of state (and other elite) power, and of what other potential or actual movements competed for allegiance’.<sup>68</sup>

We largely share the scepticism of these authors concerning grand theories and we advocate a contextual approach. Hence, this project does not aim at devising any general theory of nationalism. It rather inquires into a specific typology of nationalist discourse, tries to identify the conditions for its formulation and development, looks at how those conditions have been seized upon by specific political parties and how this has influenced wider trends in support for independence. Before describing in detail the approach and methodology adopted here, though, the other relevant literature mentioned at the beginning of this section, that on the comparative study of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties, must be discussed.

The rise of stateless nationalism in ‘the West’ occurred in the last quarter of the twentieth century has been dealt with by a number of scholars. Early cursory analyses were provided already in the late 1970s and in the 1980s by Smith<sup>69</sup>, Breuille<sup>70</sup> and Horowitz<sup>71</sup>, although within the framework of wider studies and, hence, with very limited scope. An interesting exception is provided by Peter Alexis Gourevitch’s article ‘The Reemergence of ‘Peripheral Nationalisms’: Some Comparative Speculations on the Spatial Distribution of Political Leadership and Economic Growth’.<sup>72</sup> This is by far the most interesting work among these early ones for the originality of his approach, which is in line with the claim that we believe lies at the core of the nationalism of the rich. The author’s main argument indeed focuses on the relationship between economic development and political representation.<sup>73</sup> Looking at the nationalist movements in Scotland, Flanders, Catalonia and the Basque Country, among others, and comparing their situations with those of more stable areas such as France, Germany and – at the time still – Italy, he concludes that when peripheral areas endowed with some kind of ‘ethnic consciousness’ are more developed than the core, or where political power is concentrated, some peripheral ‘elites’ might embrace ‘ethnic’ identities in opposition to the national

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<sup>68</sup> CALHOUN, *op. cit.*, p. 25. A similar position has been adopted by ÖZKIRIMLI (2000) *op. cit.*, pp. 217-222; FINLAYSON, ALAN (1998) ‘Ideology, discourse and nationalism’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 3(1), pp. 99-118. Alike concerns regarding grand theories had already been expressed by John Breuille.

<sup>69</sup> SMITH, ANTHONY (1979) *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press) pp. 150-166.

<sup>70</sup> BREUILLY, *op. cit.*, pp. 320-336.

<sup>71</sup> HOROWITZ, DONALD (1985) *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press) pp. 229-290.

<sup>72</sup> GOUREVITCH, PETER ALEXIS (1979) ‘The Reemergence of ‘Peripheral Nationalisms’: Some Comparative Speculations on the Spatial Distribution of Political Leadership and Economic Growth’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21(3), pp. 303-322.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 304. We must confess that we came across the article quite late in our research, thus, despite recognising its pioneering nature, we should stress that we independently came to similar conclusions.

one.<sup>74</sup> The research is rather embryonic still and, unfortunately, it has not been pursued further by the author, but it represents a pioneering study nonetheless, which, surprisingly, has not influenced much of the subsequent literature.<sup>75</sup>

The 1980s saw the publication of two systematic comparative analyses. The first is a collection of articles edited by Edward Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski.<sup>76</sup> There the authors aim at finding explanations of the renewed strength of separatist parties in Western Europe by putting together a series of theoretical and empirical contributions on both nationalism, generally, and Western Europe, more specifically. They come up with no universal explanation but a series of observations and hypotheses to be tested. Hence the study remains an initial exploration of the subject, although some conclusions are of direct relevance to this project: the importance of political factors, especially institutions and party systems; the assertion that ‘reactive’ or ‘developmental’ models widely used to explain ‘traditional nationalisms’, whereby a backward periphery pursues national mobilisation to defend traditional identities and/or drive development processes, are less apt to explain the ‘new nationalisms’ than ‘competition models’, according to which national mobilisation is stronger among advanced groups with high competitive potential; and the need to focus more on survey research in order to understand people’s perception and identities.<sup>77</sup> The second consists in a comparative account of the ‘failure’ of national integration in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom carried out by Anthony Birch. There, the author argues that the rise of nationalism in advanced nation-states contradicts most theories of modernisation that postulated the progressive elimination of cultural difference within such states. Birch interprets nationalism mainly as a dormant force animating a few romantics that could become salient for larger groups of people at specific points in time because of contingent conditions.<sup>78</sup> Yet, not only is the list of conditions he provides rather vague and unconvincing – they range from the impact of television to greater concentration of business in capitals – but also the idea of a ‘dormant identity’ does not account for the substantial changes in the content and form of the rhetoric of nationalist movements such as the Scottish National Party, which are recognised by the author himself.<sup>79</sup> However this idea is interesting if one considers the possibility of different individual sensitivities to the national question, something that Rogers Brubakers as well suggested when proposing to look at nationality and ethnicity as variables with different strength across and within groups.<sup>80</sup> As we will see below, the relevance of such an approach has been confirmed by electoral surveys concerning the pioneering case of Quebec.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, p. 321.

<sup>75</sup> Pioneering research on the subject was also conducted by Stein Rokkan and Derek Urwin. ROKKAN, STEIN and URWIN, DEREK (1982) *The Politics of Territorial Identity. Studies in European Regionalism* (London: Sage); ROKKAN, STEIN and URWIN, DEREK (1983) *Economy, Territory, Identity. Politics of West European Peripheries* (London: Sage). Yet, these two authors mainly concentrated on the premises of the ‘revival’ of national mobilisation in European peripheries from the 1960s onwards, by accounting for processes of centre-building and peripheralisation occurred in Western Europe in the *long durée*. We will come back on these factors and the authors’ conclusions in the latter half of chapter 2.

<sup>76</sup> TIRYAKIAN, EDWARD and ROGOWSKI, RONALD (eds.) (1985) *New Nationalisms of the Developed West. Toward Explanation* (London: Allen&Unwin).

<sup>77</sup> Ibidem, pp. 374–387.

<sup>78</sup> BIRCH, ANTHONY (1989) *Nationalism and National Integration* (London/Boston: Unwin Hyman) pp. 70-71.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem, pp. 48-71.

<sup>80</sup> BRUBAKER (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Further systematic comparative studies have been carried out in the 1990s. A first example is provided by John Coakley's *The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements*.<sup>81</sup> In this edited volume Coakley and his colleagues look for a 'standard nationalist constituency' that could therefore lead to the identification of the underlying social factors of the most recent wave of national mobilisation in the latter quarter of the twentieth century in Western Europe. Yet, they reach the conclusion that there is no pattern of social factors and relationships that cut across all cases. Hence, socio-economic explanations must be complemented by political ones in a contextual approach, especially through a focus on actors using nationalist language as a tool to interpret social change. More interestingly for the purpose of our research, and echoing some of Gourevitch's insights, Liesbet Hooghe argues in her contribution that 'at macro-level, nationalism seems most likely under two conditions: when economic and cultural centres do not coincide with political centres in the state and when the political centres do not adjust state structures to the actual dispersion of power resources'.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, the authors do not go deeper into the relationship between advanced peripheries and their relative political centres, nor adopt a consistent actor-centred approach. A few years later Christopher Harvie published *The Rise of Regional Europe*. This is a short introduction, mainly conceived for a non-academic public, which tries to draw a history of the regional, national and continental dimensions in Western Europe since the nineteenth century. Yet, Harvie introduces a concept similar to the one we are using here, that he calls 'bourgeois regionalism', by which he means the modernising drive of an advanced industrial periphery complaining about being overburdened by an archaic administrative structure that it aims to modernise – and he mentions Lombardy, Catalonia and North Rhine–Westphalia as examples.<sup>83</sup> Although Harvie did not go further into a discussion of this specific typology, his insights were later elaborated upon by Michael Keating, as we will see below. In a 1998 edited volume, Huri Tursan and Lieven De Winter collected a wide range of articles dealing with 'ethnoregionalist parties'.<sup>84</sup> Despite having the merit of focusing on single political parties in order to emphasise their role as 'ethnic entrepreneurs', compared to our work, theirs' is an exploratory analysis of a broader topic (ethnoregionalism) gathering evidence from a more heterogeneous pool of cases.<sup>85</sup> It is a useful starting point for any analysis of the subject that, unfortunately, has not been further pursued by the authors. An approach more similar to that used in this work, i.e. entailing in-depth inquiry of a few case studies, has

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<sup>81</sup> COAKLEY, JOHN (ed.) (1992) *The Social Origins of Nationalist Movements. The Contemporary West European Experience* (London: Sage).

<sup>82</sup> HOOGHE, LIESBET (1992) 'Nationalist Movements and Social Factors: A Theoretical Perspective', in COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 42. Also, in his contribution to the volume, Keating anticipated some of the considerations on the influence of economic globalisation that we will mention below and examine more in detail in chapter 7. See, KEATING, MICHAEL (1992) 'Do the Workers Really Have no Country? Peripheral Nationalism and Socialism in the United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain', in COAKLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 62–80.

<sup>83</sup> HARVIE, CHRISTOPHER (1994) *The Rise of Regional Europe* (London: Routledge).

<sup>84</sup> DE WINTER, LIEVEN and TÜRSAN, HURI (1998) *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe* (London/New York: Routledge).

<sup>85</sup> An even wider focus is used by Richard Caplan and John Feffer who, in another edited volume, gather contributions concerning both Eastern and Western European countries and conclude that the revival of nationalism is the result of the collapse of old ideological systems and the ensuing sense of disorientation which have driven people back to their ethnic/national identities. In this way they emphasise the commonalities between East and West rejecting the widespread assumption that Eastern nationalisms would be somewhat more ethnic. CAPLAN, RICHARD and FEFFER, JOHN (1996) *Europe's New Nationalism: States and Minorities in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

been adopted by Michel Huysseune.<sup>86</sup> Although self-avowedly a ‘preliminary’ work setting the ground for further and narrower research avenues, Huysseune’s recent edited volume carries out a systematic comparative analysis of ‘centrifugal regionalism’ in Flanders and Northern Italy that contributes to fill an important gap in the literature and also mentions the idea of a ‘nationalism of rich regions’, without however engaging with a full formulation of the concept.<sup>87</sup>

None of these works, unfortunately, focuses on discourse, nor aims at anchoring its analysis in the wider literature on nationalism. This is still the case, although to a lesser extent, with what are the most important comparative works currently available, i.e., Michael Keating’s *Nations against the State* and Monsterrat Guibernau’s *Nations without States*. Keating mainly aims at shattering the myth that minority nationalism is a primordial and backward force. He argues, instead, that the nationalist movements in Catalonia, Quebec and Scotland are progressive forces pushing for more democracy and modernisation. There, he suggests, ‘minority nationalism may be a mechanism for problem solving, in particular for reconciling economic competitiveness and social solidarity in the face of the international market. It may also be – he adds – a mechanism for promoting democratization and recovering representation and accountability in government’.<sup>88</sup> The role of international changes such as globalisation and European integration,<sup>89</sup> as well as the ‘new meaning of state sovereignty’, features high in Keating’s list of factors explaining the rise of nationalism in the regions he analyses. According to him, as regions compete for attracting investments, economic imbalances may set the ground for nationalist claims on the basis of a greater, or lower, economic success. This would explain the new characteristics of these nationalist movements as compared to their nineteenth century predecessors, that is: they are largely in favour of free trade, they generally support the process of European integration and they promote civic understandings of national identity.<sup>90</sup> As we will see in chapter seven, many of Keating’s conclusions do apply to the cases analysed here, especially those concerning the use of nationalist discourse as a way of combining efficiency and solidarity in a context of heightened competition, as well as its insights on the role of globalisation and European integration. Even more interestingly, Keating builds upon Harvie’s concept of ‘bourgeois regionalism’, providing a more elaborated and clear categorisation of regionalist movements, divided into: ‘bourgeois regionalism’, ‘progressive left-wing regionalism’ and ‘right-wing populist regionalism’. This is in line with his more general inquiry about the phenomenon of ‘new regionalism’.<sup>91</sup> In this study, however, we provide a different

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<sup>86</sup> See also Stéphane Paquin’s interesting contribution, although more limited in terms of theoretical insights. PAQUIN, STEPHANE (2001) *La revanche des petites nations: le Québec, l’Écosse et la Catalogne face à la mondialisation* (Montreal: VLB).

<sup>87</sup> HUYSSEUNE, MICHEL (2009) (ed.) *Contemporary Centrifugal Regionalism: Comparing Flanders and Northern Italy* (Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten).

<sup>88</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL (1996) *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) p. xii.

<sup>89</sup> Specifically on the connection between nationalism and European integration see KAROLEWSKI, IRENEUSZ PAWEL and SUSZYCKI, ANDRZEJ MARCIN (2007) (eds.) *Nationalism and European Integration, The Need for New Theoretical and Empirical Insights* (New York/London, Continuum).

<sup>90</sup> KEATING (1996) pp. 1-64. The book is rich of insights into the relationship between nationalism, globalisation and state sovereignty. We engage with them more in detail in chapter seven, where we draw together the main findings of the case studies and discuss more in-depth processes such as globalisation and European integration.

<sup>91</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL (1998) *The New Regionalism in Western Europe. Territorial Restructuring and Political Change* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar) pp. 105-106.



categorisation that, although having something in common with each of the three groups mentioned in Keating's book, cuts across them and uses different criteria to analyse and classify our cases studies (i.e. the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich, first, and other ideological distinctions, such as left-wing, right-wing, progressive, and conservative, at a later analytical stage).

Along similar lines, Guibernau argues that many scholarly treatments on the subject have dismissed what she calls 'nations without states' as either tribalism or regionalism. She thus aims to show that they are 'a response both to the changes in the capacity and legitimacy of the states containing them, and to the reconfiguration of territorial politics after the two World Wars'.<sup>92</sup> The main novelty of her approach is that she calls for an analysis of nations without states as primary actors in world politics. The core of her analysis lies in the triangular relationship between state, nation and nationalism. In this perspective, nations without states are cultural communities willing to obtain political institutions more representative of their own will. The rise of such a nationalist ideology would stem from the decreasing legitimacy of the nation-state – for which she introduces the expression 'post-traditional nation-state' – and the process of economic and cultural globalisation.<sup>93</sup>

Despite building upon their contributions, our approach differs from all these works in three major respects:

- a focus on political parties and their discourse instead of nationalist movements<sup>94</sup> or nations more in general,<sup>95</sup> as well as an attempt at identifying the socio-economic factors that have influenced their discourse and their electoral success;
- a more clear-cut definition through the typology of the nationalism of the rich;
- a clearer anchoring in the literature on nationalism through the argument that the nationalism of the rich represents a new discursive phenomenon.

We hold that this way of proceeding has three advantages. First, since we define nationalism as a form of consciousness, a focus on agency and discourse enables us to clearly identify how it is constructed. Second, using a sample composed of regions across Western Europe and introducing the category of the nationalism of the rich allow testing the hypothesis of a cross-country phenomenon showing similar dynamics and causal factors. Third, looking at the inter-play of culture, economics and identity through the proposed typology of the nationalism of the rich permits us to identify new patterns of national mobilisation to be compared with the ones already highlighted by the established literature and, possibly, to be applied to other cases as well.

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<sup>92</sup> GUIBERNAU, MONTSERRAT (1999) *Nations without States: Political Communities in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press) p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem, pp. 8-16.

<sup>94</sup> Here the expression 'nationalist movement' is used in the wider meaning of a set of actors united by a common cause that they want to advance, rather than a single organisation as a political party. A party can, of course, be defined as a movement as well, yet nationalist parties, like other kind of parties, often represent only a part of a larger entity. To give an exemple, the expression labour movement clearly refers to a wider set of actors than the Labour Party, whose agenda can sometimes be in conflict with other members of the labour movement. Similarly, the *Vlaams Belang* is but one expression of the Flemish movement. It is to this wider whole that we refer in this sentence.

<sup>95</sup> This is also due to a willingness to avoid groupism as defined by Brubaker. See above.

With regard to the successful mobilisation of the local population around the nationalist arguments of the parties analysed, the existing literature on support for 'sovereignty' in Quebec is very relevant and will be used as a theoretical reference to explain electoral behaviour. Stephan Dion tries to explain why secession is hard to achieve in established democracies such as the Canadian one, by proposing a model geared around considerations of 'fear'<sup>96</sup> of the union' with the parent state and 'confidence in secession'. Grounding his analysis on a 'moderate rational approach' according to which 'people weigh gains and losses associated with secessionism' but 'their perceptions are affected by emotions',<sup>97</sup> he argues that secession would be hard to achieve because, in order to rally the 50+1% of support necessary to obtain a majority vote in a referendum or a decisive election, both perceptions of fear and confidence have to be very high, while they usually vary in inversely proportional fashion. For instance, a high level of fear of the union due to cultural assimilation would reduce confidence in secession because of the strong opposition of the parent state. Likewise, economic success would tend to increase confidence in secession but reduce fear of the union.<sup>98</sup> A more sophisticated framework, based on the combination of internal motives and external incentives – similar to fear and confidence – but also expectations of viability has been proposed by Pinard and Hamilton. Their model attempts to combine into a multidimensional theory the grievance-based and resource mobilisation approaches previously developed by other authors. Internal motives are linked to grievances and aspirations. The former are associated with a feeling of deprivation and could be 'absolute or relative, actual or potential (threats), material or ideal, relevant or displaced, soft or hard'.<sup>99</sup> The latter, in contrast, stem from a desire for something that the individual would not feel that he/she has been deprived of. To these internal motives, they also add moral obligations, such as the commitment to the national cause for instance, although they specify that such an element is likely to be important mainly for committed voters and militants. In their opinion, internal motives are necessary but not sufficient. In many cases – they point out – grievances are experienced by a specific population for years before mobilisation arises.<sup>100</sup> Other factors thus have to explain variation. They argue that incentives – both positive or negative (costs) – or a modified perception of them, might account for the success or failure of popular

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<sup>96</sup> Fear is to be understood as 'a negative consideration about the future of the union'.

<sup>97</sup> DION, STEPHANE (1996) 'Why is secession difficult in Well-Established Democracies?', *British Journal of Political Science*, 26(2), p. 272.

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem, pp. 269-283. With regard to the hypothesis whereby a high level of fear of the union would lead to reduced confidence in secession because of the strong opposition of the parent state, Dion seems to ignore the possibility that the strong opposition from the parent state might radicalise the local population and lead to raising levels of support for secession (although not necessarily confidence in it) as recently occurred in Catalonia (see chapter 3 on this).

<sup>99</sup> PINARD, MAURICE and HAMILTON, RICHARD (1984) 'Motivational Dimensions of the Quebec Independence Movement: a Test of a New Movement', *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, 9, p. 229. Relevant grievances are those addressed by the national movement, while displaced ones are those leading to the formation of the movement because unaddressed. The authors define soft deprivations as pertaining to some personality disorders such as 'anomie', but they do not define hard ones.

<sup>100</sup> In the case of Quebec, for instance, the authors show that a majority of Quebecers have shared feelings of grievance against the rest of Canada at least since the early 1960s, but this led to mobilisation only much later and despite the objective improvement in their economic conditions relatively to the rest of the country (thus deprivation was felt, rather than objective). In this sense, they agree with the resource mobilisation theory – whereby deprivation is not important – but only inasmuch as they confirm that it is not sufficient to trigger mobilisation. Hence, they conclude that 'an important backlog of long unattended grievances provided a fertile soil for mobilization once it got under way'.

mobilisation.<sup>101</sup> On top of all that, the authors add the need of a reasonable expectation of success, although the empirical evidence is mixed. The relationship between grievances, incentives and expectations of success in the case of the 1980 Quebec referendum on sovereignty-association with Canada shows the first two to be highly correlated and the third to be dependent on them. More in detail, positive incentives are the best factor explaining support for the yes, but they lose all their explanatory power when not associated with grievances. Thus, a feeling of deprivation seems necessary to determine the perception of positive incentives. Furthermore, expectations of success are highest among people sharing feelings of grievance and perceptions of positive incentives.<sup>102</sup>

Pinard's and Hamilton's findings and theoretical suggestions have been later refined by further studies. First, national identity has been found to be the main predictor of support for sovereignty, with people with strong Francophone Quebecois identity being more likely to vote yes in a referendum on the issue.<sup>103</sup> This has also been confirmed to have a strong impact on evaluations of the probable economic, linguistic and identity consequences of sovereignty. Paul Howe convincingly suggests that national identity and support for sovereignty are more likely to influence one's evaluation of sovereignty's consequences for the economy and the French language than the other way around. Hence, those Quebecers declaring dual or intermediate national identity seem to be more influenced by rational considerations over the prospects of independence than those with strong Quebecois or Canadian identities. This would explain both the higher stability of support for sovereignty as compared to party voting<sup>104</sup> and sudden changes at specific points in time. The former would be due to the existence of a core of unconditional sovereigntists, while the latter is to be attributed to the capacity of political parties to convince conditional voters of the soundness of their arguments about the prospects of sovereignty (also because of changed condition in the structure of grievances/incentives).<sup>105</sup> In this connection, political parties have been showed to play a fundamental role as 'cue givers' in contexts of high uncertainty.<sup>106</sup>

The application of such conclusions concerning the case of Quebec to the case studies analysed in this dissertation, as well as the overall approach followed, is explored more in detail in the next section.

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<sup>101</sup> For instance, in the case of Quebec, a widespread perception of the economic costs associated with sovereignty-association at the time of the first referendum on the matter in 1980 was the most important variable explaining the no vote.

<sup>102</sup> PINARD and HAMILTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-280.

<sup>103</sup> BLAIS, ANDRE and NADEAU, RICHARD (1992) 'To be or not to be sovereignist: Quebecers' Perennial Dilemma', *Canadian Public Policy*, 18(1), pp. 89-103; MANDELSON, MATTHEW (2003) 'Rational Choice and Socio-Psychological Explanations for Opinion on Quebec Sovereignty', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 36(3), pp. 511-537.

<sup>104</sup> Pinard and Hamilton also suggest the existence of different motivations explaining support for sovereignty and for the *Parti Québécois*.

<sup>105</sup> HOWE, PAUL (1998) 'Rationality and Sovereignty Support in Quebec', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 31(1), pp. 31-59.

<sup>106</sup> CLARKE, HAROLD, KORNBERG, ALLAN and STEWART, MARIANNE (2004) 'Referendum Voting as Political Choice: The Case of Quebec', *British Journal of Political Science*, 34(2), pp. 345-355.

### 1.3 Approach, Methodology and Sources

This study does not use an existing rigid analytical framework. This does not mean though that it is not informed by theory. On the contrary, the project is based on the understanding of nationalism and on reflections regarding the literature examined above. We will restate these below in a more systematic fashion for reasons of clarity.

Nationalism is considered here as a form of consciousness – a way of seeing the world, as Brubaker would have it – based on the belief in the fundamental equality and sovereignty of the members of a nation. This ‘light’ definition accounts for nationalism as a general phenomenon that is very protean and pervasive. The other side of the coin consists of the great many particularistic nationalisms that are created around a specific set of ideas defining a nation as a unique and monolithic entity. These self-understandings are social constructions, that is, symbolic and collective works of several individual minds, which prevalently take, at least when they are not yet institutionalised, a discursive form. Of course, there is much more than discourse to the creation, and especially the institutionalisation, of these national understandings. As Thomas Eriksen correctly pointed out the “sense of being in the same boat and living in the same world, with a shared destiny” results from “regular interactions, small exchanges and mutual courtesies, webs of kinship and neighbourly relations”, not from some unaccountable feeling of attachment to the “imagined community” of the nation’.<sup>107</sup> Yet, nationalist discourse is a fundamental component of a national self-understanding, of a narrative that helps make sense and organise the social world. It provides a frame to interpret those ‘regular interactions, small exchanges and mutual courtesies’ according to a specific national self-understanding. This is especially the case of non-institutionalised nationalist discourses such as those analysed in this work, which fight against established views of the polity and cannot rely on stable, or at least not completely stable, forms of self-reproduction.

At the same time, nationalist discourses do not come from nowhere. They are the result of complex intersubjective symbolic processes involving wide groups of individuals and reflect their interests and existential problems, which are shaped by – as much as they shape – the social contexts in which these individuals live. As mentioned before, we are very sensitive to the need to focus on human agency. The choice to take political parties as our primary unit of analysis rather than individuals is the result of both contingency and strategy. Regarding the former, it is a fact that these parties have worked out the most elaborate, consistent and protracted elaboration of the nationalism of the rich, in its separatist version,<sup>108</sup> in their regions. Therefore, they simply are the best sources of information for an analysis of this discursive artefact. Concerning strategy, methodological individualism is very powerful in exploring the personal motivations and the cognitive processes that lead individuals to beget new identities and the set of ideas that underlie them. Yet, it cannot tell us much regarding their spread, political implementation or failure to do either. An analysis based on political parties as primary actors can help cope, at least partially, with this shortcoming by inquiring into the growth of party support, party strategies, the opportunity structure in which they act and the impact of their action on the wider social body.

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in ÖZKIRIMLI (2010) *op. cit.*, p. 215.

<sup>108</sup> More details about the separatist nature of these parties will be provided at the end of this section.

As a consequence, this work inquires into the novelty, formation and social contexts of the nationalism of the rich as a type of nationalist discourse described above. The analysis is carried out on five political parties located in four Western European regions. They are: *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC, Catalan Left of Catalonia); the *Vlaams Belang* (VB, The Flemish Interest); the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA, The New Flemish Alliance); the *Lega Nord* (LN, The Northern League); and the Scottish National Party (SNP). Each case study is conducted according to a three-step procedure.

The first step answers the second of the research questions formulated in the introduction, that is, how has the nationalism of the rich been formulated? After an informative introduction providing the non-specialist reader with basic information concerning the birth and evolution of each party, we look at official propaganda. There, we analyse the construction and evolution of its main arguments. The analysis concerns six dimensions of the parties' discourse: the economic relationship with the state and/or other regions of the parent state; the political relationship with them; the ideological dimension (left-right, social-democratic, liberal, conservative, none of the above); the cultural representation of the nation; the relationship with immigrants; the relationship with the EU and the wider idea of Europe. This categorisation is both the result of theory and practice. It covers quite satisfactorily the internal and external aspects of the nation's self-understanding and it has been confirmed to be relevant across the sample after an exploratory perusal of the primary sources. The analysis is thereby thematic across the case studies, but chronological within each dimension. This means that in each section the main arguments are presented and their evolution over time described. While ideally each dimension should be devoted a section, as the dimensions are not equally important in the discourse of each party, the organisation is flexible. For instance, there is no specific section on immigration in the chapter on the SNP because the few references that one can find in the party's sources are treated in the section on the cultural representation of the nation. On the contrary, as economic arguments are abundant and diverse, their treatment will span two different sections. Furthermore, in some cases – notably concerning ERC, the LN and the VB – there is an extrasection at the beginning accounting for particular issues that, despite deserving special attention, are peculiar only to the specific party under study. The time frame of the analysis varies from one party to the other regarding the starting date, while the systematic analysis of discourse ends for all of them in 2012 – for reasons of feasibility. The main criterion is the appearance in the party's propaganda of the main arguments of the nationalism of the rich. In some cases, such as the VB in the late 1970s and the N-VA in the early 2000s, this appearance coincided with the foundation of the party. Apart from the LN, in all cases the adoption of the nationalism of the rich was accompanied by a clear separatist goal. The LN, on the contrary, was founded in 1989, but adopted independence as its formal objective only in 1995. Yet, a systematic analysis not only of the 1989-1995 period, but also of the regionalist leagues that merged into it and arose during the 1980s is warranted because of the extraordinary circumstance whereby a Northern Italian – later called Padanian – identity was created without any precedent to rely upon.

The second step consists in a systematic analysis of the two major claims made by these parties, which lie at the core of the nationalism of the rich: those of economic victimisation and political marginalisation. It responds to the third research question, that is, what socio-economic conditions have favoured the formation and development of the nationalism of the rich? The aim of this part is to identify the factors that, in each case study, have created the 'breeding ground' for the formulation of such a discourse by the

parties analysed. In accordance with the focus on agency that we have stressed above, and the ensuing need to take nationalist discourse seriously, we look at the parties' rhetoric as 'hints' of the problems that might have triggered a quest for new understandings of the organisation of the social body and/or that have made existing marginal understandings more salient and appealing.<sup>109</sup> Here, Anthony Smith's notion of nationalists as 'archaeologists', who take different materials from history and, we would add from ordinary life, and put them together in a coherent narrative is useful, especially for a comparative analysis.<sup>110</sup> Hence, the study relies on a most different systems design. As the case studies are quite different in terms of size of the relevant population, historical evolution, institutional representation within the parent state, national traditions and cultural features, the discourse of the nationalism of the rich is the only variable shared across the sample. Hence, dissecting the narrative might lead to finding similar underlying conditions. Therefore, the questions that guide the examination of the parties' discourse are: to what extent do the parties' claims correspond to the available evidence?<sup>111</sup> How have they been constructed? In other words, what is the socio-economic context in which they have come about and upon which they have had an impact?

The third step goes further than the formation of the nationalism of the rich and focuses on the evolution of support for independence (meaning independent statehood), the electoral results of the case study parties, and to what extent they are due to the conditions accounting for the rise of the nationalism of the rich and/or to other factors. Such an examination is required because, as the literature on Quebec has already pointed out, support for independence, or 'sovereignty-association', and support for pro-independence parties do not coincide. Hence, by limiting our examination to the formulation of the nationalism of the rich by the case-study parties and the elaboration of hypotheses concerning the factors explaining its formation, we would risk leaving the reader with the incorrect impression that the nationalism of the rich explains everything about party success. On the contrary, we need to look at what other factors have influenced electoral results, how these are related to the nationalism of the rich and how support for independence and other constitutional options has evolved in the relevant regions. As an extensive literature on the various parties and the wider nationalist movements is available, we heavily draw on it. We also use the theoretical and empirical insights provided by the literature on Quebec reviewed above, comparing them with the available evidence for each case study. We thus expect to find that: a vote for pro-independence parties is explained by other factors than pure support for independence; national identity strongly influences support for independence; conditional supporters of independence have a higher tendency to take into account rational calculations of positive and negative incentives; grievances are necessary but not sufficient in explaining changes in support for independence (they set the ground for but do not trigger it); parties and other organisations play an important role in shaping people's perceptions of grievances, incentives and expectations of success.

The study of the parties' discourse is based on primary sources including: party programmes, campaign material (party posters and leaflets), thematic brochures and party

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<sup>109</sup> Indeed, in almost all the cases, except for the LN, the parties analysed could rely on existing separatist traditions that they adapted to new social circumstances and developed in a much more thorough and consistent way.

<sup>110</sup> SMITH (1999) *op. cit.*, pp. 174-180.

<sup>111</sup> Here, the idea is not that they can certainly be proved right or wrong according to objective standards, but rather that one can examine their consistency, compare them with existing historical and socio-economic data and eventually evaluate their robustness.

papers. They therefore span both internal and external propaganda. All the necessary documents have been collected at the following repositories: parties' headquarters (in Milan, Edinburgh, Brussels and Barcelona) and websites; the National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh); the Belgian Parliament Library (Brussels); the Heritage Henri Conscience Library and the *Archief Documentatie en Onderzoekcentrum* (Antwerp); the Library of the Catholic University of Leuven; the *Biblioteca Bertoliana* (Vicenza); the *Biblioteca del Pavello de la República* (Barcelona); and the Catalan Parliament Library (Barcelona). The complete list of the primary sources cited is to be found in the bibliography under the heading 'primary sources'. The material collected covers most of the manifestos and party papers published by the parties analysed during the time frame of study, plus various others publications. The only major gap concerns the SNP which, in fact, did not consistently publish a paper until 2000 when it started distributing 'Snapshot' and, later, the 'Saltire'. This shortcoming has been partly offset with other materials, such as short-term regular publications (the *SNP Research Bulletin* issued in the 1970s for instance) and single-issue papers published on the occasion of specific campaigns. The *Scots Independent* is a newspaper close to the party but not an official organ. We thus decided not to use it. Minor problems in collecting party papers have been encountered with regard to the LN, for the period 2004-2007 because of the closure of the archives at the party's headquarters in Milan after our first visit in January 2012. For the period 2008-2011, we have used a selection of editorials of the party's daily *La Padania*, published monthly on the party's website, while we could access digital copies of it from June 2012 on.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, we were not able to consult copies of the VB's monthly magazine for the period 2003-2006. Also, for reasons linked to our limited proficiency in Dutch that made reading sources extremely time-consuming, we have consulted only a randomly selected sample of VB's papers equal to about four issues per year. Similarly, as ERC's monthly turned briefly into a weekly for the period between March 2008 and December 2011, we randomly selected an issue a month for that period.

The research has also entailed interviews with 23 elected politicians from the case-study parties: five from ERC and the VB respectively; four from the LN, the N-VA and the SNP respectively. Annex two reports the grid of questions used for the interviews, the approach followed and a summary of each interview (except one for which the interviewee denied authorisation to publish it in the dissertation). The interviews had two main methodological purposes. First, by discussing in detail with some party members the most important elements of their propaganda, we tried to get insights into the nuances of the arguments identified in the written propaganda and thus aimed at further refining the analysis. Second, and related to the first point, we made use of the interviews to ensure internal validation and coherence, i.e., to be sure not to have completely misinterpreted some arguments or to have neglected important elements of their discourse, and to spot major inconsistencies, if any, between oral answers and the written sources. As we wanted the interviews to somehow mirror written documents, we interviewed only elected politicians, therefore those having a clear public exposure. Also, we tried to get a mixture of junior and senior members to account for possible generational differences in the use of arguments within the party. Unfortunately, the choice was heavily influenced by contingent factors, especially availability and accessibility, and time and travel constraints. For these reasons, as well as because of the limited number of people that we could meet,

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<sup>112</sup> In order to reduce the sample of sources we randomly selected four copies per month, which was equal to the copies consulted per year of *Il Sole delle Alpi*.

with obvious consequences on the generalisability of conclusions, we have taken a cautious approach to the interviews. Hence, we never found a major claim or conclusion solely on interview data, but we rather use them to confirm or contradict findings obtained through the analysis of written sources.

As the research relies on case studies, there are some aspects concerning their choice that need further explanation. In dealing with them, we are confronted with three levels of analysis: the separatist parties themselves, their wider nationalist movement and the territorial regions in which they operate. While the first will receive most of our attention, we cannot ignore the wider context in which they arose. When we refer to the movement, we mean the entire set of actors that have been struggling for recognition and further autonomy of the national community that they claim to represent. As it stands here, the movement represents a heterogeneous force whose members have competing ideas about the self-understanding of the nation and varying political agendas, but they share a specific concern for the nation's autonomy. The case-study parties represent a specific instance of the nationalist movement, although in some cases (SNP and LN) they enjoy a near monopoly over the handling of nationalist rhetoric.<sup>113</sup> Finally, the territorial region is the semantically wider term among the three considered here, since it includes people living in the territory deemed, by the nationalist parties, to be the nation's 'motherland', but who might prefer other forms of subjective identification. Moreover, apart from Padania, the regions relating to the case studies are recognised by their parent states and enjoy some form of administrative autonomy. Thereby, as the reference to the nation or the nationalist movement might be controversial – some might put into question its strength, even its existence – often the geographical term is preferred because of its largely neutral nature.

As the willingness to disengage from the system of national solidarity of the parent state lies at the core of the nationalism of the rich, we have decided to focus on separatist parties, which display a stronger commitment to this goal, and to that of independent statehood, than autonomist ones. Also, it is this separatist version of the nationalism of the rich that is of greatest empirical interest because it threatens the stability and integrity of the respective parent states. Of course, the distinction between separatism and autonomism is often not so sharp and, as we will see in the next chapters, the parties analysed in this study have often followed gradualist strategies that have taken advantage of such ambiguity. However, all the parties in the sample have, from a certain moment on in their history, declared independent statehood as their official aim, if not in the immediate future at least in the long term.

A further clarification is required. The general phenomenon that we are analysing here is the nationalism of the rich as it has been formulated by the five separatist parties mentioned above. The discourse of each of these parties therefore is a case study. However, as they arose and have operated in the same social contexts, the VB and the N-VA will be treated in the same chapter and will share step two and three of the analysis.

The choice of the case studies has been problematic with regard to three aspects: their type, number and selection. Scientific research is generally composed of two moments. The first deals with conjecture and hypothesis generating; the second consists of hypotheses testing. A small sample of cases chosen on the basis of their specific features is

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<sup>113</sup> The Padanian case is even more interesting because, while in Italy a general awareness of a cultural difference between the North and the South was acknowledged all along, such a fracture was never turned into a nationalist dispute until the establishment of the *Lega Nord*.



generally associated with the first moment, while large random samples with the latter.<sup>114</sup> These considerations have led us to opt for an in-depth analysis of a small number of cases. The goal was to get a ‘paradigmatic sample’, that is, one that could provide the most extreme embodiment of the phenomenon under study. The choice was made after a perusal of the existing literature in order to identify parties voicing the rhetoric of economic victimisation typical of the nationalism of the rich. It does not claim to be exhaustive. Other cases were taken into account, in particular, political forces in the Basque Country, Bavaria, Quebec, Czechoslovakia (before 1993), Latvia and Slovenia (before 1991). The choice to focus on Western Europe in order to reduce the heterogeneity of the sample, both in terms of historical patterns of nation-state formation and to include the process of European integration, ruled out the last four. Bavarian nationalism does not feature strong separatist parties, while the violence marking the Basque Country, and its most important separatist party, *Herri Batasuna*, sets it too much apart from the other cases in the sample. We could have added one or two counterfactual cases. But, even if we had found other examples of ‘advanced’ European peripheries in coincidence with stagnant or ‘backwards’ core areas that did not develop strong nationalist movements (or none at all), this counterfactual would have been based on the assumption that the coincidence of an ‘advanced’ periphery and a ‘backward’ core is the main factor accounting for the nationalism of the rich, which, at the moment of the selection of the cases was still an assumption. Therefore, we believe that the analysis of counterfactuals is a fundamental further step to be undertaken in a future project on the basis of the results of this preliminary research. In addition, linguistic considerations also influenced the selection of the case studies.

Finally, the Scottish National Party is a rather deviant case and this for two main reasons. First, Scotland’s wealth did not accrue to Scotland but could have done so had the country seized the revenues (or a bigger share of them) of North Sea oil. Without oil, Scotland did not stand out if compared to the British average income – on the contrary it was poorer, although not substantially, for most of its recent history. Moreover, had it been realised, this wealth would have come from the exploitation of a natural resource, thus substantially diverging from the manufacturing model prevalent in the other case studies. Second, and as a consequence of the different context in which it was operating, the SNP has consistently had to confront the accusation of Scotland being subsidised by the rest of UK, which other case study-parties have instead made against other regions of their parent state. What, however, makes the SNP worth being included in the study is the economic case for independence made by the party since the late 1960s and early 1970s, whereby the SNP has consistently depicted Scotland as a rich, advanced nation mismanaged by successive London governments. Also, Scotland is an advanced region, did have an evolved industrial structure, albeit a declining one, and there has been a long tradition of depicting the Scots in popular discourses as skilful and hard working (the myth of the ‘lad o’ pairts’).

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<sup>114</sup> GERRING, JOHN (2007) ‘The Case Study: What it is an What it Does’, in CARLOS, BOIX and SUSAN, STOKES (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp. 90-122. In this connection, Robert Stakes talks about the difference between explanation and understanding. STAKES, ROBERT E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research* (London: Sage) pp. 35-48. For an argument against some myths connected to the unscientific character of small Ns case-study research see: FLYVBJERG, BENT (2006) ‘Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research’, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(2), pp. 219-245.



## 2 The Nationalism of the Rich: A New Phenomenon

The rise of sub-state nationalism in Western democracies from the late 1960s onwards was a shocking discovery for mainstream theorists who had long predicted the disappearance of such ‘primitive’ reactions in the developed world. As Anthony Smith stated in the late 1970s, ‘these autonomist movements have arisen this century in their political form, in well established, often ancient states, with clear and recognised national boundaries, and with a relatively prosperous economy. While not minimising considerable differences of degree, all these states are fairly industrialised, and much of the population is literate and even quite well educated. And yet, despite all these advantages, which led theorists to postulate the early demise of nationalism, the ethnic minorities seem more discontented than before, and some even wish to go it alone’.<sup>115</sup> Along the same lines, Anthony Birch pointed out that between, roughly, 1850 and 1960 European political theory had been dominated by the Hegelian and Marxist assumption that progress and historical necessity required the expansion of units from smaller to larger scales, and especially from more backward to more developed institutions. After all this had been the way national development had been pursued in most of the Western part of the continent through the slow integration of diverse pre-existing human communities into the wider nation-states of England (and later Great Britain), France, Spain, Germany and Italy. The opposite process unfolding in Eastern Europe could still be considered as a positive step towards the unstoppable march of historical progress because it brought to an end the decrepit empires of Central and Eastern Europe. But the rise of separatist nationalism in established nation-states was seen as a reactionary phenomenon.<sup>116</sup> As confirmed by Eric Hobsbawm, in the nineteenth century ‘the building of nations was seen inevitably as a process of expansion [...] it was accepted in theory that social evolution expanded the scale of human social units from family and tribe to county and canton, from the local to the regional, the national and eventually the global’.<sup>117</sup> This opinion held sway among liberals and Marxists alike. While John Stuart Mill argued that ‘nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial for a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of highly civilized and cultivated people – to be a member of the French nationality’,<sup>118</sup> Marx and Engels suggested that the fate of cultural minorities in the newly formed nation-states ‘was to be consigned to the rag-bag of history’.<sup>119</sup>

These ideas changed when it became clear that reality contradicted theory. In the 1960s and 1970s, a revival of nationalist, ethnic and cultural conflicts spurred a turnaround in academia. In 1968, Arendt Lijphart published *The Politics of Accommodation*,<sup>120</sup> suggesting that social homogeneity was not a necessary pre-requisite of democracy. Some years later Walker Connor wrote influential articles stressing the continuing significance

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<sup>115</sup> SMITH (1979) *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>116</sup> BIRCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-39.

<sup>117</sup> HOBBSBAM, ERIC J. (1990) *Nations and Nationalism since 1870: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 32-33.

<sup>118</sup> MILL, JOHN S. (1988) *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government, Selections from Auguste Comte and Positivism* (London: Everyman’s Library) p. 363.

<sup>119</sup> BIRCH, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> LIJPHART, AREND (1968) *The Politics of Accommodation; pluralism and democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

of ethnicity,<sup>121</sup> and in 1974, Kenneth Douglas McRae edited *Consociational Democracy*.<sup>122</sup> As Birch pointed out, all this ‘created a minor revolution in thinking about the process of national integration, based upon the propositions that the assimilation of minorities was not taking place in the way previously imagined, was not necessary to the stability of the state, and possibly was not even desirable’.<sup>123</sup>

The most interesting reactions in the field of the study of nationalism has come from Michael Hechter and Tom Nairn. With his 1975 *Internal Colonialism*, Hechter criticises ‘diffusionist’ theories of national integration and proposes to explain the rise of peripheral nationalism in the UK with the ‘internal colonialism model’ first formulated – as he points out – by Lenin and then improved by Gramsci and sociologists working on the Amerindian region. According to this framework, the homogenisation of peripheral areas into the dominant culture of the core, due to the increased contacts between the two under conditions of modernity that the diffusionists postulated, did not come about because the more advanced group rather tended to institutionalise its position of domination over the periphery. This institutionalisation would not only concern the economic dimension, but also the cultural one and the prestige associated with each culture. The result would be a stratification system that he calls the ‘cultural division of labour’, leading to different ethnic and national identifications in the two groups.<sup>124</sup>

Hechter’s theory has been criticised on different accounts,<sup>125</sup> the most important being that the data he uses do not fit the facts with regard to Scotland – and only partially in relation to Wales. As Kendrick et al. show, Scotland’s economy has not been kept dependent or complementary to that of England, as Hechter is eager to prove, but has constantly developed abreast of the British average.<sup>126</sup> What is interesting, however, is Hechter’s suggestion that nationalism would arise out of the cultural division of labour imposed by the core-periphery relation of domination. As the core is not interested in acculturation – he suggests – ‘to the extent that social stratification in the periphery is based on observable cultural differences, there exists the probability that the disadvantaged group will, in time, reactively assert its own culture as equal or superior to that of the relatively advantaged core. This may help it conceive of itself as a separate “nation” and seek independence. Hence, in this situation, acculturation and national development may be inhibited by the desires of the peripheral group for independence from a situation perceived to be exploitative’.<sup>127</sup>

In *The Break-up of Britain*, published in 1977, Nairn takes issue with Hechter as far as the revival of nationalism in Scotland is concerned, but at the same time agrees with him on the idea implicit in the model – i.e. that nationalism comes about in exploited and

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<sup>121</sup> Most of them are to be found in a collection published at the beginning of the 1990s: CONNOR, WALKER (1994) *Ethnonationalism: the Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

<sup>122</sup> McRAE, KENNETH (1974) *Consociational Democracy: Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies* (Toronto: MacClelland and Stewart).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 48.

<sup>124</sup> HECHTER, MICHAEL (1975) *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press) pp. 1-14.

<sup>125</sup> For a thorough critique see PAGE, EDWARD (1978) ‘Michael Hechter’s internal colonial thesis: some theoretical and methodological problems’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 6, pp. 295-317.

<sup>126</sup> KENDRICK, STEVE, BECHHOFFER, FRANK and MCCRONE, DAVID (1985) ‘Is Scotland different? Industrial and occupational change in Scotland and Britain’, in HOWARD, NEWBY et al. (eds.), *Restructuring Capital: Recession and Reorganisation in Industrial Society* (London: Macmillan).

<sup>127</sup> HECHTER, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

disadvantaged peripheries – and Nairn turns it into the pillar of a general theory of nationalism. Nationalism, he writes, ‘arose out of a host of earlier phenomena as the protest of under-developed peoples. It became their way of mobilising, and trying to catch up with already industrialised areas. Over much of the world, too, it was an ideological weapon of liberation from dominance by the latter’.<sup>128</sup> However, in accordance with his idea that Scotland does not fit this description, he points to the existence of another, ‘neglected but significant’, category of peoples who ‘turned nationalist in order to liberate themselves from alien domination – yet did so, typically, not from a situation of colonial under-development but from one of relative progress. They were nationalities that struggled to free their own strong development from what they had come to perceive as the backwardness around them – from some larger, politically dominant power whose stagnation or archaism had become an obstacle to their farther progress’.<sup>129</sup> Nairn has been widely criticised by later authors, especially on account of the presumed functionalism of his theory,<sup>130</sup> as well as because locating the origins of nationalism in the periphery of the most advanced European countries would simply not square with historical events.<sup>131</sup> What concerns us here, however, is not the validity of Nairn’s suggestions as a general theory of nationalism, but rather the fact that he identifies Scotland as a case of ‘overdevelopment nationalism’ and that this is seen as somewhat of an exception in the history of nationalism. Even more interestingly, he argues that Belgium, Bohemia, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Croatia, and more recently the Ibo in Nigeria and the Kurds in the Middle East, would be kindred cases. Let us thus proceed to analyse these cases more closely.

The Habsburg Empire certainly is a good place to start an inquiry of possible precedents of the nationalism of the rich. Nairn mentions Bohemia and Croatia as regions that could show the kind of ‘overdevelopment nationalism’ that he attributes to Scotland. In his critique of Nairn’s model, Breuilly also added the Magyars, as an example of a privileged group within the empire, rather than a dispossessed one, which developed strong nationalist feelings. In economic terms, as late as 1910, the most industrialised areas of the empire were parts of Austria, notably Vienna, and the Czech lands of Bohemia-Moravia-Silesia, with 46% and 51% of the population employed in industry. The relative figures for Hungary and Croatia were 23% and 13% respectively. As far as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is concerned, while the Austrian-Bohemian area was close to the average of Western Europe, Hungary’s reached about 57% and the Balkan countries did not go beyond 40%.<sup>132</sup> As a matter of fact, ‘the Austrian and Czech lands emerged as an industrialized regional core with agricultural peripheries within the monarchy and in the neighboring Balkan countries’.<sup>133</sup> Yet, the economic relationship between the Czechs and the Germans was not one among equals. Most of the industry was

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<sup>128</sup> NAIRN, TOM (2003) *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (Altona: Common Ground) III edition, first published in 1977, p. 172. See also NAIRN, TOM (1998) *Faces of Nationalism: Janus Revisited* (London, Verso) p. 50. Albeit not so explicitly, a similar idea can also be found in Gellner’s *Thought and Change*, p. 168.

<sup>129</sup> Idem.

<sup>130</sup> See ORRIDGE, ANDREW (1981) ‘Uneven Development and Nationalism: I’, *Political Studies*, 29(1), pp. 1-15; ORRIDGE, ANDREW (1981) ‘Uneven Development and Nationalism: II’, *Political Studies*, 29(2), pp. 181-190.

<sup>131</sup> BREULLY, *op. cit.*, p. 413.

<sup>132</sup> BEREND, IVAN T. (2003) *History Derailed: Central and Eastern Europe in the Long 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press) p. 179.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

controlled by the Germans, who also constituted the overwhelming majority of the Austrian bureaucracy. Despite the growth, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, of a Czech middle-class that by 1914 managed to own a quarter of the textile industry, an Austro-German still earned on average 25% more than a Czech.<sup>134</sup>

But what about their claims? Before the 1867 Austro-Hungarian compromise, the main demand of the Czech national movement consisted in the reintroduction of the Bohemian 'state right' (*Staatsrecht*), i.e., the legal status of the Czech kingdom under the monarchy. This would have entailed some form of autonomy, recognition of the Czech nation and equal status for the Czech language in the education system and the government.<sup>135</sup> The Czech were disappointed by the 1867 compromise, as they saw themselves deserving equal status with the Magyars. From the 1870s on, the political struggle focused on language rights, which the emergence of the radical Young Czech Party, in the late 1880s, tied to demands for universal suffrage. The nationalism of the Young Czechs 'fundamentally consisted of resistance to Germanization and revival of the concept of the Bohemian state right'.<sup>136</sup> The party advocated socio-economic reforms, but these mainly concerned employment opportunities in the lower ranks of the administration for Czech people, defence of small farmers from foreign competition and a ban on discriminatory practices on the part of German cartels in the industrial and bank sectors. Furthermore, the party never put into question the monarchy.<sup>137</sup> Such an account was also confirmed by Breuille, who pointed out that Bohemian cities became the stage for a confrontation between an advancing Czech lower middle-class and the Germans occupying the upper strata. He stressed that 'small Czech merchants, retailers and manufacturers objected to liberal economic policies which seemed to favour larger German competitors'<sup>138</sup> and this, in turn, brought about a mobilisation of the Germans who fought harshly against competition from Czech labour willing to work for lower salaries.

The position and arguments of the Magyar and Croat national movements seem to conform even less to the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich. Economically, the areas in which these two movements acted occupied an intermediate position between the industrialised West and the most backward rural areas of the South and the East. The Magyar landed aristocracy enjoyed a high standard of living due to its hold over the rich agricultural production of the large Hungarian estates. Furthermore, both the Magyar and Croat elites were politically privileged, although to different extents. The Croats enjoyed a special relationship with the Hapsburg Crown and, although to varying degrees, they had benefited from some form of autonomy under Hungarian control, which was officially recognised by the 1868 Croatian-Hungarian compromise. Yet, despite such agreement, the Croats of Croatia-Slavonia were not spared a harsh policy of Magyarisation that gave renewed strength to the idea of 'Trialism', i.e., the transformation of the empire into a federal union of Germans, Magyars and South Slavs (dominated by the Croats). Thus, the main claims of the Croat national movement were based on the recognition of the historic

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<sup>134</sup> RUDOLPH, RICHARD (1976) *Banking and Industrialization in Austria-Hungary, the Role of Banks in the Industrialization of the Czech Crownlands, 1873-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> BEREND, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-105.

<sup>136</sup> WINTERS, STANLEY B. (1969) 'The Young Czech Party (1874-1914): An Appraisal', *Slavic Review*, 28(3), p. 430.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 433-442.

<sup>138</sup> BREUILLY, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

rights of the Croat kingdom, first, and the project of unification with the Southern Slavs, later, rather than on any specific socio-economic platform.<sup>139</sup>

Before the 1867 compromise, the Hungarian upper nobility consistently opposed the modernisation policies promoted by the Hapsburg monarchy since the end of the eighteenth century. It especially resented the abolition of serfdom, the attempts to introduce German as the only language of the empire and, more in general, the trend of political centralisation that threatened their historical rights. In the first half of the nineteenth century, national demands revolved around linguistic legislation. An economic agenda did blossom under the leadership of Lajos Kossuth, but reflected the primitive development of the Hungarian economy. Kossuth called for protective tariffs against Austrian competition and urged his compatriots to buy only Hungarian industrial products in order to boost the infant local manufacturing sector.<sup>140</sup> However, the economic balance progressively changed to the advantage of the Magyars. As argued by Andrew Janos: ‘while Hungarian nationalists never stopped complaining about the depredations of Austria [...] the economic relationship between the two halves of the realm was gradually reversed, until it had reached the point where it could be safely said that Hungary exploited Austria, by refusing to pay her fair share of common defense and overhead expenses, and by forcing upon the empire a system of protective tariffs, highly injurious to Austro-German and Bohemian industrial interests’.<sup>141</sup> The 1867 compromise elevated the Magyars to a status unrivalled by other nationalities in the empire. Austria and Hungary were *de facto* independent except for a common ruler, army, ministry of foreign affairs and a financial contribution to these two activities. The Magyar political elite enjoyed full powers over the relationship with the nationalities inhabiting its territory and consistently applied a policy of cultural assimilation and economic discrimination. Thus, until the turn of the twentieth century, the Magyars were among the strongest supporters of the empire. Things began running soar with the rise of the Independence Party in 1894, which, emboldened by Hungary’s good economic performance, mainly due to the tariff system, believed that Hungary could stand alone. However, although there were some clashes over the periodic negotiation of the common expenditures, the real bone of contention related to the military, where the Magyar nationalists demanded an independent militia with Magyar as official language. These demands fell away when Franz Joseph threatened to introduce universal suffrage throughout the empire, a move that would have menaced the supremacy of the landed Magyar classes not only with regard to the non-Magyar minorities, but also to the Magyar lower classes.<sup>142</sup>

An interesting case not mentioned by Nairn and, yet again, part of the Habsburg Empire is Lombardy. The Risorgimento’s historical tradition portrayed the Habsburg policy as discriminatory and largely detrimental to the interests of the Lombard economy. Such a view, however, has been largely reconsidered. First, while being one of the richest territories of the empire,<sup>143</sup> between 1815 and 1859, and enjoying a buoyant export-oriented economy, Lombardy’s wealth was mainly due to the agro-commercial sector and

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<sup>139</sup> KANN, ROBERT A. (1950) *The Multinational Empire: Nationalism and National Reform in the Habsburg Monarchy 1848-1918*, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press) pp. 233-259.

<sup>140</sup> BEREND, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-111.

<sup>141</sup> JANOS, ANDREW (1982) *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary, 1825-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. 321.

<sup>142</sup> MASON, JOHN W. (1997) *The Dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 1867-1918* (London: Longman) pp. 16-45.

<sup>143</sup> It still enjoyed an estimated per capita GDP equal to about half as much as that of Lower Austria, though.

an over-reliance on the rather primitive silk industry.<sup>144</sup> The myth of an unbearable Austrian taxation was mainly based on the high revenues deriving from export duties on silk, which did not negatively influence trade and were offset by disproportional levels of public expenditure. Second, although there were tensions between the economic interests of the Lombards and the rationales guiding imperial economic policy, there was no formulation of a clear Lombard common economic interest, but rather a constellation of varying interests often at odds with each other. What is most striking, in this connection, is that within the general debate on the need, or not, to industrialise the Lombard economy, as a step towards the modernisation of the entire Italy, that took place in the Lombard press in the first half of the nineteenth century, not only was the empire not the object of scorn and loathing, but it was not even taken into consideration. As made clear by Kent Greenfield ‘the Lombard journalists did not oppose the Austrians; they ignored them’.<sup>145</sup>

Similar arguments about an unbearable fiscal burden as lying at the roots of the Belgian secession from the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1830 have been made by some early nationalist historiography. Leon van der Essen, for instance, mentioned the fact that the Belgians were asked to pay for the debts incurred by the Dutch Republic, as well as for the defence of the Dutch colonies from which they did not derive any advantages, as a reason for the failure of the union of the Low Countries.<sup>146</sup> Yet such a claim is nowhere to be found in more recent and nuanced treatment of the subject. Els Witte pointed out that the 1830 revolution stemmed from a strange alliance between a liberal upwardly mobile intellectual middle-class that had no specific economic grievance, but simply wanted to see recognised its new status by pressing through political and social reforms, on the one hand, and the landed gentry that, along with the clergy, was dissatisfied with the religious policies pursued by William I, on the other.<sup>147</sup> Ernst Kossmann provided further details over the economic situation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The malaise of the early 1820s gave way for the rest of the decade to a slow but constant growth. As compared to the period of French occupation, taxation decreased and it was in any case higher in the north, where per capita contributions averaged 17 guilders, than in the south, where they reached only 11 guilders.<sup>148</sup> All this left the dominant economic elites quite content with their prosperity for the entire period and, although the biennium 1829-30 saw increasing poverty among the lower classes, this was mainly due to bad harvests and an unusually rigorous winter rather than to structural conditions. Kossmann also pointed out that, despite lack of clear evidence, part of the Belgian liberals were convinced that the young and vigorous Belgium would take over the stagnant and immobile Northern Netherlands as the leading force within the Kingdom and when they realised that this would not happen opted for secession.<sup>149</sup> Yet, this did not clearly figure in their programme that was rather

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<sup>144</sup> PICHLER, RUPERT (2001) ‘Economic Policy and Development in Austrian Lombardy, 1815-1859’, *Modern Italy*, 6(1), pp. 35-58.

<sup>145</sup> GREENFIELD, KENT ROBERT (1965) *Economics and Liberalism in the Risorgimento. A Study of Nationalism in Lombardy, 1814-1848* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press) revised edition, p. 267.

<sup>146</sup> VAN DER ESSEN, LEON (1920) *A Short History of Belgium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) p. 151.

<sup>147</sup> WITTE, ELS (2009) ‘Breakthrough of a Liberal Constitutional State (1830-1848)’, in ELS, WITTE, JAN, CRAEYBECKX and ALAIN, MEYNEN, *Political History of Belgium: From 1830 Onwards* (Brussels: ASP) pp. 21-28.

<sup>148</sup> KOSSMANN, ERST H. (1978) *The Low Countries (1780-1940)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) pp. 130-131.

<sup>149</sup> It must be stressed however that this was not the initial intent. The first petitions sent to the King in 1829 did not mention the possibility of a break-up.



geared around demands for wider liberties including, free press, free education and linguistic freedom, largely ignoring social and economic problems.<sup>150</sup>

There are two cases, however, among those mentioned by Nairn that can, to a large extent, be considered forerunners of the nationalism of the rich. They are represented by the nationalist movements that arose in Catalonia and the Basque Country between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

Analysing the then Catalan-Spanish relationship, Joan Culla argued that '*pour la grande majorité des politiciens espagnols, il était incompréhensible et inacceptable que la Catalogne, le territoire le plus fort, prospère, et européen, réclame l'autonomie à un État dans lequel il jouissait de l'hégémonie économique. Quelqu'un l'a exprimé sous la forme d'une boutade: « C'est le premier cas d'une métropole qui veut s'émanciper de ses colonies »*'.<sup>151</sup> According to Pierre Vilar, Juan Linz and Salvador Giner, the rise of nationalism in Catalonia, in the second half of the nineteenth century, coincided with a spectacular economic development accompanied by limited political power, which encouraged the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie to abandon any attempt to take over the Spanish institutions and rather focus on regional autonomy.<sup>152</sup> What is often emphasised in the literature is that the development of the region coincided with the contemporary decline of the rest of Spain, except for the Basque Country. Even more interestingly, Catalan nationalism, as formulated at the time, contained, among others, a socio-economic argument whereby 'Catalonia's subordination to Castile was thwarting the enterprising spirit of the Catalans at a time when Catalonia was recovering from centuries of decadence'.<sup>153</sup>

From around 1820 to 1885, in the wake of the spread of romantic nationalism, a Catalan national identity began to develop without being felt as incompatible with the Spanish one. Yet, during this period the interests of Catalan and Spanish economic elites started diverging, as the former was increasingly willing to protect its industry from foreign competition through high tariffs that the latter considered harmful to its agricultural exports. This clash led to a steady conflict over trade policy that, despite having been won by the Catalan bourgeoisie in many instances, nourished anxiety among its members and anti-Catalan feelings among big landowners in the rest of Spain. The process was accelerated by the Spanish loss of its remaining colonies at the end of the Spanish-American War of 1898, which came as a true shock to the Catalan trading bourgeoisie, especially the loss of Cuba, since about 60% of exports went to the island.<sup>154</sup> The defeat brought home to the Catalan economic elites that they belonged to an inevitably declining power, whose decadence was much more evident when compared to Catalonia's rise. As argued by a then Catalan MP, if Spain had been a successful nation,

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<sup>150</sup> Ibidem, p. 133-147.

<sup>151</sup> CULLA i CLARA, JOAN (1999) 'La Catalogne : histoire, identité, contradictions', *Herodote*, n. 95, p. 41.

<sup>152</sup> VILAR, PIERRE (1962) *La Catalogne dans l'Espagne moderne. Recherches sur les fondements économiques des structures nationales* (Paris: SEVPEN) pp. 144-158; LINZ, JUAN (1973) 'Early State-Building and Late Peripheral Nationalism against the State. The case of Spain', in SHMUEL NOAH, EISENSTADT and STEIN ROKKAN, *Building States and Nations*, Vol. 2 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publication) p. 63; GINER, SALVADOR (1980) *The Social Structure of Catalonia* (Sheffield: Anglo-Catalan Society) pp. 8-10.

<sup>153</sup> LLOBERA, JOSEP (2004) *Foundations of National Identity: From Catalonia to Europe* (New York: Berghan Books) p. 66.

<sup>154</sup> CONVERSI, DANIELE (1997) *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilisation* (London: Hurst) p. 26.

there wouldn't have been any attempt to put its legitimacy into question.<sup>155</sup> The *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League), founded by the multimillionaire industrialist Francesc Cambó in 1901, was the best embodiment of such a move towards Catalan autonomy.<sup>156</sup> On the other hand, Spanish neutrality during the Great War decisively advantaged the Catalan textile industry unleashing an extraordinary wave of prosperity that made the Catalan upper classes more assertive.<sup>157</sup> Most Catalan nationalists, however, remained loyal to the Spanish framework and this mainly for two reasons: Catalonia needed the Spanish market; independence would mean violence and the Catalan society, being wealthier than the Spanish one, had too much to lose from a violent rebellion.<sup>158</sup>

The 1920s also saw the development of a Catalan separatist tradition, that, despite being marginal, exercised a fundamental influence over *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* in the 1930s and largely shaped the tormented events occurred during its period in power.<sup>159</sup> It is in those years that ERC made the first, although still incipient, denunciations of a deliberate policy of fiscal exploitation carried out by the Spanish state to the disadvantage of the Catalan people, denunciations which would become so important from the 1980s on and which replaced tariff policy as the main bone of contention between the local elites and those of the rest of Spain with regard to economic issues. Already in the interwar years, ERC claimed that Catalonia contributed about 19% of Spain's tax revenue but received only 5.5% of state transfers, while representing 11% of the country's population.<sup>160</sup>

The Basque case shares many of the above elements. Both industrialisation and the formation of Basque nationalism began slightly later than in Catalonia but developed very rapidly. The bases of a modern Basque economy, centred around heavy industry and, later, the financial sector, were laid down between 1876 and 1898. During this period iron production increased twenty-fold and at the turn of the century 30% of Spanish banking investments were concentrated in the Basque country. Similarly to Catalonia, Spanish neutrality in the Great War favoured the economy and already in the first months of the conflict 80% of Spanish steel was produced in the Basque country.<sup>161</sup>

From the late 1880s on, a young Basque intellectual, Sabino de Arana i Goiri almost singlehandedly formulated the ideological basis of the Basque national identity and founded the Basque Nationalist Party. This was radically separatist at the beginning, but turned more conciliatory and autonomist from the early twentieth century onwards. In this formulation not only the Basques and the Spaniards were thought of as being two completely unrelated peoples, but the Basques were also considered as considerably more advanced. As Stanley Payne pointed out: 'in Vizcaya and Guipuzcoa [the two most

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<sup>155</sup> Quoted in VILAR, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>156</sup> VILAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-158; GINER, *op. cit.*, p. 17-25. Yet, the *Lliga's* attitude, as well as Cambó's, was much more ambiguous and still expressed, at times, a willingness to exercise greater influence over Spanish politics.

<sup>157</sup> CONVERSI, DANIELE (1993) 'Domino effect or internal development? The influence of international events and ideologies on Catalan and Basque nationalism', *West European Politics*, 16(3), p. 263.

<sup>158</sup> CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 40; LINZ, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>159</sup> See Chapter 2 for more details.

<sup>160</sup> BALCELLS, ALBERT (1996) *Catalan Nationalism: past and present* (New York: St. Martin's Press) p. 97.

<sup>161</sup> PAYNE, STANLEY (1975) *Basque Nationalism* (Reno: University of Nevada Press) pp. 61-94.

important Basque provinces EDM] nationalists considered Basques the economic elite of Spain, which, rather than providing new opportunities, was holding them back'.<sup>162</sup>

Yet, there is a major difference between Catalan and Basque nationalism. As a consequence of the suppression of the *fueros*<sup>163</sup> after the Carlist Wars, in 1876, and with the aim to appease the Basque elites, the then Spanish President of the Council of Ministers, Antonio Cánovas offered a very favourable regime of local fiscal autonomy called *concierto economico* (economic agreement), which remained in place until 1937. As a result, the inhabitants of the Basque provinces were subjected to about half the tax burden borne by the rest of the population of Spain. Furthermore, the industrialists were able to secure high custom tariffs to protect their activities. This had two consequences. First, the industrial and financial elite was satisfied with its position within the Spanish crown and did not aim at either challenging the regime or at taking it over. Second, economic issues became salient only on those few occasions when governmental policy threatened the privileges secured through the *concerto economico*, for instance in 1894 and 1904.<sup>164</sup> Also, in its early separatist phase, Basque nationalism did not really bother with this kind of economic struggle, but rather left it to spontaneous organisations – called *Ligas Forales* – for the defence of the *concierto* that nationalists regarded as examples of short-sighted regionalism.<sup>165</sup>

Overall, these two cases are certainly of great interest as forerunners of the nationalism of the rich and should be analysed further in-depth in a future research project. However, a number of elements suggests considering them precisely as forerunners rather than fully-developed cases: their association with a single parent state, Spain, which does not allow a cross-country analysis; the weakness of clear separatist forces within them, which limits the scope of a study of the redefinition of national identity as incompatible with membership of the parent state; and, above all, the dubious economic grievances in the Basque case as well as the mainly traditional character of the Catalan ones, based more on skirmishes over tariff walls rather than on unfair redistribution, that is, a claim of economic victimisation 'purportedly carried out by poorer regions and/or inefficient state structures', as postulated in the nationalism of the rich.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the economist Milica Zarkovic Bookman published two books<sup>166</sup> in which he inquired into the economic forces associated with secessionist movements. Analysing a large sample of regions characterised by the presence of relevant separatist groups throughout the world, he concluded that 'the perception by the population in the relatively high-income regions tends to be that they receive insufficient capital and budget allocations while making high contributions to the central budget. In addition, the population deems to have too small a role in decision-making relative to the region's economic importance, and too little power over its own resources'.<sup>167</sup> While not being concerned only with relatively high-income regions, he found that most of the

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<sup>162</sup> Ibidem, p. 107.

<sup>163</sup> These were a series of administrative and fiscal customary rights that had granted a varying degree of autonomy to the Basque provinces since the Middle Ages.

<sup>164</sup> FUSI AIZPURUA, JUAN PABLO (1979) *El problema vasco en la II Republica* (Madrid: Ediciones Turner) pp. 17-19.

<sup>165</sup> PAYNE, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>166</sup> ZARKOVIC BOOKMAN, MILICA (1991) *The Political Economy of Discontinuous Development* (New York: Praeger); ZARKOVIC BOOKMAN, MILICA (1993) *The Economics of Secession* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan).

<sup>167</sup> ZARKOVIC BOOKMAN (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

movements in the sample were active in these areas. The cases he mentioned were: Bougainville, Catalonia, Eritrea, Punjab, Katanga, Latvia, Lombardy, Slovenia and Transylvania. However, when isolating only the relatively high-income regions in high-income countries, he ended up with Catalonia, Lombardy and Slovenia. Despite being very different from a methodological perspective, Zarkovic Bookman's conclusions confirm, at least in part, the nature of the arguments making up the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich. They also point to the existence of other case studies to which the analysis could be extended – and which, being of recent origin do not disprove the argument about the novelty of the nationalism of the rich. We have already discussed in the previous section the reasons for the selection of our case studies with regard to other movements in relatively high-income regions in high-income countries. Zarkovic Bookman, however, also dealt with regions in low-income countries and post-colonial states, such as Bougainville, Eritrea, Katanga and Punjab. All the reservations concerning comparability that we have mentioned above apply here, but there is at least another consideration that suggests leaving their analysis to future research projects. As compared to the four regions above, our case study parties act in nation-states of longer formation that are, therefore, much more interesting to look at in light of the theories of national integration dominant until the 1960s.

Until now, we have mainly focused our historical analysis on minority groups seeking to obtain autonomy and/or independence from wider political units. The nationalism of the rich however is interesting also when looking at patterns of state formation in Western Europe through processes of progressive territorial consolidation, which actually constituted the norm in this part of the continent. Such trajectories began in the late Middle Ages at the edges of the so-called 'trade route belt', that is, the stretch of independent and confederated cities and city states roughly extending from Central and Northern Italy to the North Sea and the Baltic, through Western Germany and Eastern France.<sup>168</sup> The relationship between these cities and the emerging dynastic centres around them – especially in the West, but also in the East, notably Prussia – are fundamental in order to understand dynamics of state formation in Europe.

War making has been recognised as one of the primary forces behind the rise of modern territorial states, not only because it favoured territorial expansion, but also because the creation of specialised bureaucracies and financial systems grew alongside the need to plan and raise resources for war. This also hinged on the economic and value system of the late Middle Ages, whereby land was the major source of power and conquest the major source of honour. Military territorial acquisitions thus entailed improvement in both the economic and symbolic resources of kings and their vassals.<sup>169</sup> Yet, war was expensive and, because of technological progress and international competition, it became increasingly so through the centuries. A ruler could obtain the means to wage war in two ways: buying them (for which he needed capital), or by exercising coercion over the population and territory already under his jurisdiction. Most

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<sup>168</sup> ROKKAN, STEIN (1975) 'Dimensions of State Formation and Nation-Building: A Possible Paradigm for Research on Variations within Europe', in CHARLES, TILLY (ed.) *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) pp. 562-600.

<sup>169</sup> BLOCKMANS, WIM (1994) 'Voracious States and Obstructive Cities: An Aspect of State Formation in Preindustrial Europe', in CHARLES, TILLY and WIM, BLOCKMANS (eds.) *Cities and the Rise of States in Europe. AD 1000 to 1800* (Boulder: Westview Press) pp. 224-225. The author suggests that such logic lived much longer than the feudal system that had brought it about and informed the entire process of state-formation through the centuries.

often he extracted such means through a combination of both ways. The role of capital was more important in Western Europe because of its large concentration in the urban centres of the fragmented central belt mentioned above. Rulers willing to expand their domains therefore looked with greed at cities and city-states, either as allies from which to receive loans for their campaigns, or as subjects from which to extract the necessary resources through coercion. Although city-states withstood the competition with territorial states well into the nineteenth century, ‘the increasing scale of war and the knitting together of the European state system through commercial, military, and diplomatic interaction eventually gave the warmaking advantage to those states that could field great standing armies; states having access to a combination of large rural populations, capitalists, and relatively commercialised economies won out’.<sup>170</sup> Alternative combinations of capital and coercion between the capital-intensive pole represented by city-states and the coercion-intensive one of some eastern empires existed throughout the period between the late Middle-Ages and the triumph of national states in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the long run, however, most converged, through a kind of ‘natural selection’ by means of war and institutional imitation, towards a ‘capitalised coercion’ model best embodied by France and England.<sup>171</sup> These two countries indeed largely managed to make their territorial core coincide with important urban systems of high capital concentration – Paris and London – that progressively consolidated their domain over adjacent areas.<sup>172</sup> A similar situation happened in Portugal, where the early creation of a modern territorial state in the seventeenth century coincided with the rise of Lisbon to the role of a commercial capital of continental pre-eminence.<sup>173</sup> The formation of Spain, however, only partially mirrored the above trend. Whereas the territorial unification of the country under the Crown of Castile and Aragon did coincide with the economic decline of Barcelona and the rise of Castile and its thriving urban centres, the unification of its different components into a modern centralised territorial state occurred only from the eighteenth century onwards, when Castile’s economic fortune were steadily declining and, despite its impressive size, Madrid had turned into an administrative and financial centre based on rent rather than commerce and production.<sup>174</sup> As we have seen above, the economic take-off of Catalonia, along with the emergence of a strong industrial centre in the Basque Country, further complicated the picture.

Italy and Germany were late-comers in this process. The high urban density and territorial fragmentation of their northern and western parts, respectively, largely contributed to the delay in territorial consolidation. Yet, the emergence of two territorial states, the Kingdom of Sardinia (also known as Piedmont-Sardinia) and the Kingdom of Prussia, combining high capital concentration, military force and administrative capacity – relatively to the rest of the area – constituted the prelude to the unification of the entire country by territorial conquest and agglomeration under the leadership of these cores. Piedmont clearly led economically and politically, retaining decisive political influence for

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<sup>170</sup> TILLY, CHARLES (1990) *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1990* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell) p. 58.

<sup>171</sup> Ibidem, pp. 38-66; SPRUYT, HENDRIK (1994) *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) pp. 151-180.

<sup>172</sup> TILLY (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>173</sup> HESPANHA, ANTONIO MANUEL (1994) ‘Cities and States in Portugal’, in TILLY and BLOCKMANS, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-195.

<sup>174</sup> ALBALADEJO, PABLO FERNANDEZ (1994) ‘Cities and State in Spain’, in TILLY and BLOCKMANS, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-183.

a long time even after the transfer of the capital to Rome. By contrast, Germany showed a much more pronounced polycephalic character and Berlin had to compete with the strong economic centres of the western part of the country.<sup>175</sup> This reality also came to be reflected in the institutional architecture of the country, whereby ‘the formerly independent regional states, though integrated into a larger political entity, persisted as important formal units within a new federal political system’.<sup>176</sup>

The trajectories of progressive territorial consolidation of the major Western European countries seen above seem to confirm Charles Tilly’s assertion that, as centres of concentration of capital, ‘important trading cities managed to build into the state apparatus more of their local and regional power structures than did local and regional market centres’,<sup>177</sup> and that the specific institutional configurations of such countries largely depended upon the class structure of the populations that came to be under specific jurisdictions and their territorial articulation.<sup>178</sup> In this framework, the nationalism of the rich is interesting for two main reasons. First, as we will see more in detail in the case-study chapters, and in a more rigorous comparative perspective in chapter 7, this nationalist discourse in part arose as the result of changes in the economic relationship between different areas within consolidated territorial states that did not lead to an immediate adjustment in their political representation, or at least to a perception of a lack of such an adjustment. The economic rise of Catalonia between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century would be an early example of such a process, thus accounting for the pioneering role of the Catalan nationalist movement of the time pointed out in the paragraphs above. The outstripping of the Walloon economy on the part of Flanders, the rise of what has been called the ‘Third Italy’ and the discovery of North Sea oil would be later instances of a similar phenomenon.

Second, as already mentioned, war making has received great attention in the literature as a major factor in pushing actors towards seeking greater aggregation, as well as in explaining the failure of alternative forms of political organisation – such as city-leagues and city-states.<sup>179</sup> Yet, since the Second World War – and progressively so after the end of the US-USSR confrontation – war has become ever less a priority in the list of state activities, as also evidenced by the dramatic reduction in military spending in most Western countries. Gigantic economic and political powers endowed with virtually nil military might, such as Germany and Japan, would provide further support to such an argument.<sup>180</sup> This does not mean the end of the sovereign territorial state. On the contrary, as the following chapters will show, what our case-study parties are seeking is precisely a sovereign independent state, although they are open to accept the constraints of an interdependent world on a par with all other existing states, and their separatist stand rather confirms the increasing, rather than decreasing, importance of sovereign territoriality. Yet, the nationalism of the rich does reflect a lower concern with size and

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<sup>175</sup> ROKKAN, STEIN and URWIN, DEREK (1983) *Economy, Territory, Identity. Politics of West European Peripheries* (London: Sage) pp. 37-38.

<sup>176</sup> ZIBLATT, DANIEL (2006) *Structuring the State. The Formation of Italy and Germany and the Puzzle of Federalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. 110.

<sup>177</sup> TILLY (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>178</sup> TILLY (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> For a more nuanced interpretation of the reason why national states based on sovereignty and territoriality prevailed, based not only on the ‘natural selection’ mechanism of war, but also on imitation and institutional legitimacy, see SPRUYT, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-180.

<sup>180</sup> TILLY (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

military force, as sources of power in the contemporary world, and a more pronounced focus on economic capability, whereby a smaller size can even turn into an advantage. While this does not only depend on such security aspects – we will come back to this in chapter 7 – and it might still be a temporary phenomenon due to the peculiar circumstances of the last 70 years, it does mark an important change in Western European history.





## 3 Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

### 3.1 Origins and Evolution of ERC

*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia, ERC) was founded on March 19, 1931, with the goal of establishing the independent Republic of Catalonia. The party, however, did not represent a cohesive and clearly separatist organisation, but rather a coalition of three different groups: the separatist party *Estat Català* (Catalan State), the *Partit Republicà Català* (Catalan Republican Party – CRP) of Lluís Companys and the group of intellectuals centred around the weekly *L'Opinio* (The Opinion). Despite declaring the 'right to exercise the power of self-determination as a means to achieve national liberation', in practice, ERC was open to compromise with the Spanish state. This was due to its composition, whereby the radical nationalism of *Estat Català* blended with the more moderate and socially-focused leftist programme of Companys' movement and the federalist outlook of the members of *L'Opinio*.<sup>181</sup>

The party did not represent the first instance of Catalan separatism.<sup>182</sup> This had originated at the beginning of the twentieth century, but for a couple of decades remained squeezed between the conservatism of the *Lliga Regionalista* (Regionalist League) and the labour movement. Things started to change after the Great War, with the creation, in 1919, of the *Federació Democràtica Nacionalista* (Democratic Nationalist Federation) by Francesc Macià and Daniel Cardona, with the aim to achieve Catalan sovereignty. The two leaders soon drifted apart and the more moderate Macià founded *Estat Català*. Originally willing to use armed struggle, Macià quickly realised the weakness of this option and the need to join other Catalanist and progressive forces against the monarchy. *Esquerra* was the result of such an attempt at unity.<sup>183</sup>

Created only some weeks before municipal elections it did not have sufficient funding or a proper structure. This notwithstanding, it won an absolute majority in the municipality of Barcelona and immediately declared the Republic of Catalonia,<sup>184</sup> although such a claim was quickly withdrawn after some days of negotiations with the Spanish government and in exchange for the establishment of autonomous institutions in the form

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<sup>181</sup> ALQUEZAR i ALIANA, RAMON (2001) 'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya' in RAMON, ALQUEZAR i ALIANA, FRANCESC-MARC, ALVARO et al. (eds.) *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, 70 anys d'història (1931-2001)* (Barcelona: Columna) pp. 25-54.

<sup>182</sup> The meaning of the term separatism, however, for most Catalan radical nationalists of this period did not necessarily coincide with secession. On the contrary, they accepted the idea of a 'free association' with the rest of the Iberian peninsula (Portugal included in order to balance the domination of Castile). In order to do that, though, each constituent nation had to be recognised as an independent and separated entity, voluntarily joining the others. The core of radical nationalism in Catalonia in those years was its *contingut regeneracionista* (regenerationist content), i.e., the assertion of the need for radical change in order to get over the 'rotten condition' of the then Spanish state through Catalan self-determination. RUBIRALTA, FERMI (2004) *Una història de l'independentisme polític català. De Francesc Macià a Josep Lluís Carod Rovira* (Lleida: Pagès) p. 211. See also, UCELAY-DA CAL, ENRIC (2001) 'Republicanisme, separatisme i independentisme: un desequilibri exitosament sostingut', in ALQUEZAR, ALVARO et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 195-204.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>184</sup> This success can be explained with references to Macià's charisma, anti-Crown feelings among the population, the mass character of the party and its populist outlook, as well as the unpopularity of the dictatorship of General Primo de Rivera in Catalonia.

of the *Generalitat*.<sup>185</sup> ERC dominated Catalan politics throughout the 1930s experiencing moments of serious conflict with Madrid – Companys declared a Catalan independent Republic in 1934, hence, the *Generalitat* was suspended until 1936 and its leaders imprisoned – until it was forced into clandestinity and exile with the onset of Franco’s dictatorship.<sup>186</sup> During this period, ERC was the most persecuted party in Catalonia. Between 1938 and 1943, 793 militants, including Lluís Companys, were shot (out of 3,500 sent to the firing squad by the regime). Franco also took punitive measures against the memory of *Esquerra*.<sup>187</sup>

The party immediately reorganised in France and, after its occupation, in the United Kingdom, while clandestine activity in Catalonia began in 1941. This polycentric structure entailed fragmentation that, in the 1950s, evolved into an opposition between the former leader of the party, and then President of the *Generalitat* in exile, Josep Terradellas, along with his supporters in Mexico, and his successor at the head of ERC, Joan Sauret. Meanwhile, clandestine activity in Catalonia remained marginal until the early 1960s. There, ERC lost touch with the increasingly changing Catalan society and remained ever more a party of the past. When Franco died in 1975 and the democratic transition began the party could only rely on its heritage and the popularity of Terradellas in the looming electoral competition.<sup>188</sup> Also, *Esquerra* participated reluctantly in those institutions that brought together the other members of the opposition, especially the *Assemblea de Catalunya* (Assembly of Catalonia) and the *Consell de Forces Polítiques de Catalunya* (Council of Political Forces of Catalonia), mainly because it believed that these were not vocal enough in demanding the re-establishment of the *Generalitat* as a necessary condition for any negotiation with Madrid.<sup>189</sup>

At the first general elections, in 1977, ERC won only one seat (held by then leader Heribert Barrera) and 4.5% of the regional vote, a performance repeated at the 1979 election.<sup>190</sup> Thus, in the first years of the transition, the party was seriously threatened with extinction. This was avoided because of its prestige and the skilful leadership of Barrera who, despite being its only representative in the Spanish Parliament, was able to have an impact on the debate concerning the Spanish Constitution and the Catalan Statute of Autonomy.<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, *Esquerra* won the battle for the return of Terradellas as

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<sup>185</sup> ALQUEZAR, *op. cit.*, p. 28. The term *Generalitat* indicated, and indicates even today, the whole of the autonomous institutions of Catalonia, mainly made up of the Parliament, the Government and the President of Catalonia.

<sup>186</sup> BALCELLS, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-127.

<sup>187</sup> CULLA i CLARA, JOAN (2013) *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya 1931-2012 : una història política* (Barcelona: La Campana) pp. 51-53.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 50-107.

<sup>189</sup> ALQUEZAR i ALIANA, RAMON (2001) ‘La travessia del desert. De l’Assemblea de Catalunya (1971) fins a les primeres eleccions legislatives (1977)’, in ALQUEZAR, ALVARO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 141-144.

<sup>190</sup> ARGELAGUET, JORDI et al. (2004) ‘L’Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, la troisième force de l’espace politique catalan’, *Pôle Sud*, n. 20, p. 12. It must be noted, however, that in 1977 the party had to run in coalition with the *Partido del Trabajo de España* (Labour Party of Spain), a Maoist organisation far from the ideological positions of *Esquerra*, because it was still banned for its republican ideas.

<sup>191</sup> The party abstained at the vote on the Constitution in the Spanish Congress and recommended voters to do the same in the ensuing referendum, because the text did not recognise Catalonia as a nation. Likewise, it abstained at the vote on the Statute of Autonomy in the Spanish Congress, but later recommended voters approving it.

President of the reinstated *Generalitat*, in 1977, which had been one of its major goals in the immediate aftermath of the end of the dictatorship.<sup>192</sup>

At the first Catalan election, in 1980, ERC obtained 8.9% of the vote and won 14 seats (out of 135). Despite winning about twice as many votes as those gained in the previous two elections, the party was clearly side-lined by the domination of the regionalist *Convergència i Unió* (CiU) led by Jordi Pujol. The election opened up a decade of stagnant results, culminating in the loss of its seat in Madrid in 1986 and *Esquerra*'s lowest performance ever (2.4%) at the 1987 municipal elections.<sup>193</sup> It is precisely at this time, between 1986 and 1987, that a radical process of political regeneration began.

In the first half of the 1980s, Catalonia experienced what is usually referred to as *independentisme sociològic* (sociological separatism).<sup>194</sup> Fermi Rubiralta has defined it as 'based on the discredit and disillusionment that were provoked by the autonomist path for a generation of young people increasingly removed from the knowledge and experience of the fight against Franco'.<sup>195</sup> The initiative for ERC's regeneration came precisely from this politically active and left-wing separatist youth. In 1986, one of the leaders of the latter, Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, published an article (known as *Crida a Esquerra*) in the Catalan daily *L'Avui* where, noting that Catalan nationalism and social progressivism were being kept divorced by the bipolar opposition between CiU and the *Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya* (Socialist Party of Catalonia, PSC), he suggested re-founding ERC in order to offer a third way combining both social reformism and national dignity. Barrera enthusiastically seized the occasion and convinced the most liberal wing of the party to integrate members coming from the organisations that had responded to the appeal.<sup>196</sup> These quickly took over ERC, steering its discourse further to the left and making it clearly separatist.<sup>197</sup> The process was completed in 1989, at the historic Congress of Lleida, with the toppling of Joan Hortalà, representative of the old leadership, and the election of Angel Colom to the role of Secretary General. The sweeping change experienced is clear when looking at the data of the 1992 Congress: 66.8% of the participants had joined the party after 1989, furthermore 48.7% of them were between 18 and 34 years old and only 6.4% were retired. ERC had gone from being one of the oldest parties in Catalonia to being the youngest.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> SOBREQUÉS i CALLICO, JAUME (2001) 'La lluita per la supervivència d'un gran partit històric', in ALQUEZAR, ALVARO et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 149-168.

<sup>193</sup> SEGURA i MAS, ANTONI (2001) 'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, 1997-2000: la lenta consolidació', in ALQUEZAR, ALVARO et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 171-174.

<sup>194</sup> The word 'independentism' does not exist in English. This makes it hard to mark the linguistic difference between *independentisme* and *separatisme*, whereby the former stresses the right to decide, while the latter the condition of separation. Yet, most often, and especially in the propaganda material that we will analyse, the two go together and are quite interchangeable. On the distinction between separatism and secession in Catalan radical nationalism see note 182.

<sup>195</sup> RUBIRALTA, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>196</sup> CULLA (2013) *op. cit.*, pp. 286-297.

<sup>197</sup> Shortly after the Congress of Lleida, in December 1989, the party filed a resolution, approved by the Catalan Parliament, stating that 'Catalonia is a national reality different from the rest of Spain and the Catalan people will not renounce its right to self-determination'. GARCIA, MARIE-CARMEN (1998) *L'Identité Catalane, Analyse du processus de production de l'identité nationale en Catalogne* (Paris: L'Harmattan) p. 36. Also, in 1992, the party set independence as its major goal in the first article of its statute.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 297-350. See also, BUCH i ROS, ROGER (2001) 'De l'Esquerra d'Alliberament Nacional a ERC', in ALQUEZAR, ALVARO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 185-193.

Rejuvenated, with a much clearer profile and a stronger militant basis, ERC immediately started recording better results. In 1992, it won 11 seats (8% of votes) in the Catalan Parliament, becoming the third force behind CiU and the PSC.<sup>199</sup> Although it kept achieving lower results in the general and municipal elections as compared to the Catalan ones, even there it received twice as many votes as in the previous decade. At the 1995 elections, the party improved its strength in the Catalan Parliament, with 13 seats and 9.5% of the vote.<sup>200</sup> Yet, around 1995–1996 the militants began growing weary of Colom’s increasingly authoritarian leadership and exclusive focus on the national issue. A loss of about 25,000 votes at the 1996 Spanish elections offered dissenters an occasion to speak up and Colom’s brutal reaction triggered an open internal conflict. After some months of turmoil, Colom and his entourage surprisingly left the party and founded the short-lived *Partit per la Independència* (Independence Party). Carod-Rovira replaced him as Secretary General and set out to reinforce the, until then neglected, leftist profile of the party.<sup>201</sup>

Under Carod-Rovira’s leadership, ERC reached its apogee. Also thanks to favourable political conditions,<sup>202</sup> *Esquerra* recorded its best electoral performances since the beginning of the democratic period,<sup>203</sup> took part in two successive regional governments (2003-2006 and 2006-2010) – along with the PSC and the ecologist *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds* (Initiative for Catalonia Greens, ICV) – and was able to initiate the reform of the 1979 Statute of Catalonia. Nevertheless, the decade was also marked by harsh tensions both within the party and the governing coalition. In January 2004, right after its outstanding success in the Catalan election, the Spanish right-wing daily *ABC* published evidence of a secret meeting between Carod-Rovira, then Vice-President of the *Generalitat*,<sup>204</sup> and members of the Basque terrorist organisation ETA. The episode was made worse by a later press release where the organisation declared a truce in Catalonia, which seemed to confirm the conservatives’ accusations that Carod-Rovira had come to an agreement with the Basque terrorists. As a consequence, he had to leave his government post in order to save the majority and began losing legitimacy within the party.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> PALLARÉS, FRANCESC and FONT, JOAN (1995) *The Autonomous Elections in Catalonia (1980-1992)* (Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials) p. 19.

<sup>200</sup> ARGELAGUET et al. (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>201</sup> SEGURA, *op. cit.*

<sup>202</sup> These were, among others: CiU’s loss of its electoral majority, a much more Catalanist (i.e. in favour of Catalan autonomy) PSC under the leadership of Pasquall Maragall, Prime Minister Zapatero’s pledge to reform the statute of autonomy, the symmetry of alliances between Barcelona and Madrid, where ERC supported the socialist majority despite not being in the government. See, ORTE, ANDREU and WILSON, ALEX (2009) ‘Multilevel Coalition and Statute Reform in Spain’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 19(3), pp. 415-425; DAVIS, ANDREW (2004) ‘The November 2003 Elections in Catalonia, a landmark change in the Catalan political landscape’, *South European Society and Politics*, 9(3), pp. 146-147.

<sup>203</sup> These were realised at the 2003 Catalan elections (16.4% of the Catalan vote and 23 seats), at the 2004 Spanish elections (15.7% and 8 seats) and at the 2006 Catalan elections (14% and 21 seats). See, ARGELAGUET et al. (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 12; PALLARÉS, FRANCESC and MUNOZ, JORDI (2008) ‘The autonomous elections of 1 November 2006 in Catalonia’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 18(4), pp. 449-464; TORCAL, MARIANO and RICO, GUILLEM (2004) ‘The 2004 General Election: In the Shadow of Al Qaeda’, *South European Society and Politics*, 9(3), pp. 107-121.

<sup>204</sup> In fact, on that day, January 2, 2004, Carod-Rovira was holding the Presidency because President Maragall was on holiday in Istanbul.

<sup>205</sup> CULLA (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 580-608. Carod-Rovira’s leadership was also affected by the rise of Joan Puigercos, who had a firmer grip over the party’s apparatus. The fracture between the two had become clear already in 2005, when the militants (with Puigercos’ support) imposed the ‘No’ vote in the referendum on

The second crisis happened in 2006 and led to the fall of the Catalan government as a consequence of the Spanish amendments to the new Statute of autonomy voted by the regional Parliament. The process began in February 2004 and lasted until September 2005, when the final draft was approved and sent to the Madrid Parliament. There, it was deemed far too ambitious by the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (Socialist Labour Spanish Party, PSOE) and underwent huge modifications. ERC's opposition to the text in the ensuing referendum put an end to the regional executive. Yet, after the next elections, the continuing electoral strength of ERC and the failure of the PSC and CiU in finding an agreement led to a new tripartite coalition (PSC-ERC-ICV).<sup>206</sup> The sudden end of the previous government, though, had opened up fractures within the party and soon things came to a head. The most extremist segments criticised the leadership for being subservient to the PSC. The 2007 municipal elections confirmed a downward trend, begun in 2004, and emboldened the internal opposition which, in the meantime, had organised in two factions: *Ragrupament.Cat* (Rally.Cat) and *Esquerra Independentista* (Pro-Independence Left). At the National Conference of October 2007, a third of militants rejected the gradualist line pursued by Carod-Rovira and called for a more radical policy. Furthermore, Joan Puigcercos, a young charismatic leader, decided to make a bid for the leadership putting his candidature forward as head of the list for the 2010 Catalan election.<sup>207</sup>

For the 2008 Spanish election, the different factions agreed on a compromise candidate, Joan Ridaó, but the result was catastrophic. Expecting to keep about 5-6 seats, ERC was left with only one and lost 55% of the votes won in 2004. At the next Congress, Puigcercos was elected President of the party, while Ridaó became Secretary General, but they obtained only 37% of congress votes. Puigcercos later managed to strengthen his hold on the party, but this remained weak as became clear when, at the 2010 Catalan elections, held after the controversial judgement of the Constitutional Tribunal over the Statute of Catalonia, ERC gained only 7% of the vote and saw its representation halved.<sup>208</sup> The following municipal elections confirmed the party's downturn and the militants began asking for a change at the top. Oriol Junqueras, who had won ERC's only seat at the previous European election as an independent, became the perfect candidate because he was not compromised by belonging to any faction, enjoyed a good popular support as an historian with a high visibility in the Catalan media and had been an activist for independence in the orbit of ERC since 2005. Thus, at the 2011 Congress, he was elected President by 92% of the militants, along with Marta Rovira i Vergès as Secretary-General. Once in power, he declared a return to a strategy of flexible alliances guided by the principle that 'between the right and the left, we choose the left, but between the left and the country, we work for the country'.<sup>209</sup>

When, in September 2012, the President of the *Generalitat* and leader of CiU, Artur Mas decided to dissolve the Parliament and call an early election on the holding of a

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the European Constitution, while Carod argued in favour of a blank vote to distinguish ERC from extreme-right wing parties supporting the 'No' as well.

<sup>206</sup> ORTE and WILSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-428. ERC's did not vote no in the Spanish Congress but abstained.

<sup>207</sup> CULLA (2013) *op. cit.*, pp. 633-666.

<sup>208</sup> Part of the votes were 'stolen' by a new party founded by the former President of the FC Barcelona Joan Laporta, who attracted quite a few ERC's dissidents. The hostility towards Laporta and ERC's almost complete neglecting of the civil society organisations campaigning for 'the right to decide' that arose between 2009 and 2010 certainly influenced the party's performance.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 667-732.

referendum on independence in 2014, ERC, which had been advocating this for at least a couple of decades, found itself in a comfortable position. It doubled its representation (13.7% of votes and 21 seats) and became, for the first time in its recent history, the second party in the Catalan Parliament, while CiU lost about 80,000 votes and 12 seats, far from the absolute majority it was seeking. The improved performance of other parties supporting the ‘right to decide’ (ICV and *Candidatura d’Unitat Popular*, CUP) allowed the formation of a government whose main goal was to organise a referendum on independence in 2014. Despite having signed the agreement and voted in favour of the government, ERC has decided to remain in the opposition and to support the executive only on those measures foreseen in the pact. On January 23, 2013, the Parliament of Catalonia issued a Declaration of Sovereignty which ‘defines Catalonia as a “sovereign political subject” and emphasizes the democratic character of the decision on the future status of the country’.<sup>210</sup> After months of internal negotiations, in December 2013, the parties supporting the right to decide agreed to hold an independence referendum on November 9, 2014, which would put the two following questions to Catalan residents: ‘Do you want Catalonia to become a state?’; and in case of positive answer, ‘Do you want this state to be independent?’.<sup>211</sup>

**Figure 3.1 – ERC’s Electoral Results, regional and general elections, 1980-2012 (percentage of regional vote)**



Source: [http://www.electionresources.org/es/cat/index\\_en.html](http://www.electionresources.org/es/cat/index_en.html) (accessed on November 13, 2014).

<sup>210</sup> MARTI, DAVID (2013) ‘The 2012 Catalan election: the first step towards independence?’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 23(4), p. 514.

<sup>211</sup> ‘Catalan President Mas: “The country’s good sense has made it possible to come to a consensus and agree on an inclusive, clear question, which enjoys broad support”’, press release, Generalitat de Catalunya, 12 December 2013, [http://premsa.gencat.cat/pres\\_fsvp/AppJava/notapremsavw/237529/ca/catalan-president-mas-countrys-good-sense-possible-come-consensus-agree-inclusive-clear-question-enjoys-broad-support.do](http://premsa.gencat.cat/pres_fsvp/AppJava/notapremsavw/237529/ca/catalan-president-mas-countrys-good-sense-possible-come-consensus-agree-inclusive-clear-question-enjoys-broad-support.do) (accessed on May 6, 2015).

In January of the following year, the Catalan Parliament voted a motion to ask the Spanish Congress to allow the referendum to take place. Three months later, on April 8, 2014, the Spanish Parliament refused, by an 86% majority, to transfer to the Catalan Parliament the powers requested.<sup>212</sup> The decision put under strain the ‘sovereignist camp’ especially pitting ERC, willing to go on with the organisation of the referendum, against CiU, more preoccupied with following a process in accordance with Spanish law. A compromise was found in the organisation of a non-binding ‘consultation’ to be held on the same date and asking the same questions as the original referendum. Yet, the decree of the Catalan government officially calling the poll, adopted on September 27, 2014, was suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Tribunal only three days later.<sup>213</sup> After days of negotiations with the other forces in favour of the right to decide, the Catalan government replaced the consultation with a ‘consultative process’ whereby citizens would simply be asked their opinion about the future of the region – the date and the questions were to be the same, though. Although it declared itself disappointed by Catalan President Mas’ decision not to hold the original consultation regardless of the judgement of the Tribunal, ERC supported the change in return for assurances that this will be followed by early elections centred around the independence issue.<sup>214</sup> Despite a new suspension from the Constitutional Tribunal, the ‘consultative process’ – *de facto* a mock referendum – took place on the date scheduled. More than 2 million people, or 36% of Catalan voters, participated and about 80% of them chose the ‘Yes-Yes’ option coinciding with the demand for full independence.<sup>215</sup> The vote was followed by two months of intense talks between the parties of the ‘sovereignist front’, especially ERC and CiU, concerning the next steps to be taken. While ERC favoured an immediate election in which pro-independence parties would run separately but agree on a road-map for independence to be pursued, in case of victory, with or without the consent of the Spanish government, Mas preferred to put together a single list uniting all pro-independence parties, to defer the dissolution of the Parliament and to avoid the scenario of a unilateral declaration of independence, although he did not rule it out altogether.<sup>216</sup> The two parties eventually reached a compromise and on January 14, 2015, the Catalan government announced that early elections would be held on September 27. At the same time, the radicalisation of Catalan politics has favoured ERC’s electoral success. At the European elections, in May 2014, it became the first party in the region for the first time in the post-dictatorship period,

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<sup>212</sup> TOMAS, NEUS (2014) ‘Puerta constitucional’, *El Periodico*, 9 April, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/puerta-constitucional-3245664> (accessed on May 6, 2015).

<sup>213</sup> RIOS, PERE and PINOL, ANGELS (2014) ‘El Parlament da luz verde al 9-N’, *El Pais*, 19 September, [http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/09/19/catalunya/1411141135\\_402343.html](http://ccaa.elpais.com/ccaa/2014/09/19/catalunya/1411141135_402343.html) (accessed on May 6, 2015); BATALLAS, MARGARITA (2014) ‘El TC suspende en tiempo record el 9-N y los actos de preparacion’, *El Periodico*, 30 September, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/suspende-tiempo-record-9-n-los-actos-preparacion-3560097> (accessed on May 6, 2015).

<sup>214</sup> ‘Junqueras acuerda con Mas “un compromiso absoluto” con el nuevo 9N pero exige elecciones’, *El Periodico*, 22 October 2014, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/reunion-mas-junqueras-proceso-participativo-3623572> (accessed on 6 May, 2015).

<sup>215</sup> ‘Catalonia’s Future: Let them vote’, *The Economist*, 15 November 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21632478-madrid-government-should-let-catalans-have-vote-and-then-defeat-separatists> (accessed on May 6, 2015).

<sup>216</sup> BARRENA, XAVIER (2014) ‘Junqueras ubica su plan en los antipodas del esbozado por Mas’, *El Periodico*, 3 December, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/junqueras-ubica-plan-las-antipodas-del-esbozado-por-mas-3740129> (accessed on May 6, 2015).

with 23.7% of votes.<sup>217</sup> Recent polls, conducted in February 2015, suggested a slight decrease in support (around 17%), but *Esquerra* was still ahead of all the other parties in terms of voting intentions.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> TOMAS, NEUS (2014) 'ERC obtiene una victoria historica', *El Periodico*, 26 May, <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/europa/erc-obtiene-una-victoria-historica-3282682> (accessed on May 6, 2015).

<sup>218</sup> GESOP (Gabinet d'Estudis Socials i Opinió Publica) (2015) *Barometre politic de Catalunya, Tabulacions*, February, [http://www.elperiodico.com/es/ext\\_resources/gesop/BarEPCAT\\_Feb2015\\_Tabulacions.pdf](http://www.elperiodico.com/es/ext_resources/gesop/BarEPCAT_Feb2015_Tabulacions.pdf) (accessed on May 6, 2015).



## 3.2 Discourse and Strategy

In this part of the chapter, we examine in detail the propaganda material of ERC from the late 1980s until 2012. While providing some information concerning the party's discourse from after the end of the dictatorship to 1986, and then on the 1986-1989 transition, most of the analysis will deal with the post-1989 period, when the new members led by Angel Colom and Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira took over the party and turned it into a truly separatist organisation.

As explained in the previous chapter, the part is divided in themes. These are organised as follows: the first section looks at the transition from an ambiguously federalist to a pro-independence outlook; the second explains the party's arguments about economic victimisation; the third is on political marginalisation; the fourth section dwells on the ideological orientation of the party along the left-right spectrum, while the fifth examines the cultural aspects of its definition of the Catalan nation; finally, external factors such as immigration and European integration are analysed in the last two sections.

### 3.2.1 The Move to Independence

In his book on the history of Catalan separatism, when dealing with the years immediately after the democratic transition up to the end of the 1980s, Fermi Rubiralta never mentions *Esquerra* among the parties fighting for Catalan independence.<sup>219</sup> Primary sources confirm his choice. In the campaign for the first Spanish elections after about 40 years of dictatorship, the party's main objective consisted in the re-establishment of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia and the 1932 Statute of Autonomy, abolished by Franco in 1938, as well as the return of its President in exile, and former ERC leader, Josep Terradellas.<sup>220</sup> The party's willingness to work within the Spanish institutions is clear from the following quote: 'it is today a mandatory obligation for all Catalans to give priority to the great effort necessary in order to regain our historical institutions, from which it will be possible to rebuild our civil (sic) life in an ordered and responsible way, thus contributing to the consolidation of democracy in the Spanish State'.<sup>221</sup> In the manifesto for that election, *Esquerra* clearly declared itself to be in favour of a federal system, not only as the most adequate solution to the plurinational nature of Spain, but also because distributing power across multiple layers would be a guarantee of democratic stability and a check against the vagaries of the partisan, incompetent and irresponsible Spanish bureaucracy.<sup>222</sup> Yet, although there is no mention of independence, we already find the idea of the Catalan Countries as a single nation, that is, all those territories of Catalan language and culture

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<sup>219</sup> RUBIRALTA, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-200.

<sup>220</sup> FRONT D'ESQUERRES (1977) *Declaracio*, March, ERC archives (henceforth ERCA) E'77. Other goals included: a law of amnesty for all political and trade union prisoners and sentenced, trade union freedom, the consolidation of the democratic regime, economic reforms, support to the demands of autonomy of other parts of the Catalan countries, compensation to all organisations unjustly expropriated of their assets during and after the war.

<sup>221</sup> Idem. Henceforth, quotes in English taken from non-English sources are our translations, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>222</sup> ERC (1977) *Sintesi Programatica*, ERCA, E'77. See also, ERC, FRONT ELECTORAL DEMOCRATIC (1977) *Units per vencer. Programa*, ERCA, E'77, E'79, M'79.

that extend beyond the boundaries of the Catalan *Generalitat*, such as: the Balearic Islands, Northern (or French) Catalonia and parts of Aragon and the Valencian Country.<sup>223</sup>

One might point out that, in 1977, ERC was not a legal party yet and had to run in coalition with the *Partit del Trebal Espanyol* (PTE). Thus, it might have toned down its rhetoric for electoral purposes. But, in fact, we find clear consistency in the party's discourse until the second half of the 1980s. For instance, in an article written in October 1977, some months after the elections, when the alliance with the PTE was already a thing of the past, Barrera defined the *Generalitat* as the first step 'in the task to build a state acceptable for all Spaniards. In this respect, it is a victory for Catalonia, but it is also a victory no less important for all Spain'.<sup>224</sup> Such a posture is to be found in later texts,<sup>225</sup> although accompanied by the awareness of the need to focus on assuring the preservation of the Catalan nation and culture through the establishment of autonomous institutions. Therefore, in this period, the party clearly subscribed to federalism, although it sometimes mentioned the attainment of self-determination and sovereignty as a long-term goal, without however elaborating any specific strategy to achieve it.<sup>226</sup>

Furthermore, in those years the party struggled to produce detailed and clear policy making. While it clearly called on the vote of a constituency made up of the lower classes, small enterprises and shopkeepers,<sup>227</sup> its policy proposals remained quite sketchy and inspired by an ambiguous mix of liberalism and socialism. Until 1985, arguments concerning the Catalan fiscal deficit appeared rarely and the party's best selling point was its glorious past in the 1930s.<sup>228</sup>

All this was very different from the organisation that Carod-Rovira depicted in its *Crida* of November 1986. Arguing that ERC should exploit its Catalanist and reformist traditions in order to modernise left-wing separatism and make it appealing to the masses, he called for its transformation into 'a party that ultimately asserts that there is no future without our own state structure'.<sup>229</sup> Such a difference was visually clear by mid-1987, as shown by the front page of the party's paper, *La Humanitat* (Figure 3.2). Despite not being yet dominated by the new members who had joined that year, ERC had already changed its discourse to a much clearer separatism. Angel Colom asserted that 'we have to be able to become the mainstay of all the left, of the movement of national liberation, of the

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<sup>223</sup> ERC (1977) *Sintesi, op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>224</sup> BARRERA, HERIBERT (1977) 'La restauracio de la Generalitat provisional', *La Humanitat*, II(4), October, p. 5. The article was first published in Spanish on the newspaper *Diario 16* and then republished in *L'Humanitat*.

<sup>225</sup> See for instance, BARRERA, HERIBERT (1981) 'L'ERC a l'hora actual', *La Humanitat*, III(42), 17 March, p.5.

<sup>226</sup> Ibidem and ERC (1984) *Programa de govern d'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERCA, E'82, M'83, C'84, pp. 5-12. In the 1986 manifesto, there was a slight toughening of the party's line, since this proposed to reform the constitution in order to bring about a confederation of the Iberian peninsula in which every federated member would enjoy the right of self-determination. ERC (1986) *Linies basiques del programa electoral d'Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, June, p. 3-7, ERCA, E'86, EU'87, M'87.

<sup>227</sup> ESQUERRA DE CATALUNYA, FRONT ELECTORAL DEMOCRÀTIC (1977) *Electoral letter*, 13 May, ERCA, E'77; HORTALÀ i ARAU, JOAN (1983) *Electoral letter*, 21 April, ERCA, E'82, M'83, C'84.

<sup>228</sup> On this see the cover page of *La Humanitat*, II(4), October 1977 ; the electoral poster 'Ahir...com avui' published in *La Humanitat*, III(4), 20 February 1979, pp. 6-7; and ERC (1981) 'Editorial', *La Humanitat*, III(42), p. 2.

<sup>229</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA, JOSEP-LLUIS (1986) 'Una necessitat vital: refundar ERC?', *L'Avui*, 1 November, p. 9, in ERC (2012) *1987, L'Any de la Crida Nacional a Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Barcelona: ERC) p. 6.

groups of alternative struggle’,<sup>230</sup> and even Joan Hortalà, leader of the party and representative of the old guard, indulged in the language of national sovereignty.<sup>231</sup>

**Figure 3.2 – ‘Now, to the Municipalities for Independence’ (1987)**



Source: *La Humanitat*, June 1987.

Arguing that the process of devolution of powers carried out until then was totally insufficient, the 1988 manifesto already outlined a road map to full sovereignty to be implemented by 1991. This involved the constitution of Catalonia as a single province, the modification of the Statute of Autonomy and the reform of the Constitution in order to insert the Catalan right of self-determination, although this would not necessarily mean secession, as the Catalan people would decide about their future. The party thus coined the expression *independentisme metòdic i gradual* (methodic and gradual struggle for independence), which would echo during the leadership of Carod-Rovira a decade later. At any rate, the party clearly rejected the symmetric federalism defended by both the *Partido Popular* (Popular Party, PP) and the PSOE.<sup>232</sup> The transition to a pro-independence struggle was further consolidated with the rise of Colom as the head of the party in 1989<sup>233</sup> and it was eventually formally completed in 1992, when *Esquerra* amended the first article of its statute in order to declare ‘the territorial unity and independence of the Catalan nation, by means of the construction of its own state in the European framework’<sup>234</sup> as its overriding goal. Although there would still be ambiguities

<sup>230</sup> COLOM i COLOM, ANGEL (1987) ‘L’Esquerra una força d’alliberament’, *La Humanitat*, 85/4, June, p. 5.

<sup>231</sup> HORTALÀ i ARAU, JOAN (1987) ‘Unes eleccions importants per ERC’, *La Humanitat*, 85/4, June, p. 3. The difference between the two of them is however clear when looking at the slogans they used. Colom’s was ‘*ara independència*’ (independence now), while Hortalà called for ‘*competència i agorosament*’ (competence and audacity).

<sup>232</sup> ERC (1988) *El Millor per Catalunya, Programa*, ERCA, C’88, EU’89, E’89, pp. 14-20.

<sup>233</sup> See for instance: ERC (1990) ‘Entrevista al Secretari General’, *La Republica*, 5, March-April 1990, p. 3; ERC (1991) ‘La casa comuna de l’independentisme’, *La Republica*, 12, September, p. 2.

<sup>234</sup> ERC (1992) ‘18<sup>e</sup> Congrés Nacional Extraordinari d’ERC’, *La Republica*, 15, December, p. 11.

about the true meaning of the terms independence, sovereignty and separatism, between 1986 and 1989, the party went through a major change and has not since reneged on its pro-independence posture.

### 3.2.2 L'Espoli Fiscal

As seen in the first chapter, the denunciation of a deliberate policy of fiscal exploitation carried out by the Spanish state to the disadvantage of the Catalan people goes as far back as the 1930s. Yet, from the Colom period on, it became one of the central, and arguably the most important,<sup>235</sup> arguments of the party.

The claim is complex and multifarious, but, at the core, there is the assertion that the Spanish government has consistently extracted more resources from the Catalan economy than those reinvested in the region through the funds allocated for public services and the bloc grants to the autonomous institutions.<sup>236</sup> As clearly explained in the 1992 manifesto for the Catalan Parliament elections: 'the process of economic depredation of the Spanish State is constant' and this 'translates into a steady increase of the fiscal pressure without any significant improvement either in public services or in infrastructures. This capital drain entails lack of investment and of the capacity to reconvert and adapt our enterprises in view of entry into Europe'.<sup>237</sup> A year later, in the midst of economic recession, the party launched the first campaign centred around the fiscal deficit under the title '*Solidaritat si. Robatori no. Els nostres impostos a Catalunya*' (Solidarity yes. Larceny no. Our taxes in Catalonia).<sup>238</sup> In this connection, the party has used colonial metaphors<sup>239</sup> – although not so often – as well as that of a deliberate policy of 'economic asphyxiation',<sup>240</sup> that would warrant the call for independence of the Catalan people and the adoption of a new economic relationship with Madrid based on the Basque model of the *concert economic* (economic agreement) as an intermediate step.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> CAMPS BOY, JOAN (1990) 'El sistema de finançament autòmic ara (2)', *La Republica*, 9, November-December, pp. 6-8; RAMOS, ANGEL (2003) 'Carod Rovira "Hem posat fi al divorci entre catalanisme i progressisme"', *Esquerra Nacional*, 49, November, pp. 6-7; ILLA, EDUARD and SOL, SERGI (2008), "'La mare de totes les crisis és el mal model de finançament'", *Esquerra Nacional*, 104, 22-28 July, p. 5.

<sup>236</sup> One of the first fully-fledged denunciations of the argument of fiscal exploitation is to be found in ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, la nova frontera, vota Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, Spanish election manifesto, ERCA, C'88, EU'89, E'89.

<sup>237</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap a la independència*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, C'92, R'92, p. 47.

<sup>238</sup> ERC (1993) 'ERC pel Concert econòmic', *La Republica*, 16, July, p. 8.

<sup>239</sup> COLOM i COLOM, ANGEL (1990) 'Presupostos Generalitat any 1990', *La Republica*, 6, May-June, pp. 3-5; COLOM i COLOM, ANGEL (1991) 'Pressupostos 1991', *La Republica*, 10, January-February-March, pp. 10-11; ERC (2000) *Programa marc, Eleccions al Congrés dels Diputats i al Senat de l'Estat espanyol*, ERCA, E'00, p. 21.

<sup>240</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA, JOSEP-LLUIS (1997) 'Pagar menys per viure millor', in *Tornar Amb la Gent. L'esquerra nacional cap al segle XXI* (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat: Columna, 1997), p. 90. The expression was borrowed from a book written by the economist and politicians Ramon Trias i Fargas in 1984. See part 2 for more details. Most recently it has been turned into the related idea of the *ofec economic* (economic choking).

<sup>241</sup> The Basque Country collects and manages about 90% of the tax revenue of the region and transfers only 10% to the Spanish government as a fee for the services carried out by this on the Basque territory. See, CAMPS BOY (1990) 'El sistema...(2)', *op. cit.*; ERC (1996) *La teva veu, cap a la independència*, Spanish Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, E'96, p. 13; ERC (2001) 'ERC torna a portar al carrer la reivindicació d'un finançament just', *Esquerra Nacional*, 26, May-June, p. 4; ERC (2008) *Objectiu: un país de la (per això volem la independència)*, Spanish Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, E'08, p. 13; in the 2010-12

Estimates of the fiscal deficit between what Catalonia pays and what it receives back – also called *espoli fiscal*, i.e., fiscal plundering – have varied widely. In 1989, *Esquerra* claimed that each Catalan was robbed of 180,000 pesetas a year (about 1,380 euros),<sup>242</sup> or 64% of the taxes paid.<sup>243</sup> In the mid-1990s, it argued that the deficit amounted to 12-13% of Catalan GDP<sup>244</sup> and decreased to between 7 and 10%, or 1,800 euros a year per capita (in the early 2000s) after the fiscal concessions made by the Socialists and Popular governments. In 2008, the party calculated it at 2,622 euros per Catalan each year (Figure 3.3) and in the context of the recent economic crisis it decreed that since 1986 the state had deprived the Catalans of about 8% of their GDP per year on average.<sup>245</sup>

**Figure 3.3 – The State Keeps 2,622 euros from Each Catalan (2008)**



Source: ERC (2008) 'L'Estat es queda 2.622 euros de cada ciutadà català', *Esquerra Nacional*, 87, 4-10 March, p. 8.

According to ERC, the fiscal assault against the Catalans has been deployed on several fronts. In the early 1990s, it suggested that the relation between Catalonia and Spain would perpetuate the 'dependency' of the former on the transfers from the latter. The deliberate use of the term 'dependency' stressed the fact that, despite recording a fiscal surplus, Catalonia was forced to transfer its tax revenue to Madrid and then to depend on insufficient funding from the centre to finance its own services. As the party suggested, autonomy would not resolve the problem because Madrid's evaluations of the real cost of services transferred to the communities with wider powers, such as Catalonia, would remain very conservative.<sup>246</sup> Therefore, regions with low autonomy would receive more

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period the party also suggested holding a referendum on the issue of the *concert economic*. See for instance, CAPELLA, ESTER (2012) 'L'etern espoli fiscal', *Esquerra Nacional*, 204, February, p. 3.

<sup>242</sup> Our calculations based on Eurostat's historical exchange rates data, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/exchange-rates/data/database> (accessed on May 8, 2015).

<sup>243</sup> ERC (1989), *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>244</sup> ERC (1995) *Força cap a la independència*, Catalan Parliament Elections, ERCA, C'95, p. 23; ERC (1996), *La teva*, *op. cit.*, p. 11-13.

<sup>245</sup> ERC (2005) 'L'Espoli fiscal, el repte del nou model de finançament', *Esquerra Nacional*, 60, February, p. 5; SOL, SERGI (2012) 'Sense espoli ens en sortim', *Esquerra Nacional*, 207, July-August, pp. 4-7; ERC (2012) *Un nou país per a tothom*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, p. 12.

<sup>246</sup> This argument is still present when the party claims that fiscal transfers have to be periodically renegotiated, thus putting Catalonia's funding at the mercy of Spanish decisions ERC (2006) *Un país de gent*

transfers, as the central state was directly responsible for services there, while the most independent ones would not. Also, internal migration was not taken into account when calculating the resources needed to finance infrastructures.<sup>247</sup> Furthermore – ERC has argued – the system of transfers has also penalised the most efficient territories. The standard example provided in this respect is healthcare. According to *Esquerra*, Catalonia has developed structures of excellence that attract many more users than those of other regions, but this is not considered when calculating the funding requirements of the autonomous community. All this would therefore warrant the creation of a Catalan social security separate from that of the rest of the country.<sup>248</sup>

Throughout his history the party has denounced the ‘appalling inefficiency’ of the Spanish administration. Its ‘parasitic’ and ‘gigantic’ bureaucracy, extracting resources in the form of excessive taxes, would be Spain’s true original sin<sup>249</sup> that, in the mid-1990s, even brought the country to the verge of fiscal bankruptcy, threatening the welfare services obtained by the Catalan population.<sup>250</sup> As stated in the 2003 manifesto, ‘we pay taxes like a social-democracy and we receive public spending like an ultraliberal country’.<sup>251</sup> *Esquerra* has thus vocally supported the need to reform the state administration in order to make it transparent and efficient, rather than to privatise services, but it has also shown a rather sceptical attitude towards high taxation. According to the party, taxes should correspond to the level of services provided and not hamper job-creation. They should also target financial speculation and capital, rather than labour and the productive economy.<sup>252</sup>

ERC has also made clear that, as a consequence of the insufficient transfers from Madrid, the Catalans have often had to compensate deficiencies in state services by supplying them through the private market, with the inevitable consequence of higher costs of living as compared to the rest of Spain. Highway tolls have been the most frequent example mentioned. They were also the object of a specific electoral campaign entitled *Catalunya lliure de peatges* (Catalonia free of tolls), in which *Esquerra* not only decried that highways were toll-free in most of Spain, thus accusing Madrid of deliberate

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*emprenedora amb treball per a tothom\_emprenedors*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, C’06, p. 55.

<sup>247</sup> CAMPS BOY, JOAN (1990) ‘El sistema de finançament autòmic ara (1)’, *La República*, 8, September-October, pp. 4-5; CAMPS BOY (1990) ‘El sistema...(2)’, *op. cit.*;

<sup>248</sup> In 2008, the party calculated that Catalonia spent 48 million euros for non-Catalan residents and received only 10.2 million from the Cohesion Fund of the Spanish state, while Catalans in other communities spent only about 12 million, thus leaving a deficit of about 26 million. ERC (2008) *Objectiu*, *op. cit.*, p. 43. See also, ERC (2000) *Programa*, *op. cit.*, p. 18. The separation of social security had however already been claimed in 1990. CAMPS BOY (1990) ‘El sistema...(2)’, *op. cit.*

<sup>249</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap a*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>250</sup> COLOM i COLOM, ANGEL (1995) *Contracte amb Catalunya* (Barcelona: Columna) ERCA, C’95, p. 12.

<sup>251</sup> ERC (2003) *Un país actiu i equilibrat, eleccions al parlament de Catalunya 2003*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, C’03, p. 5. See also, ERC (2012) *Un nou*, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>252</sup> See for instance, ERC (1989), *L’Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-46; ERC (1994) *Països Catalans, Unió Europea, Per l’Europa de les Nacions*, European election manifesto, ERCA, EU’94, M’94, p. 24; ERC (1996) *La teva*, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15; ERC (2000) *Programa*, *op. cit.*, p. 12. In the 2000s, however, this argument mainly gave way to more specific policy proposals in support of SMEs, research and development, and infrastructure.

discrimination against the Catalans, but also that the private companies that supplied the service were actually guaranteed a monopoly by the state, thus making prices soar.<sup>253</sup>

But *Esquerra* has pointed out other forms of Spanish deliberate attempts to undermine the Catalan economy. In the late 1980s, it claimed that the Madrid government was trying to deindustrialise entire sectors of Catalan manufacturing, diverting foreign investments out of the region, and to weaken it financially by imposing absurd compulsory investment coefficients upon the Catalan saving banks.<sup>254</sup> More, recently, the party has made two rather different accusations that we find in other case studies as well. First, the concentration of political power in Madrid would have incited big companies, even Catalan ones, to locate their headquarters in the capital, thus driving firms out of Catalonia and often those in the most innovative and strategic sectors.<sup>255</sup> Second, it has claimed that fiscal controls have been tighter in Catalonia, making fiscal evasion easier in other regions to the disadvantage of Catalan taxpayers.<sup>256</sup>

According to the party, the consequences of all these forms of fiscal discrimination against Catalonia have been serious not only *per se*, but also because of the high potential of the Catalan economy and the prosperity that this could afford to its citizens. Here, two elements are outstanding in the party's rhetoric: the role of claims concerning the need for market efficiency in justifying the call for self-determination and the impact of the Spanish incorporation into the European market, in the 1990s, and into the global economy, in the 2000s. With regard to the former, the party has consistently stressed that a robust economy is necessary in order to be able to provide services and redistribution to the members of the national community. Its discourse, though, has been a little contradictory because *Esquerra* has at times stressed the Catalan economic success, portraying it as an advanced European region, while, at others – especially in the late 1980s and the early 1990s – it has underlined the gap with the richest continental economies. However it may be, ERC has consistently extolled the modernity of the Catalan economy identifying it with the rest of Europe and arguing that the reasons for its shortcomings lie in the flaws and open discriminatory practices of the Spanish state that have hampered Catalonia's competitiveness.<sup>257</sup> The party clearly denounced the inadequacy of the policies adopted by the Spanish government to soften the impact of the common market and the competition of more developed economies.<sup>258</sup> This is all the more relevant because, at the beginning of the 1990s, *Esquerra* claimed that accession into the European Community would eventually break the mechanism whereby the inefficiencies of the Spanish state, what it has called *Cost Espanya* (cost Spain), were compensated by the Catalan trade surplus with the rest of the country, propped up by high Spanish trade tariffs, and led to the conclusion

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<sup>253</sup> HUGUET, JOSEP (1998) 'Feudals', *Esquerra Nacional*, 9, November, p. 1. The article is equally critical of those Catalan entrepreneurs that profited from the monopoly granted by Madrid. See also: ERC (1999) 'En marxa la campanya d'ERC contra el peatges', *Esquerra Nacional*, 13, March-April, p. 4.

<sup>254</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>255</sup> ERC (2004) *Parlant la gent s'entén*, Spanish Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, E'04, p. 4. This argument is quite similar to the one made by the Scottish National Party about London and the South-East of England. See section 5.2.2 below.

<sup>256</sup> ERC (2001) *ERC torna a portar*, *op. cit.* This is an argument used by the *Lega Nord*, the *Vlaams Belang* and the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* as well.

<sup>257</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 56; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 20; ERC (1996) *La teva*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13; ERC (2006) *Ara toca no*, *Catalunya Mereix Més*, campaign brochure, ERCA, REF'06, p. 2.

<sup>258</sup> ERC (1996) *La teva*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

that ‘in this context, it is evident that Spain is not the solution. On the contrary, Spain is the problem’.<sup>259</sup>

Spain would be the problem also because it has always imposed homogenous policies over very different realities. ERC has extensively argued that the Catalan socio-economic fabric is quite distinct from that of the rest of the country, with the former based on a dense network of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) reflecting the high level of entrepreneurship of the Catalan people. In this way, it has clearly distinguished the productive economy of Catalonia, and its bottom-up process of industrialisation, from the speculative economy of Madrid.<sup>260</sup> Thus, as Angel Colom declared in 1995, ‘Catalonia finds itself totally subordinated to the policies designed in Madrid, that are very poorly attuned to industrial dynamics’.<sup>261</sup> Although it has not overemphasised it, especially during the Colom years *Esquerra* has used a culturally-determinist argument in order to explain the economic differences between the Spanish regions.<sup>262</sup> This was made very clear, in 2003, when the party asserted that ‘the important growth of Catalonia has been possible thanks to an over-effort (*sobreesforç*) of our society that had to fight a clear deficit of infrastructures, to suffer from a historical predatory fiscal deficit, to compensate for a public sector totally discriminatory and to face a cost of living higher than the Spanish mean’.<sup>263</sup>

Such an understanding has gone along with the party’s attempt to present itself as the true representative of Catalan SMEs. Especially in the 1990s and early 2000s, *Esquerra* displayed an understanding of SMEs as more than just business units. On the one hand, they embody the values of hard work and entrepreneurship of the Catalan nation. On the other, they are a model of cooperative and democratic work because their small size would naturally make employees more involved in corporate decision-making.<sup>264</sup> Also, the opposition between SMEs and big firms came to embody the one between Catalonia and Spain and the party consistently defended measures to protect the former, although being careful not to scare away foreign companies.<sup>265</sup>

For its denunciation of the *expoli fiscal*, the party has predictably been accused of promoting Catalan selfishness. *Esquerra*’s main argument in rejecting such accusations has been that what the rest of Spain calls for is not solidarity, but clientelism and dependence. The concept was clearly explained by Colom in 1995: ‘Catalonia is willing to

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<sup>259</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels Catalans, per Catalunya. Cap a l’independència*, Spanish Parliament election, ERCA, E’93, p. 14.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 11-13. In this piece the party also talked about the declining heavy industry of Cantabria and the almost ‘third-world-like’ economy of Extremadura, concluding that the heterogeneity of Spain made it unviable in the framework of the common market. Yet, the opposition between the productive economy of Catalonia and the speculative one of Madrid is a much more constant element in the party’s rhetoric.

<sup>261</sup> COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>262</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*, p. 14; ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 26; ERC (1996) *La teva, op. cit.*, p. 12; ERC (2001) ‘La política industrial d’ERC’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 32, April, p. 13.

<sup>263</sup> ERC (2003) *Un país actiu, op. cit.*, p. 4. For the identification of the values of hard work and thrift as basic elements of the Catalan national identity see section 3.2.5.

<sup>264</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*, p. 27; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 18 and 55; ERC (1996) *La teva, op. cit.*, p. 3; ERC (2003) *Un país actiu, op. cit.*, pp. 25-26;

<sup>265</sup> ERC (1996) *La teva, op. cit.*, p. 3; ERC (2000) ‘ERC vol modificar la llei de caixes d’estalvi per tal d’impedir la sortida del país de 500.000 pessetes anuals dels estalvis depositats’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 20, May-June, p. 13; ERC (2003) *Un país actiu, op. cit.*, pp. 4-5; In the 1990s the party also criticised CiU and its leader, Jordi Pujol, for having favoured multinationals over local SMEs. COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 15; ERC (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 20.



be solidary with the other peoples of the state that are in need, especially those from which many Catalans come. Nevertheless, we are not willing to confuse solidarity with charity'.<sup>266</sup> He thus argued that, instead of redistribution, Catalan taxes were used to feed clientelism by financing jobs in the public sector, which did not help the endogenous development of the beneficiaries. As a consequence, Spain had stifled the industrial engine of the country – Catalonia – in order to waste the money raised in unproductive activities in the rest of the country.<sup>267</sup> The main difference with the similar arguments made by the *Lega Nord*, the *Vlaams Belang* and the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, is that ERC has been very careful to focus its attacks on the Spanish state and to make clear that the other peoples of the country would be victims as well.<sup>268</sup> Accordingly, Catalonia would still be ready to help, but would want to do it on specific conditions: solidarity should be directly managed by the *Generalitat*, it should target endogenous growth and be limited in time and amount.<sup>269</sup> For instance, in recent proposals for a reform of the financing deal between Catalonia and Spain, the party has proposed contributing 2.5% of its GDP to a fund of inter-territorial cohesion for a decade.<sup>270</sup> After that, however, solidarity with Spanish regions would not be different from that with other nations of the world, many of which are much more in need of help. As said by Carod-Rovira in 1999, 'we want to exercise solidarity, but not in a compulsory and unjust form. Not with the Andalusian gentry or the Madrid bourgeois who travel by high-speed train, but rather with Central America and the countries of the Sahara'.<sup>271</sup>

Furthermore, in 2000, ERC claimed that despite being a rich region in Spain, Catalonia was not rich by European standards. Being a wealthy region in a poor country, it was a net contributor to the EU budget – by about 0.4% of its GDP – while, in absolute terms, it would qualify as a recipient.<sup>272</sup> But more in general, and especially during the 1990s, the party has contradictorily argued that Catalonia is less rich than is often thought. It has complained that, despite having a higher per capita GDP, the region is among the most expensive in the country and wide pockets of poverty still remain.<sup>273</sup> In this connection, the budget deficits recorded by the government of the Catalan autonomous community have been regarded with indulgence by the party, as they were deemed the consequence of the fiscal deficit between Spain and Catalonia, which – ERC claimed – in 2001 was equal to 84% of the entire annual budget of the autonomous community.<sup>274</sup>

<sup>266</sup> COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>267</sup> Idem. ERC (1993) 'Editorial: Nord-Sud', *La Republica*, 17, December, p. 2. ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>268</sup> See for instance, ERC (1993) 'Una solidaritat unidireccional', *La Republica*, 17, December, p. 3. Here, the party denounced 'the subsidy culture promoted for electoral reasons by any incumbent Spanish government'. See also, ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>269</sup> ERC (1999) 'ERC vol que la nova legislatura signifiqui un canvi real per a Catalunya', *Esquerra Nacional*, 16, September-October, p. 6.

<sup>270</sup> ERC (2003) 'Una constitució per a Catalunya', *Esquerra Nacional*, 42, March, p. 5. See also ERC (2006) *Un país compromès amb la millora de la qualitat de vida de les persones, programa 2006\_benestar*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, ERCA, C'06 p. 6.

<sup>271</sup> ERC (1999) 'ERC presenta Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira com a candidat a la presidència de la Generalitat de Catalunya', 11, *Esquerra Nacional*, January, p. 1.

<sup>272</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>273</sup> CANDEL, FRANCESC (1989) 'La nova pobresa', *La Republica*, 3, May, pp. 14-15; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>274</sup> ERC (2005) *L'Espoli fiscal, op. cit.*, p. 5.

Throughout its recent history, *Esquerra* has pointed to two complementary ways to improve the Catalan situation. On the one hand, the long march towards full self-determination, which will eventually allow the population to decide its own affairs. On the other, the daily fight, within the existing institutional framework, to improve the autonomy and the welfare of the Catalans. During the 2000s, the latter prevailed, according to the gradualist policy outlined by Carod-Rovira. In 2008, the party proposed a progressive reduction of the deficit to about 4% of the region's GDP in two years and then the adoption of a full new economic relationship on the model of the Basque *economic concert*, with a 2% of GDP contribution to the inter-territorial fund seen above.<sup>275</sup> The 2010 judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal and the economic crisis, however, have dramatically changed the picture, bringing the issue of immediate self-determination, rather than that of progressive reform, to the fore.

### 3.2.3 The Failed Transition to Democracy

In the party's rhetoric, the economic exploitation of the Catalan nation is nothing but the direct consequence of its political subordination to the Spanish state. In the late 1980s, ERC often described Catalan history as a tale of occupation, repression and attempts to erase the cultural distinctiveness of the Catalan nation.<sup>276</sup> Such rhetoric was later toned down, but the argument remained in the idea – popular during the entire Colom period – that the democratic transition had failed and the state had remained anchored in the previous Francoist establishment.<sup>277</sup> This would be reflected in the inherent corruption and inefficiency of the Spanish bureaucracy and political class, but also in its persistently anti-democratic and centralist mind-set.<sup>278</sup> Even more seriously, the transition was proclaimed to have been a betrayal, because it did not recognise the Catalan right of self-determination, but only the existence of the Spanish nation and perpetuated the division of the Catalan territories into different autonomous communities.<sup>279</sup> As a consequence, Catalonia remained 'a nation separated into two states, economically plundered, culturally subjugated and, what is most important and that determines the rest: politically subordinated'.<sup>280</sup>

Under the leadership of Angel Colom, the party developed the idea that democracy is more than a theory of legitimate power of the majority, as it would also concern guarantees for minorities and people's participation. With regard to both these criteria – *Esquerra* argued – Spain would not be a democracy. More specifically, on the one hand, the system should allow for the possibility to redefine at any time the minority-majority relations whereby a minority can constitute its own institutions and become the majority.

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<sup>275</sup> ERC (2008) *Objectiu*, *op. cit.*, p. 13. In this proposal, the party suggested a surprisingly long time-horizon for the transition to a full *economic concert*, as compared to previous proposals, equal to about 15-20 years.

<sup>276</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 4. COLOM (1989) 'Per la llibertat del presos Catalans', *La Republica*, 4, July, p. 3.

<sup>277</sup> ERC (1990) 'Espai entrevista: Heribert Barrera i Costa', *La Republica*, 6, May-June, p. 16; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 51. Yet, later in the same text, Colom also recognised that Spain had gone a long way on the path of democracy, although it could have done much more.

<sup>278</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>279</sup> Article 145 of the Spanish Constitution clearly forbids the merger of autonomous communities. The Spanish constitution was considered anti-democratic for a number of other reasons, *inter alia*: it obstructed the right of self-government of the *Generalitat*; and it was repressive in terms of democratic participation. ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>280</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

On the other, the party was extremely critical of representative democracy and campaigned for a higher involvement of citizens in the democratic process.<sup>281</sup> The critique has targeted specific features of both Spanish politics – an electoral law that advantages big parties and is undemocratic because of closed electoral lists, the persistence of the monarchy and the absence of any form of direct people’s participation in the legislative process – and of most Western and Southern European democracies, which have been accused of being based on a Jacobin conception of the state and affected by a chronic sclerosis of the political system, elicited by the corruption scandals that have plagued them. To these corrupted Western states, in the early 1990s, *Esquerra* used to oppose the healthy Nordic and German countries, mononational, federalists, with strong welfare systems, or the nations that were separating from previous multinational entities and would soon become like the German and Nordic ones.<sup>282</sup>

Corruption scandals were frequent across much of Europe in the 1990s – Italy and Belgium are two notable examples – and this was the case in Spain as well. In this context, ERC could present itself as the only ‘clean’ Catalan party and call on a renewal of the political class that had managed the transition and held the reins of Spanish politics during the previous 20 years.<sup>283</sup> Such accusations also concerned state bureaucracy, adding to the claims of inefficiency and hypertrophy mentioned before.<sup>284</sup> The Spanish parties, however, were not solely responsible for the political subordination of the Catalan nation. In the 1990s, when it was still a marginal organisation, in the opposition, the party repeatedly criticised its senior partner, CiU, for having sold Catalonia out to successive Madrid governments and for not having been firm enough in negotiating further transfers of powers.<sup>285</sup>

From the turn of the century on, these arguments were adapted to the new reality of the PP’s absolute majority in the Spanish Congress<sup>286</sup> and, later, to the debate about the reform of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy. With regard to the former, *Esquerra* vocally decried the Popular Party’s attempt at re-centralisation, as well as the so-called *mentalitat radial* (radial mentality)<sup>287</sup>, i.e., the idea that everything must emanate from and pass through Madrid. As the party made clear in 2000: ‘the PP unleashed again a clear reactionary offensive, based on the claims of the staliest Spanish-centred mentality and the return to the unitary state, thus stigmatising democratic peripheral nationalism and

<sup>281</sup> ERC (1989) *L’Esquerra*, op. cit., pp. 20-22; ERC (1992) *Cap*, op. cit., pp. 23-25; ERC (1993) *Ideological Declaration of the Esquerra Republicana of Catalonia*, Diliname, Digital Library of National Movements in Europe, Centre Maurits Coppieters; COLOM (1995) op. cit., pp. 38-41.

<sup>282</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap*, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>283</sup> COLOM (1995) op. cit., pp. 42-43.

<sup>284</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap*, op. cit., p. 32.

<sup>285</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels*, op. cit., p. 1; ERC (1995) op. cit., pp. 20-21. COLOM (1995) op. cit., pp. 50-51.

<sup>286</sup> In 1996, after about 20 years of socialist uninterrupted rule, the right-wing PP won the general election and ruled for two mandates, holding an absolute majority during its second one, between 2000 and 2004.

<sup>287</sup> See ERC (2000) ‘Puigcerros evidencia les discriminacions de l’Estat cap a Catalunya’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 20, May-June, p. 7; and ERC (2003) *Un país actiu*, op. cit., p. 6. On the centralising efforts of the PP see also: ERC (2001) ‘Pacte Nacional per Catalunya’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 28, September-October, p. 5; ERC (2002) ‘Espanya: un estat, una nació, una capital’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 30, January-February, p. 4. The issue of the restitution of the historical archives moved by Franco from Barcelona to Salamanca at the end of the Civil War has been used by the party to argue that the persisting centralising mentality of the PP was shared by the PSOE as well. STRUBELL, TONI (2002) ‘Paisatge amb Salamanca de fons’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 35, July-August, p.12.

rejecting any proposals of plurinational structure'.<sup>288</sup> It especially accused the PP of using the pretext of equality among the different Spanish regions to block the transfer of powers to Catalonia<sup>289</sup> and, more fundamentally, to threaten Spanish democracy in general.<sup>290</sup>

The debate about the place of Catalonia within the Spanish state became much more heated during the reform of the Statute of Autonomy. ERC had demanded it as an intermediate step on the transition to full independence, but also because the model of the state of the autonomies had shown its limits in terms of actual powers that could be exercised by the *Generalitat*. It thus aimed to achieve a new constitutional balance based on a real recognition of the differential identity of the peripheral nations.<sup>291</sup> When the Spanish Parliament modified the Statute that had been agreed in the Catalan Parliament, ERC claimed that it had changed 65% of the original articles and defined it 'an authentic democratic scandal'.<sup>292</sup> The party also pointed out that 'the non-recognition of Catalonia as a nation means the perpetuation of the contempt of the country [Catalonia EDM] on the part of Spanish nationalism',<sup>293</sup> and decided to vote against the Statute.

Although since 1987-1989 the solution proposed by the party to free Catalonia of its subordinated condition has unambiguously been independence, its concrete formulations and strategies for achieving it have varied across time. In 1989, the party proposed a gradual process to be completed in the next few years and made up of three steps: the reinforcement of autonomy; the modification of the then statute to reduce the political and economic dependence of Catalonia from Spain; the reform of the Spanish Constitution to include the right of self-determination of the Catalan nation.<sup>294</sup> Then, in 1991, Carod-Rovira drafted a more complete blueprint. Analysing different forms of national struggle – violent, revolutionary, autonomist, democratic – he opted for the last one as the most adequate to the Catalan context.<sup>295</sup> This however did not mean that Catalonia should not try to get as many powers as possible within the existing political framework. Only, autonomy could not be the ultimate tool of national liberation, which instead had to consist of a unilateral declaration of independence to be issued after the Catalan population had voted in free elections for a pro-independence party. According to Carod-Rovira, the opposition of the Spanish state would not be legitimate because the right of the

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<sup>288</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 7. Please note how the party pitted the democratic nationalism of the periphery against the authoritarian one of the centre.

<sup>289</sup> ERC (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 6. Here, the party adopted a conciliatory tone, not in line with other texts of the period, claiming to be willing to share its democratic achievements (in terms of transfers) with the rest of Spain with a view to triggering 'a general process of improvement of the democracy and the quality of self-government of the nations and regions making up the State', but demanded that the process of devolution of powers remained open.

<sup>290</sup> *Idem*, p. 6.

<sup>291</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>292</sup> ERC (2006) *Preguntes entor a l'estatut*, campaign flyer, ERCA, , REF'06.

<sup>293</sup> ERC (2006) *Ara, op. cit.* Beside the principled argument of non-recognition of the Catalan nation, other reasons to reject the Statute were that: it perpetuated the fiscal plundering, it condemned Catalonia to be at the bottom of the European ranking for social services, it did not block the diversion of the Ebro river, it limited the use of referenda (especially on self-determination), it infringed upon the powers of the Catalan Parliament, accepting the amendments would close the issue for a couple of decades mortgaging Catalonia's future, the advances obtained could be achieved in any case through different procedures.

<sup>294</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>295</sup> While the violent and revolutionary scenarios would not gather much popular support, reforming the system from within the Spanish institutions was considered as an illusion, simply because Catalonia had only a minority of MPs within the Spanish Parliament and thus any major reform would easily be toppled.

Catalans to express their will over their own future would override the Spanish one.<sup>296</sup> In order to get to that stage, however, he argued that the party needed to set the ground for a pro-independence majority to be achieved through multiparty action and collaboration with civil society organisations. Hence, he suggested moving from a message only based on the righteousness of independence to one based on the pragmatic advantages that independence could afford to the people of Catalonia.<sup>297</sup>

Despite making clear that reforming or modernising Spain would not only be impossible, but also pointless, Colom accepted the gradualist strategy towards independence proposed by Carod-Rovira, although the latter would pursue it much more consistently once at the head of the party. As stated in the 1992 manifesto, ‘any action or event that entails a gain of quotas of sovereignty by the Government of Catalonia is a step forward in the process towards independence. To achieve state structures, areas of strictly Catalan decisional power, are facts that bring the final goal of full national sovereignty closer’.<sup>298</sup> Although ERC proposed different concrete projects, it has consistently advocated the renegotiation of the relation with Madrid into one between equals, either in the form of the transfers of all powers to Catalonia except for foreign policy and defence,<sup>299</sup> or as a federation, or confederation, of freely associated, but sovereign states<sup>300</sup> until the Catalan people express their willingness to become a separate country, either by electing a pro-independence party, as above, or through a referendum, with the latter option practically replacing the former in the party’s propaganda since the second half of the 1990s.<sup>301</sup>

During the years in government at the *Generalitat*, and especially during the negotiations for the statute, ERC kept playing on both levels of reform and self-determination. The idea of constructing preliminary state structures for a future independent Catalonia was much emphasised as a way to keep at bay the internal opposition of the most extreme party fringes, on the one hand, and to present itself as a competent and reliable ruling actor, on the other (Figure 3.4).<sup>302</sup> Before 2005-2006, it mainly focused on the details of the change that the new statute would bring about. Later, it kept working on reinforcing the powers of Catalonia, but it also gave more emphasis to the idea of a referendum on independence, partly as a reaction to the possible negative

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<sup>296</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA, JOSEP-LLUIS (1991) *La via democràtica a la independència nacional*, p. 1-5.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6. Carod-Rovira also made clear the need to sensitise the international community.

<sup>298</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap, op. cit.*, p. 16. See also ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.* Here Colom spoke about an orderly and quiet divorce between Catalonia and Spain.

<sup>299</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>300</sup> ERC (2003) *Un país, op. cit.*, p. 6; ERC (2003) ‘Una constitució’, *op. cit.*; ERC (2005) ‘Federalisme, la propera estació cap a la independència’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 62, May, p. 4.

<sup>301</sup> ERC (1998) ‘ERC pel dret a l’autodeterminació i la reforma de la Constitució’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 8, October 1998, p. 1; ERC (1998) ‘CiU i PSC reconeixen el paper determinant d’ERC’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 9, November 1998, p. 3; ERC (1999) ‘O igualtat o independència’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 11 January, p. 3; ERC (1999) ‘ERC presenta l’Avantprojecte d’Estatut Nacional de Catalunya’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 14, May, p. 9. In this latter text, however, the party strangely proposed the example of Bavaria.

<sup>302</sup> ERC (2006) *Un país compromès, op. cit.*, p. 3; ERC (2006) *Una societat moderna per un país lliure i integrador ciutadania*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, p. 4, ERCA, C’06; ERC (2008) ‘Estem construint un Estat propi’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 120, 10-15 December, p. 8. The fear that, once in government, ERC could become ‘like all other parties’, was already there at the beginning of the 2000s, when the party began eyeing a potential government involvement. ERC (2000) ‘Joan Puigcercos, “No ser presents a Madrid fa més forta la dreta de Catalunya”’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 18, January-February, pp. 10-11; ERC (2001) ‘Punt de trobada i estació de sortida’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 25, March-April, p. 4.

judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal over the Statute of Autonomy.<sup>303</sup> As stated in 2008, ‘the immediate goal is to gradually create spaces of sovereignty, one’s own state structures [*estructures pròpies d’Estat*], out of the Catalan institutions and with the highest possible influence in Spanish politics. The right to decide [*Dret a Decidir*] with capital letters must be the culmination of a process of previous political, institutional and social change’.<sup>304</sup>

**Figure 3.4 – ‘We are Building a Own State’ (2008)**



Source: *Esquerra Nacional*, 118, 25 November-1 December 2008, p. 12.

Since the second half of 2009, the party supported the grassroots movement for the ‘Right to Decide’ that began organising spontaneous referenda on independence in various municipalities throughout Catalonia. The right to decide thus became the main theme of the campaign for the 2010 Catalan election and one of the conditions for any post-electoral alliance.<sup>305</sup> However, Joan Puigcercos’ decided not to ally with the civil society organisations in favour of Catalan sovereignty that had arisen since the end of 2009,<sup>306</sup> which clearly undermined the party’s electoral performance. This changed with the new leadership of Oriol Junqueras who immediately joined a coalition with other pro-independence groups for the 2011 general election and set the ground for the following

<sup>303</sup> LLAMBRICH, IOLANDA (2007) ‘Esquerra planteja al Parlament convocar un referendum per la independència de Catalunya’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 78, April, p. 15.

<sup>304</sup> ERC (2008) *Objectiu, op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>305</sup> PAGÈS, POL (2009) ‘La darrera gran Diada autonòmica?’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 153, 15-21 September, p. 4; PAGÈS, POL (2010) ‘El camí de la feina ben feta’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 171, 2-15 March, p. 7; AGUDO, CRISTIAN (2010) ‘Només Esquerra defensa la IP per la independència’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 181, 27 July – 31 August, p. 6.

<sup>306</sup> PUIGCERCOS, JOAN (2010) ‘Carta oberta als i les independentistes’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 183, 14-29 September, p. 12.

party's expansion. When, in autumn 2012, Artur Mas decided to call an early election on the issue of an independence referendum, ERC suddenly had the opportunity to deliver on one of its major goals. The 2012 manifesto, therefore, unsurprisingly deals extensively with the details of an independence scenario. There, the party pledged to respect the sovereignty of the Catalan people by holding the referendum and committed to bringing about independence in the most consensual and participatory way, if the people voted for it. It also added that the poll would be an occasion for Spain to show its commitment to the principle of democracy. Yet – the manifesto read – if Spain missed this chance and did not recognise the validity of the vote, the party would appeal to international law and the international community. ERC has thus accepted the possibility of a unilateral declaration of independence – as it already did in the past<sup>307</sup> – but it would be careful to portray it as the last resort of a national community that has been refused its democratic right of self-determination by the Spanish state.<sup>308</sup>

The most interesting feature of the 2012 manifesto, however, is that its most important part was written for a foreign audience under the title 'Proposal of Catalonia to the World'. In other words, it was not intended to convince the Catalans of the soundness of ERC's proposal, nor the Spanish government to let Catalonia freely decide. The primary purpose rather was to urge the international community to support the region in its struggle against the undemocratic Spanish state.<sup>309</sup>

### 3.2.4 El Catalanisme del Benestar

The will to combine Catalan nationalism and left-wing progressivism lay at the very core of ERC's rejuvenation in the late 1980s. The famous *Crida a Esquerra*, made by Carod-Rovira in 1986 (see section 3.1), specifically decried the dissociation between the struggles for national dignity and social justice, calling on ERC to provide the necessary third way between regionalist conservative Catalanism (CiU) and the bureaucratic Spanish-subjected Left (PSC).<sup>310</sup> Embodying such a 'third-way' is a claim that the party has since consistently defended.<sup>311</sup>

Hence, ERC clearly took issue with what it defined as the Marxist postulate of an inevitable divorce between national and class struggle,<sup>312</sup> proudly profiling itself as a non-dogmatic leftist party. As stated in its ideological declaration, 'Esquerra can lay claim to having been, since its foundation, a leading light on the European Left at a time when a good part of that Left allowed itself to be drawn into totalitarian models and dogmatic doctrines which proved unviable as authentic left-wing projects. At the same time, the failure of these models throws into sharp relief the important deficiencies and economic

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<sup>307</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA (1991) *op. cit.*; ERC (2003) 'ERC explica a la London School of Economics el seu projecte sobiranista', *Esquerra Nacional*, 41, February, p. 8.

<sup>308</sup> ERC (2012) *Un nou*, *op. cit.* pp. 6-9.

<sup>309</sup> The text, also, describes the party plans for a future Catalan state. It would be a parliamentary or semi-presidential democracy, with a strong welfare such as the Scandinavian ones, effective participative institutions on the Swiss model and an inclusive definition of citizenship.

<sup>310</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA (1986) *op. cit.*

<sup>311</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra*, *op. cit.*; CUCURELLA, SANTIAGO (1989) 'L'Esquerra dels noranta', *La Republica*, 1, March, p. 12; CAROD-ROVIRA, JOSEP-LLUIS (1996) 'Esquerra i país. Un horitzo per a l'esquerra nacional', in *Tornar*, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-126; ERC (2004) *Parlant*, *op. cit.*, p. 5; SOL, SERGI (2011) 'Companys, un dels nostres', *Esquerra Nacional*, 201, October, pp. 6-9.

<sup>312</sup> RODRIG i FEBRE (1992) 'L' hora del segadors', *La Republica*, 14, April, p. 4.

and social injustices of the system defended by economic liberalism'.<sup>313</sup> *Esquerra's* original leftist positions are clear when looking at its early analysis of the evolution of welfare in Europe. In 1989, the party argued that the crisis of the welfare state was dealt with in opposing ways by the Left and the Right. The latter drifted far from the previously accepted 'welfare consensus'. The former, in contrast, remained stuck in its old conception of management, characterised by unchecked spending and a culture of subsidies. Thus, while the Right devised a 'harmful' neoliberal ideology, the Left provided no alternative and often fell back on the Right's policies once having confronted the failure of its old recipes.<sup>314</sup> This interpretation went hand in hand with a sceptical view of the state and the administration, quite unusual for a European left-wing party. *Esquerra* vocally criticised the process of 'bureaucratisation and a state that excessively strengthened itself and created authoritarian forms of tutelage in all aspects of public life, misappropriating the immense power of the consensus that the societies of the post-war period had given it in order to build up a more just social order'.<sup>315</sup>

Likewise, ERC has stressed that being left-wing means working towards the reduction of injustice and marginalisation, but it has also recognised the primary role of the productive economy in creating the necessary wealth for redistribution. Such productive economy, distinguished from the speculative one, which must be discouraged and regulated, is mainly based on the work of the lower and middle classes that *Esquerra* has aimed at representing. Furthermore, despite solidarity being a fundamental principle in any left-wing tradition, ERC has consistently made clear that subsidies must not turn into charity or dependency. Thus, social services have to be provided and remain public – the party has been against wild privatisation and actually took pride in having increased welfare expenditures during its time in power –<sup>316</sup> but their delivery must follow private-sector standards of efficiency, while the size of the state must tally with the range and quality of services provided. Also, public institutions should be as democratic and transparent as possible, in order to favour people's participation and control.<sup>317</sup>

During the Colom years, the relation between the state and society as proposed by *Esquerra* seemed to require a really high level of social consensus. As the party argued in 1993, citizens have rights, but also duties towards the community and the environment. Therefore, liberty and responsibility would be two sides of the same coin:<sup>318</sup> 'the contradictions that occasionally emerge between guaranteeing individual liberty and the system of production, conservation and distribution of natural resources and wealth, demand the most wide ranging social consensus possible. The state is the organism charged with managing this consensus. This is why it is important that this state be established over a territory and a population with the highest level of cohesion. Beyond local boundaries, the human community with the greatest capacity for cohesion and for

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<sup>313</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>314</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, op. cit.*, p. 60; CANDEL (1989) *op. cit.*

<sup>315</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, op. cit.*, p. 60. We have already seen in section 3.2.2 the party's ideas on taxation.

<sup>316</sup> See for instance ERC (2006) *Un país compromès, op. cit.*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>317</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, pp. 10-11; ERC (1996) *La teva, op. cit.*, p. 70; ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 12; ERC (2003) *Un país, op. cit.*, p. 15; ERC (2006) *Un país de gente, op. cit.*, pp. 55-60; ERC (2010) *Eleccions, Parlament de Catalunya*, Catalan Parliament election manifesto, pp. 49-53.

<sup>318</sup> This argument is to be found also in the 2003 manifesto, although the text does not draw the same conclusions, but rather focus on the issue of popular democratic participation. ERC (2003) 'Una nació europea democràtica i solidària', Catalan Parliament elections manifesto, ERCA, E'03, p. 19.



sharing values is the nation'.<sup>319</sup> In other words, the party subscribed to the communitarian argument made by David Miller<sup>320</sup> whereby only cohesive societies, that is, national societies, can assure strong solidarity, in the form of welfare services, and reduce free-riding.<sup>321</sup>

In many other respects, however, the party has defended standard left-wing ideas. This is especially the case with its understanding of North-South relations and redistribution among nations in the international context. In the 1990s, the party explained the differences in wealth between the First and the Third World with reference to the military and economic domination of the former over the latter during the years of colonialism. Hence, developed countries' solidarity with the South would be fundamental to redress this wrong and development cooperation should be increased to 0.7% or even 1% of a state's GDP. A similar call for solidarity, without references to colonialism or domination though, has also been made regarding the gap between richer and poorer countries in Europe.<sup>322</sup> In the late 2000s, the party stressed the need to guarantee economic development as a basic human right and to provide an alternative to the dominant neoliberal ideology.<sup>323</sup> In both cases, however, ERC has also been very careful to point out that such solidarity must not turn into endless subsidies, but rather nourish self-sustaining productive activities.

The green agenda and the principle of sustainable development have also featured highly among ERC's priorities,<sup>324</sup> while other progressive policies supported through the years have been: the defence of the rights of women and LGBTs, including measures of positive discrimination;<sup>325</sup> disarmament and exit from NATO, although ERC has supported humanitarian interventionism;<sup>326</sup> the reduction of the working week on the French model in order to reduce unemployment<sup>327</sup> and the introduction of a living wage for all.<sup>328</sup>

The most important argument concerning nationalism and progressivism, however, has consisted in the agenda outlined by Carod-Rovira and summarised by the concept of the *catalanisme del benestar* (welfare Catalanism), i.e., the idea that national self-determination must be achieved not because it is important *per se*, as a principle, but

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<sup>319</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>320</sup> MILLER, DAVID (1995) *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>321</sup> Colom repeated a similar argument in 1995, although he rather focused on the quality of democracy as a consequence of the major social consensus that would be realised in small, homogenous nations. COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 46. Furthermore, being a pro-independence party, ERC clearly calls for the coincidence between the national and political community, as plurinational states inevitably lead to the domination of the stronger nation over the others. ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 20. See also, the with Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, Annex 2.

<sup>322</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 21-22; ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 28-29;

<sup>323</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 78; ERC (2003) *Un nació Europea, democràtica i solidària*, Catalan Parliament Election, ERCA, C'06, pp. 8-19; ERC (2010) *Eleccions, op. cit.*, pp. 194-198.

<sup>324</sup> ERC (1990) 'Editorial: ERC, Partit verd', *La República*, 7, July-August, p.1; ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*, pp. 20-26; ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 10; ERC (2003) *Un país, op. cit.*, pp. 55-60; ERC (2008) *Objectiu, op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>325</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*; ERC (1995) *op. cit.*; ERC (2003) *Una nació, op. cit.*; ERC (2006) *Una societat, op. cit.*, pp. 27-31; ERC (2008) *Objectiu, op. cit.*, pp. 77-80.

<sup>326</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 53. ERC (2000) '50 anys de l'OTAN, Una estructura aliena a Europa', 20, May-June, p. 13.

<sup>327</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>328</sup> ERC (2001) 'Drets socials, drets de ciutadania', *Esquerra Nacional*, 29, November-December, p. 16.

because it will improve the quality of life of the Catalans.<sup>329</sup> This idea has entailed two programmatic goals: convincing the Catalan people of the advantages of independence and subscribing to a gradualist policy of self-determination. Already Colom had declared that the nationalism of ERC was ‘an economic and social separatism’,<sup>330</sup> yet Carod-Rovira formulated the concept more in detail. In his 1991 *La via democràtica a la independència*, he advocated combining ‘a patriotic separatism – valid only for patriots – with a pragmatic separatism – useful to the entire society and all economic sectors. A separatism in touch with the needs of the people, that has an impact on the daily routine and people’s lives, and, what is most important, that offers guarantees of being able to make life better’.<sup>331</sup> Thus, the project devised by Carod-Rovira aimed at abandoning the victimising and strictly culturalist rhetoric of small cliques of committed nationalists to embrace a wider positive message of material and spiritual prosperity that would enable the party to gather an electoral majority and bring about constitutional change.<sup>332</sup> As the party recently argued, ‘the most convenient option for Catalanism is that of economic growth. The demand for more self-government and sovereignty will grow if we manage to make people understand that this will entail more economic growth and, as a consequence, more welfare’.<sup>333</sup> After all, the goal has not seemed hard to achieve because, *Esquerra* has suggested, there has consistently been a majority of Catalans who think that ‘Spain today is a brake that prevents us from obtaining the prosperity that we deserve on the basis of our effort. And that are fully aware that we have been paying for years too onerous a price for our dependence and, probably because of this, more people everyday associate the right to decide with the idea of a just, noble cause that is worth fighting for’.<sup>334</sup> What is very important to notice, here, is the contrast stressed by the party between the prosperity that the Catalans enjoy and that which they would ‘deserve’ on the basis of their ‘effort’, because this claim is precisely what legitimises the rejection of solidarity with the rest of Spain.

In this framework, *Esquerra* has portrayed the welfare state as a fundamental pillar for the legitimacy of the state vis-à-vis the national community. The model is that of the Scandinavian countries. Independence and the establishment of Nordic-style welfare depend on each other, as the hostility of the Spanish state makes using the resources of the Catalans to bring about ‘the Scandinavian utopia’ impossible, while the welfare project is necessary to convince the people about the merits of independence (Figure 3.5).<sup>335</sup> After the 2010 Catalan elections, when the party went back into the opposition, ERC stressed its left-wing agenda by criticising the cuts imposed both by the Catalan Generalitat and the Spanish government. In this context, *Esquerra* made a clear connection between the *espoli fiscal* and the *espoli social* (social plundering) imposed by the austerity agenda. It not only defended measures to protect the social strata most affected by the crisis and to increase the revenues of the autonomous community by taxing the rich, but it also, and above all, insisted that, without the fiscal plundering, Catalonia would be the Sweden of the

<sup>329</sup> Here we find a clear correspondence to Alex Salmond’s idea of the economics of independence and the positive message in favour of independence.

<sup>330</sup> ERC (1989) ‘Entrevista’, *La Humanitat*, n. 0, p. 1.

<sup>331</sup> CAROD-ROVIRA (1991) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>332</sup> ERC (1992) ‘ERC, tercera força de Catalunya’, *La República*, 14, April, p. 3; RAMOS, ANGEL (2001) ‘Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira, “A ERC no volem regalar el protagonisme de la política catalana a CiU i al PSC”’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 25, March-April, pp. 10-11.

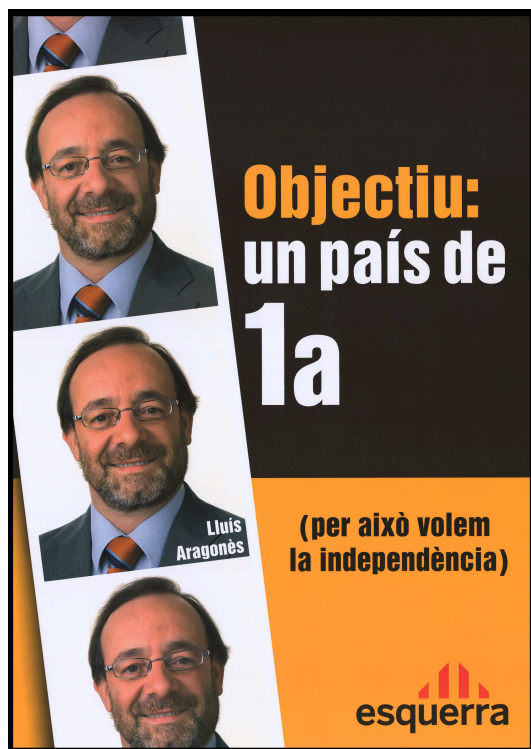
<sup>333</sup> ERC (2008) *Objectiu*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>334</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>335</sup> ERC (2012) *Un nou*, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

Mediterranean, would much more easily get out of the crisis and would even be one of the few countries in Europe to record a budget surplus.<sup>336</sup>

**Figure 3.5 – ‘Goal: A First-Class Country (because of this we want independence)’ (2008)**



Source: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, online resource.

Finally, there is another important concept introduced by Carod-Rovira in the party's rhetorical arsenal that goes hand in hand with the *catalanisme del benestar*. This is the idea of *desacomplexat nacionalisme* (nationalism without complexes, or relaxed nationalism), whereby ERC and the Catalans should not worry about the strength of their identity, but rather take it for granted, and carry out a self-confident and ambitious policy.<sup>337</sup> Therefore, the Catalans should not care about Spain, but rather focus on the changes that can be brought about within Catalan society to improve freedom and justice.<sup>338</sup> This would also entail negotiating with Madrid and collaborating with Spanish

<sup>336</sup> ERC (2011) 'Inconformistes davant les retallades socials', *Esquerra Nacional*, 191, 8-21 February, p. 4; ERC (2011) 'De la crisi no se'n surt només amb retallades', *Esquerra Nacional*, 191, 8-21 February, p. 5; AGUDO, CRISTIAN (2011) 'Retallades Socials', *Esquerra Nacional*, 194, April, p. 6; ARAGONÈS, PERE (2011) 'Execucions hipotecàries', *Esquerra Nacional*, 198, August, pp. 6-10; PÉREZ, LLUIS (2011) 'La Renda Bàsica. Un nou dret de ciutadania?', *Esquerra Nacional*, 199, September, pp. 14-15; ARAGONÈS, PERE (2012) 'La Suècia del Mediterrani?', *Esquerra Nacional*, 204, February, p. 9; ERC (2012) 'Ni espoli fiscal, ni espoli social', *Esquerra Nacional*, 204, February, p. 13. See also the infographic in *Esquerra Nacional*, 208, October 2012, p. 6.

<sup>337</sup> ERC (2001) *Punt*, *op. cit.*; ERC (2002) 'ERC proclama Carod candidat a la Generalitat', *Esquerra Nacional*, 33, May, p. 5. In fact, we already find echoes of such an approach in the 1993 manifesto, but the concept was fully developed and consistently used only later. ERC (1993) *Pels*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>338</sup> ERC (2003) *Un país*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

parties as equals, if beneficial to the Catalan cause. This policy was extensively used before and during the negotiations for the new Statute of Autonomy. In 2005, Carod-Rovira thus addressed the Spanish government: ‘from the quiet separatism, from the friendly sovereigntism [*sic*], from the national and constructive left of this country, we reach out to Spain, in a sincere gesture, to take the next step together: the federal step. We do it deliberately, but also for the last time’.<sup>339</sup> This gradualist and friendly attitude, however, did not totally replace uncompromising principles concerning national dignity and the right of self-determination of the Catalan people. While they were quite imperceptible before the Spanish modifications to the Statute of Autonomy,<sup>340</sup> these became much more visible in the campaign for the 2006 referendum, especially in those instances when the party denounced the Spanish refusal to recognise Catalonia as a nation,<sup>341</sup> and abated again as ERC entered a new government coalition in the Catalan Parliament. Since late 2009, the party has rallied behind the grassroots popular movement in favour of the ‘Right to Decide’. In this connection, the party made clear its conviction that the Spanish state would never recognise the Catalan right to self-determination and, especially after the electoral victory of the Popular Party at the 2011 general election, it predicted an inevitable frontal clash between Madrid and the growing Catalan pro-independence majority. It then emphasised the need to stress the tension between the democratic right of the Catalans to decide about their destiny and the conservative opposition of the Spanish state.<sup>342</sup>

### 3.2.5 The Catalan Language and Culture

The area in which the rhetoric of dignity and violated national rights has been most vocal is probably that of culture and language. The centrality of language in the definition of the Catalan identity has been repeatedly stressed by the party.<sup>343</sup> The following words probably best express such a fundamental role: ‘we know that our own language genuinely feeds our national consciousness and is the soul of our personality, as oppressor states want their dominant language to be imposed in order to homogenise citizens. Precisely because of that, we are still victims and subjects of coercion and harassment, because our neighbours see in our linguistic sovereignty our political freedom’.<sup>344</sup>

Until the late 1990s, the party was primarily concerned with the survival of Catalan. ERC acknowledged that the national society, above all in Barcelona, was split between locals and Spanish-speakers. Such a situation required urgent measures to improve knowledge and use of Catalan, but at the same time imposed constraints on the process of linguistic homogenisation because of possible protests and alienation of the Spanish-speaking community. In 1989 *Esquerra* argued that Catalonia was affected by an identity crisis, as it was not clear what it meant to be Catalan, and proposed an open, voluntaristic and not essentialist identity project based on two pillars: the Catalan language and the

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<sup>339</sup> ERC (2005) *Federalisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>340</sup> See for instance: ESTEVE, PERE (2003) ‘Una nova etapa’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 43, May, p. 3.

<sup>341</sup> ERC (2006) ‘Ara toca “No”: Catalunya mereix més!’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 71, June, p. 4.

<sup>342</sup> AGUDO, CRISTIAN (2011) ‘El xoc de trens entre la legitimitat catalana i la legalitat espanyola és inevitable i no ens fa cap por’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 201, November, pp. 16-17.

<sup>343</sup> ERC (1989) *L’Esquerra*, *op. cit.*, p. 3; ERC (1992) *Cap*, *op. cit.*, p. 76; COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 37. ERC (2006) *Una societat*, *op. cit.*, p. 7; ERC (2010) *Eleccions*, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>344</sup> FERRER, FRANCESC (1996) ‘Manifest per la llengua’, *La Republica*, 20, May, p. 26.

transformation of the Catalan nation into a sovereign community.<sup>345</sup> The former entailed the ‘normalisation’ of Catalan, i.e., a process that was to lead to the primacy of the national language in all spheres of life, although everybody would be allowed to keep his/her own mother tongue along with Catalan.<sup>346</sup> The first phase targeted the teaching of Catalan and its use in the institutions of the *Generalitat*. The second one shifted the attention to its actual use in the media, the cultural industry and the wider private sector (Figure 3.6).<sup>347</sup>

**Figure 3.6 – ‘For Freedom, Catalan, Official Language’ (2003)**



Source: ERC’s archives, 2003.

The policy of normalisation has been justified in terms of the historical relationship between Spanish and Catalan in the region. In this connection, the party has vocally denounced the imposition of Spanish in the Catalan countries not only during Franco’s dictatorship, but also since the end of Catalan autonomy within the Kingdom of Spain in 1714.<sup>348</sup> Therefore – ERC has suggested – the linguistic laws have been necessary to

<sup>345</sup> ERC (1989) *L’Esquerra, op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>346</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap, op. cit.*, p. 76. The debate about bilingualism is interesting because the party has been careful not to portray normalisation as an imposition that threatens to erase the cultural specificity of the non-native Catalans. The solution seems to have lain in the idea that Catalan must have priority over, but not exclude, the other languages spoken by the non-natives. This is also because Catalan is suggested to be a fundamental tool of integration of migrants into the national community, as we will see in the next section.

<sup>347</sup> This does not mean that language use was ignored before. The goal of normalisation was to make Catalan the primary language both in the public and in the private sectors all along. Simply, this was more quickly implemented in the former. Therefore, from the second half of the 1990s, the party began focusing on its extension to the private sphere. For the party’s own reflection on this shift see: ERC (1998) ‘La intervenció de Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 1, January, p. 2; ERC (2003) *Una nació, op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>348</sup> ERC (1989) *L’Esquerra, op. cit.*, p. 4. Here the party talked about a systematic attempt to erase the Catalan culture and nation. ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 19. Another major accusation made to the Spanish government has been to keep the linguistic division of the Catalan nation by promoting the status of

defend and strengthen the knowledge and use of Catalan in a context of unequal power relations. Accordingly, bilingualism would not be a solution because, in the long term, the stronger language – Spanish – would prevail.<sup>349</sup> Furthermore, especially from 2000 on, ERC began arguing that Catalan would never be on a par with Spanish until it would obtain the status of official language at the state level and a preferential one in Catalonia, through a system of linguistic territorialisation according to which the inhabitants of Catalonia would have a duty to know it, although the personal rights of Spanish speakers in the region would be guaranteed.<sup>350</sup> This – the party added – should also go hand in hand with the recognition of Catalonia as a nation, since without a reform of the Constitution in order to recognise the plurinational character of Spain, Madrid would recurrently attempt to homogenise the country.<sup>351</sup>

In ERC's rhetoric we do not find racist or xenophobic arguments against Spanish or foreign migrants. As already said, the party has been very careful to direct its accusations against the Spanish government dominated by an oligarchy of bureaucrats, landlords and speculators. Therefore, such a Madrid oligarchy has been the main 'relevant other' in the identity-building process of the nation.<sup>352</sup> Since this 'other' has often been described as backward and authoritarian, Catalans would be, by nature, modern and democratic. For instance, in his 1995 campaign booklet, *Contracte amb Catalunya* (Contract with Catalonia), Angel Colom defined the Catalan society as one that 'has a good potential to find itself among the most advanced in Europe. Values such as freedom, effort, initiative, solidarity that make us a society open to change are prevalent'.<sup>353</sup> By contrast, 'Spain remains an archaic state, unable to catch up with Europe, in which a political class originated in territories and environments that know only the rules of the speculative and financial economy'.<sup>354</sup> The connection with the dense network of SMEs characteristic of the region has been especially important in the party's discourse, as these enterprises would embody the typically Catalan values of hard work and entrepreneurship.<sup>355</sup> Thus, as already mentioned, the party seems to have suggested a culturally-determinist explanation of the economic difference between Catalonia and the rest of Spain. Probably the best example of such an argument – although applied to a different context – is to be found in the 1994 manifesto for the European election, where it reads: 'we find ourselves before a set of historical nations with their own traditions at all levels and with their own specific

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regional languages such as Valencian and Balearic, which the party has deemed to be variations of Catalan. This point has been confirmed by Carod-Rovira in an interview for this research project, see Annex 2.

<sup>349</sup> LLOPART, FRANCESC (1989) 'Que vol dir...Normalitzacio Lingüística', *La Humanitat*, 1, May, p. 6; ERC (1998) 'La Intervencio', *op. cit.*

<sup>350</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65; SEVER, SALVADOR (2003) 'Cinc anys de la Llei de Política Lingüística: una valoració', *Esquerra Nacional*, 41, February, p. 13; BOFILL, MIQUEL (2006) 'Plurilingüisme, dret democràtic', *Esquerra Nacional*, 73, August-September, p. 18.

<sup>351</sup> ERC (2000) *Programa*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>352</sup> In psychology the 'relevant others' are all those subjects that contributes to the relational construction of the self. ANDERSEN, SUSAN, CHEN, SERENA and MIRANDA, REGINA (2002) 'Significant Others and the Self', *Self and Identity*, 1, pp. 159-168.

<sup>353</sup> COLOM (1995) *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52. In the text, Colom went on extolling the intense associative life of the Catalan population, on the one hand, and the long tradition of craftsmanship and small and medium-sized enterprises, on the other, as basic traits of the Catalan identity. For similar descriptions of the cultural difference between Spain and Europe, and its economic consequences, see: CAROD-ROVIRA, JOSEP-LLUIS (1996) 'Debat de política general 1996, Discurs al Parlament de Catalunya, 16 October 1996', in *Tornar*, *op. cit.*, p. 99; ERC (1996) *La teva*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13; ERC (2012) *Un nou*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>355</sup> ERC (1993) *Pels*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

needs. This reality is not indiscernible at the economic level, but rather, on the contrary, is part and parcel of the structure of a people. Indeed, economic differences are mainly born of diverse cultural forms and this wealth in diversity is an inalienable patrimony of the European Union'.<sup>356</sup> Yet, again, *Esquerra* has traditionally been very careful to talk about institutions and specific classes rather than using sweeping generalisations about wide cultural aggregates.<sup>357</sup>

### 3.2.6 Una Nacio Integradora

Although with some variation across time, ERC has consistently held a positive and open attitude towards immigration. Its early texts on the subject were clearly influenced by the understanding of North-South relations that we have seen in section 3.2.4 of this chapter. Hence, immigrants were regarded as victims of an inherently exploitative capitalist system that prevented the development of Third World countries and, at the same time, attracted cheap workforce from them to the developed economies. Thus, the party denounced the fact that the ruling classes of advanced states were willing to welcome foreign immigration 'even if it is causing more misery among the migrants and more discomfort within the receiving population'.<sup>358</sup> Despite having been critical of this pattern of migration, and having also defended in its Ideological Declaration 'the right to work in one's own country',<sup>359</sup> *Esquerra* has not come to the conclusion that immigration should be stopped, nor considered it as a negative thing in itself, as, for instance, the *Vlaams Belang* and the *Lega Nord* have done.

On the contrary, in its early years, ERC proposed a radically open immigration policy, suggesting doing away with the requirement of a work contract in order to obtain a visa. It also asserted the moral imperative to provide services to all the people resident in Catalonia, regardless of their origin and political status.<sup>360</sup> This approach, however, gradually gave way to a more pragmatic one, especially during the years in government.<sup>361</sup> In most texts published in the 2000s, ERC has recognised the need for some form of control of immigration flows in order to assure a smooth process of integration. As the 2003 manifesto made clear, 'in this respect, far from the exclusionary demagoguery, on the defensive, or the left-wing paternalism, as inadequate as the former, to speak frankly is essential: neither visas to everybody, then, nor is there room for anybody else'.<sup>362</sup> Accordingly, *Esquerra* has confirmed its view of immigration as a strength and asserted that migrants should be treated as persons, not numbers. They should enjoy full civil rights and duties and the budget for social services should be calculated taking into account their

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<sup>356</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>357</sup> This was the case also in most of the interviews we had with current and former members of the party. On the one hand, they all agreed on the existence of cultural differences between Catalans and other Spanish peoples as well as on the economic consequences of such differences. On the other, they made clear that, according to their left-wing thinking, such features should not be essentialised and argued that specific institutional and historical contexts played a role as well.

<sup>358</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap, op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>359</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>360</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap, op. cit.*, p. 102; ERC (1993) *Pels, op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>361</sup> However, already in the 1993 Ideological Declaration, one could read that 'sovereign peoples have the right to decide, democratically, what level of immigration they can accept in accordance with the possibilities that the immigrant population has of finding work and achieving a decent standard of living, which will facilitate their social incorporation'. ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>362</sup> ERC (2003) *Una nacio, op. cit.*, p. 9.

presence to discourage competition with locals. But, at the same time, positive discrimination should be kept to a minimum and be carefully targeted, flows should be controlled and limited on the basis of the real possibilities of integration to avoid disrupting social cohesion and co-existence. Finally, cultural and religious freedom should be guaranteed, but practices against basic democratic institutions should be prohibited.<sup>363</sup>

Especially from the leadership of Carod-Rovira on, the most important element of the party's immigration policy has been the focus on the necessity to integrate migrants within the national language and culture. The model proposed for the accommodation of differences in the Catalan multicultural society, thus, is not colour-blindness nor assimilation, but rather active integration into a basic set of values and cultural traits, for the benefit of both locals and newcomers. On the migrants' side, ERC's arguments in favour of integration have started from the assumption that human beings do not exist in a vacuum. People can be free only when they are part of a wider community that bestows rights and duties upon them. Language and culture are thus instruments to assure full participation of the individual in this community as well as a feeling of belonging that makes the enjoyment of rights and duties complete.<sup>364</sup> On the locals' side, integration ensures the preservation of the national community and a positive relation with the immigrants.<sup>365</sup> Therefore, teaching of Catalan and access to culture are services that the *Generalitat* should provide to all members of the community and especially to newcomers.<sup>366</sup> In 2009, the party drafted a Law of Reception and a National Pact for Immigration with a view to regulating immigration flows, adapt public services to the presence of the migrant population and to further the creation of a 'common public culture' that should be 'the shared space of communication, coexistence, recognition and participation of our diverse society [...] so that the Catalan nation keeps being the reference point of all the population that lives and works in Catalonia'.<sup>367</sup> It entailed a reception service for all immigrants and the provision of courses to familiarise them with the Catalan language, society, legislation and labour market. Despite not being obligatory, these classes have been strongly promoted and have also been designed to have an impact on the migrants' chances to find employment.<sup>368</sup>

This has built upon the civic and voluntaristic conception of Catalan citizenship defended by the party. As made clear in the Ideological Declaration, 'in the Republic of

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<sup>363</sup> Ibidem, p. 20. CAPDEVILA, CARME (2001) 'Els novinguts: un repte per a Catalunya', *Esquerra Nacional*, 28, September-October, p. 4. Some texts published during the period of Puigcercos' leadership seem to suggest a tougher stand on the subject, as they put much more emphasis on the need to make migration flows tally with the requirements of the labour market and showed understanding for the anxiety of the local population. Yet, there is not enough evidence to point to a major policy shift. For an example, see JUANOLA, LAURA (2008) 'Integrar amb ordre, deures i drets, i en català', *Esquerra Nacional*, 119, 2-9 December 2008, p. 6; BAQUEDANO, LAURA (2010) 'Entre l'assimilació i la multiculturalitat', *Esquerra Nacional*, 176, 11-24 May, p. 6.

<sup>364</sup> ERC (2006) *Una societat, op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>365</sup> FORCADELL, CARME (2001) 'Llengua i immigració', *Esquerra Nacional*, 25, March-April, p. 16. The party also argued that a positive integration into the national language and culture would naturally produce a majority in favour of Catalan sovereignty, because only through integration newcomers can really be free. The reason why well-integrated migrants would automatically support Catalan independence, however, is not really clear. See ERC (2006) *Una societat, op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>366</sup> ERC (2006) *Una societat, op. cit.*, p. 10; ERC (2010) *Eleccions, op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>367</sup> ERC (2010) *Eleccions, op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>368</sup> The most controversial aspect of this law, however, was that Catalan, and not Spanish, was to be the official language of reception and integration of the immigrants. PAGÈS, POL (2009) 'La llei d'acollida estableix el català com a llengua comuna del país', *Esquerra Nacional*, 142, 2-8 June, p. 7.



Catalonia those considered Catalan will be any citizen born in Catalonia, or who has Catalan parents, or who was born outside the territory but is now legally resident in the Catalan Nation and has expressed a desire to become Catalan; without distinction as to place of birth, family origins, ethnic group or religion. The only condition is that they accept the basic values (arrived at by consensus) of the Catalan people and expressed through their constitution'.<sup>369</sup>

### 3.2.7 Europe

As for many other nationalist parties, *Esquerra*'s rhetoric on Europe has centred around the idea of a 'Europe of the peoples' as opposed to a Europe of the states. According to such an interpretative framework, the project of European integration has not led to a redefinition of sovereignty in Europe along national lines, but has rather remained firmly in the hands of state governments who have focused only on economic and monetary collaboration, ignoring any cultural and social dimension.<sup>370</sup> As explained in 1989, 'according to ERC, the ultimate goal is the realisation of a Federal European Union based on the free transfer of sovereignty of the nations and the peoples that compose it.'<sup>371</sup> This project of Federal European Union entails the preliminary recognition of the right of self-determination of the stateless nations that make up Europe and implies the disappearance of those states that, given their plurinational nature, have an artificial character, as it is currently the case with the Spanish state'.<sup>372</sup> Therefore, in the early years of its separatist propaganda, ERC saw in the process of European integration a tool for constitutional change.<sup>373</sup> This however varied over time, especially because the lack of recognition, on the part of the European institutions, of the right of self-determination of European stateless nations called into question the credibility of the process.<sup>374</sup> Since the mid-1990s, the party began arguing that the EU had been constructed on the model of the old nation-states: too bureaucratic, non-transparent, inefficient and with a serious democratic deficit.<sup>375</sup> Furthermore, the strongest European countries imposed, through the monetary union, huge sacrifices on the weakest ones – among whom Spain<sup>376</sup> – and a neoliberal consensus that is at odds with ERC's tenets.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>370</sup> BARRERA, HERIBERT (1989) *Electoral letter*, 1989 European election, ERCA, C'88, EU'89, E'89; ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, op. cit.*; ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 5; ERC (1996) 'ERC vol que la Unio Europea sigui més social, integradora i que fomenti l'ocupació', *La Republica*, 20, May, pp. 24-25; ERC (1996) 'ERC', *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25; CASTELLS, LAIA (2003) 'Com es construeix Europa', *Esquerra Nacional*, 40, January, p. 4; SOLÉ, JORDI (2004) 'El model social europeu, una altra oportunitat perduda', *Esquerra Nacional*, 57, October, p. 4.

<sup>371</sup> In the original texts the terms 'peoples' (*pobles*) and nations (*nacions*) are used as synonyms, thus their combination here is most likely due to a stylistic choice.

<sup>372</sup> ERC (1989) *L'Esquerra, op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>373</sup> See also: ERC (1992) 'L'empenta d'ERC al Parlament', *La Republica*, 15, December, p. 9.

<sup>374</sup> ERC (1993) *Ideological, op. cit.*, p. 21; ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>375</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>376</sup> The party has carefully referred to Spain and not Catalonia because that would imply it to be a weak economy. The ambiguity of being a rich region in a poor country mentioned in section 3.2.2 echoes here.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5. ERC (1999) *Programa eleccions europees*, European election manifesto, ERCA, M'99, EU'99, p. 6. Similar arguments have been used by Oriol Junqueras, during his time as an MEP, in order to justify his lack of support for the re-election of Manuel Barroso as President of the Commission. ERC (2009) 'Junqueras no votarà Barroso', *Esquerra Nacional*, 153, 15-21 September, p. 8.

Nevertheless, *Esquerra* has strongly supported the EU and constantly confirmed its willingness to join it once achieved the independence of the Catalan nation.<sup>378</sup> Simply, beside the recognition of stateless nations' self-determination, it has proposed modifying the Union by devolving to it only economic and territorial planning, foreign affairs and defence and security policy and turning the Committee of the Regions into a true federal senate.<sup>379</sup> The party has suggested democratising the EU and bringing it closer to the citizens by empowering the Parliament and granting the right of representation within EU institutions to stateless nations.<sup>380</sup> Even when encouraging its electors to vote against the European Constitution, in the period 2005-2006, ERC argued that it was advocating for a 'Europeanist No', based on an alternative constitutional proposal envisaging, among others, the recognition of national diversity within the member states, a more democratic process of policy-making, and a more substantial engagement of the EU in social and environmental policy making.<sup>381</sup>

With the Eastern Enlargement, the recognition of Catalan self-determination became an even more debated topic in the party's publications. Already in the mid-1990s, ERC had extolled the process of fragmentation experienced in Eastern Europe, hoping for its expansion westward, and supporting the new members' candidatures.<sup>382</sup> As the process was being completed, though, *Esquerra* vocally decried that Catalonia was bigger and richer than most newcomers, but it would not have a say in the decisions of the EU, concluding that 'political dependency [on Spain for foreign affairs EDM] ends up being a burden, not only for Catalonia's presence in Europe, but also for the need to adapt to a globalised world'.<sup>383</sup> Some years later, while discussing the EU Constitutional Treaty, ERC argued that about 25% of the EU members – in fact 5 out of 27 – had obtained their independence in the previous 20 years and concluded that 'our country represents the biggest non-recognised national reality in the European Union. For its political, economic, linguistic and demographic characteristics it is a unique case within the EU and it will be necessary to exploit [literally to sell (*vendre*) EDM] this singularity'.<sup>384</sup> Much before these events, however, ERC had called for the attribution of a special status to those nations, *Länders* or regions enjoying legislative competences within their home country and/or creating an organ that will represent them within the European institutions<sup>385</sup> as well as for the recognition of Catalan as an official EU language.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> For a recent confirmation of this commitment and a recall of the long ERC's history of support for the EU see ERC (2012) *Un nou, op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>379</sup> However, the party complained that the Committee of the Regions put together nations with a long history and wide constitutional powers with regions that were nothing but administrative inventions, thus, somehow, downgrading Catalonia. Ibidem, p. 20.

<sup>380</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5; ERC (1999) *Programa, op. cit.*, p. 7; JUNQUERAS i VIVES, ORIOL (2009) *Idees Clares a Europa*, press conference, 27 February.

<sup>381</sup> ERC (2005) 'Per moltes raons, aquesta Constitució no', *Esquerra Nacional*, 59, January, pp. 4-5.

<sup>382</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>383</sup> ERC (2003) *Un país, op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>384</sup> ROYO, ALBERTO (2007) 'Catalunya devant el futur Tractat Europeu', *Esquerra Nacional*, 81, July-August, p. 19.

<sup>385</sup> ERC (1992) *Cap, op. cit.*

<sup>386</sup> ERC (1999) *Programa, op. cit.*, pp. 9-10; ERC (2010) *Eleccions, op. cit.*, p. 190. Pushing for the recognition of Catalan as an official language within the EU has also been expedient, if successful, to then force similar concessions on the Spain state. That is precisely what the party claimed after having obtained, in 2006, a limited recognition of Catalan entailing its use in some EU meetings. ERC (2005) 'El català, de Brussels a Madrid', *Esquerra Nacional*, 64, July-August, p. 5.

The most important shift in the party's rhetoric on Europe, however, has probably been the acknowledgment that the EU would not make independence easier – as originally argued – although it would make it more necessary. This has been linked to the failure of the so-called Europe of the Regions, i.e., the idea that regions with a strong identity and enjoying wide forms of autonomy could obtain some form of substantial representation in EU policy-making. From the beginning of the 2000s, the party began stressing much more the daily impact of EU legislation on the life of the Catalans and, therefore, the need to obtain statehood, as only such status would allow them to be full members:<sup>387</sup> ‘the European Union exercises an influence evermore important on our reality and it constitutes the future political and economic reference framework. All that is decided in Brussels or Strasbourg cannot in any way be considered as foreign policy, but rather as an extra-dimension of domestic politics’.<sup>388</sup> As the Maastricht Treaty allows the Spanish autonomous communities to take part in meetings of the Council of Ministries concerning competences devolved to them, the party has also denounced the paradoxical situation whereby, the Spanish state still claims representation for all policy areas, although it is not responsible, at the domestic level, for some of them.<sup>389</sup>

Finally, during the Colom period, Europe, rather than the EU, and even more Northern Europe, played another fundamental role in the relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish state, i.e., it has been the ‘positive other’ used as an example of modernity and progress in opposition to the ‘negative other’, the backward Spanish state.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> CIVIT, FERRAN (2004) ‘Miquel Mayol, eurodeputat, “Hem de millorar el funcionament del Parlament Europeu”’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 54, May-June, p. 4.

<sup>388</sup> ERC (2003) *Una nació, op. cit.*, p. 3. See also: ERC (2000) ‘La presencia catalana a les institucions de la Unio Europea’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 19, March-April, p. 6; CIVIT, *op. cit.*; ROYO, *op. cit.*, p. 19;

<sup>389</sup> ERC (2000) ‘La presencia catalana a les institucions de la Unio Europea’, *Esquerra Nacional*, 19, March-April, p. 6.

<sup>390</sup> ERC (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 23; ERC (1996) *La teva, op. cit.*, p. 13.

### 3.3 Examining ERC's Discourse and Strategy

The core arguments of ERC have been that the Catalan nation has been fiscally plundered by and politically subordinated to the Spanish state. Here, we critically discuss these claims. In the first section, we focus on those concerning economic victimisation, both on a historical and more contemporary perspective. Likewise, in the second one, we look at Catalonia's position within the kingdom of Spain, focusing first on some important historical debates and, then, on the recent process of devolution. The aim of both sections is, first, to provide the historical context for the formulations of ERC's claims; then, to evaluate to what extent they can be considered valid when weighed against the available historical and socio-economic evidence. We also try to explain why the nationalism of the rich arose at the end of the 1980s.

#### 3.3.1 Economic Victimisation

In the introductory chapter, we have already suggested that the Catalan nationalist movement of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century can be considered as a forerunner of the nationalism of the rich. This has been implicitly suggested by students of Catalan nationalism such as Juan Linz, who, pointing out that 'in many other European societies the linguistic, cultural, peripheral oppositions challenging central power emerged in agricultural, economically underdeveloped regions, often from a society based on peasant communalism',<sup>391</sup> concluded that Catalonia constituted a noticeable exception. Thus, Catalonia experienced the almost contemporary birth and development of nationalist doctrines and industrial growth.<sup>392</sup>

Spain, in contrast, has been defined as a case of early state-building and late nation-building.<sup>393</sup> Although Spanish unification was completed through marriage policy and conquest by 1512 (with the annexation of Iberian Navarre), the Kingdom was composed of very different and largely autonomous entities. The constituent parts of the Crown of Aragon – the kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia and the Principality of Catalonia – maintained their own political institutions until the eighteenth century. Economically speaking, in this early phase, thanks to its explorations in the Atlantic, Castile enjoyed an advantage over Catalonia, which entered a phase of recession coinciding with the decline of Mediterranean trade. Yet, Spain did not embark on any process of national homogenisation, although attempts at administrative centralisation came about in the seventeenth century. The persistent imperial effort and reduced colonial revenues induced Charles V and Philippe II to adopt a more efficient system of taxation.<sup>394</sup> The autonomous institutions of the constituent parts, though, stood against their efforts, leading, in the case of the Principality of Catalonia, to the wars of 1640-1652 and the conflict with the Spanish Crown in the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714).<sup>395</sup> Ironically, Catalonia's economic revival began soon after the loss of the Principality's autonomous institutions. As argued by Vilar and Giner, this occurred before large-scale participation of Catalan merchants in the colonial trade – according to Shaw the economic revival constituted a necessary

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<sup>391</sup> LINZ, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

<sup>392</sup> See VILAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-158; LINZ, *op. cit.*, p. 63; GINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>393</sup> LINZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>394</sup> This was accelerated by the fall in revenues coming from American silver, the maintenance costs of the troops and the ensuing debt of the Crown.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibidem*, 38-47; CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 36.

premise to such participation – and was mainly based on improvements in the agricultural sector that made the capital accumulation necessary to invest in manufacturing possible.<sup>396</sup> While some authors focus more on the role of the *menestralia* – i.e., artisans, shopkeepers and workshop owners – and their ‘Protestant-like mentality’<sup>397</sup> and others on the fortunate transformation of merchant capital into financial capital flowing into the industry,<sup>398</sup> all agree that the development of the region and the contemporary decline of the rest of Spain – except for the Basque Country – heavily impacted on the formation of the Spanish national identity in the nineteenth century.

As Borja de Riquer i Permaner suggested, Spanish and Catalan nationalism developed abreast during the nineteenth century, especially from 1840 on, and their interaction largely determined the final outcome. Thus, in Catalonia an old territorial identity slowly turned into a national one, although it remained fundamentally compatible with the Spanish framework until the interwar years. The diverging interests of the Spanish and Catalan economic elites, on the one hand, and the failure of the Spanish liberals to propose a non-organic definition of the Spanish nation, alternative to the conservative one, set the ground for a strengthening of autonomist and even separatist national traditions in the region.<sup>399</sup> This was favoured by the weakness of the Spanish state institutions. While the conservatives mainly followed a Jacobin model of state centralisation, they lacked both the same material and ideological sources that other European countries used to lead a modernising process of economic development and cultural homogenisation.<sup>400</sup> The Spanish state could not, for instance, enact a truly comprehensive and compulsory education system – in 1900, 63.8% of the population was illiterate against only 16.5% in France.<sup>401</sup>

Hence, the inefficient character and declining influence of the Spanish state in the nineteenth century, combined with the nationalist mobilisation begun early on in the region along with its exceptional modernisation, go a long way to explaining the strength of Catalan nationalism and the failure of Spanish nation-building at the beginning of the twentieth century. This early Catalan nationalism, however, did not threaten Spain’s unity.<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, Catalan society has historically been riven by internal fractures. As the first region in Spain to industrialise, it also was the first to experience the struggle between labour and capital. For instance, although they disagree on the real support of Catalan industrialists for Franco, several authors point to a cyclical pattern whereby – both in the 1920s, with the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera, and in the late 1930s – the Catalan industrial elites initially backed regime change, but after having lost control over the process, and fearing that reform would go too far, supported restoration in order to stop social unrest.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> VILAR, *op. cit.*, 555; GINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-25.

<sup>397</sup> GINER, *op. cit.*, p. 16; CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>398</sup> VILAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 561-563.

<sup>399</sup> We will deal more in detail with the process of development of Catalan nationalism in the next section.

<sup>400</sup> DE RIQUER i PERMANER, BORJA (2000) *Identitats Contemporànies: Catalunya i Espanya* (Vic: Eumo Editorial) p. 14.

<sup>401</sup> CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 38. Balfour and Quiroga mention a slightly lower figure (59%), but still in line with Culla’s. BALFOUR, SEBASTIAN and QUIROGA, ALEJANDRO (2007) *The Reinvention of Spain. Nation and Identity since Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 25.

<sup>402</sup> CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 40; LINZ, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>403</sup> LINZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57; CONVERSI (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 36-41; PAQUIN, pp. 121-124; SHAFIR, GERSHON (1995) *Immigrants and Nationalists: Ethnic Conflict and Accommodation in Catalonia, the*

The dictatorship hit the Catalan movement very hard and actively repressed Catalan identity. Yet, from an economic perspective, especially from 1959 on when Franco imposed a radical change on the country's economic policy replacing Falangist ministers and staff with technocrats from the *Opus Dei*, Catalonia experienced an impressive economic development. Between 1960 and 1973, the region's GDP grew 8% per annum on average. Furthermore, between 1955 and 1975, Catalonia's gross composite value of industrial production increased by 287% and the region gathered a disproportional share of foreign investments entering Spain.<sup>404</sup> As a consequence, in the late 1970s, Catalonia enjoyed a per capita income 30% higher than the Spanish average and, while inhabited by 16% of the population it accounted for 20% of Spanish GDP, 26% of industrial production and 20% of bank deposits.<sup>405</sup> The fiscal relationship with the rest of Spain however remained strained. Claims of unfair redistribution were already made by ERC in the 1930s. These were, of course, muted during the dictatorship, although fiscal imbalances persisted – according to data provided by Conversi, in 1970 only 52%<sup>406</sup> of what was taken from Catalonia was reinvested there –<sup>407</sup> and some academic calculations of the transfers were carried out. Apart from Catalan intellectuals abroad,<sup>408</sup> an important role was played by the economist and politician Ramon Trias i Fargas. He was one of the few to conduct studies on the subject during the dictatorship, rejecting the myth that Catalonia's wealth solely depended on the Spanish market and proposing to define it as an 'economic region'. In the first years of the transition, he strongly advocated the adoption of a formula similar to the Basque *concierto economico* and later published books popularising the technical details of the fiscal relationship between Spain and Catalonia.<sup>409</sup> From the end of the 1970s, economic analyses of the relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish administration began being produced quite systematically, while during the 1980s the saliency of the issue increased with the expansion of public spending. Overall state expenditure went from 20.1% of GDP in 1970 to 42.7% in 1990, recording one of the highest percentage progressions among advanced economies over the same period<sup>410</sup> – in

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*Basque Country, Latvia and Estonia* (New York: State University of New York Press) p. 58. VILAR, *op. cit.*, p. 135; DE RIQUER, *op. cit.*, p. 252. However, Culla and Balcells made clear that only a minority of Catalans supported Franco. CULLA (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 43. BALCELLS, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>404</sup> McROBERTS, KENNETH (2001) *Catalonia: Nation-Building without a State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p. 92.

<sup>405</sup> GINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-54. Nevertheless, as compared to the interwar years, Madrid closed the gap with Catalonia.

<sup>406</sup> Balcells suggested a similar figure for the 1930s, since back then Catalonia had a potential revenue from income tax of 233 million pesetas per year, but its budget, in 1938, was only 128 million, that is, 55% of its contribution to state coffers. See BALCELLS, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>407</sup> CONVERSI (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 119. Conversi also pointed out that, in this period, economists such as Carles Pi-Sunyer 'expressed the idea that language was deeply inter-linked with identity and economic prosperity' (p. 172) which, we have seen, has echoed in ERC's propaganda.

<sup>408</sup> See PI-SUNYER, CARLES (1959) *El comerç de Catalunya amb Espana* (Mexico: Club del Llibre Català).

<sup>409</sup> TRIAS i FARGAS, RAMON (1979) *Nacionalisme i Llibertat* (Barcelona: Destino); TRIAS i FARGAS, RAMON (1985) *Narració d'una asfíxia premeditada* (Barcelona: Tibidabo Edicions). On the role of Fargas see, GENERALITAT DE CATALUNYA (1991) *Homenatge a Ramon Trias i Fargas* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya); CABANA, FRANCESC (2002) *25 anys de llibertat, autonomia i centralisme. Una visió econòmica* (Barcelona: ECSA) pp. 225-227; ESPASA, MARTA and BOSCH, NURIA (2010) 'Inter-regional fiscal flows: methodologies, results and their determinant factors for Spain', in NURIA, BOSCH, MARTA, ESPASA and ALBERT SOLE OLLE, *The Political Economy of Inter-Regional Fiscal Flows* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar) p. 150.

<sup>410</sup> COMIN, FRANCISCO and DIAZ, DANIEL (2005) 'Sector público administrativo y estado del bienestar', in ALBERT, CARRERAS and XAVIER, TAFUNELL (eds.) *Estadísticas históricas de España, Siglos XIX-XX* (Bilbao: Fundación BBVA) II ed., p. 877.

fact the highest of all in the 1980s and, during the same decade, the country also showed the fastest increase in tax revenues, as a percentage of GDP, in Western Europe.<sup>411</sup> This evolution should not be uncritically seen as a sign of deterioration of public finances. On the contrary, it largely represented a ‘normalisation’ compared to neighbouring countries that had created complex welfare systems and expanded state intervention into the economy well before Spain did. Nevertheless, the change was radical and carried out in much more unfavourable conditions than those of the period of extraordinary economic growth experienced by the rest of the continent between 1945 and 1975 – the so-called *trente glorieuses* – during which most other European welfare states had been built.<sup>412</sup> This led to consistent budget deficits and rising debt throughout the 1980s – although lower in absolute terms when compared to Italy’s and Belgium’s. As we will see below, coupled with the corruption scandals that undermined the legitimacy of the Socialists in government in Madrid since the early 1980s, these trends in state finances clearly opened up a window of opportunity for ERC to frame arguments of fiscal protest in national terms.

Estimates have, however, varied according to the methods adopted and especially whether the calculations have been made using the monetary flow or the benefit flow method for the assessment of spending.<sup>413</sup> The difference lies in that the former attributes expenditure to the region where public goods are produced, regardless of who are the true beneficiaries, thus overemphasising ‘headquarter effects’. The latter instead allocates general services, such as foreign policy or the army, often geographically concentrated in some areas but at least in principle for the benefit of the entire population, on a per capita basis. There is no agreement on which of the two is sounder. On the one hand, general services clearly cater for the entire population and their cost should therefore be divided among all the inhabitants. On the other, it is undeniable that the concentration of such services in specific areas can have disproportional positive effects on the local economy, and sometimes function as a subsidy, as well as give rise to protests on account of diverging interests and policy preferences among different communities within the country.<sup>414</sup>

Already in 1983, using the monetary flow method, Castells and Parellada calculated the Catalan fiscal deficit for the years 1975-1979 at around -7% of the Catalan GDP,<sup>415</sup> while at the end of the 1980s, Bosch et al. reached lower, although still sizable, results with the

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<sup>411</sup> TANZI, VITO and SCHUKNECHT, LUDGER (2000) *Public Spending in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 6-7.

<sup>412</sup> COMIN and DIAZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 893-894.

<sup>413</sup> For a complete review see BARBERAN ORTI, RAMON (2006) ‘Los estudios sobre la balanzas fiscales regionales en Espana (1960-2005)’, *Presupuesto y Gasto Publico*, n. 43, pp. 63-94.

<sup>414</sup> For more methodological considerations on how to calculate fiscal balances see: RUGGERI, GIUSEPPE (2009) *Regional Fiscal Flows Measurement Tools*, Document de treball de l’Institut d’Economia de Barcelona n. 4; VAILLANCOURT, FRANÇOIS (2010) ‘Inter-Regional Fiscal Flows: Interpretation Issues’, in NURIA, BOSCH, MARTA, ESPASA and ALBERT, SOLE OLLE (eds.) *The Political Economy of Inter-Regional Fiscal Flows, Measurements, Determinants and Effects on Country Stability* (Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing) pp. 39-58; BARBERAN ORTI, RAMON (2010) ‘Comment V’ in BOSCH, ESPASA and SOLE OLLE, *op. cit.*, pp. 182-187.

<sup>415</sup> CASTELLS, ANTONI and PARELLADA, MARTI (1983) ‘Los flujos economicos de Cataluna con el exterior’, in BANCO DE BILBAO, *La economia de Cataluna, hoy y manana* (Bilbao: Banco de Bilbao) pp. 402-470. In most studies the fiscal deficit shows a negative sign. This is because the fiscal balance of each autonomous community with the central administration is calculated as the difference between its spending and tax revenue. Therefore, if a community contributes more than what it spends its balance will be negative.

benefit flow one<sup>416</sup> (Table 3.1). Similar figures were later confirmed by more recent studies. Working on data concerning the period 1991-1996 and using both methods, Castells et al. calculated an average yearly transfer of -6.4% of regional GDP with the monetary flow analysis and -4.6% with the benefit flow one.<sup>417</sup> In 2000, summing up the findings of the previous 15 years, Pons i Novell and Tremosa i Balcells estimated an average capital drain equal to -7.5% of regional GDP per year. The authors also argued that this had turned into a fiscal liability that was preventing the Catalan economy from growing at the same pace as the most advanced European countries and pointed out that the personal income of Catalans dropped from second to seventh place in the ranking of the Spanish autonomous communities, during the 1985-2000 period.<sup>418</sup> The analyses they quoted, however, were exclusively based on the monetary flow method. On a similarly long time series, but adopting a benefit flow perspective, Uriel Jiménez and Barberán Ortí have assessed an average fiscal deficit of -5.2% of Catalonia's GDP for the period 1991-2005.<sup>419</sup> Finally, starting with the new tripartite government elected in 2004 and composed of the Socialist Party, the Greens and *Esquerra*, the Catalan *Generalitat* has systematically published its own findings on the fiscal transfers. On the basis of data provided by the central administration of the state, it has since calculated the deficit at about -8/-9% of the Catalan GDP using the monetary flow method and at -6/-7% with the benefit-flow one.<sup>420</sup>

An alternative interpretation of the figures has, however, been proposed by Angel De la Fuente, who argued that only a fourth of public spending<sup>421</sup> can be correctly considered as territorially allocated, since, according to him, the rest pertains to categories that do not allow for geographical discrimination. He maintains that this would especially be the case with social security – equal to about two-thirds of public spending – that should only depend on the specific income of Spanish citizens and not on their community of residence. Accordingly, he estimated the fiscal deficit at only about -1.8% of regional GDP for the period 1990-1997.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Quoted in CASTELLS, ANTONI and PARELLADA, MARTI (1998) 'L'Economia Catalana nel context Espanyol i Europeu', in SALVADOR, GINER (ed.) *La Societat Catalana* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya) pp. 493-505.

<sup>417</sup> CASTELLS, ANTONI et al. (2000) *Las balanzas fiscales de las Comunidades Autónomas (1991-1996). Análisis de los flujos fiscales de las Comunidades Autónomas con la Administración Central* (Barcelona: Ariel) pp. 262-266. The authors interestingly pointed out that, when using the benefit flow method, in absolute terms almost all of the overall fiscal deficit is borne by the autonomous communities of Madrid and Catalonia.

<sup>418</sup> PONS i NOVELL, JORDI and TREMOSA i BALCELLS, RAMON (2005) 'Macroeconomic effects of Catalan fiscal deficit with the Spanish state (2002-2010)', *Applied Economics*, 37(13), pp. 1456-1461.

<sup>419</sup> URIEL JIMENEZ, EZEQUIEL and BARBERAN ORTI, RAMON (2007) *Las balanzas fiscales de las comunidades autonomas con la Administracion Publica Central* (Bilbao: Fundacion BBVA), pp. 285-322.

<sup>420</sup> GTABFC (Group de Treball per l'Actualitzacio de la Balança Fiscal de Catalunya) (2005) *La balança fiscal de Catalunya amb l'administracio central*, Generalitat de Catalunya; GTABFC (2008) *Resultats de la balança fiscal de Catalunya amb l'administracio central, 2002-05*, Generalitat de Catalunya; GENERALITAT DE CATALUNYA (2012) *Resultats de la balança fiscal de Catalunya amb el sector public central 2006-2009*, Departament d'Economia i Coneixement.

<sup>421</sup> This would include: territorially homogenised funding (education, social services and basic territorial funding), infrastructures, regional aid and other goods and services.

<sup>422</sup> Our calculation on DE LA FUENTE, ANGEL (2001) 'Un poco de aritmetica territorial: anatomia de una balanza fiscal para las regiones espanolas', *Studies on the Spanish Economy*, n. 91, FEDEA, p. 25.



**Table 3.1 – Estimates of Catalonia’s Fiscal Deficit, selected studies (average values as a percentage of regional GDP)\***

Author	Year of publication	Years studied	Monetary Flow	Benefit Flow
Castells and Parellada	1983	1975-79	-7.3%	
Bosch et al.	1988	1980-85		-2.75%
Colldeforns	1991	1986-88	-9.2%	
Castells et al.	2000	1991-96	-6.4%	-4.6%
Pons and Tremosa	2000	1985-2000	-7.5%	
De la Fuente	2001	1990-97		-1.8% <sup>a</sup>
Uriel and Barberan	2007	1991-2005		-5.2%
Generalitat of Catalunya	2005, 2008, 2012	2001-09	-8.6%	-6.2%

<sup>a</sup> Excluding social security.

\* See note 415 for an explanation of why Catalonia’s fiscal deficit is negative.

Sources: see authors quoted in text.

Commenting on the wide variety of the estimates available in the various studies he reviewed, Barberán Ortí concluded that ‘any debate, based on such data, about the redistributive inter-territorial consequences of the practices of the central public administration and about policies necessary for its correction seems unhelpful’.<sup>423</sup> Yet, when taking into account only studies using the same method divergences shrink considerably. Thus, the Catalan fiscal deficit has averaged between -4/-6% and -7/-9% of its GDP according to the method used since the 1980s. The general stability of the transfers is also confirmed by an analysis of the relation between primary and disposable income per capita of Catalan residents. Building on a formula provided by Lago-Penas et al. adapted to the Spanish context, we have calculated that, between 1995 and 2008, the per capita ‘redistributive effort’ of the Catalan population has remained limited between -3% and -4.5% of their per capita standardised primary income, that is, their per capita primary income in percentage of the national average has been reduced through the system of fiscal redistribution by an amount equal to the above range (always expressed as a percentage of the per capita standardised primary income) (Figure 3.7).<sup>424</sup>

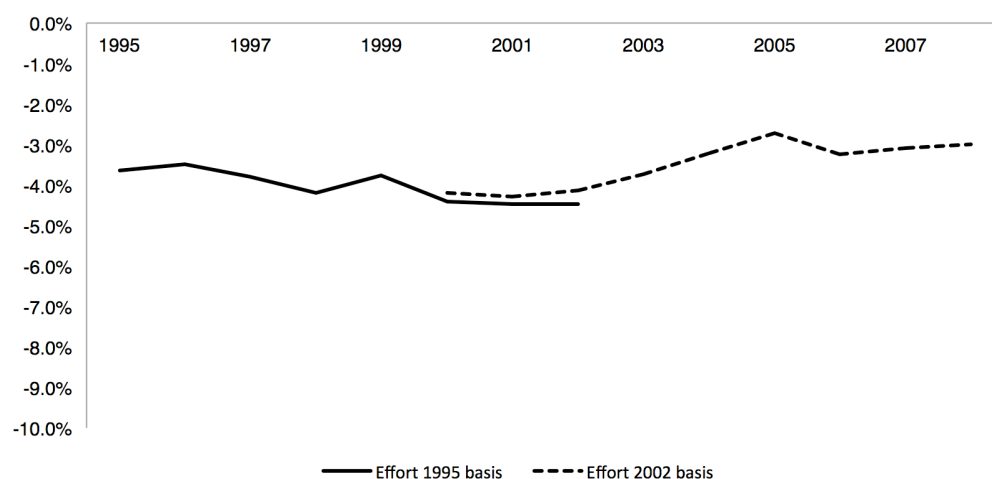
What Figure 3.7 and the review of the literature on the transfers seen above show is that there are substantial transfers and their amount has not varied substantially in the period

<sup>423</sup> BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>424</sup> Primary income is equal to the income generated by households through their participation in the economy. It mainly consists of gross wages and social security contributions plus income coming from the remuneration of financial or other assets. Disposable income, by contrast, coincides with the income available to households for spending and saving as the result of the deduction of taxes and social security contributions from primary income.

under study. On the one hand, this means that we cannot explain variations in support for separatist parties and/or for independence with reference to a deterioration of Catalonia's redistributive effort – if anything this seems to have slightly shrunk. On the other, the persistency of the transfers can be used as a weapon by ERC, and other organisations, in order to argue that, despite major reforms, the system has remained fundamentally the same. The lack of a consensual methodology allows for varying interpretations of the transfers' extent and causes. Knowledge of this issue became quite extensive from the second half of the 1980s on, when substantially detailed studies had already been conducted and the first autonomic government was coming to an end bringing with it the issue of a renegotiation – and thus also a first evaluation – of fiscal arrangements.

**Figure 3.7 – Redistributive Effort per Capita, Catalonia, 1995-2008\* (percentage of standardised primary income)\*\***



\* We used two different statistical series for Spanish and Catalan primary and disposable (the first using 1995 as base year and relating to the 1995-2002 period, the second using 2000 as base year and covering the 2000-2008 one). This is due to the fact that the Spanish statistical institute (INE) calculates macro-aggregates on the basis of periodical in-depth household surveys that are not directly comparable between themselves.

\*\* Our measure of the regions' redistributive effort is based on a formula proposed by Lago-Penas et al. as a modification of the approach first suggested by Bayoumi and Masson. Accordingly, the redistributive effort of a specific region is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Effort} = ((D_i/D_n) - (P_i/P_n))/(P_i/P_n)$$

where  $D_i$  is the region's disposable income per capita,  $D_n$  the country's disposable income per capita, while  $P_i$  and  $P_n$  are the regional and national primary incomes per capita respectively. In other words, a region's redistributive effort is equal to the difference between the region's per capita disposable and primary incomes both standardised by the corresponding national average. The difference is then expressed as a percentage of the region's per capita standardised primary income. See LAGO-PENAS, SANTIAGO, PRADA, ALBINO and VAQUERO, ALBERTO (2013) *On the Size and Determinants of Inter-regional Redistribution in European Countries over the Period 1995-2009*, MPRA paper n. 45406, p. 13; BAYOUMI, TAMIM and MASSON, PAUL (1995) 'Fiscal Flows in the United States and Canada: Lessons for Monetary Union in Europe', *European Economic Review*, 39, pp. 253-274.

Sources: our calculations on data from the INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADISTICA, *Renda familiar disponible bruta*.

Furthermore, Catalonia is not the only, or necessarily the biggest contributor – in terms of share of GDP – to the Spanish redistribution system. Almost all studies show that when

using a benefit flow method the biggest deficit is held by the Community of Madrid.<sup>425</sup> This is in part due to the role of Madrid as capital, since when using a monetary flow method the deficit decreases considerably or even turns into a surplus.<sup>426</sup> Nevertheless, it also reflects the capital's new economic status as the richest community in the country, which clearly frustrates Catalan arguments of economic superiority. Sizable transfers, on average equal to -4.3% of regional GDP for the period 1991-2005,<sup>427</sup> have been recorded in the Balearic Islands as well. Yet, despite the development of regionalist parties such as the *Unió Mallorquina*, this has never led to the rise of a nationalist cleavage as strong as the Catalan one, nor, until very recently and still limited to a minority position in the political spectrum, to claims of fiscal exploitation nearly as vocal as those in Catalonia.<sup>428</sup> Such a situation begs the question why claims of fiscal exploitation are not as strong in the Balearic Islands and, even more so, why they have not led to an increase in support for independence.<sup>429</sup> The answer probably lies in that, despite being considered as part of the Catalan cultural area, about 60% of the local population declares itself *Españolista* rather than Catalan or regionalist.<sup>430</sup> The answer to the same question with regard to Madrid is pretty banal. Madrid is the political and cultural centre of the country and thus profits, both economically and symbolically, from headquarter effects that offset the fiscal imbalance.<sup>431</sup> These two cases confirm that it is the idea of being a different community in the first place that sets the ground for the nationalism of the rich. It also points to the perception of a mismatch between economic and political power as a potent factor. In this connection, Castells and Parellada have compared the Catalan fiscal imbalance with those among other European regions. We will come back on this comparative issue more systematically in the concluding chapter, what however strikes one in the numbers provided by the authors is not the amount of the fiscal imbalance per se, but rather that, with the exclusion of some areas of Northern Italy and the regions of Baden-Württemberg and Bayern, similar fiscal imbalances in other European countries would be mostly limited

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<sup>425</sup> Uriel Jiménez and Barberán Ortí estimated it at 10.2% for the 1991-2005 period, but some of the studies mentioned by Barberán Ortí in his review reaches figures as high as 15% (taking into account only the benefit flow ones). URIEL and BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 306-307.

<sup>426</sup> See for instance the studies reviewed in BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72. See also ESPASA, and BOSCH, *op. cit.* p. 164.

<sup>427</sup> URIEL JIMENEZ and BARBERAN ORTI, *op. cit.*, pp. 285-322.

<sup>428</sup> Politics in the Islands have been dominated by the Popular Party, which however often ruled in coalition with the *Unió Mallorquina*. On the left, the PSOE has had to rival with the Socialist Party of Mallorca and some other minor nationalist and regionalist forces. These have never gone beyond a fifth of the overall vote, though. See JUNTA ELECTORAL DE LES ILLES BALEARS, *Resultats electorals (Eleccions al Parlament de les Illes Balears)*, <http://juntaelectoral.parlamentib.es/Default.aspx?idArea=1#resultats> (accessed on September 10, 2014)

<sup>429</sup> In 2012, 78% of the population of the islands was against a referendum on independence and, asked how they would vote in case one was organised, 81% said they would vote No. IBES (2012) *Barómetro de Opinión sobre la situación general de la Comunidad Balear*, 4th wave, December.

<sup>430</sup> In the survey, *Españolista* meant that Spain was the main referent of subjective national identification, while nationalist referred to somebody who defended the sovereign project of the Catalan Countries and regionalist to those who did not put the Spanish state into question but wanted autonomy for the Balearic Islands. The document is a poll of 23 polls conducted between 2007 and 2012. IBES (2012) *Ideología política y sentimiento identitario en el marco sociopolítico de las Islas Baleares*, June.

<sup>431</sup> However, in the context of the recent debate over the *Generalitat's* plans to organise an independence referendum, in part, as a consequence of the Spanish government's refusal to discuss a new fiscal deal, the President of the Community of Madrid, Ignacio Gonzales, decried the fiscal discrimination suffered by his constituency and proposed a complete reform of the system of funding of the autonomous communities. Yet, he also criticised the Catalan leaders for mixing fiscal reform with independence claims and assured that he had no intentions of the like.

to capital regions such as the South East of England, the Île de France and the Stockholm metropolitan area. In addition, as the authors pointed out, in the first half of the 1990s Catalonia's GDP per capita was equal to only 95% of the EU average, while that of other European regions showing similar imbalances was between 15% and 20% higher.<sup>432</sup>

The fiscal relationship between Catalonia and the Spanish central administration clearly offers a great potential for the development of political arguments of fiscal victimisation. Since the turn of the late 1980s, Esquerra has been the main purveyor of the rhetoric of fiscal plundering, using it as a legitimising argument for its project of radical constitutional change. In doing this, it has played on an old idea tracing back to the nineteenth century formulation of the Catalan national identity – i.e. the opposition between a modern Catalonia and a primitive Spain – and has largely profited from the post-dictatorship burgeoning literature on the fiscal transfers in order to provide evidence of its claims. Its role, however, must also be evaluated against the activity of its major rival in the Catalan nationalist camp, that is, *Convergència i Unió* (CiU). CiU has certainly been the main defender of the Catalan economic interests in Madrid, obtaining some modifications of the region's fiscal deal with the centre. Yet, only very recently has the party fully embraced the rhetoric of 'fiscal plundering' strongly promoted by ERC. In the 1980s, CiU was mostly focused on the task, set out already during the 1960s and 1970s by its future leader, Jordi Pujol, of *fer pays* (literally 'build up the country'), i.e., of working to reconstruct the economic, social and cultural fabric of Catalonia after the trauma of the dictatorship. This laid great emphasis on the need to modernise the Catalan economy in order to make it a touchstone of the nation-building process.<sup>433</sup> Furthermore, despite having initially supported the *concierto economico* and having voted against the Organic law on the funding of the autonomous communities (LOFCA)<sup>434</sup> in 1980, the party later focused on the consolidation of the existing institutions rather than seeking a frontal clash with the Spanish administration on the fiscal issue. After having failed to project its modernising thrust in the rest of Spain through the so-called *Operació Reformista* of Miquel Roca,<sup>435</sup> CiU successfully implemented a policy of 'constructive opposition' to the PSOE and the PP whereby, relying on its electoral clout in Catalonia, it presented itself as the legitimate representative of all Catalan interests in Madrid and negotiated concessions from the centre. In this way, it stood out as a nationalist opposition, but a responsible one, which prevented it from making radical claims of fiscal exploitation. A clear example is provided by the refusal to fight for a substantial reform of the fiscal deal with the government at the time of its first renegotiation in 1986.<sup>436</sup> Also, in the 1980s, the fiscal issue was overshadowed by the debate over linguistic policy and the autonomic process of

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<sup>432</sup> CASTELLS and PARELLADA, *op. cit.*, p. 501. The figure later improved considerably. It touched 113% in 2009, but decreased to 106% because of the debt crisis.

<sup>433</sup> DOWLING, ANDREW (2005) 'Convergència i Unió, Catalonia and the New Catalanism' in SEBASTIAN, BALFOUR (ed.) *The Politics of Contemporary Spain* (London: Routledge) pp. 108-110. Later in the article Dowling argued that CiU openly encouraged the rhetoric of fiscal plundering, but then quoted a 1998 campaign against highway tolls launched by ERC.

<sup>434</sup> See below for further details.

<sup>435</sup> At the 1986 general election, with the support of CiU, Roca ran in the entire country at the head of the *Partit Reformista Democràtic* (Democratic Reformist Party), which aimed at modernising the Spanish state on the Catalan model. The party however did not obtain a single seat.

<sup>436</sup> LO CASCIO, PAOLA (2008) *Nacionalisme i autogovern* (Catarroja: Afers) pp. 260-290. Similarly, Pujol justified the support given to the PP between 1996 and 2000, which by his own admission was paid dear by CiU at the 2003 Catalan election, as an act of responsibility to the Catalans.

transfer of powers – which we will examine in detail below. The fiscal imbalance gained central place from the late 1980s on, coinciding with the renewed rhetoric of *Esquerra*.

In order to assess the formation of ERC's claims of fiscal exploitation and their credibility for the wider population, however, some other factors must be examined. While the adequate level of social redistribution is a political question that cannot be proved fundamentally right or wrong, what can be discussed is whether there are major flaws in the system that might nourish discontent with concrete forms of social redistribution. Ways of looking at this include the evaluation of: overcompensation effects, considerations of efficiency and regional economic convergence, trends in taxation and public finances, and the overall evolution of the economy. These are all elements that we find in ERC's propaganda, as the party has consistently claimed not only that the transfers are excessive, but also that they have not worked, have fed clientelism and the inefficient Spanish administration, and have eventually left the donor worse off.

If we take a minimal definition of fiscal redistribution whereby regions<sup>437</sup> should contribute in accordance with their income but receive equal per capita spending, this means that those with a higher than average income should have a negative deficit (i.e. a surplus with the central administration) and viceversa. Figure 3.8 shows precisely that for the period 1991-2005. The position of Catalonia in the third sector of the Cartesian plane suggests that its real situation is roughly in line with this principle, although the precise amount can be questioned. Bosch and Espasa, for instance, demonstrated that the allocation of state spending in Spain has not necessarily followed a principle of per capita equality. Using data for 2005, they demonstrated that Catalonia received between 12% and 14% less than the Spanish average.<sup>438</sup> Hence, there is certainly a measure of overcompensation,<sup>439</sup> although the same study revealed that other communities received even lower amounts and De la Fuente calculated the same finding at 6% below the average for the period 1990-97.<sup>440</sup> However, even De la Fuente, who provided very conservative estimates of the fiscal deficit, acknowledged that Catalonia had been the community which, both in absolute and per capita terms, had received less investment in infrastructures in all Spain during the 1990s, while other communities with similar levels of income had received much larger amounts – notably Madrid, the Basque Country and Navarre. Public spending in infrastructure investment represents a small fraction of the deficit claimed by ERC,<sup>441</sup> but it probably had a sizable negative impact on the development of the Catalan economy<sup>442</sup> and, as we will see below, has been a topic of heated debate in the region during the 2000s.

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<sup>437</sup> Strictly speaking Spain does not have regions but autonomous communities. However, these coincide, in terms of administrative structure, with the concept of regions, endowed with large devolved powers, in many other European states. Therefore, we use the two terms interchangeably.

<sup>438</sup> ESPASA and BOSCH, *op. cit.*

<sup>439</sup> By overcompensation, here and in the next chapters, we mean that the equalisation provided by the system of redistribution goes beyond ensuring the same per capita level of spending in all regions (regardless of fiscal capacity) by providing more resources (as a percentage of the national average) to the regions that contribute less than the average and vice-versa.

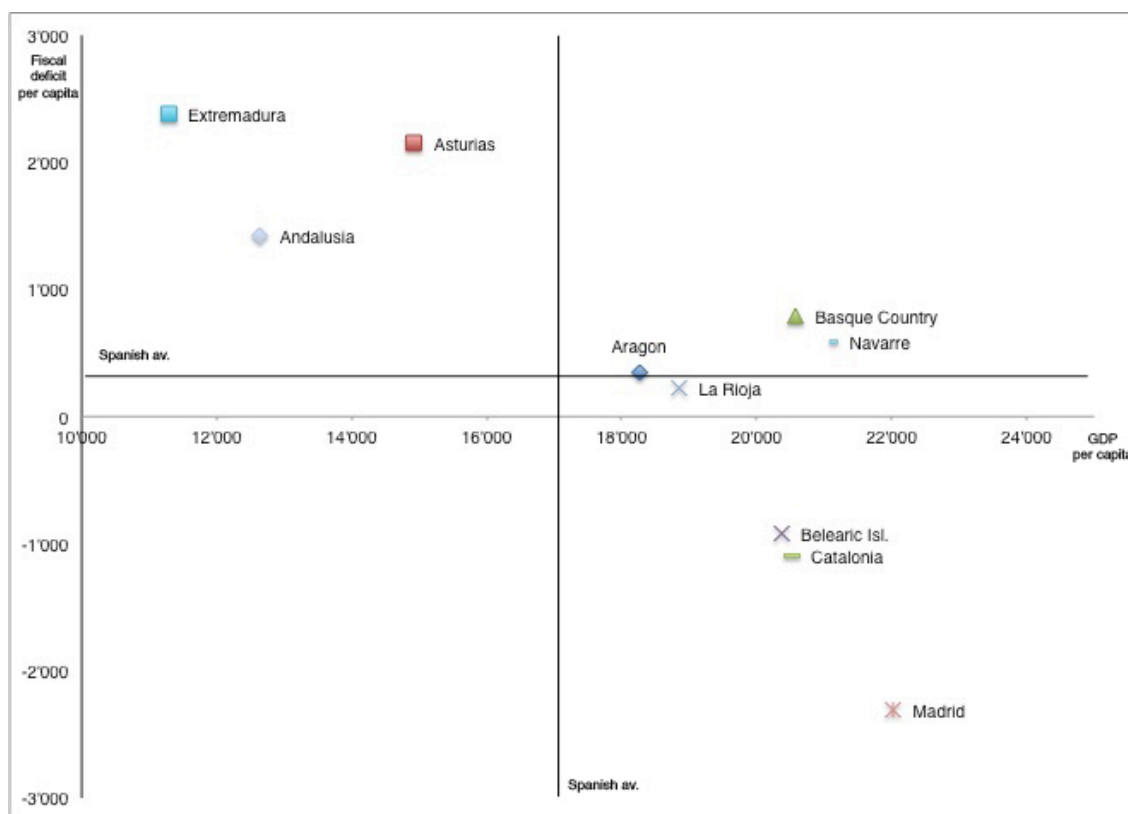
<sup>440</sup> DE LA FUENTE, ANGEL (2005) *Los mecanismos de cohesión territorial en España: un análisis y algunas propuestas*, Fundación Alternativas, documento de trabajo 62/2005.

<sup>441</sup> DE LA FUENTE (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 25. See also, DE LA FUENTE (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 36-45.

<sup>442</sup> See the interview to Castells in GENIS, SINCA (2004) *Adéu Espanya! Independència si, independència no, la societat catalana reflexiona sobre el seu futur* (Barcelona: Columna).

Quite paradoxically, from a perspective of sheer inter-territorial justice<sup>443</sup>, the true mistreatment towards the Catalans has been carried out by the ‘communities of chartered regime’ (*comunidades forales*) of the Basque Country and Navarre that, despite enjoying similar levels of aggregate income, have consistently received more than their contribution to the central administration. The paradox lies in that the Basque Country’s and Navarre’s special relationship with Spain, the *concierto economico*, has been taken as a model by the Catalans. In other words, one of the very few uncontroversial instances of fiscal injustice in Spain is being advocated by the Catalan nationalist parties as the way to end the fiscal injustice they have been claiming to endure. This however has a political rather than a purely economic explanation. It stems from the demand of recognition of the special status of Catalonia as a nation.

**Figure 3.8 – Fiscal Deficit per Capita and GDP per Capita, benefit-flow method, 1991-2005 average (2005 euros)**



Source: URIEL and BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, p. 412.

In terms of economic convergence among Spanish regions, most studies show that this has occurred, although it slowed considerably from the 1980s on and it was almost absent in the 1990s.<sup>444</sup> Some works however suggested that the increase in income per capita in

<sup>443</sup> We are not denying here the existence of historical and political reasons for the persistence of the *concierto economico* between the communities of chartered regime and the Spanish state, but rather analysing it from a purely inter-territorial economic perspective.

<sup>444</sup> See GOERLICH, FRANCISCO, MAS, MATILDE and PEREZ, FRANCISCO (2002) *Concentración, convergencia y desigualdad regional en España*, MPRA Paper No. 15831; MAS, MATILDE et al. (1994)

the poorer regions has largely been driven by public sector employment, as well as emigration, rather than by private endogenous growth.<sup>445</sup> Such a perception was certainly favoured by the wide array of corruption scandals that affected the PSOE during its 14 years in power and especially in the early 1990s. Overall, they evoked the existence of widespread clientist networks of voters supporting the socialists in exchange for public employment and investments, especially in the communities of Andalusia and Extremadura. The paradigmatic case has been that of the *Plan de Empleo Rural* (Plan of Rural Employment, PER). This instrument, introduced in 1982 and modified in 1990 in order to reduce abuses, was conceived of as a subsidy, equal to 75% of the minimum salary, to all those who showed that they had worked at least 60 days a year as rural labourers. Frauds were extensive and curiously elicited by the fact that while, during the period 1984-1990, employment in agriculture decreased sharply, the number of people on the PER increased steadily.<sup>446</sup> Yet, as argued by Jonhatan Hopkin, the PER is probably the only case of clear systematic clientist network creating a dependent electorate. This does not mean that the PSOE did not engage in clientist practices – on the contrary it largely supported its own militants with public employment – but such uses seem to have remained limited in scope, especially if compared with similar dynamics in Italy.<sup>447</sup> Similar considerations, however, did not prevent the scandals from reinforcing an already existing and widespread stereotype of Andalusia as ‘a land of idlers’.<sup>448</sup> Also, these widely broadcasted abuses nourished the perception, dominant between the late 1980s and late 1990s, that corruption was an acute problem in Spain and badly hit the legitimacy of the socialist government, especially in the metropolitan areas.<sup>449</sup> They favoured the first expansion of ERC, between 1988 and 1995, which denounced the corrupted character of the Spanish parties and portrayed itself as a clean organisation. The scandals also coupled with the hike in government debt and budget deficit since the late 1980s that allowed *Esquerra* to accuse Prime Minister Gonzales to have brought the country on the verge of fiscal collapse (Figure 3.9).

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‘Disparidades regionales y convergencia en las cc.aa. españolas’, *Revista de Economía Aplicada*, 2(4), pp. 129-148.

<sup>445</sup> GARCIA-MILÀ, TERESA and McGUIRE, THERESE (2001) ‘Do interregional transfers improve the economic performance of poor regions? The case of Spain’, *International Tax and Public Finance*, p. 283.

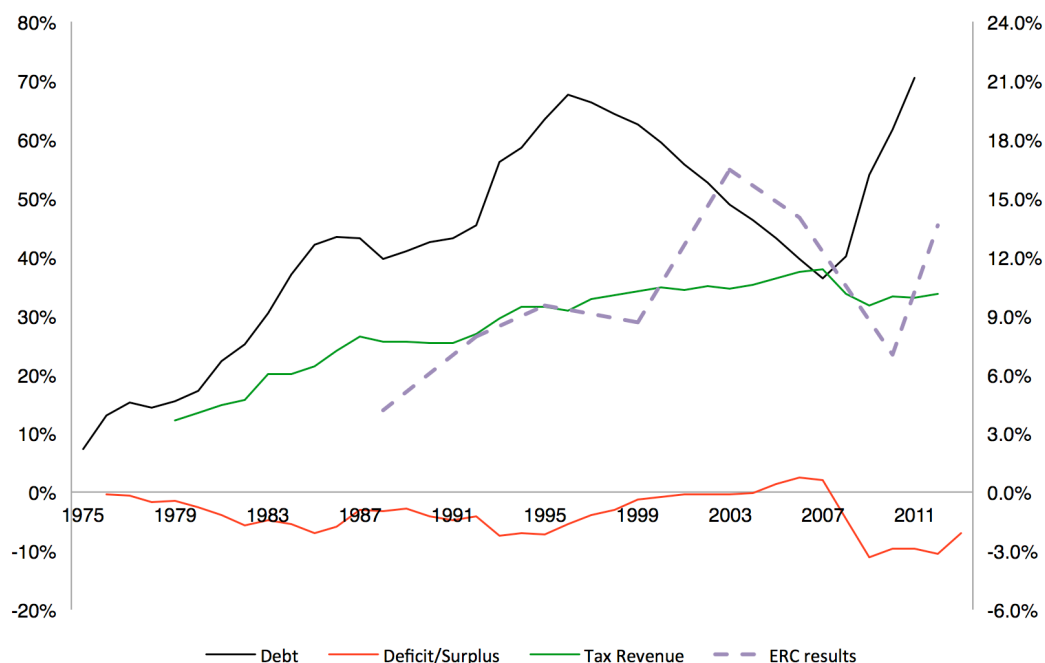
<sup>446</sup> See HEYWOOD, PAUL (2005) ‘Corruption, democracy and governance in contemporary Spain’, in BALFOUR, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53; CAZORLA, JOSE (1994) *El clientelismo de partido en España ante la opinión pública. El medio rural, la administración y las empresas*, Universidad de Granada, Working Paper n. 86, pp. 5-6.

<sup>447</sup> HOPKIN, JONHATAN (2001) ‘A “Southern model” of electoral mobilisation? Clientelism and electoral politics in post-Franco Spain’, *West European Politics*, 24(1), pp. 115-136. Another case of public choice largely influenced by clientist considerations was the decision to lay down the first high-speed railway connection between Madrid and Seville, rather than the more obvious, in economic terms, Madrid-Barcelona axis. For a comparison of clientist practices in Italy and France see PUJAS, VERONIQUE and RHODES, MARTIN (1999) ‘Party Finance and Political Scandal in Italy, Spain and France’, *West European Politics*, 22(3), pp. 41-63.

<sup>448</sup> CAZORLA, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>449</sup> Idem; HEYWOOD, *op. cit.*

**Figure 3.9 – Spain’s Public Debt, Budget Balance and Tax Revenue (left y-axis) vs. ERC’s Results at Catalan Elections (right y-axis), 1975-2013 (percentage of Spain’s GDP and percentage of Catalan regional vote)**



Sources: IMF-FAD (International Monetary Fund-Fiscal Affairs Department), *Historical Public Debt Database*, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2010/data/wp10245.zip> (accessed on May 6, 2015), for 1975-2012 debt data; Eurostat for 2013 debt data and 1995-2013 deficit data; HOPKING, *op. cit.*, for 1975-1994 deficit data; our calculations on OECD data for tax revenue data.

Hence, the presence of sizable and widely studied fiscal transfers, coupled with the perception of a high level of corruption furthered by scandals involving allegedly clientist networks in some of the poorer regions could easily favour the idea of Catalan fiscal exploitation. This would be confirmed by a study conducted by the *Institut d'Investigacio Comercial i Opinió Publica* on behalf of the *Convencio per la Independència Nacional* (Convention for National Independence) in the fall of 1988.<sup>450</sup> According to its findings, already back then, 56% of the Catalan population thought that the central government was little or not concerned with the economic progress of Catalonia and 59.6% believed that the public works and services provided by the government were not sufficient in light of the taxes paid by the community.<sup>451</sup> This would also suggest that, at the time of the formulation within ERC of the rhetoric of fiscal plundering, this idea was already quite widespread among the wider population and, therefore, the activity of the party would have been one of 'resonance' rather than 'induction', that is, the party would have

<sup>450</sup> This work is probably the only detailed statistical analysis of the strength of support for independence in the region at such an early date. Although carried out by an independent company, the study was commissioned by a separatist organisation, which should be taken into account when assessing the findings. The methodology reported at the end of the study however included a sample of 2100 interviewees selected through multistage cluster sampling and thus seems to conform to scientific standards.

<sup>451</sup> ESTRADE, ANTONI and TRESERRA, MONTSERRAT (1990) *Catalunya independent? Anàlisi d'una enquesta sobre la identitat nacional i la voluntat d'independència dels catalans* (Barcelona: Fundació Jaume Bofill) pp. 77-85.



amplified beliefs already diffused in the reference society and proposed independence as the best solution. Later surveys confirm the impression that the account formulated by the party has been largely shared by a substantial portion of the Catalan population. According to data from the Catalan *Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials* (ICPS) of the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, in the 2001-10 period 76.5% of the Catalan population on average thought that the Spanish government favoured some autonomous communities over others and 51.4% that Catalonia received a worse treatment.<sup>452</sup>

Until the recent economic crisis, *Esquerra*'s claims have coincided with a period of prolonged and sustained growth. As seen above, Catalonia grew at an impressive pace in the 1960-73 period. Although at a lower rate, Catalonia's GDP has steadily expanded at 2.5% in real terms between 1981 and 1995, and 2.1% in the 1995-2007 period, in line with the Spanish growth average and above the EU one.<sup>453</sup> Also, the evolution of household disposable income per capita – probably a better measure of people's true income – has largely reflected GDP trends (Figure 3.10). Economic growth has favoured the generation of about 1.4 million new jobs between 1995 and 2007, or 106,000 a year.<sup>454</sup> The process has not been smooth, of course, and the opening up of the country to the outside world after the end of the dictatorship has entailed both opportunities and threats. For instance, despite being more productive than their Spanish counterparts, Catalan firms were not competitive at the European level in the 1980s and early 1990s, a feature noticed also in ERC's propaganda and used as an argument in favour of the reduction of the transfers to Madrid. Partly because of this, many enterprises were bought by foreign multinationals. Already in 1996, about a third of the region's biggest enterprises were owned by foreign groups, while in the mid-1990s these held majority ownership of 51.6% of all Catalan companies.<sup>455</sup>

Yet, overall the economic transformation of Catalonia after the dictatorship has been a success, as witnessed not only by the improvements in GDP per capita, but also by the sharp increase in foreign investments and trade.<sup>456</sup> Foreign trade grew from 4.9% in 1964 to 60% of GDP in 2008, while the share of Catalan exports on the Spanish total has edged up from 16% to 26.8% over the same period.<sup>457</sup> Likewise, the market destinations of the sales of Catalan firms have diversified, with an increase of the share of foreign destinations over the rest of Spain. The former have indeed gone from accounting for 23% of sales, in 1995, to 31.3% in 2006, while the latter have shrunk from 41.6% to 34.5%.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> ICPS (Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials) *Sondeig d'Opinio Catalunya*, <http://www.icps.cat/recerca/sondeigs-i-dades/sondeigs/sondeigs-d-opinio-catalunya> (accessed on June 9, 2014).

<sup>453</sup> BOIX, RAFAEL (2012) 'Facing globalization and increased trade: Catalonia's evolution from industrial region to knowledge and creative economy', *Regional Science Policy and Practice*, 4(1), pp. 97-112; and our calculation on data provided by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 101.

<sup>455</sup> McROBERTS, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-98 and data from the *Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya* (IDESCAT), <http://www.idescat.cat/cat/economia/ecosectext.html> (accessed on June 9, 2014).

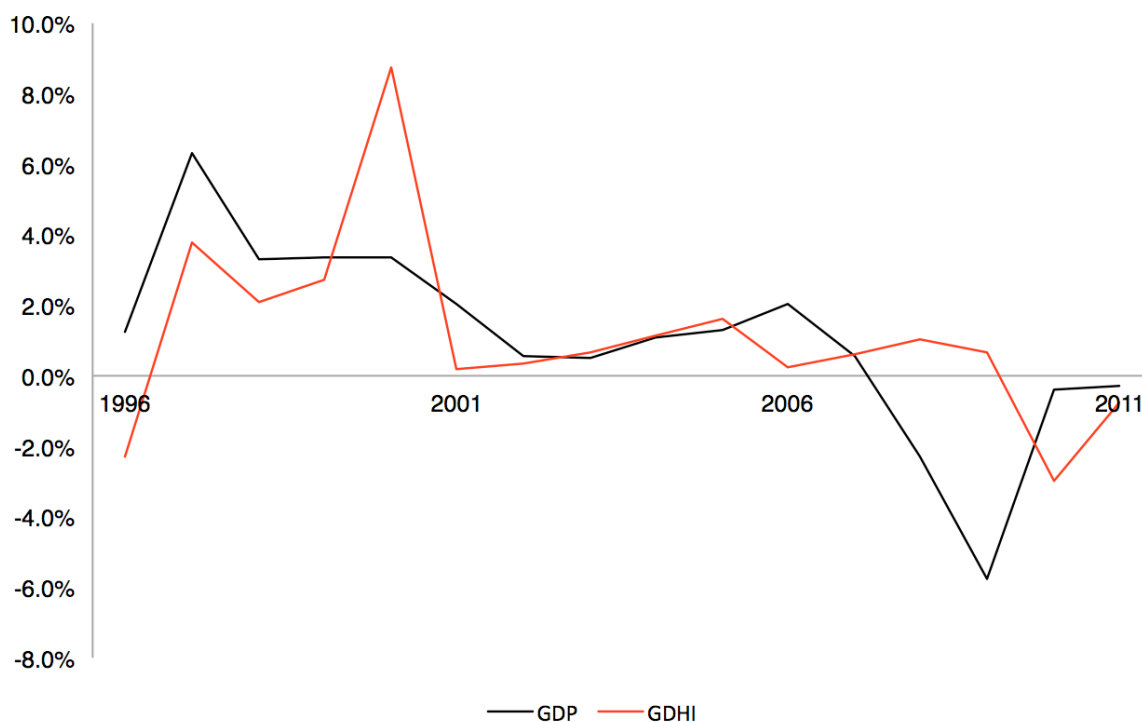
<sup>456</sup> From 1987 to 1994, Catalonia absorbed about 30% of foreign investment, second only to the community of Madrid. ITHURRALDE, MARIANICK (2002) *Le Pays Basque, la Catalogne et l'Europe* (Paris: L'Harmattan) p. 295.

<sup>457</sup> McROBERTS, *op. cit.*, p. 99 and our calculation on IDESCAT, <http://www.idescat.cat/economia/inec?tc=3&id=8154&dt=200800&x=10&y=6> (accessed on September 10, 2014).

<sup>458</sup> BOSCH, NURIA, ESPASA, MARTA and SOLE OLLE, ALBERT (2010) *The Political Economy of Inter-Regional Fiscal Flows, Measurements, Determinants and Effects on Country Stability* (Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing), p. 359.

In this connection, although the proportion of exports on imports has risen from 49.5% to 79% from 1990 to 2010, Catalonia's trade balance has remained negative.<sup>459</sup> This deficit has historically been offset partly by a huge surplus in tourism and partly by the region's significantly advantageous commercial relation with the rest of Spain. Thus, Catalonia has continued in its historical role of processing goods bought abroad and selling them back to the Spanish market, although increasingly less so.<sup>460</sup>

**Figure 3.10 – Real Regional GDP and GDHI per Capita Growth, 1996-2011\***



\*The series have been calculated collecting the Idescat's 1995, 2000 and 2008-based series for GDHI and the 2000 and 2008-based ones for regional GDP in current prices and deflating them through the Eurostat deflator in euros (base year 2005). According to the INE's methodology, every several years an in-depth statistical operation is carried out based on the defined year's economic structure. The following years of the same series are updates. As this might raise comparability issues, the series should be taken as illustrative of general trends. More precisely, the peak in the value of 2000 GDHI is probably due to the transition from one series to another.

Source: IDESCAT, <http://www.idescat.cat/cat/economia/ecomacro.html> (accessed on October 27, 2014).

Despite the rise of services – accounting for 71% of value added in 2010 – Catalonia still is one of the most important Spanish industrial regions, churning out 25% of the country's manufactured products, with SMEs dominating the sector.<sup>461</sup> Since at least 1998,

<sup>459</sup> Ibidem, p. 100 and our calculations on data provided by BOIX, RAFAEL, *op. cit.*, pp. 101.

<sup>460</sup> McROBERTS, *op. cit.*, p. 100. At the end of the 1990s, Castells et al. also suggested that, contrary to economic theory, the fiscal imbalance with the central administration was not compensated by the commercial imbalance with the rest of Spain, although the evidence they provided was far from conclusive. CASTELLS and PARELLADA, *op. cit.*

<sup>461</sup> BOIX, *op. cit.*, p. 101. Catalonia's economic structure has not substantially differed from the average Spanish one in terms of average enterprises' size, but the region accounts for a share of manufacturing SMEs

regional authorities have tried to direct the transformation of the industrial basis from medium-low to high technology manufacturing, as well as to boost employment in creative and knowledge-intensive services. The share of jobs in such sectors increased by 5% a year on average from 34.5% of total employment in 1995 to 39.5% in 2007.

During the 2000s, however, this generally positive picture began showing fissures. Already before the financial and debt crisis, real growth slowed down considerably, from 3.4% in the 1996-2000 period, to 1.2% in the 2000-07 one. Furthermore, frictions with the central government over key investments concerning the infrastructure of Barcelona's metropolitan area arose. These mainly concerned major delays in the construction of the high-speed train line connecting Catalonia with Madrid, Valencia and Southern France and the enlargement of the overcrowded Barcelona airport. It decisively contributed to the rhetoric that the central government was holding back Catalonia by privileging investment in other areas, especially in Madrid, as reflected in some opinion surveys showing that 'lack of transport infrastructure' jumped from marginal to central place among the main problems listed by interviewees in 2007.<sup>462</sup> Yet, these frictions did not coincide with a substantial rise in support for independence until the 2008-2009 period.

### 3.3.2 Political Marginalisation

In the previous section we have stressed the fact that a fiscal imbalance is not a sufficient element for the formation and success of a nationalist rhetoric of economic victimisation. In the following paragraphs we thus examine ERC's arguments of political marginalisation. In order to do that, we first look at the historical relationship between Catalonia and Spain, focusing this time on the institutional and cultural dimensions. After this introduction, we analyse the post-dictatorship period dwelling upon the transition and the way it was achieved; the process of devolution, the models sought by the different actors involved and the consequences of autonomy; the participation of the Catalans in the central institutions of the state and the sources of the feeling of marginalisation.

Especially in its first years, ERC has often described the history of Catalonia within the Spanish state as a tale of subordination and repression, in which Castile constantly aimed at erasing Catalonia's cultural specificity. From a historiographical point of view, such a picture is clearly one-sided and simplistic. It is true, however, that the history of the Iberian peninsula and the relationship between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, especially Castile, has probably been more problematic than that between Scotland and the rest of the UK, to take a similar example. A number of historical events can be used to support such arguments. For instance, the Decrees of *Nueva Planta* (New Foundation) of 1716 have been almost unanimously considered as the major sign of Catalonia's cultural repression, after the victory of King Philip in 1714 and the abolition of the Parliament of the Principality, because the decrees imposed Spanish as the sole language to be used in the King's courts of law. Yet, as Laitin, Solé and Kalyvas have shown, the Catalan upper classes had already switched to Spanish in their appeals to the King, and in other official uses, about a generation earlier. Hence, the decrees merely acknowledged an already established custom. Martinez Shaw even observed that, during the War of Spanish

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considerably higher than its demographic share would warrant. ITHURRALDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-296, and our calculations on data from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE), available at <http://www.ine.es/jaxiBD/tabla.do?per=12&type=db&divi=DIR&idtab=5> (accessed on January 14, 2014).

<sup>462</sup> See CENTRO D'ESTUDIS D'OPINIO (CEO) (2007) *Barometre d'Opinio Política*, n. 404.

Succession (1707-1714), 90% of the anti-Philip propaganda in Barcelona was published in Spanish. What is true, however, is that, as a symbolic measure, the decrees did foment opposition against Castile and politicised the use of language to an extent unprecedented before.<sup>463</sup>

Likewise, the historiographical current arguing that the Catalans were excluded from access to the Spanish possessions in Latin and Central America was seriously challenged in the 1980s. Martinez Shaw not only convincingly demonstrated the absence of any clear and serious legal discrimination against Catalan participation in the colonial trade, but he also invoked several examples showing the actual participation of Catalan merchants. Although Barcelona was excluded as a consequence of the monopoly granted to the port of Seville – and later Cadiz – this was due to geographical and economic considerations in line with the mercantilist theories dominant at the time, rather than resulting from a deliberate policy of discrimination against the Catalans.<sup>464</sup> More fundamentally, as he argued, the meagre participation of Catalan merchants in the colonial trade was a consequence, rather than a cause, of Catalonia's economic slump. Until the second half of the eighteenth century, they simply did not have the financial and human resources to stand the competition of merchants from more prosperous regions.<sup>465</sup> Yet, these two events, among others, are often quoted as examples of a long-lasting subordination of the Catalan nation to Castile not only in nationalist propaganda, but also in some academic contexts.

For much of the eighteenth century, in the wake of Catalonia's renewed prosperity and eventually successful exploitation of the colonial markets, a genuine sense of 'Spanishness' spread among the Catalan merchant and industrial classes, which might account for the durable co-existence of Catalan nationalism and ideas of membership of the Spanish state as well as of a pactist understanding of the bond at the core of its formation. Unfortunately, we do not have enough space to do justice to the complexity of this process. We thus limit ourselves to highlight some fundamental events and processes.

Jaun Pablo Fusi described the rise of peripheral nationalism in Spain as a process of *longue durée*, whereby old identities were given new meanings.<sup>466</sup> In Catalonia, the process began with a cultural movement for the promotion of the Catalan language and culture as well as – according to some – a recollection of the medieval splendour of the Principality against the ontological displacement caused by the rapid industrialisation of the region. The movement assumed a more modern profile with the work of Valenti Almirall and his 1886 *Lo Catalanisme* (Catalanism). Almirall was able to rally the bulk of

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<sup>463</sup> LAITIN, DAVID, SOLE, CARLOTA and KALYVAS, STATHIS N. (1994) 'Language and the Construction of States: The Case of Catalonia in Spain', *Politics Society*, 22(5), 5-29. Until that time people probably switched from Catalan to Spanish very often for functional reasons and without perceiving a clear-cut difference. The Spanish academy was only founded in 1713 and Catalan was standardised only at the beginning of the twentieth century. Vilar even suggested that Catalan was spoken without any political meaning until the *Renaixença*, in the mid-nineteenth century. VILAR, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

<sup>464</sup> Especially because, strictly speaking, it was discriminatory against all the regions of Spain except Andalusia, or rather, Seville.

<sup>465</sup> MARTINEZ SHAW, CARLOS (1980) 'Cataluna y el comercio con America. El fin de un debate', *Boletín americanista*, 30, pp. 223-236. For an author supporting the thesis of the exclusion of Catalonia from colonial markets see DELGADO RIBAS, JOSEP MARIA (1978) 'America y el comercio de Indias en la historiografía catalana (1892-1978)', *Boletín Americanista*, n. 28, pp. 179-189.

<sup>466</sup> FUSI AIZPURUA, JUAN PABLO (2000) 'Los nacionalismos y el Estado español: el siglo XX', *Cuadernos de historia contemporánea*, 22, pp. 21-23.

the Catalan industrial bourgeoisie that, according to Conversi, despite remaining pro-Spanish in essence saw Catalan nationalism as a useful tool to bring forth its demands of protectionism, defend the Catalan civil code and, more generally, claim more political power within the Spanish state.<sup>467</sup> In the following years, the Catalan national identity was built around the region's vernacular language, its institutional history, its bourgeois civil society and the belief in the hard work ethic and industriousness of its people.<sup>468</sup> It was also strongly influenced by Romanticism, the existence of a national Church and the weakness and inefficiency of the Spanish state.<sup>469</sup> Prat de la Riba's *La Nacionalitat Catalana* (the Catalan nationality), published in 1906, probably represented the best formulation of such identity.<sup>470</sup> In this connection, Josep Llobera pointed out that 'the image of the spirit of Catalonia subjugated within the Spanish state was dear to the ideologists of Catalanism. To justify the right of Catalonia to some form of separate existence two different types of arguments were used. At a general level, a metaphysico-political case was made for the preservation of Catalan identity threatened by extinction by the ever-growing encroachment of the Spanish state [...] But there was also an argument of socio-economic rationality: Catalonia's subordination to Castile was thwarting the enterprising spirit of the Catalans at a time when Catalonia was recovering from centuries of decadence'.<sup>471</sup> It is precisely at this time that the idea of Catalan political marginalisation was born. Furthermore, what Llobera suggested is a dynamic similar to that realised in our other case studies, although much earlier on, whereby the reversed economic relationship between Catalonia and Spain laid the ground for a new political relation.

In his study Llobera also tried to give statistical substance to the claim of Catalan marginalisation. He calculated that, in the 1875-1902 period, out of 175 Spanish ministers only five were Catalan, against 35 Castilians and 26 Andalusians. Between 1902 and 1930, there were 182 ministers in total, 51 were Castilians, 43 Andalusians and only 13 Catalans. Paradoxically, during the Second Republic (1931-36) and the Civil War (1936-39) the Catalans were, for the first time, fairly represented in government – 14% against a share of the population equal to 13%.<sup>472</sup> And yet, Llobera suggested that this was more the result of a deliberate choice of the Catalan elites, rather than a Castilian initiative: 'in the second half of the nineteenth century, Catalonia, despite being the most economically developed area of Spain, refused to participate in political life, hence abandoning the running of the state to elites from other areas. There were some exceptions, particularly during the revolutionary period between, 1868 and 1874. However, the experiences of the Catalan elites were rather negative because they tried to implement a set of modernising policies (federalism, secularism, internationalism, socialism, etc.), which found no support either

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<sup>467</sup> CONVERSI (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>468</sup> As a consequence, the Castilians were considered as lazy and backward.

<sup>469</sup> LLOBERA, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>470</sup> Among the founder of the *Lliga Regionalista*, Prat de la Riba later became President of the Municipality of Barcelona in 1907 and created the Institut d'Estudis Catalans where Pompeu Fabra standardised the Catalan language.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 66.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151. De Riquer provided data for the 1815-1899 period and counted 22 Catalan ministers out of 850, i.e. 2% while at the time Catalonia represented 10% of the Spanish population. DE RIQUER, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67.

in Castile or in Andalusia. In this sense, one could say that the Catalan political elites that participated in the tasks of governing the Spanish state were rather naive'.<sup>473</sup>

The main problem thus seems to have lain in the different projects followed by the Catalan and Spanish (mainly Castilian and Andalusian) elites. In this connection, the loss of the colonies at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898 was a fundamental date. It made the decadent state of Spain so obvious that 'Carlists, conservatives, liberals, republicans, radicals, socialists, anarchists and Catalan regionalists all developed opposing projects of "national regeneration"'.<sup>474</sup> While Catalan nationalists founded the *Lliga*, Spanish conservatives intensified the nation-building effort and set out to fight both peripheral nationalism and the left (what Franco later called *los rojoseparatistas*, the red separatists). The first application of such programme came under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera who launched a project of mass nationalisation and militarisation of state institutions. In Catalonia, this authoritarian experiment in Spanish nation-building caused the identification between democracy (in the form of republicanism) and Catalan nationalism that paved the way to the success of ERC in the 1930s, a phenomenon repeated after Franco, although this time to the advantage of CiU.<sup>475</sup>

The repression of the Catalan language and culture during the dictatorship, as well as the political subordination of Catalonia, are incontrovertible facts on which there is large consensus. Ironically, however, in the long run, the regime both weakened the Spanish national identity and reinforced the association between peripheral nationalism and democracy. On the one hand, 'Francoism contaminated the symbols of and debate about the nation with totalitarian meanings',<sup>476</sup> thus ruling out any discussion on national identity for about two decades after its demise. On the other, the coincidence of the fight for democracy and autonomy meant that the transition could not but entail a decentralisation of the Spanish state. This is relevant because, since its renewal at the end of the 1980s, ERC has declared the failure of the transition on account of the continuity of the political system with the past regime and the insufficient results of the process of devolution, especially concerning the lack of recognition of the plurinational nature of the Spanish state and the Catalan right of self-determination.

In terms of bureaucratic staff, continuity with the previous regime is an historical fact. Among the political elite there has been a somewhat higher renewal,<sup>477</sup> although, in general terms, the transition has been carried out with the deliberate intention to avoid a sharp break with the past. All actors involved in the political process committed to prevent the country from falling again into the violence of the Civil War. A 'pact of silence' was tacitly signed by the main political parties who agreed to work by consensus on the new constitution.<sup>478</sup> This, however, does not mean that Spain has not become a democracy.

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<sup>473</sup> Ibidem, p. 150.

<sup>474</sup> BALFOUR and QUIROGA *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>475</sup> Ibidem, pp. 32-34.

<sup>476</sup> Ibidem, p. 1. This was due not only to its length and ruthlessness, but also to its exceptionalism in the post-Second World War European context.

<sup>477</sup> At the 1977 elections 56.6% of the votes and 168 out of the 350 seats went to parties that had opposed the dictatorship. See HOPKIN, *op. cit.*

<sup>478</sup> AGUILAR, PALOMA (2001) *Justicia, politica y memoria: Los legados del franquismo en la transicion Española*, Working paper 163, Centro de estudios avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, pp. 1-13. COLOMER, JOSEP (1998) 'The Spanish state of autonomies: non institutional federalism', *West European Politics*, 21(4), p. 44; PELLISTRANDI, BENOÎT (2006) 'L'Espagne et sa pratique democratique', *Etudes*, 405(1), p. 23; CONVERSI (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 141-143.

The country is often quoted as an example of successful democratic transition and has consistently been ranked among the countries with the best democratic records in the world.<sup>479</sup> It is true however that the opposite perception has been strong in Catalonia. Between 1992 and 2006, 56.7% of the population of the region, on average, found that Spanish democracy had not reached the level of other European democracies.<sup>480</sup> Furthermore, the process of devolution of powers has been problematic and its outcomes inevitably contested, as it aimed at satisfying diverging, if not opposing, views. Precisely because of wide discrepancies in the ideological positions of its drafters, the Constitution was ambiguous about the limits of devolution. The UCD<sup>481</sup> wanted to keep power at the centre and thus imposed the maintenance of the old provinces, which had been introduced during the Napoleonic occupation as a tool to divide the unity of the Catalan territories. The Basques and Catalan nationalist parties, on the contrary, aimed at obtaining as many competences as possible and sought recognition of their differential status. The socialists were open to federalisation, but according to a symmetric model. Each obtained something. The provinces were left untouched. The Basques, Catalans and Galicians were defined as historical nationalities – it was not clear what that concretely meant, though – and were allowed to immediately initiate the transfer of powers. Finally, all the other communities were given the possibility to obtain similar powers, even if through different procedures and at later stages.<sup>482</sup>

The fundamental trait of the Spanish devolution has been the *principio dispositivo*, whereby the process has been driven by the periphery that could decide to access different degrees of autonomy.<sup>483</sup> This has made it possible that ‘without a single reform of Chapter VIII of the Constitution, the system has gradually transformed itself from an asymmetric decentralized system toward a largely symmetric federation, defined by the dominance of legislative concurrent powers and revenue-sharing as the main funding model and may be transforming itself again into a more decentralized and asymmetric federation’.<sup>484</sup> Being open, the process assured flexibility, but at the same time was prone to a self-reinforcing competitive dynamic whereby the advances of the strongest communities, willing to mark their differential status, have fuelled demands for equality on the part of the other Spanish regions.

The history of Spanish devolution can be divided into four phases. The process began between 1978 and 1983. The first communities to access devolved powers were the three historical nationalities<sup>485</sup> plus Andalusia that, after a massive rally and a referendum, obtained a derogation from the government to follow the fast-track procedure. The process

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<sup>479</sup> See for instance the country’s records in the Democracy Index of the Economist Intelligence Unit and Freedom House.

<sup>480</sup> ICPS, *op. cit.*

<sup>481</sup> *Unio de Centro Democrático* (Union of the Democratic Centre) was a self-declared centrist party, which however included several members of the former regime. It won the first two elections in 1977 and 1979 and played a major role in the drafting of the constitution and the transition more generally. From 1979 on, it suffered from serious internal splits until it was severely beaten at the 1982 elections and later disbanded. Many of its members moved to *Alianza Popular*, predecessor of the PP.

<sup>482</sup> COLOMER, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-42.

<sup>483</sup> FOSSAS, ENRIC (1999) *Asymmetry and Plurinationality in Spain*, Working Paper n. 167, Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, p. 6.

<sup>484</sup> COLINO, CESAR (2009) ‘Constitutional change without constitutional reform: Spanish federalism and the revision of Catalonia’s statute of autonomy’, *Publius*, 39(2), p. 264.

<sup>485</sup> Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, so defined in the Constitution because they had already been granted such a status in the 1930s, or had voted for it in regional referenda.

triggered the reaction of some generals who, in 1981, attempted a military coup in order to stop a dynamic that they saw as threatening to break up the country. Despite failing, the plot undeniably put pressure on the UCD and the PSOE to hold the process in check. The two parties thus decided to fill the normative vacuum left by the Constitution and to regulate in detail the limits of devolution. The *Ley Organica de Armonización del Proceso Autonómico* (Organic law of harmonisation of the process of autonomy, LOAPA)<sup>486</sup> was clearly informed by a symmetric federal conception, as in the long run it would allow all communities to enjoy the same powers. This attempt at harmonisation was challenged by the institutions representing the historical nationalities – the Catalan *Generalitat* above all – which appealed to the Constitutional Tribunal and obtained recognition of constitutional protection over its autonomy.<sup>487</sup> The 1983-1993 period saw intense transfer of powers but also prolonged conflict over the attribution of concurrent legislation. At the end of it, the PSOE and the PP agreed once again on a general reform aimed at equalising the positions of the communities, granting ordinary regions powers to catch-up with the historical ones faster. Madrid's hopes that the Second Autonomic Agreements signed in 1992 would eventually stop decentralisation were dashed by political contingency. The 1993 elections put an end to a decade of PSOE's absolute majority governments and opened seven years of government coalitions in which CiU could make use of its electoral clout to negotiate further advances and lead the system back again down a path of institutional asymmetry.

In this context the negotiations for a better fiscal treatment took central stage. Overall, there have been five major reforms of the financing system of the communities: 1986, 1993, 1996, 2001 and 2009. The 1980 LOFCA established that after a transitory period of six years, i.e. from 1986 on, the transfers had to be negotiated every five years between the central administration and the autonomous communities in the Council of Fiscal and Financial Policy (CFFP). These periodical re-negotiations contributed to the unstable nature of the system. After a first mild modification in 1986, from 1989 on the Catalan *Generalitat* began demanding the rejection of the old principle of 'effective cost', whereby the state denied the communities a large fiscal autonomy in order to avoid inequality. In 1993, in return for its electoral support for the PSOE, CiU obtained that the *Generalitat* could manage 15% of value added tax and income tax, which was increased to 30% in 1996 through a similar agreement with the PP.<sup>488</sup> Such gains were later extended to all communities – except for the Basque Country, Navarre and the Canary Islands that were granted a different treatment all along. The electoral majority gained by the PP in 2000 put an end to the Catalan favourable bargaining position and initiated a phase of opposition to further devolution that nourished discontent in the autonomous community, although

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<sup>486</sup> GREER, SCOTT (2007) *Nationalism and Self-Government. The Politics of Autonomy in Scotland and Catalonia* (New York: State University of New York Press), p. 121.

<sup>487</sup> The conflict in fact was two-sided and peaked at 135 legal disputes between the *Generalitat* and the Spanish government over conflicts of attribution in 1985. Two rulings have to be highlighted. In ruling 37/1981 the Constitutional Tribunal argued that civil rights are the only realm in which citizens must be assured absolute equality, therefore allowing for asymmetry in all other matters. Ruling 73/1983 asserted that autonomy was protected by constitutional guarantees and therefore overruled ordinary legislation, which amounted to a rejection of much of the LOAPA. BERAMENDI, PABLO and MAIZ, RAMON (2004) 'Spain, Unfulfilled Federalism (1978-1996)', in UGO, AMORETTI and BERMEO, NANCY GINA (eds.) *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press) p. 137-139.

<sup>488</sup> PETITHOMME, MATHIEU (2009) 'L'État espagnol et le financement autonome. Le dilemme de la conciliation entre autonomie régionale et solidarité nationale dans un contexte de fédéralisation asymétrique (1980-2009)', *Fédéralisme Régionalisme*, 9(2), pp. 1-24.



mainly at the political level.<sup>489</sup> A new negotiation in 2009 brought about a rise of the communities' share of income tax and VAT to 50%, plus 58% of special fees. As a consequence, about 40% of state spending is now managed by the communities, while in 1980 the state controlled 90%.<sup>490</sup> Despite these important modifications, however, the devolution process has been marked by three major flaws. First, until 1997 fiscal autonomy progressively shrank rather than increased. This was due to the fact that, as the communities obtained more financial powers (i.e. relating to spending) but not an equivalent transfer in fiscal power (i.e. relating to revenues) and responsibility, the bulk of the needed and increasing resources came from the central government, thus increasing fiscal dependence on Madrid. Second, and as a consequence of the first, few incentives for financial responsibility were given to the regions. Hence, these competed not for making their spending more efficient, but rather for demanding ever more resources.<sup>491</sup> Third, besides the responsibility incentives, two other elements have been missing: a clear definition of what was to be meant in practice by the constitutional principle of equal fiscal treatment – say, for instance, equal spending per capita; and a specific stream of revenues to finance investments in non-needy regions. In this connection, until recently, several wealthy regions – Catalonia among them – have compensated such absence by resorting to regional debt.<sup>492</sup> In other words, similarly to the context of other cases studies, politics and contingency have largely determined the course of events, much more than principles and any kind of models and this not only at the fiscal level, but at the institutional one more in general.<sup>493</sup> In this connection, there is wide disagreement among experts of federalism, whether Spain has been transformed into a federation in all but name or not, as its architecture lacks some basic elements of a federal structure, above all, a true territorial senate allowing the communities to have a substantial role in the lawmaking process.<sup>494</sup>

However, it would be a retrospective and mechanical argument that 'the state of the autonomies' built up since the 1978 Constitution has been a failure. The relative peace and prosperity enjoyed by the country until 2008-10, after 40 years of a dictatorship that had dug deep fractures in its social fabric, is enough evidence of its overall success. Devolution of powers to the communities was conceived of as a device to ease conflict and assure state legitimacy in the periphery, especially among the population of the historical nationalities, after the repression of the Francoist period. As argued by Martínez-Herrera and Guibernau,<sup>495</sup> devolution has reinforced dual identity (see also Figure 3.11),

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<sup>489</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL and WILSON ALEX (2009) 'Renegotiating the State of Autonomies: Statute Reform and Multilevel Politics in Spain', *West European Politics*, 32(3), pp. 540-541.

<sup>490</sup> MONASTERIO ESCUDERO, CARLOS (2002) 'El laberinto de la financiación autonómica', *Hacienda Pública Española*, 163, p. 181; SALA, GEMMA (2014) 'Federalism without Adjectives in Spain', *Publius*, 44(1), p. 123.

<sup>491</sup> Two reasons mainly account for this: first, non *foral* communities were given very limited legislative powers over tax regulation; second, until 2009, no sanction was foreseen for communities that failed to legislate in the field of tax regulation, thus not assuming their fiscal responsibilities. See, RUIZ ALMENDRAL, VIOLETA (2012) 'Sharing taxes and sharing the deficit in Spanish fiscal federalism', *eJournal of Tax Research*, 10(1), pp. 88-125.

<sup>492</sup> MONASTERIO, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-169.

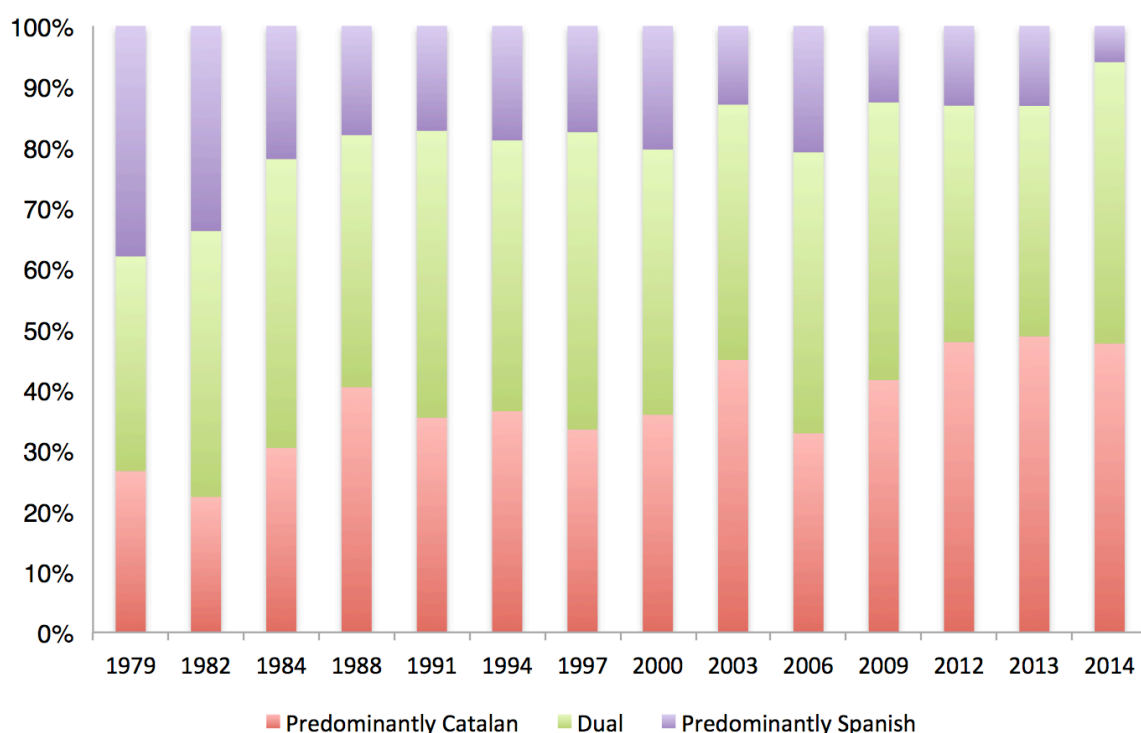
<sup>493</sup> PETITHOMME, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>494</sup> SALA, *op. cit.*

<sup>495</sup> GUIBERNAU, MONTSERRAT (2006) 'National identity, devolution and secession in Canada, Britain and Spain', *Nations and Nationalism*, 12(1), pp. 51-76; MARTÍNEZ-HERRERA, ENRIC (2002) 'From national-building to building identification with political communities: Consequences of political

therefore, as a sign of goodwill by Madrid to accommodate difference, it has been an effective nation-building tool. Its performance must also be weighed against the peculiar nature of Spain, marked by ‘the coexistence of nationalities with a very strong political personality with regions where the main goal is to reach an efficient system of government with wide political decentralisation’,<sup>496</sup> an asymmetry that has generated strong competitive dynamics.

**Figure 3.11 – Subjective National Identity in Catalonia\*, 1979-2014 (percentage of total population)**



\* The categories ‘predominantly Catalan’ and ‘predominantly Spanish’ have been obtained by collating data concerning the original ‘uniquely Catalan/Spanish’ and ‘more Catalan/Spanish than Spanish/Catalan’ categories.

Source: ARGELAGUET (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 437 for 1979-88 data; ICPS, *op. cit.*, for 1991-2014 data.

At the same time, devolution has inevitably offered structures from which nationalist and regionalist parties and organisations – CiU above all – could carry out a nation-building process, evidenced by Pujol’s slogan of *fer país*, that has consolidated the Catalan national difference, by strengthening the Catalan identity and language, especially among the youngest generations, and by promoting the creation of a distinct public sphere. Language policy is probably the sector in which the effects have been most visible. The disappearance of Catalan during the Francoist period was a serious concern as the coincidence of its repression and the extraordinary immigration from other Spanish

descentralisation in Spain, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia, 1978-2001’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 41(4), pp. 421-453.

<sup>496</sup> FOSSAS, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

regions threatened its survival.<sup>497</sup> Yet, despite being in competition with a language spoken by the majority of the state population, legally banned, and put under pressure by a heavy flow of Spanish-speaking immigrants, Catalan was not the lower status language. Given the native-Catalans' domination of the local economy, immigrants did have an incentive to learn the local language in order to assure their upward social mobility and associated it with concepts of prestige.<sup>498</sup> This dynamic allowed Catalan to survive, not to prosper though. In 1981, about 20% of the population did not understand Catalan at all and, as late as 1986, only 64.2% of the population could speak it.<sup>499</sup> The Catalan educational and linguistic policy aimed at redressing this situation. Article 3 of the 1979 Statute of Autonomy defined Catalan as the *Generalitat's* 'own language' (*llengua pròpia*), meaning by that the language of common use in the region. Then, the 1983 Law of Linguistic Normalisation stipulated that all school-age children had to learn both Catalan and Spanish. While in 1979-80 only 9% of primary schools taught wholly or partially in Catalan, in 1986-87 they had increased to 62%.<sup>500</sup> Next, the 1998 Law of Linguistic Policy forced autonomic and municipal civil servants to be proficient in Catalan and clarified the concept of 'own language', by providing that it would be the language of normal use in the workings of the Catalan administration, although each citizen could ask to be addressed in Spanish. Likewise, the bill set Catalan as the normal language of education that all pupils should learn through the process of 'linguistic immersion' (Catalan as language of instruction) in primary schools.<sup>501</sup> But the *Generalitat's* effort has gone beyond the educational realm. The government has subsidised artists and intellectuals, publishing houses and periodicals. It has managed three TV channels and quite a few radio stations, with a view to promoting the use of Catalan and creating a distinct public sphere.<sup>502</sup> As a result, knowledge of Catalan has improved considerably<sup>503</sup> and has gone along with an increase in the strength of the Catalan identity (Figure 3.11),

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<sup>497</sup> Between 1951 and 1970 about 1.2 million people from other regions of Spain settled in Catalonia. As a result, in 1970, 38% of the population had been born outside it. These immigrants especially concentrated in the suburbs of Barcelona where in some neighbourhoods they made up 80% of the population. CONVERSI (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 182-186. As in the case of Flanders, the Laponce law of linguistics – whereby in a context of intense linguistic interaction between two languages, the higher-status one, i.e., the one that people have a higher interest to learn, will always prevail – would have predicted the slow disappearance of Catalan. For more information on these linguistic mechanisms see: VAN PARIJS, PHILIPPE (2011) 'The Linguistic Territoriality Principle: Right Violation or Parity of Esteem?', in PHILIPPE, VAN PARIJS and PAUL, DE GRAUWE (eds.) *The Linguistic Territoriality Principle, Right Violation or Parity of Esteem?*, Re-Bel Initiative e-book, n. 11, October, p. 8-14.

<sup>498</sup> WOOLARD, KATHRYN (1989) *Double Talk. Bilingualism and the Politics of Ethnicity in Catalonia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) p. 87.

<sup>499</sup> ROLLER, ELISA (2001) 'The 1997 Llei del Català: A Pandora's Box in Catalonia?', *Regional and federal studies*, 11(1), p. 42.

<sup>500</sup> WOOLARD, KATHRYN and GAHNG, TAE-JOONG (1990) 'Changing language policies and attitudes in autonomous Catalonia', *Language in Society*, 19, pp. 314-315.

<sup>501</sup> Parents can choose that their pupils should be taught in Spanish. However, if they do so, the children receive 'individualised treatment', that is separate specific classes, but they are not put in a Spanish monolingual class as the law specifically prohibits separation. Some have criticised this regime, arguing that it in fact aims at assimilation. COSTA, JOSEP (2003) 'Catalan Linguistic Policy: Liberal or Illiberal?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 9(3), p. 416-426.

<sup>502</sup> BALFOUR and QUIROGA, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>503</sup> In 2011, 95% of the population could spoke Catalan, 73% spoke it, 79% read it and 56% wrote it. Data from IDESCAT available at <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=800&t=1996&x=7&y=5> (accessed on January 17, 2014).

as the predominantly Catalan identity went from 26.6% to 38.6% between 1979 and 2009.<sup>504</sup>

This notwithstanding, Catalonia experienced no nationalist radicalisation until the end of the 2000s, when the most important institutional conflict of the democratic period began unfolding. This has centred around the reform of the statute of autonomy and has brought to light the latent contradictions between the views of Catalan nationalists, Spanish socialists and conservatives. The reform, long advocated by ERC but carefully avoided by CiU, which had been faithful to its policy of ‘constructive opposition’, became a possibility when, in 2003, *Esquerra* joined a coalition in Catalonia led by the socialist candidate Pasquall Maragall, who had made a pledge to modify the statute during the electoral campaign and enjoyed the support of soon-to-be Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero. Orte and Wilson argued that Maragall lost control over the process and was outmanouvered by the far-reaching demands of ERC,<sup>505</sup> later followed by CiU in an attempt to vie for the palm of defender of the Catalan interest. The ambitious constitutional draft agreed in the Catalan Parliament put the PSOE in a difficult situation, as the text was deemed to go too far in many respects. Attacked by the PP before the press and facing serious internal opposition to the text, Zapatero’s party heavily amended the new Statute in the Spanish Congress.<sup>506</sup> From another perspective, however, the behaviour of the PSC would simply point to a fracture between the Catalan socialists and those of the rest of Spain, with the former being part of a cross-party coalition in Catalonia in favour of a more radical assertion of the community’s differential identity.<sup>507</sup>

In other words, it is not clear whether such a far-reaching text was achieved because of grassroots pressure rather than resulting from the differing negotiating skills of the actors involved. Some authors stressed the dissatisfaction with the centralisation policies enacted by the PP after the 2000 victory.<sup>508</sup> Furthermore, Andrew Davis pointed to the decisive influence of a new generation of Catalans – overrepresented among ERC’s voters<sup>509</sup> – that not having experienced the dictatorship would be much more assertive in their nationalist ideas and less concerned about political stability.<sup>510</sup> By contrast, Michael Keating and Alex Wilson have suggested that in Catalonia ‘interest and knowledge of statute reform was low’ and this ‘was perceived more as an objective of parties than a key issue for regional voters’.<sup>511</sup> Opinion poll data show wide support for the reform in 2005, with 56.3% of the population finding the process timely, but somewhat lower for its most far-reaching aspect, as 43.8% valued positively the inclusion of the definition of Catalonia as a nation in the statute, 26.9% were indifferent and 24.3% opposed it. However, despite being heavily amended, the Statute still included the definition of Catalonia as a nation – although only

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<sup>504</sup> ARGELAGUET, JORDI (2006) ‘Subjective National Identities in Catalonia’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 12(3-4), p. 437.

<sup>505</sup> The most controversial one, at least from a symbolical standpoint, was the introduction of the term nation to define Catalonia in the text of the statute.

<sup>506</sup> ORTE and WILSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-430.

<sup>507</sup> This was probably also the case with the Popular Party. Keating and Wilson revealed that the leader of the Catalan PP, Josep Piqué, had accepted the principle of statute reform in Catalonia and was open to recognise the right of Catalonia to develop asymmetrical levels of autonomy. At one point, the Catalan PP was almost ready to accept the term ‘nation’ in the statute. KEATING and WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

<sup>508</sup> ORTE and WILSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-425; DAVIS, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>509</sup> For the composition of ERC’s electorate see ARGELAGUET et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>510</sup> DAVIS, *op. cit.*, p. 146-147. Montserrat Guibernau as well has suggested the existence of a ‘generational effect’. GUIBERNAU (1999) *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>511</sup> KEATING and WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 556.

in the preliminary paragraphs, which had no legal consequences, as the Constitutional Tribunal made clear in its 2010 controversial ruling – and was ratified by the Catalan population with a more than 70% majority. The turnout was low (49.4%),<sup>512</sup> but this was mainly due to the fact that voters were presented with a *fait accompli* after an exhausting process of negotiation.<sup>513</sup>

The process just described above is important because the radicalisation realised from 2008-2009 onwards is often linked to the judicial procedure begun in 2006 with the appeal against the Statute of Autonomy presented by the PP, and other organisations, to the Constitutional Tribunal and ending with the ruling delivered in summer 2010. The PP had asked the court to rule over the accordance with the Constitution of 187 articles of the Statute. The Tribunal eventually found non-constitutional parts of 14 of them and gave constraining interpretations of another 27. The most controversial points have concerned the definition of Catalonia as a nation, the status of Catalan as an official language on a par with Spanish, the constitutional protection of the devolved competences from central government encroachment and some mechanisms aimed at reducing the fiscal burden of the community and increasing state investment.<sup>514</sup> The issue of the definition of the Catalan nation, declared void of any legal value by the Tribunal, has probably been the most sour and debated point. It nourished support for a grassroots movement for the ‘Right to Decide’, the *Plataforma pel dret a decidir*, that had been born in 2005, after the Spanish Parliament had severely modified the draft statute, and had organised unofficial referenda in several Catalan municipalities in 2009 and early 2010. In July 2010, it promoted a giant demonstration in Barcelona attended by more than one million people. Two years later, on the occasion of the 2012 celebration of the Catalan national day (on September 11), again, more than one million people participated in a protest demanding the right to decide over the future of Catalonia in an independence referendum.<sup>515</sup>

On the one hand, the ruling made explicit what probably had passed unnoticed in the modified Statute, i.e., that the Spanish Constitution defines Spain as a mononational state. In this way, it shattered a ‘constructive ambiguity’ that had lain at the core of the constitutional pact during the entire democratic period and that had accommodated opposing views of the status of Catalonia and its relation with the rest of the country. On the other, despite being in line with legal rules and practice, the ruling of the Tribunal has been severely criticised on the basis of democratic theory because it invalidated parts of a

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<sup>512</sup> LAGO, IGNACIO, MONTERO, JOSE RAMON and TORCAL, MARIANO (2007) ‘The 2006 Regional Election in Catalonia: Exit, Voice and Electoral Market Failures’, *South European Society and Politics*, 12(2), pp. 226-227. The authors also revealed that in polls preceding the 2006 elections, held some months after the referendum, only 5% of the voters deemed regional financing the most important problem in the region, while most mentioned housing, immigration and crime as higher priorities. This would reflect a political landscape similar to Flanders’ where the political debate is more heated at the top than at the grassroots, at least until 2009-2010. Yet, the opposition between these two sets of issues (institutional problems like regional financing and social ones such as housing and crime among others) is misleading because one does not exclude the other, but, on the contrary, the two are linked in the party’s propaganda, since constitutional change is framed as a tool for solving social problems. A question concerning the relation between the two would be much more useful.

<sup>513</sup> KEATING and WILSON, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

<sup>514</sup> For further details see GUIBERNAU, MONTSERRAT (2013) ‘Secessionism in Catalonia: After Democracy’, *Ethnopolitics*, 12(4), p. 382.

<sup>515</sup> SUBIRATS i HUMETS, JOAN and VILAREGUT SAEZ, RICARD (2012) ‘El debat sobre la independència de Catalunya. Causes, implicacions i reptes de futur’, *Anuari del conflicte Social*, pp. 514-527.

text that had been approved by two parliaments and ratified through popular referendum.<sup>516</sup> The legitimacy of the judicial body was also put into question with reference to its specific composition, which changed right after the approval of the statute in Madrid when the PP obtained the recusal of judge Pablo Pérez Tremps because of a supposed conflict of interest with the case.<sup>517</sup> The recusal triggered vocal complaints from most Catalan parties accusing the PP of trying to win its legal battle by changing the balance within the Tribunal.<sup>518</sup>

In other words, the process of modification of the Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia opened a controversy about the place of the community within Spain that fuelled perceptions of political marginalisation. These did not have so much to do with the democratic institutions of Spain as such, but rather with the type of democracy that they embody. For instance, while Catalan parties have consistently been underrepresented in the Spanish Congress and government since the democratic transition – they held 13.5% of seats against 16% of the total population of the country and only 5 ministries between 1982 and 1996 – this has not been a major argument in ERC's, or in CiU's, rhetoric.<sup>519</sup> The bones of contention have rather been the fiscal deal – which we have already analysed in the previous section – and the recognition of Catalonia as a nation endowed with the right of self-determination. The claim of political marginalisation therefore depends on the definition of the community as having a distinct character and deserving recognition. As Enric Fossas pointed out:

‘the demand for a particular status on the part of national minorities is not only directed to an increase of powers, but also to their recognition as nation. These positions reflect a more profound difference in the very concept of federation: for the minorities, federalism is above all a federation between founding peoples based on equality, which would demand asymmetry between national and regional units; for the majorities, federalism is first and foremost a union of equal units, which demands symmetry [...] their basic claim [of minorities EDM] does not consist in defending the political community as culturally diverse, but in sustaining that more than one political community exist, each one of which has the right to govern itself’.<sup>520</sup>

As we will see in the next section more in detail, the perception of such a lack of recognition in Catalonia is hegemonic today, and embodied in the strength of people's mobilisation as well as in the overwhelming support for an independence referendum. It is interesting to note however that, already in 1994, 75.8% of the population of the community agreed with the idea that Catalonia is a country with its own personality and 76.1% thought that this reality was not recognised in the rest of Spain. What seems to have

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<sup>516</sup> FOSSAS, ENRIC (2011) ‘El Control de Costitucionalidad de los Estatutos de Autonomia’, *Revista catalan de derecho publico*, 43, pp. 2-19.

<sup>517</sup> He had contributed his expertise to drafting some sections of the statute.

<sup>518</sup> MILEY, THOMAS JEFFREY (2008) ‘Recusal and the Question of Judicial Independence: Reflections on the Current Spanish Controversy in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective’, Working Paper RS/2, Centro d'estudios politicos y constitucionales.

<sup>519</sup> Our calculations on INE's data and those of the *Consulta de Resultados Electorales*. See: <http://www.ine.es/> and <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/min/home.html> (accessed on January 16, 2014); LLOBERA, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157. This is also due to the fact that, especially in the 1990s, CiU played a fundamental role in determining the balance of power in Congress by supporting the PSOE, first, and the PP, later, thus holding considerable political leverage.

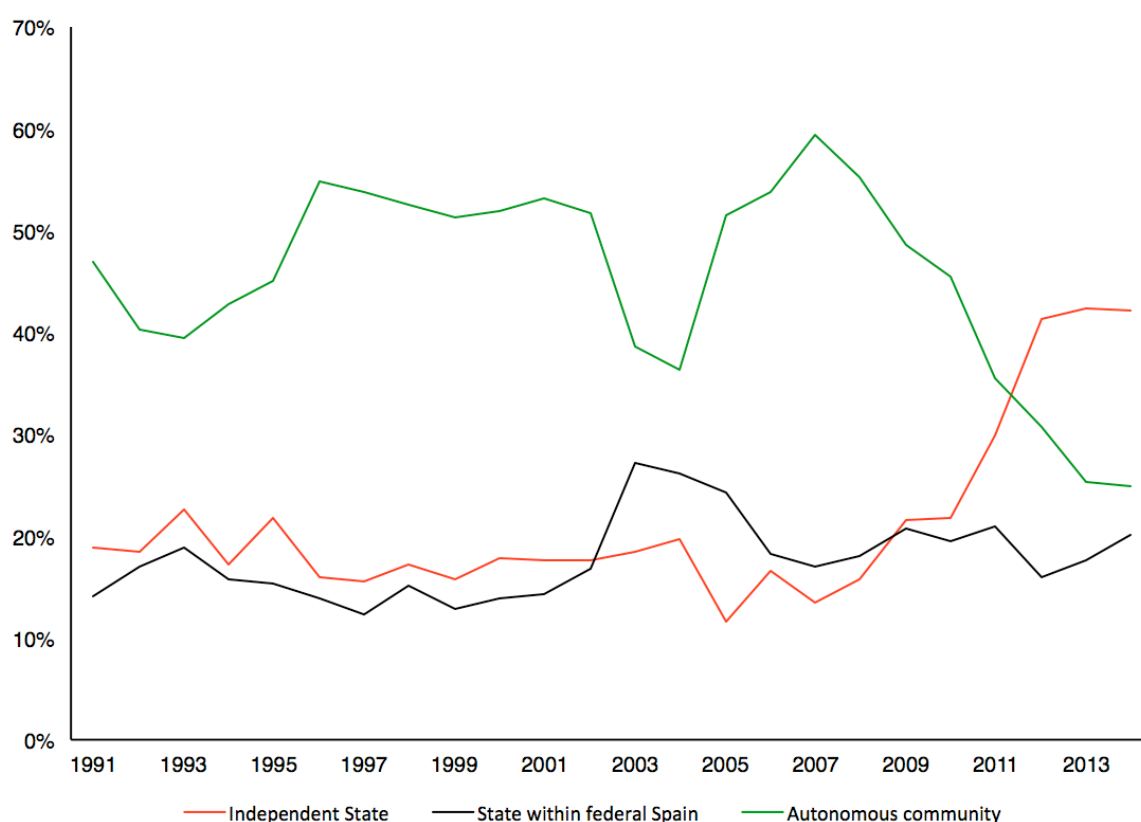
<sup>520</sup> FOSSAS, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Without quoting him, Fossas, here, made reference to the works of Will Kymlicka.

changed therefore is the salience rather than the substance of the relation with the rest of Spain and the recognition of Catalonia.

### 3.4 Support for Independence and Electoral Results

Between 1991 and 2007, support for independence in Catalonia remained quite constant, even slightly decreased (Figure 3.12). During the same period, in contrast, ERC's electoral results were far less stable. Broadly speaking, the party experienced three major waves: a first, more modest progression, between 1989 and 1995; then a much more marked hike between 2000 and 2006; and the most recent improvement begun in 2012 (Figure 3.1). As only the recent growth coincided, in part, with a radicalisation in support for independence, these data clearly suggest distinguishing between the two phenomena.

**Figure 3.12 – Support for Independence and Other Constitutional Options, 1991-2014 (percentage of Catalonia's population)\***



\*The question asked in the survey concerned which was the interviewee's preferred constitutional option for Catalonia among: a Spanish region, an autonomous community of Spain, a state within a federal Spain, an independent state. The percentage shown here concerns the last three answers.  
Source: ICPS, *op. cit.*

As the first sociological analysis of ERC's militants carried out in the early 1990s showed, most party members and office holders who had joined after the 1987 renewal came from the ranks of the many separatist extra-parliamentary organisations that had arisen between the late 1960s and early 1980s and had suffered from an endemic political



fragmentation.<sup>521</sup> Until the late 1980s, Catalan separatism had remained a marginal phenomenon, mostly limited to writers, student and intellectual circles unable to connect with wider strata of the Catalan society. However, the first half of the 1980s saw the emergence of the so-called *independentisme sociologic*, which consisted in the capacity of separatism to channel the discontent of a growing number of young Catalans regarding the democratic transition. Two events were very important in this respect. Despite not being successful, the attempted military coup of February 23, 1981, cast a long shadow over the supposed accomplishments of the democratic transition. The ensuing constraints put on the process of devolution with the adoption of the LOAPA – as a way to reassure the army – further nourished disaffection within some sections of the Catalan population. Some weeks after the attempted coup, the Spanish daily *Diario 16* published *Los Manifiesto de los 2,300* (The Manifiesto of the 2,300). The document, signed by Spanish-speaking intellectuals and members of the intelligentsia mainly resident in Catalonia, complained of a climate of linguistic opposition between communities in the region, allegedly fuelled by local politicians, and argued that imposing Catalan as the only language of the autonomous community would be discriminatory.<sup>522</sup> It triggered a strong reaction of Catalan institutions and civil society, especially among students, in defence of the primacy of Catalan and led to the establishment of a permanent organisation, *La Crida*, led by Angel Colom, which organised events in favour of the Catalan language and culture throughout the 1980s.<sup>523</sup> By the late 1980s, however, the thrust of *La Crida*, as well as of other organisations that had arisen in the meantime, was fading. Between 1987 and 1993, then, ERC managed to absorb within its ranks much of this generation of young separatists. Hence, ERC's first modest wave of electoral success can largely be explained as the result of this consolidation of the previously fragmented separatist base around its banner.

Paradoxically, however, while the party had recruited heavily among members of movements that in the early 1980s had held a strong focus on the defence of the Catalan language, the main innovation introduced by the party in these years was precisely the battle against the *expoli fiscal*. This focus on socio-economic arguments represented a revolution compared to the previous separatist tradition, because it abandoned the radical anti-system overtones of the previous organisations and, making reference to the cold numbers available in the studies on the fiscal transfers, it could appeal to the interests of a much wider constituency. In this way, it set the ground for future expansions, but, more fundamentally, it contributed to the 'normalisation' of separatism, as a legitimate goal achievable through democratic means within the existing parliamentary institutions.<sup>524</sup>

As seen in section 3.2.4, this new approach was further developed during the leadership of Carod-Rovira, mainly through the theme of the *catalanisme del benestar* and the gradualist strategy envisaging the transformation of Spain into a federal plurinational democracy. Figure 3.12 suggests that such a strategy was largely successful, as ERC's first true electoral breakthrough in 2003-04 coincided with a marked increase in support for the idea of Catalonia as a state within a federal Spain – from 13% in 1999, to 27% in 2003. This outcome however also stemmed from other factors, above all, the exhaustion of

<sup>521</sup> CULLA (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 350. ARGELAGUET, JORDI, MAESTRO, JESUS and AMOROS, MOISES (1998) 'Anàlisi sociològica dels assistents al XIX Congrés Nacional d'ERC', *Papers*, 54, pp. 187-200.

<sup>522</sup> GINER (1996) *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>523</sup> MANNE, ENRIC and SELGA, LLUISA (1991) *Historia de la Crida a la Solidaritat en Defensa de la Llengua, la Cultura i la Nació Catalanes* (Barcelona: La Campana).

<sup>524</sup> ALIMBAU, JAUME RENYER (1995) *Catalunya, qüestió d'estat, vint-i-cinc anys d'independentisme català (1968-1993)* (Terragona: El Médol) p. 72.

CiU's domination after more than 20 years in power, especially after its support for the PP government<sup>525</sup> and Aznar's refusal to negotiate any further devolution of powers to the historical nationalities after he had obtained an absolute majority in 2000.<sup>526</sup> The electoral expansion of *Esquerra* in the early 2000s also curiously coincided with the break in the 'pact of silence' concerning Spain's past on the part of both the PP and the PSOE. In this period, a new generation of liberal conservatives within the PP tried to formulate a genuine right-wing discourse on the nation that celebrated regionalism as an enriching feature of contemporary Spain and opposed it to its vicious deviation, i.e., nationalism or, worse, separatism. Peripheral nationalism was thus presented as a dangerous primordial feeling, while the party claimed to subscribe to the concept of constitutional patriotism.<sup>527</sup> So did the PSOE, which however remained torn between the principles of social equality, postulating symmetric federalism, and sympathy with regional autonomy, compatible with asymmetric devolution.<sup>528</sup> The natural corollary of the post-national discourse adopted by both parties has been that 'tolerant, democratic, and modernized Spain was confronted by the allegedly backward, intolerant, and anti-democratic nationalisms of Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia'.<sup>529</sup> Thus, from the early 2000s on, neither the PP nor the PSOE have been able to create an inclusive narrative allowing for the accommodation of peripheral nationalism. However, until very recently, the majority of the population of Catalonia has been in favour of a substantial form of autonomy within the Spanish state, rather than independence, and radicalisation has been a very recent phenomenon.

In the 2008-2013 period, support for independence increased steadily from 16% to 42%. In this connection, electoral data provided by the CEO and the ICPS, as well as survey analysis carried out by Muñoz and Tormos seem to confirm the argument that the combination of the constitutional and the economic crisis have turned independence into an appealing goal to a much wider share of the Catalan population than ever before. They also substantiate the conclusions drawn from the literature on demand for sovereignty in Quebec, concerning the primary role of national identity and perceptions of the economic prospects of independence. In 2013, 94% of those declaring themselves as having an exclusive Catalan identity supported independence in a hypothetical referendum.<sup>530</sup> This has gone along with a reinforcing of the 'predominantly Catalan' category of identification – from 30.4% in 2006 to 47% in 2013 – and a weakening of dual, Spanish/Catalan, identification, from 42.9% to 36.6%. Furthermore, the number of people who deemed the

<sup>525</sup> Such exhaustion was already clear in 1999, when the Socialists won 37.8% of the vote against CiU's 37.6%. Although the latter obtained 56 seats against the former's 52 and went on to form a new government, the result was landmark compared to previous elections in which CiU had been by far the first party and signaled a strong demand for change in the community. See PALLARES, FRANCESC (2000) 'The Elections of 17 October 1999 in Catalonia', *Regional & Federal Studies*, 10(3), pp. 149-156.

<sup>526</sup> GUIBERNAU (2013) *op. cit.*, pp. 380-381.

<sup>527</sup> The Catalan MEP, Alejo Vidal-Quadras for instance commented that 'constitutional patriotism transforms nations drunk on identity into *patrias* ennobled by civic sense, helping us to travel along the hygienic path that leads from tribe to *polis*'. Quoted in BALFOUR and QUIROGA, *op. cit.*, p. 115. The authors, however, made clear that despite the purported civic nature of the PP's discourse on the nation, the traditional ethnic and cultural definition of Spain is taken for granted in its propaganda.

<sup>528</sup> In practice, the former conception prevailed everywhere but in the historical communities.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84. Balfour and Quiroga also pointed out that the Left could not give birth to a genuine anti-fascist rhetoric because of the consensual way in which the transition had been carried out. Likewise, the PSOE's acceptance of the monarchy largely reduced the range of historical figures from the nineteenth and early twentieth century representing the fight for democracy that could be used as models for a new discourse on national identity, because most of them were convinced republicans.

<sup>530</sup> CEO (2013) *Baròmetre d'opiniò política*, n. 733, 3<sup>rd</sup> wave.

debate over the reform of the state to be ‘very important’ increased from 9.6% to 28.8% between 2008 and 2013.<sup>531</sup> Munoz and Tormos also found that, apart from national identity, the other variable that best correlated with support for independence consisted in ‘basing one’s support for independence on economic considerations’. More interestingly, similarly to what Howe did with support for sovereignty in Quebec, the authors have been able to distinguish two typologies of voters, those who would opt for independence in a hypothetical referendum even if the option of a Catalan state in a federal Spain would be available and those who would rather choose the latter alternative if provided. While economic factors were quite irrelevant for the former, they were fundamental for the latter. In other words, there was a substantial body of ‘conditional’ supporters – they estimated them at at least 34% of those supporting independence – for whom the belief in the equation between better economic conditions and Catalan independence – which has been the core of ERC’s propaganda for about two decades – was key.<sup>532</sup> This suggests that while grievances concerning the economic mistreatment of Catalonia were there much earlier, the perception of the incentives associated with independence changed from 2008 onwards. The financial and debt crisis has largely been responsible for this change. While real GDP was not hit so hard – the reduction from 2008 to 2011 was equal to 2.2% –<sup>533</sup> unemployment soared, with a sharp increase from 8.9% to 16.2% precisely between 2008 and 2009, before reaching 23.1% at the end of 2013<sup>534</sup> and 50.2% among the under 25.<sup>535</sup> In this context, people have become much more sensitive to the issue of the transfers.<sup>536</sup> At the same time, the constitutional crisis has contributed to spreading the perception that a federal reform of the Spanish state, intended as a plurinational entity in which Catalonia’s national difference will be recognised, is impossible. It is in this context that the idea that Catalan identity and membership of the Spanish state are incompatible, or not suitable, has become hegemonic. Paradoxically, ERC did not profit from the grassroots movement that arose in the late 2000s, mainly because of internal dissent and lack of leadership. But once regained its cohesion, the party began tapping into the growing pro-referendum movement. It thus became the second party in the Catalan Parliament, in 2012, and the first at the 2014 European elections, overtaking CiU for the first time in its history.

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<sup>531</sup> ICPS, *op. cit.*

<sup>532</sup> MUNOZ, JORDI and TORMOS, RAÛL (2012) *Identitat o càlculs instrumentals? Anàlisi dels factors explicatius del suport a la independència*, Centro d’Estudis d’Opinio, Generalitat de Catalunya. According to them, national identity was positively associated with unconditional voters – the stronger the Catalan identity the higher the support for independence – but not with conditional ones. The relationship between identity and the impact of economic considerations has been furthered investigated by Ivan Serrano, who showed that, although having an independent impact on all categories of national identification, such economic arguments were more influential among dual and predominantly Spanish voters. SERRANO, IVAN (2013) ‘Just a Matter of Identity? Support for Independence in Catalonia’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 23(5), pp. 523-545. Unfortunately, until very recently, the main opinion surveys carried out in Catalonia did not include a question on the economic prospects of independence, therefore, we cannot analyse the evolution of people’s perception of them over time.

<sup>533</sup> Our calculations on GDP data from the *Institut d’Estadística de Catalunya* (IDESCAT) available at <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=ceac&n=1.1&lang=en&t=2012&x=12&y=6> (accessed on January 14, 2014).

<sup>534</sup> INE (2013) *Resultados por comunidades y ciudades autónomas y provincias*, third semester 2013, <http://www.ine.es/daco/daco42/daco4211/epapro0313.pdf> (accessed on January 13, 2014).

<sup>535</sup> IDESCAT, <http://www.idescat.cat/cat/economia/ecotreball.html> (accessed on June 9, 2014).

<sup>536</sup> In a 2011 survey carried out by the CEO, the single most mentioned group of reasons for supporting independence (32% of all answers) was that of ‘the capacity and wish to manage its own economic resources’. See CEO (2011) *Barometre d’Opinio Política*, n. 661.

Another important factor that is often mentioned when explaining the recent radicalisation in Catalonia has to do with the rise of a new generation of Catalans who were born at the end, or after, the dictatorship. They would have been socialised within predominantly Catalan institutions and would be much more assertive in demanding respect for their national rights.<sup>537</sup> As explained in the previous section, this would also result from the educational and linguistic policies of the *Generalitat*, which contributed to the reinforcement of the Catalan identity, especially among young pupils. Improvements in Catalan proficiency have gone along with a reinforcement of the Catalan identity. According to a survey by Jordi Argelaguuet, in 2001, the predominantly Catalan identity was strongly associated with speaking the Catalan language at home – 75% of those polled were found to be in this category. Even more interestingly, comparing cohorts of age who had been exposed to the post-1983 Catalan education and others who had not, Aspachs-Bracons et al. found that the longer the exposure to education in Catalan the higher the likelihood to vote for a nationalist party.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> GUIBERNAU (2013) *op. cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>538</sup> ASPACH-BRACONS, ORIOL, CLOTS-FIGUERAS, IRMA and MASELLA, PAOLO (2007) *Education and Political Behaviour. Evidence from the Catalan Linguistic Reform*, Departamento de Economía, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid, Working Paper 07-78.

### 3.5 Conclusion

Despite having remained until very recently a small political party, *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* has had a disproportionate influence on the Catalan political life of the last 25 years. Apart from its time in government that led to the controversial modification of the Statute of Autonomy – triggering a series of events at the roots of the current crisis in the region – *Esquerra* has been the reference point for radical constitutional change, either in the form of secession or of a free association with Spain as a step towards full sovereignty. In summing up the main findings of this chapter we have to distinguish three levels of analysis. First, there is that of discourse and its critical discussion; then, that of the analysis of the historical context in which the party's arguments were constructed and evolved; finally, we have to account for the electoral results of the party and evolution of support for independence in the region.

To begin with the first, ERC has arguably been the first expression of the nationalism of the rich in history, as already in the 1930s the party denounced the fact that Catalonia was getting a rough deal out of its relationship with the Spanish central administration and was being held back by a less developed core. The argument, however, has been fully developed only from the second half of the 1980s on and, broadly speaking, goes as follows: the Catalans have been robbed of a figure averaging around 8% of their GDP and such capital drain has hampered them from improving their welfare and competing with more advanced foreign regions in the continental and global markets. The transfer of resources is not legitimate on grounds of solidarity, since it has not been used to further development, but rather to prop up the inefficient Spanish bureaucracy and the wastages of a corrupt political class. The rejection of solidarity is also warranted on account of the nature of Catalan wealth, which mainly derives from the effort of its entrepreneurial and hard-working people. In this connection, the party has been very careful to direct its critiques against the Madrid establishment and the state administration, although a culturalist argument explaining the difference in levels of prosperity between the region and the rest of the country seems to lurk behind these claims. If kept in Catalonia, those resources would afford a generous and efficient welfare system for all Catalans. In order to do that, however, the Catalan nation – including those Catalans outside the autonomous community of Catalonia – needs an independent state. The Catalans have tried unsuccessfully for centuries to change the backward and authoritarian Spanish state as well as to be treated as an equal nation endowed with a right of self-determination. Nevertheless, independence should be seen as a process rather than an event and can also be reached by steps. Thus, any increase in powers should be hailed as good news, although a confederation or a free association with the rest of Spain, based on a fiscal relationship similar to that enjoyed by the Basque Country and Navarre, representation at the EU institutions and all competences devolved except for defence and foreign policy, should be aimed at in the short-term. Although having formally been part of the party's rhetorical baggage since the renovation of the late 1980s, such gradualist strategy took centre stage during the years of leadership of Carod-Rovira from 1996 to 2008, when the party enjoyed its best results of the post-dictatorship period. It was put into question by internal dissenters in the late 2000s, although the party did not renege on it, but simply adapted, albeit with some difficulty, to the surge of support for independence in the region. The gradualist line has gone along with the theme of the *catalanisme del benestar*, which has emphasised the instrumental character of the struggle for independence, as a means to achieve a better standard of living and better welfare, and with a civic definition of

Catalan identity, open to whoever regardless of his/her origins and provided he/she would be willing to share a minimum set of values – not really clarified in practice though – as well as to learn Catalan. Such a voluntaristic approach happily combined with a shift from language and culture, as the main focus of traditional Catalan separatism, to economic arguments, which could be shared much more easily by non-native Catalans, especially as ERC did not direct its criticism at other Spanish regions but primarily against Madrid.<sup>539</sup> The gradualist strategy has also entailed a stronger emphasis on catering for the everyday needs of the people, on engaging with and providing sound policy-making with regard to all the areas of government action. In this way, *Esquerra* has ‘normalised’ separatism and turned it into a goal that can be democratically achieved from within the Catalan political institutions.

In the third part of this chapter, we have tried to assess the validity of *Esquerra*’s major arguments. In economic terms, nobody can deny the role of generous contributor that Catalonia has played in the Spanish fiscal system. Substantial flows have persisted for at least three decades, convergence has been only partially achieved, overcompensation effects have been documented – although estimates have varied somewhat – especially with regard to infrastructural investments, and corruption scandals in the early 1990s contributed to spreading the perception that Catalan resources were being siphoned off for clientelist purposes. The fiscal imbalance calculated by the party, however, is compatible with academic studies based on a monetary flow methodology that underestimate the distribution of general expenses. Furthermore, a comparative analysis with the situation of other Spanish regions puts the Catalan position in a different perspective. On the one hand, Spain’s deficit with the community of Madrid has consistently been bigger, in per capita terms, than that with Catalonia. Madrid’s contribution however decreases substantially when using a monetary-flow approach. The political centrality of Madrid not only compensates for the community’s fiscal effort, but it is also a cause of it, as much of the region’s wealth depends on its role as capital. Hence, the odd position of Catalonia, even in a continental perspective, is that it contributes to the Spanish fiscal system to the level of other European capital regions, and even more, without enjoying such status. On the other hand, the Balearic Islands have recorded similar fiscal imbalances but not similar calls for self-determination, the main reason being that regional identification has not been in conflict with the Spanish one. Furthermore, the true injustice, in strictly fiscal terms, towards the population of Catalonia has mainly been committed by communities such as the Basque Country and Navarre that, despite having similar levels of income, are net recipients.

In political terms, the history of the relationship between Catalonia and Spain offers a number of examples that can be used to claim Catalonia’s oppression. Some, such as the persecution of Catalan culture and language under Franco or the abolition of the Catalan Parliament after the War of Spanish Succession in the eighteenth century, are incontrovertible facts. Others, such as imposition of Spanish with the decrees of *Nueva Planta* and the exclusion of Catalan merchants from the colonial trade lie on shakier grounds, without being for this reason less effective. Furthermore, there is some statistical evidence of underrepresentation of the Catalans in the central institutions of the Spanish

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<sup>539</sup> In an interesting comment during an interview for this research project, Carod-Rovira stated that back in the 1980s the separatists were only intellectuals, especially humanist intellectuals – he for instance studied philology – while since the 2000s the economists had become separatist as well. See interview with Josep-Lluís Carod Rovira, Annex 2.

state for much of the period 1875-1930, as well as for the post-dictatorship one. Curiously, however, this has rarely been mentioned in the party's rhetoric. What has on the contrary been much more vocally decried is Spain's rejection of the plurinational character of the state and of the recognition of the right of self-determination of its constituent nations. Until recently, a frontal confrontation had been avoided mainly thanks to a 'constructive ambiguity' at the core of the constitutional pact, with the use of the term 'nationality' to indicate the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia. This has however been shattered by the 2010 ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal.

With regard to the historical formation and evolution of the arguments making up the nationalism of the rich as formulated by *Esquerra*, in the 1980s the party profited from the so-called *independentisme sociologic* and was able to absorb almost completely the many small left-wing separatist parties and extra-parliamentarian organisations that had arisen in the early 1980s. The *independentisme sociologic* was mainly triggered by events concerning the political process of transition to democracy and the state of autonomy as well as the linguistic policy of the *Generalitat*. The primacy of language, also as an element of identification during and after the dictatorship, has been confirmed by most of the elected politicians interviewed for this research project.<sup>540</sup> The economic discrimination of Catalonia did not occupy centre stage at the time, but this changed in the late 1980s. Between 1983 and 1991, the studies of Castells and Parellada, Bosch et al., and Coldefons showed the existence of substantial fiscal transfers for the entire period 1975-1988. Not coincidentally, the 1989 manifesto for the Spanish Parliament election was the first to clearly introduce the concept of the fiscal deficit and provide data about it. The increased salience of the fiscal relationship with the rest of Spain in the political debate involved other Catalan parties as well, since, from the summer of 1989 after the first mild renegotiation of the fiscal deal with Madrid carried out in 1986, the CiU-led *Generalitat* began calling for a rejection of the principle of 'effective cost' and an increase in the fiscal responsibility of the autonomous community. Yet, only ERC seized the occasion to introduce the rhetoric of the *expoli fiscal* and advocate independence on the basis of this. The argument was refined in some articles of *La Republica* in the early 1990s and, by 1992, had become a central theme in the party's discourse. Apart from the publication of detailed studies, the relevance of the claims of Catalan fiscal victimisation was favoured by the steady increase in state spending, taxation and debt, coupled with widely broadcast corruption scandals. At a deeper level, they tapped into older nationalist narratives depicting Catalonia as an advanced periphery that was being held back by a more backward Spain. Furthermore, ERC could take the lead in denouncing the *expoli fiscal* because CiU had embarked in a policy of 'constructive opposition' that entailed a much more compromising attitude. Since these formative years, the rhetoric of the party has shown surprising stability. While, in the transition from Colom's to Carod-Rovira's leadership, there have been considerable modifications with regard to the left-wing ideological profile of *Esquerra* and the adoption of a much more explicit gradualist strategy, entailing the association of independence with higher levels of welfare and a federal reform of Spain, the main arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation have largely remained the same. Dramatic change has been brought about by the process of reform of the Statute of Autonomy and by the economic crisis, but, their

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<sup>540</sup> See interviews with Josep-Lluís Carod Rovira, Cesc Iglésies and Joan Manuel Tresserras in Annex 2. See also Carod-Rovira's biography and that of Joan Puigcercos: AGUILERA i MARCUALL, GEMMA (2003) *Saltar la paret: biografia de Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira* (Barcelona: Llibre de l'index); PAIRÓ, GISELA (2007) *Corredor de fons. Retrat de Joan Puigcercos* (Barcelona: Dau).

true impact seems to have consisted in making ERC's existing rhetoric much more suitable both as a diagnostic and a prognostic device<sup>541</sup> for the Catalan population, rather than in urging any major adjustment in the discourse and strategy of the party.<sup>542</sup>

Accordingly, support for independence has dramatically increased only since the beginning of the financial and debt crisis, which has coincided with the constitutional crisis triggered by the reform of the statute of autonomy. Yet, while ERC's first mild electoral expansion, in the early 1990s, was associated with a general stability in demands for constitutional change and largely depended on the party's capacity to rally behind itself the previously fragmented left-wing separatist sector of Catalan politics, a decade later *Esquerra* did take advantage of increased demand for a federal reform of Spain. This enabled it to substantially contribute to the process of reform of the Statute of Autonomy that ended with the controversial 2010 ruling of Constitutional Tribunal. In the late 2000s, the party failed to capitalise on such grass-root radicalisation because of internal dissent and lack of leadership. This was even more surprising as the civil society organisations promoting a referendum on self-determination borrowed much of ERC's discourse, especially concerning the rhetoric of the *xpoli fiscal*. It is also for this reason that, once its internal problems fixed, the party successfully managed to regain a position of leadership over the process and became Catalonia's first party for the first time in its recent history.

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<sup>541</sup> We refer here to the difference between diagnostic and prognostic framings suggested by Robert Benford and David Snow, whereby the former refers to the identification of problems to be solved and the latter to the solutions proposed. See BENFORD, ROBERT and SNOW, DAVID (2000) 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, pp. 615-618.

<sup>542</sup> In this connection, it is useful to note that already in the late 1980s a majority of the Catalan population thought that Catalonia received an insufficient amount of resources from the centre when compared to its contribution to state revenues and, similarly, in 1994, 76% believed that Catalonia was not recognised as a different national reality in the rest of Spain. Yet, this did not translate into any majority support for independence.





## 4 The Vlaams Belang and the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie

### 4.1 Origins and Evolution of the VB and the N-VA

It would be a mistake to isolate the history of the *Vlaams Belang* (the Flemish Interest, VB)<sup>543</sup> and the *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (the New Flemish Alliance, N-VA) from the wider history of the Flemish movement. However, for reasons of scope we cannot provide a detailed account of the struggle for Flemish emancipation. Suffice it to say, here, that the Flemish movement arose as early as the second half of the nineteenth century and, until the First World War, was mainly limited to a cultural fight for the recognition of the Dutch language and Flemish culture as foundational elements of the Belgian state. The Great War represented a major fracture that charged the Flemish movement with wider political ambitions. During the First World War the Germans promoted the *Flamenpolitiek* (Flemish policy) and enjoyed the support of a minority within the Flemish movement. The majority, instead, stayed away from collaboration, hoping that the Belgian elite would meet some of their demands. As, after the conflict, this did not happen, part of the non-collaborationists radicalised, developing deep anti-Belgian feelings and opening up a gulf within the movement between moderate and more extreme currents that persists today.<sup>544</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s, this ‘new Flemish nationalism’ progressively moved to the racist and fascist right, with the 1931 *Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal-Solidaristen* (Union of Dutch National-Solidarists, Verdinaso)<sup>545</sup> and the 1933 *Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (Flemish National League, VNV) as its major embodiments. The two organisations progressively came to dominate the nationalist camp and during the Second World War some of their members sided with the Nazi occupation.<sup>546</sup> After the war many collaborators were sentenced – some even unjustly, thus sowing the seeds of future Flemish grievances – and Flemish nationalism virtually disappeared.<sup>547</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> As we will see later, the *Vlaams Belang* was founded only in 2004, but it practically coincides both in terms of organisation and propaganda with the the *Vlaams Blok*, that was established as a party in 1979. For matter of simplicity, henceforth we will refer to both of them with the acronym VB.

<sup>544</sup> VOS, LOUIS (1993) ‘Shifting Nationalism: Belgians, Flemish and Walloons’, in TEICH, MIKULAS (ed.) *The National Question in Europe in Historical Context* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press) pp. 133-139.

<sup>545</sup> The Verdinaso rather strove for the creation of the ‘Greater Netherlands’, involving the integration of the Belgian and French Flanders into the Netherlands. Yet, the first stage of this programme did consist in the independence of Flanders.

<sup>546</sup> In 1939, the radical nationalist currents managed to obtain about 15% of votes in Flanders. MUDDE, CAS (2002) *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), pp. 81-82. Vos also argues that in the 1930s the line dividing the radicals from the moderates became less clear and that some of the most important Flemish institutions collaborated with the Germans as well. VOS, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>547</sup> About 53,000 sentences were delivered out of more than 400,000 cases, affecting 0.64% of the Belgian population (0.73% of Flemings, 0.52% of Walloons). MABILLE, XAVIER (2000) *Histoire politique de la Belgique. Facteurs et acteurs de changement* (Bruxelles: CRISP), IVth edition, pp. 308-309. Mudde claims that, in 1954, 1,500 collaborators were still in prison and about 150,000 Belgians were deprived of civil rights. It should also be stressed that, despite being separatist and right-wing, the *Verdinaso* did not take part in collaboration. DELWIT, PASCAL (2009) *La vie politique en Belgique de 1830 à nos jours* (Brussels: Edition de l'Université de Bruxelles), pp. 92-94. For further details on the repression of the collaboration see section 4.4.2.

In the immediate post-Second World War period, despite not being directly framed in Flemings vs. Francophones terms, the Royal Question and the (Second) School War clearly showed the overlaps between some social fractures characterising Belgian society (especially the religious vs. free-thinkers one) and the linguistic divide. The former pertained to the return of King Leopold III after five years of exile. Because of his ambiguous behaviour during the German occupation, the socialists and the liberals (mostly concentrated in Brussels and Wallonia) were against his return, while the Catholics (disproportionally represented in Flanders) supported it. In a referendum held in 1950, the majority of Belgians voted in favour, but the country seemed clearly divided, with most of the 'Noes' coming from francophone areas – although huge variations divided different areas in each linguistic region. After violent riots, the leaders of the major parties convinced the King to abdicate in favour of his son Baudoin in order to counter social unrest. The latter question concerned a clash between religious and secular schools and the principle of freedom of education. A first School War between Liberals and Catholics had taken place between 1879 and 1884. It ended with a law granting public financing to religious schools. In 1950, the Christian-Democratic government of Joseph Pholien increased wages to teachers in private – mostly religious – schools. This and other measures triggered the reaction of Socialists and Liberals who, taking over in coalition in 1954, reversed the policies of the previous executive and tried to extend the network of secular schools, thus arousing the protests of the Catholics. The confrontation lasted until 1958, when an agreement was reached whereby all schools (public and private) would be financed by the state. Although the conflict overtly opposed Catholics and Freethinkers, the community conflict partly overlapped, as the Catholic camp was overrepresented in Flanders, while Francophones made up most of the anti-clerical ranks.<sup>548</sup>

However, at the time, the socio-economic and religious dimensions were perceived as much more salient and they were superseded by the linguistic conflict only in the 1960s. Furthermore, for most of the 1950s, Flemish nationalism still suffered from the stigma acquired after collaboration with the Nazi occupier. The foundation of the *Volksunie* (the People's Union, VU) had brought the Flemish movement back to the political stage in 1954. Some other nationalist organisations, such as the *Vlaamse Concentratie* (the Flemish Concentration) and the *Vlaamse Militanten Orde* (the Order of Flemish Militants), had seen the light of day at the end of the 1940s, but, overall, they had remained marginal phenomena. From 1961 on, instead, the VU began an electoral progression that peaked at the 1971 election, when the party polled 19% of the Flemish vote. Federalist and vocally anti-establishment, the VU polarised the political agenda and contributed to the split of the traditional parties along linguistic lines.<sup>549</sup>

In 1977, under the leadership of Hugo Schiltz, the *Volksunie* decided to enter a government agreement called the Egmont Pact. Despite being approved by the party congress, a considerable share of the militants did not agree with the decision.<sup>550</sup> Some defected and founded the *Vlaamse Nationale Partij* (Flemish National Party, VNP), led by Karel Dillen, which, the following year, joined another splinter group, the *Vlaamse Volkspartij* (Flemish People's Party, VVP) founded by the former VU senator Lode Claes,

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<sup>548</sup> DESCHOUWER, KRIS (2012) *The Politics of Belgium* (Basingstoke: Palgrave) II ed., pp. 9-10; ERK, JAN (2005) 'Sub-State Nationalism and the Left-Right Divide: Critical Junctures in the Formation of National Labour Movements in Belgium', *Nations and Nationalism*, 11(4), p. 563.

<sup>549</sup> WITTE, ELS (2009) 'Increasing Tensions Between the Communities and the Creation of a Federalised Belgium' in WITTE et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 361-369.

<sup>550</sup> DELWIT, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-189.

into an alliance called the *Vlaams Blok*. The alliance scored only about 2% of the Flemish vote, but Dillen managed to obtain a seat in the senate, while Claes did not and broke the alliance. However, many of Claes' fellow members moved to Dillen's VNP that, in the meantime, took the name of the alliance, i.e. *Vlaams Blok*. The VB, thus, officially arose as a rejection of the compromises made by the VU with the Egmont Pact<sup>551</sup> and set out to fight for the establishment of a Flemish Republic from a right-wing platform based on anticommunism, solidarism and demands for amnesty.<sup>552</sup> Yet, the roots of the split reached further back in time, as witnessed by Dillen's clashes with the VU's leadership since the early 1960s.<sup>553</sup>

After a small setback at the 1981 federal election, the party steadily increased its absolute and relative number of votes at any single poll until becoming the largest Flemish party in 2004, with 24.2% of the regional vote (Figure 4.1).<sup>554</sup> This was in part due to Dillen's decision, in the mid-1980s, to restyle and broaden the appeal of the organisation. Through 'Operation Rejuvenation', the VB co-opted members from satellite student organisations and, with them, acquired new arguments and approaches. Future leaders such as Gerolf Annemans, Filip Dewinter and Franck Vanhecke were recruited and shifted the party's attention to problems such as immigration, multiculturalism and security.<sup>555</sup> The change was not painless. In December 1988, long-standing members accused some of the newcomers, especially the group around Dewinter, of being 'Lepenist' and to side-line the nationalist question in favour of other concerns.<sup>556</sup> Yet, Dillen backed Dewinter forcing the dissenting minority to leave. About a year earlier, the party had also profited from the adherence of the Flemish branch of the anti-tax populist party *Respect voor Arbeid en Democratie* (Respect for Work and Democracy, RAD), which created even more room for the VB on the political right.<sup>557</sup>

Until then, the VB had been a phenomenon limited to the city of Antwerp. Rejuvenated and with a new slogan, *Eigen Volk Eerst* (Own People First), the party made its first breakthrough outside the port city in 1988 and 1989.<sup>558</sup> The 1991 federal elections marked a historical watershed as the movement overtook the VU on what has been called 'Black

<sup>551</sup> These consisted of the acceptance of language facilities for the Francophones in the Flemish area around Brussels as well as the set up of the Brussels region.

<sup>552</sup> ERK, JAN (2005) 'From Vlaams Blok to Vlaams Belang: The Belgian Far-Right Renames Itself', *Western European Politics*, 2(3), p. 496. It might seem odd that in 1978 amnesty was still an issue within the Flemish movement. Yet, it was a high priority in the VB's programme. See section 4.2.4 for further details.

<sup>553</sup> GOVAERT, SERGE (1992) *Le Vlaams Blok et ses dissidences*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, n. 1365, pp. 4-12.

<sup>554</sup> For details about electoral results see ABRAMOWICZ, MANUEL and HAELSTERMAN, WIM (1997) *La représentation électorale des partis d'extrême droite*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, n. 1567-1568; FANIEL, JEAN (2001) *L'extrême droite après le scrutin de 1999 et 2000. Représentation électorale et implantation*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* n. 1709-1710; PAUWELS, TEUN (2011) 'Explaining the strange decline of the populist radical right Vlaams Belang in Belgium: The impact of permanent opposition', *Acta Politica*, 46(1), pp. 60-82.

<sup>555</sup> For instance, in 1987, Annemans took Dillen's seat in Parliament and a youth organisation, the *Vlaams Blok Jongeren* (VBJ) was founded, with Dewinter as leader.

<sup>556</sup> With this term the dissenters made reference to the French *Front National* (FN) and its focus on immigration. The main problem with this association was that the FN also represented a strongly centralising force, denying the existence of national minorities on French soil and it was therefore at odds with the Flemish nationalist denunciation of the cultural francophone homogenisation carried out by the Belgian state.

<sup>557</sup> MUDDE, *op. cit.*, 88-93.

<sup>558</sup> GOVAERT (1992), *op. cit.*, pp. 12-17; ABRAMOWICZ and HAELSTERMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Sunday'.<sup>559</sup> All main traditional parties immediately agreed not to enter into government coalitions at any administrative level with the VB, setting up a *cordon sanitaire* that has lasted until today.<sup>560</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the 1990s, the VB kept growing, both geographically, with only West Flanders and Limburg as areas of limited penetration, and socially, by tapping rich semi-rural constituencies in the 2000s in addition to the lower-middle class urban ones of the early 1990s.<sup>561</sup>

Still in the 1990s, the party overcame three other major challenges. First, it managed to consolidate its strength on the ground, building up a structure of about 150 local sections (out of 308 municipalities in Flanders).<sup>562</sup> Second, it completed the party's ideological outlook by means of a series of thematic congresses leading to specific publications. Third, and probably most importantly, it dealt with Dillen's succession without major infighting between the two main opposing factions: the nationalist one around Gerolf Annemans and the populist one around Filip Dewinter. Here, the former leader played a major role by designating a neutral candidate, his fellow MEP Franck Vanhecke, as his successor.<sup>563</sup>

The party's progression seemed unstoppable, but just as it recorded its best score, in 2004, it was disbanded. The Centre for Equality of Opportunity (*Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen*) and the Flemish wing of the League of Human Rights (*Liga voor de Mensenrechten*) brought three organisations<sup>564</sup> affiliated with the VB to court on the basis of the Moureaux law against racism and xenophobia. They were accused of advocating racist discrimination. Initially, both the 46th chamber of the Brussels judiciary and the Court of Appeal of Brussels declared the case inadmissible because of their lack of competence over the matter. Yet, the case was re-examined by the Court of Appeal of Ghent, which found the three organisations guilty and sentenced them to pay an administrative fee. The VB then appealed referring to article 3 of the Belgian constitution on freedom of expression. The Flemish Court of Appeal rejected the claim and, on the contrary, confirmed the sentence of the previous court ordering the party to dissolve and reorganise itself with a programme in accordance with the law in order to remain eligible for public subsidies. Some days before the judgement, the party had already softened the most extreme points of its programme and the transition to the new *Vlaams Belang* was extremely smooth, also because changing name is quite common among political parties in Belgium. Among the Francophones, the ruling received positive comments, while most

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<sup>559</sup> The VB obtained 10.3% of the Flemish vote against the 9.3% of the VU. GOVAERT, SERGE (2001) *Les griffes du lion. Le nationalisme flamand à la veille de 2002* (Brussels: Labor) p. 25.

<sup>560</sup> MUDDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-93. A first unsuccessful attempt at drawing a quarantine line around the party had already been made in 1989.

<sup>561</sup> FANIEL, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>562</sup> ABRAMOWICZ and HAELSTERMAN (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 5. Unfortunately, we did not find more recent data. Nevertheless, as the party kept growing until 2004 and experienced its first major setback in 2009 (although the 12.4% recorded in 2010 is still higher than 12.3% scored in 1995) it is unlikely that the number of sections significantly shrunk. This might however have been the case after the most recent electoral defeat in 2014, when the VB obtained only 6% of the regional vote. The strong organisation of the VB is confirmed by Mudde, who, however, points out a low number of militants (about 10,000 in 2000), and Swyngedouw and Ivaldi, who compare it to the model of the Stalinist communist parties. MUDDE, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-93. SWYNGEDOUW, MARC and IVALDI, GILLES (2001) 'The extreme right-wing utopia in Belgium and France: The ideology of the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the French Front national', *West European Politics*, 24(3), p. 2.

<sup>563</sup> ERK (2005) 'From', *op. cit.* p. 498.

<sup>564</sup> These were the *Vlaamse Concentratie* (Flemish Concentration), the *Nationalistisch Vormingscentrum* (a training centre for militants and officials) and the *Nationalistische Omroepstichting* (the party's broadcasting company).

Flemish observers were sceptical. Many feared that it would do nothing but reinforce the VB's position, as it would fuel its anti-establishment and martyr-like rhetoric. Some also argued that the ruling only enabled the party to draw people's attention on a long-sought shift to a less extreme and more respectable image.<sup>565</sup>

Such an attempt could not prevent the rise on the Flemish nationalist right of a more moderate and respectable adversary, the N-VA. While the VB emerged as a reaction to the VU's drift towards a 'neither left nor right' moderate nationalism, the N-VA represents its transformation into a clearly separatist and conservative party.

Electoral speaking, the decline of the VU already began in 1971 when it reached its apogee. Politically, however, it became evident in the 1990s, when, after having been overtaken by the VB, the VU kept losing ground. The sense of emergency is clear from the slogan of the 1995 regional elections – *Vlaanderen zonder de Volksunie? 300,000 maal nee* (Flanders without the People's Union? 300,000 times no) – in which the leader, Bert Anciaux, declared that he would leave the party if it did not receive at least 300,000 votes. While Anciaux won his bet, this closing of ranks did not stop the VU's decline. Two factions slowly arose: one, led by Anciaux, thought that the community conflict was no longer relevant and the party had to move to a post-nationalist platform; the other, led by Geert Bourgeois, believed instead that the nationalist agenda had to be radicalised. Both realised that with the transformation of Belgium into a federation the task of the VU had been accomplished and the party had to either change or die.<sup>566</sup> After a long series of minor clashes, the final showdown came with the voting of the Lambermont bis agreement in 2001, which modified the way in which regions and communities would be financed – with the faction behind Bourgeois rejecting it in the Chamber of Representatives because it did not yet ensure enough fiscal autonomy for Flanders. Irremediably divided, the party organised an internal referendum to determine what faction would control it, with three groups running: the *Toekomstgroep* (Future Group), led by Anciaux; the *Vlaams-Nationaal* (Flemish National) led by Bourgeois; and the *Niet splitsen* (No Split). The winner would inherit all the assets of the party. With 47.18% of votes, the *Vlaams-Nationaal* group triumphed. On October 13, 2001, the N-VA was founded, with Bourgeois as president, and declared to be separatist, republican, liberal and opposed to the ethnic nationalism of the VB.<sup>567</sup>

The N-VA tried to run alone at the 2003 federal elections but, after a poor performance (only one seat in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives) and the introduction of a 5% threshold to access the Flemish Parliament, it joined in an alliance with the *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* (Christian-Democrats and Flemish, CD&V) for the 2004 regional ones. It obtained 6 seats (out of 124), entered the regional government and largely influenced the attitude of its major partner by radicalising the alliance's

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<sup>565</sup> ERK (2005) 'From', *op. cit.*, pp. 494-495. In this connection Erk points out that the shift began long before: 'Party leaders are always well-dressed, they speak proper Dutch, they participate in family events, they tend to be courteous to their opponents in debates; and recently they have been careful to bring the spotlight to their new female members'. *Ibidem*, p. 498.

<sup>566</sup> In a wider sense, talking about the Flemish movement, of which the VU was the mainstream expression, Kris Deschouwer has argued that: 'Ce n'est plus un mouvement, mais un état-membre d'une fédération. On peut même dire que le mouvement flamand se meurt, puisque l'état flamand a pris le relais'. DESCHOUWER, KRIS (1999-2000) 'Comprendre le nationalisme flamand', *Fédéralisme et régionalisme*, 1.

<sup>567</sup> GOVAERT, SERGE (2002) *La Volksunie. Du déclin à la disparition (1993-2001)*, Cahier hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 1748, pp. 5-32.

demands.<sup>568</sup> The two parties ran together again in the 2007 federal elections, scoring 31.4% of the Flemish vote, with the N-VA receiving 5 seats (out of 150).<sup>569</sup> Again, the party's intransigence and demands, some of which were inscribed in the alliance's programme, made the negotiations for the government agreement quite hard, contributing to the longest *impasse* in the history of the country. The deal was reached 194 days after the elections and obtained only the passive support of the N-VA that, in any case, quickly withdrew it in 2008.<sup>570</sup>

In the meantime, in 2004, Bart De Wever had replaced Geert Bourgeois as chairman, in a move that, according to some, explains much of the N-VA's later success. In January and February 2009, De Wever appeared on a popular TV quiz, the *Slimste Man ter Wereld* (The Cleverest Man in the World), beating for many weeks his opponents in a game based on general knowledge. He became thus very popular, even among those who did not share his ideas, especially because of his cynic humour. Many think that such a widely broadcast show helped the party succeed in the following 2009 and 2010 elections, when, running alone, it won 13.51% in the Flemish election, and 28% in the federal one, becoming the first party in Belgium.<sup>571</sup> This trend has been confirmed at the recent municipal elections, in November 2013. De Wever won 38% of votes in the city of Antwerp, of which he is the current mayor, and the party went from being almost inexistent in 2006 to laying down roots in the entire Flemish territory with an average score of about 30%.<sup>572</sup> More concretely, De Wever has striven to consolidate the party's presence on the ground as well as to refine and widen its policy proposals. He has also put great emphasis on the need for a smooth transition to independence through an intermediate step towards a confederation. The party thus came to the 2014 federal election<sup>573</sup> ahead of all others in the opinion surveys. Its primacy was confirmed at the polls where it scored 32% of the regional vote, but, because of the specific configuration of the results, it did not become the unavoidable coalition partner that it wished to be in order to impose its own line. It, however, agreed to join a 'Flemish-dominated' federal coalition with the Flemish Christian-Democrats (CD&V) and Liberals (OpenVLD) along with the francophone liberals of the *Mouvement réformateur*.<sup>574</sup> The VB, in contrast, obtained 5.9% and recorded one of its worst performances ever.<sup>575</sup> Hence, by filling a gap in the nationalist camp between the loyalist traditional parties and the extreme-right, the N-VA has undoubtedly contributed to the decline of the *Blokkers* since 2004.<sup>576</sup> What has not declined, however, is the overall nationalist (and after the demise of the VU even separatist) vote in Flanders (Figure 4.1).

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<sup>568</sup> DELWIT, *op. cit.*, p. 266-267.

<sup>569</sup> The alliance obtained 30 seats altogether. The number of seats apportioned to the N-VA depended on the balance of power between the two parties, of which the N-VA was the minor one at the time.

<sup>570</sup> SINARDET, DAVE (2008) 'Belgian Federalism put to the test: the 2007 Belgian Federal Elections and their aftermath', *West European Politics*, 31(5), pp. 1016-1032.

<sup>571</sup> ROCHTUS, DIRK (2012) 'The Rebirth of Flemish Nationalism: Assessing the Impact of N-VA Chairman Bart De Wever's Charisma', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 12(2), pp. 268-285.

<sup>572</sup> STROOBANTS, JEAN-PIERRE (2012) 'Belgique: après leur percée, les séparatistes flamands pensent déjà aux législatives', *Le Monde*, 14 Octobre.

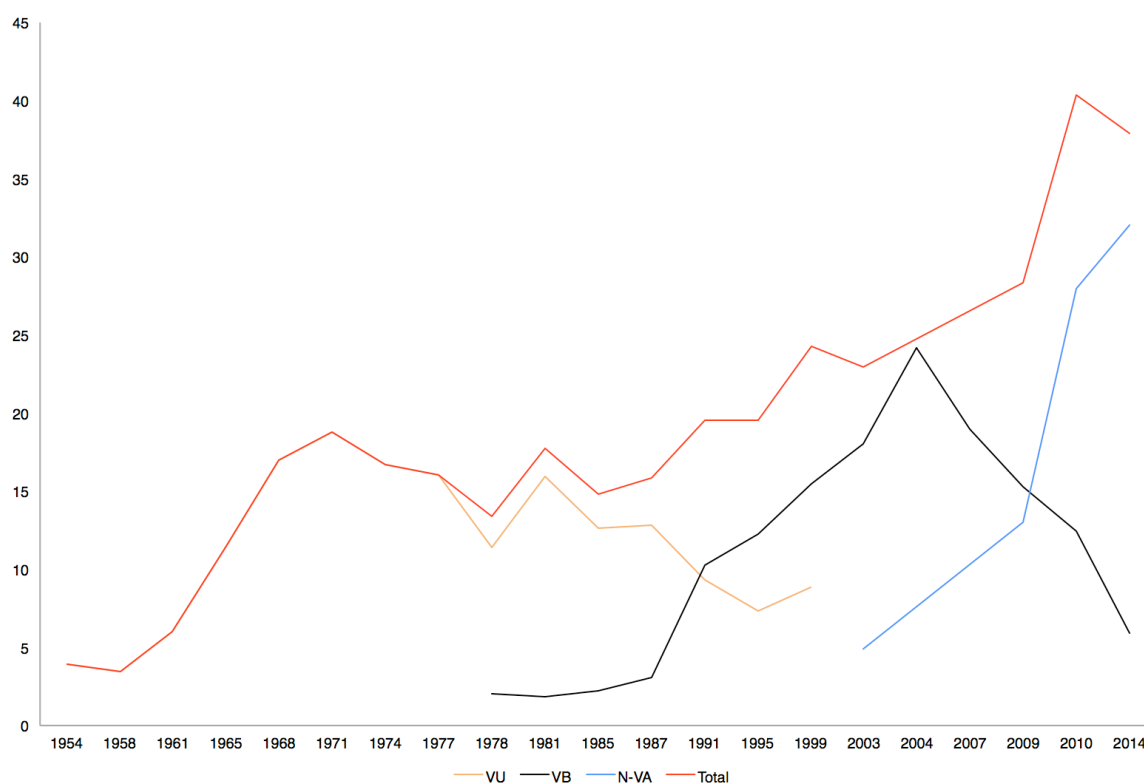
<sup>573</sup> The May 2014 federal election also coincided with the regional and European ones.

<sup>574</sup> The N-VA also rules at the regional level in coalition with the CD&V and the OpenVLD. The party's former leader, Geert Bourgeois, is Minister-President.

<sup>575</sup> Electoral data from the Belgian government: [http://elections2014.belgium.be/fr/vla/results/results\\_graph\\_VLR00000.html](http://elections2014.belgium.be/fr/vla/results/results_graph_VLR00000.html) (accessed on September 19, 2014).

<sup>576</sup> PAUWELS, *op. cit.*

**Figure 4.1 – Evolution of the Total Nationalist Vote in Flanders, 1954-2014\* (percentage of regional vote)**



\* The 2004 and 2007 results of the N-VA have not been taken into account because obtained in a cartel with the CD&V.

Sources: DELWIT, *op. cit.*, pp. 260 and 290; TEUN, *op. cit.*, p. 62; BEYENS, STEFANIE, DESCHOUWER, KRIS, VAN HAUTE, EMILIE and VERTHE, TOM (2013) *The Rise and Success of a (not so new) Party: the N-VA in Flanders*, Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 29 August- 1 September, p. 2; CHAMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES OF BELGIUM (n. d.) *Election 2014: List Results*, available at: [http://polling2014.belgium.be/en/cha/seat/seat\\_CKR00000.html](http://polling2014.belgium.be/en/cha/seat/seat_CKR00000.html) (accessed on May 8, 2015).



## 4.2 Discourse and Strategy: the VB

As in the other case studies, we review, here, the main arguments made in the VB's political propaganda since the party's foundation. This part is divided into six sections respectively dealing with the reasons for the creation of the party, its economic grievances, the claims of political marginalisation, its right-wing beliefs, its ethnopluralist ideology and the issue of Europe. In order to minimise overlaps, the cultural definition of the Flemish nation provided by the party has not been dealt with in a dedicated section, but rather in the sections concerning the fight for principles (4.2.1), the relationship with the Francophones within the Belgian state (4.2.3) and ethnopluralism (4.2.5).

### 4.2.1 Radical Nationalism and the Fight for Principles

At the beginning of its *Grondbeginselen* (Charter of Principles) the VB traced the origins of the movement both as a consequence of a long-lasting process and of a recent historical accident. The former consisted in the steady drift of the VU towards the left side of the political spectrum and ever closer to the establishment parties. Many had warned against the abandoning of the fight for principles – argued the VB – and the transformation of the VU into an organisation interested more in power than in the well being of the people, but these voices had remained unheard. Hence, the recent historical accident: the VU's acceptance of the Egmont Pact that marked the betrayal of the Flemish movement. In the VB's mind, the VU had definitively become a Belgo-Flemish party where the fight for principles had been side-lined for a few apparent victories. The VB thus arose as a fierce reaction to the Egmont pact and the tolerant VU.<sup>577</sup>

This account is consistent with the content of the articles published right after the split on the pages of *De Vlaams Nationalist* (The Flemish Nationalist), the monthly paper of the VB's predecessor, the *Vlaamse Nationale Partij* (The Flemish National Party, VNP), and in fact constitutes the main subject treated there. Karel Dillen, for instance, opened the first issue declaring that 'the Volksunie as a party, nationalistically, spiritually, morally and humanly, committed suicide'.<sup>578</sup> The main problem lay in that, by accepting to participate in the Egmont Pact, the VU, which until then had maintained an uncompromising attitude according to the slogan 'done with give and yield',<sup>579</sup> caved in to the demands of the francophone parties in order to reach the agreement.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> VB (VLAAMS BLOK) (1990) *Grondbeginselen. Manifest van het rechtse Vlaams-nationalisme* (Brussels: Vlaams Blok), p. 3. Informally called the 'Oranje Boekje' (the orange booklet), because of the colour of its cover, this charter was first drafted at the end of the 1970s and then slightly modified in 1990. Criticism against the VU remained a mainstay of the party's rhetoric in later years. See for instance: WOUTERS, LEO (1982) 'Vlaanderen tussen links en rechts', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 3., March, p. 4; DILLEN, KAREL (1989) 'Brussels Verkocht', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 2; ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1991) 'Gedaan met geven en Volksunie', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 10, November, p. 5; VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (2000) 'Volksunie weer in nesten', *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 3, March, p. 15.

<sup>578</sup> DILLEN, KAREL (1977) 'Zelfmoord van een partij', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n.1, December.

<sup>579</sup> Idem. See also VNP (VLAAMSE NATIONALE PARTIJ) (1978) 'Art. 26 of de onnoemelijke vernedering', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 12, October; FAVERE, PATRICK (1979) 'Sanering van de staatsfinancien voor de VU?', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 4, April; DILLEN, KAREL (1979) 'Tussenkomst in het parlementair debat over de regeringsverklaring', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 5, May.

<sup>580</sup> These mainly consisted in the language facilities for the Francophones in the Flemish area around Brussels and the acceptance of the Brussels region.

As a consequence, the VNP, and later the VB, aimed at becoming the true voice of the Flemish movement. It wanted to be ‘a radical, clear-cut nationalist and solidaristic right wing party’ with a pronounced a-Belgian and anti-Belgian character.<sup>581</sup> The fight for principles was highlighted as a fundamental feature distinguishing it from the other parties.<sup>582</sup> Some years later, Dillen used the term ‘marginals’ to describe the true nationalists. He presented them as people who had been isolated by the rest of society – and especially the rest of the Flemish movement – but were proud of their condition, as this was the sign of their higher moral status in a country inhabited by corrupted individuals.<sup>583</sup> In its first years, thus, the party's rhetoric had a highly principled content and also made direct appeal to Flemish youth offering them an ideal to fight for.<sup>584</sup>

The VB's criticism was as much against the Belgian establishment as against the Flemish nationalist elite. In the late 1980s, the party argued that if Belgium had been imposed upon and lived off the Flemings' back, it was largely because of Flemish impotence, tolerance and cowardice.<sup>585</sup> It further suggested that most Flemish representatives were affected by an inferiority complex (*minderwaardigheidsdenken*) reflected, for instance, in the idea, shared by many, that in return for independence Flanders had to give up Brussels to the Francophones. Again, it was mirrored in the belief, prevalent since the Second World War, that ‘a Flemish state, without Belgium, was deemed unreachable’.<sup>586</sup> Yet, it also claimed that the ‘defeatist mentality’ (*verslagenendenken*) diffused among the Flemish elites had been dropped by the people already in the 1950s, when the country reached the brink of civil war on the Royal Question and the School War. That popular pressure led to constitutional change, but – the party stressed – any change short of independence would be ineffective. Federalism and confederalism were defensive actions of the Belgian establishment, ‘bad compromises’ sold as victories and aimed at preserving injustice. According to the VB, thus, there was, and still is, no alternative to the establishment of an independent Flemish state.

Nationalism has been all along the defining feature of the party, which has argued that the right to self-determination corresponds to the duty of self-determination. The national community prevails over the state and the latter serves the interests of the former, not vice-versa. Thus, the nationalism of the VB is an ethnic nationalism that in its early years sought the reunification of the entire Dutch nation into a natural federation.<sup>587</sup> This pan-Dutch project, however, was increasingly less emphasised later on. Already in 1990, texts such as *Onafhankelijkheid, moet en kan* (Independence we must and can) and *Zeggen wat*

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<sup>581</sup> DILLEN (1977) *op. cit.*

<sup>582</sup> DILLEN, KAREL (1978) ‘De Betekenis van 17 december. De Vlaams-Nationalistische taak van het Vlaams Blok’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 1, January.

<sup>583</sup> DILLEN, KAREL (1987) *Wij, Marginalen* (Antwerp: Uitgeverij AMU), pp. 7-17. There, he wrote ‘there was a time when the Flemish nationalists totally were the pariahs, the outcasts, the spat at...the blackshirts’. While referring to the condition of the radical nationalist right after the Second World War, later in the text, he clearly compared these to the radicals of the *Vlaams Blok*. One of the major points made by Dillen is that the radicals could not leave to the Christian Democrats and other establishment parties the monopoly over symbolic ceremonies such as the Pilgrimage to the Yser, where the casualties of the Great War were commemorated, and the *Zangfeest* (festival of the Flemish song).

<sup>584</sup> VAN HAVER (1978) ‘Oproep’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 1, January.

<sup>585</sup> VB (1988) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>586</sup> VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS and VERREYCKEN, WIM (1990) *Onafhankelijkheid, moet en kan. Deel II, Brussel and state reform*, Vlaams Belang, p. 85.

<sup>587</sup> VB (1988) *op. cit.*, pp. 5 and 15. See also VB (1981) ‘Kongresbesluiten’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, March, p. 3.

*u denkt* (Saying what you think) made no mention of pan-Dutch ideas. Likewise, these did not appear in the 1992 brochure for the English-speaking public ‘The VB: Facts and Objectives’, while in the 1997 *100 vragen aan en antwoorden van Vlaams-Blokpropagandisten* (100 questions and answers from Vlaams Blok propagandists) the party suggested a solid confederal structure with the Netherlands based on autonomy and a network of treaties, but also sharply criticised ‘all sort of ethical and social tendencies that still have the upper hands in the Netherlands’.<sup>588</sup> Finally, in more recent publications the party only talked about strengthening the relations with the Netherlands after independence.<sup>589</sup>

This is not the only thing that has changed in the party rhetoric. Through the years the VB has widened and refined its policy proposals, as recognised by Dillen himself in 1990: ‘the Vlaams Blok was originally created as a protest against the degeneration of the Volksunie’, but it later ‘entered upon a struggle against the great problems that threaten our people: the relaxation of the Flemish movement, the decline of the quality of education, the increasing invasion of foreigners, the murder of the unborn child, the pollution on all territory, ever increasing crime and the scourge of drugs’.<sup>590</sup> Until very recently, the ‘fight for principles’ has remained one of the party’s brands. This has been furthered by the decision to remain in opposition and play a ‘whip’ role, i.e., to force ruling parties to adopt or debate part of its programme by means of its electoral power.<sup>591</sup> In the mid-2000s, one could perceive a slight change towards a more functional and less principled position. For instance, in 2005, one could read that independence ‘is no silly romanticism but a clear choice for an efficient governance, for a policy that fits the Flemish interests and lamentations’.<sup>592</sup> This change was probably due to the VB’s will to enlarge its electoral support after the peak reached at the 2004 elections. Yet, competition from the more moderate N-VA, since at least 2007, has upset the VB’s leadership, which has alternated offers of collaboration with other nationalist parties – mainly the N-VA and the *Lijst Dedecker* – in view of obtaining substantial increases of autonomy for Flanders<sup>593</sup> and attempts at setting itself apart by claiming to be the only real alternative to the traditional

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<sup>588</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF and BUILTINCK, KOEN et. al. (1997) *100 vragen aan en antwoorden van Vlaams-Blokpropagandisten*, Vlaams Blok, p. 107. Here, the party referred to liberal policies and attitudes concerning drug use and prostitution adopted in the Netherlands.

<sup>589</sup> See for instance: CLAEYS, PHILIP (2001) ‘Heelnerlands pleidooi’, *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 5, May, p. 25; LEEN, LUDO and VAN DEN TROOST, TOM (2005) *Vlaamse onafhankelijkheid, 10 vraagen en antwoorden. Deel II*, Vlaams Belang, p. 25.

<sup>590</sup> VB (1990) *Zeggen wat u denkt*, p. 1. See also DE MAN, FILIP (1991) ‘The tijdbom tikt verder’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, pp. 6-7.

<sup>591</sup> See for instance: ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1991) ‘Uit Zelf-Verdediging’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 10, November, p. 4; VAN HAUTHEM and VERREYCKEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92; VANHECKE, FRANK (2001) ‘Het Vlaams Blok is en blijft een strijdpartij’, *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 3, March, p. 3; ER (1994) ‘De Slag om Antwerpen’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 11, November, p. 10; ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK et. al., *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54; VANHECKE, FRANK (2000) “‘Een revolutionaire partij: de enige partij die opneemt voor de belangen van de kleine man’”, *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 5, May, p. 2. In the last three texts, however, the party started contemplating the idea of being in power, although its members made clear that they would not compromise their major principles.

<sup>592</sup> LEEN, LUDO and VAN DEN TROOST, TOM (2005) *175 jaar België, 10 vraagen en antwoorden over dit kunstmatige land. Deel I*, Vlaams Belang, p. 3.

<sup>593</sup> JORIS, MARC (2007) “‘De moeilijkste verkiezingen ooit’”, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 7-8, July/August, p. 12; VB (2008) ‘Vraggesprek met Frank Vanhecke en Bruno Valkeniers’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 3, March, pp. 6-7; VB (2010) “‘Wij zijn de stok achter de deur!’”, *VB Magazine*, n. 7-9, July-August, pp. 9-13.

establishment – in which its nationalist rivals were quickly included – and the true defender of the Flemish nation and Flemish independence.<sup>594</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Geldstroom and Prosperous Flanders

Claims of economic exploitation were not new in Flemish politics. The myth of *Arm Vlaanderen* (Poor Flanders), whereby Flanders was being kept poor by an indifferent and Francophone-dominated Belgian state, was already widespread before the reversal of the economic relations between the north and the south of the country.<sup>595</sup> At the end of the 1970s, however, the subject took on a new life, also thanks to academic works on fiscal transfers of some Flemish research centres.<sup>596</sup> The economic victimisation of the region thus assumed the contours of a fiscal exploitation carried out by lazy socialist Walloons and inefficient Brussels institutions.<sup>597</sup>

This theme lies at the core of the VB's discourse, as recently recognised by the party itself: 'Flemish nationalism is not to be reduced to a mere issue about pennies. Nevertheless, social security, public debt, prosperity, taxes and unemployment are important matters about which most Flemings feel directly concerned. The financial transfers therefore regularly form the core of the Flemish national argument'.<sup>598</sup> Unsurprisingly, this theme was already prominent at the first Congress of the party on March 22-23, 1980. There, making extensive reference to the academic studies mentioned above, the VB attempted the first calculations of the *geldstroom* (the flow of money) from Flanders to Wallonia. Its members claimed that while Walloon wages kept pace with the Flemish ones, productivity did not, which caused higher unemployment in the southern region and made businesses dependent on subsidies. The amount of the net transfer was difficult to calculate because – the party argued – the government did not provide clear data, but it was probably around 50 billion<sup>599</sup> Belgian francs a year for the period 1974-1978 (equal to approximately 2.5 billion 2005 euros).<sup>600</sup> The figure has varied overtime and current VB figures estimate it at around 12 billion euros per year, tantamount to 7% of

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<sup>594</sup> VB (2007) 'Volk, Word staat!', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 7-8, July/August, p. 6; VANHECKE, FRANK (2007) 'Anti-Vlaamse Racisme', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 10, October, p. 2; VANHECKE, FRANK (2007) 'Weg met die "realpolitici"', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 2; VAN HAUTHHEM, JORIS (2009) 'Niet Uitgeteld', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 7-8, July-August, p. 6-7; VB (2011) 'Akkord Di Rupo is nachtmerrie', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 12, December, pp. 26-29.

<sup>595</sup> BOEHME, OLIVIER (2008) 'Economic Nationalism in Flanders before the Second World War', *Nations and Nationalism*, 14(3), p. 558.

<sup>596</sup> See section 4.4.1 for further details.

<sup>597</sup> Michel Quévit indicates the statements of the Christian-Democrat leader Eric Van Rompuy in 1979 as the beginning of such a mainstream discourse. QUEVIT, MICHEL (2010) *Flandres-Wallonie. Quelle solidarité?* (Brussels: Couleurs livres). Yet, similar arguments were on display in the articles of *De Vlaams Nationalist* at about the same time. See for instance VNP (1979) 'The laatste slag?', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n.1, January; VNP (1979) 'Sinterclaes op bezoek in Wallonie', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 3, March; FAVERE, PATRICK (1979) 'Sanering', *op. cit.*; FAVERE, PATRICK (1979) 'Barst de Belgische Frank?', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 8, September.

<sup>598</sup> VB (2009) *VLeerst!*, regional election manifesto, pp. 3.

<sup>599</sup> Here, and henceforth, we use the term billion in the currently widespread meaning of a thousand millions, rather than the old British meaning of a million millions.

<sup>600</sup> VAN GORP, GUI, TRUYENS, EDWIN, DILLEN, MARIJKE, GERITS, LUDO and VAN RAEMDONCK, FRED (1980) *Vlaams-Nationale ekonomie: Financiële perspectieven voor een zelfstandig Vlaanderen*, First Vlaams Blok Congress, 22-23 March, pp. 1-4. Our calculations based on Eurostat historical exchange rates and GDP deflator data for Belgium.

the Flemish GDP and – as the party likes to recall – much more than what West Germany has paid to East Germany.<sup>601</sup> In 1992 the VB published its most complete brochure on the subject under the eloquent title *De kostprijs van België* (The Cost Price of Belgium). There, the party argued that the transfers from Flanders and Brussels to Wallonia amounted to 418 billion francs (about 11.6 billion 2005 euros), which meant that each Wallon received 130,000 francs per year (about 3,600 2005 euros).<sup>602</sup> This figure could be broken down in the following components: social security, interest on the debt, and other grants, mainly concerning the subsidies to ‘uncompetitive’ Walloon companies.<sup>603</sup> The brochure thus concluded that ‘the Belgian Treasury and the Belgian social security are a kind of efficient draining system for Flemish resources and Flemish energy’. It then continued saying: ‘add to this the incredible arrogance of the Walloons, in particular their Socialist Party. They are not satisfied with Flemish pennies, but on top of this they want constant Flemish genuflections, humiliations’.<sup>604</sup> It even suggested that without the Flemish resources the Socialist Party would not think twice to break up Belgium, since the country would be of no value to the Walloons anymore.

In the first years of the party’s existence, the claim against state subsidies to southern enterprises featured quite high in its propaganda. Already the VNP had complained that the state bought with Flemish money shares of bankrupt Walloon steel companies at unreasonable prices to the advantage of Walloon and Brussels profiteers.<sup>605</sup> This concern, however, lost salience over time to the advantage of the skyrocketing public debt and the costs of social security, which were also deemed to lie at the roots of the rise in unemployment experienced by the country between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Furthermore, whereas the party had denounced the ‘astronomic proportions’ of the debt already in 1979,<sup>606</sup> the issue became much more inflammatory amidst the corruption scandals of the 1990s. In 1992, for instance, the party denounced the fact that Belgium had ‘a dazzling (sic) national debt of 300,000 million US\$. The traditional parties’ politicians are not servants of the people. They primarily serve their party, their clan, their trade union. Political appointments of civil servants, embezzlement of public funds and other malpractices are rampant’.<sup>607</sup> Similarly, in 1993, it declared that ‘from its original function

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<sup>601</sup> VB (2007) *Toekomstplan voor Vlaanderen, federal election manifesto*, p. 4; VB (2009) ‘Wil u 2.000 euro extra verdienen?’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 5.

<sup>602</sup> The Brussels contribution accounted for only 48 billion francs. The brochure was re-published, with basically the same structure and only updated data, in 2003 and 2009. The only major difference lies in that the 1992 version (and 1997 reprint) did not contain a list of countries by GDP per capita that was added to the following two versions in order to show that an independent Flanders would be one of the 10 richest countries in the world. JOSEPH, BART and LEEN, LUDO (2003) *De kostprijs van België. De financiële plundering van Vlaanderen*, VB; VB (2009) *Vlaams Geld, in Vlaamse Handen*. Data in euro are our calculations based on Eurostat historical exchange rates and GDP deflator data for Belgium.

<sup>603</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF and SMOUT, WILLY (1997) *De kostprijs van België. Nord-Zuid-transfers in België anno 1992* (Brussels: Vlaams Blok) II edition.

<sup>604</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15. Similar claims had been made before though. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Belgian state the VB claimed that ‘Belgium means a century and a half of theft to the disadvantage of the Flemish community. How many hundred billions have been stolen from the Flemish community is incalculable, not even approximately’. VB (1980) ‘België barst, opdat Vlaanderen leve’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 1, January.

<sup>605</sup> VNP (1979) ‘Sinterclaes’, *op. cit.*; See also: FEVERE, PATRICK (1979) ‘Barst’, *op. cit.*; LAITEM, JOHAN (1980) ‘Cijfers om bij te tellen’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 3, March.

<sup>606</sup> FAVERE (1979) ‘Sanering’, *op. cit.*; for similar criticism during the 1980s see: CARPELS, HANS (1986) ‘Hakken’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, p. 1.

<sup>607</sup> VB (1992) *The Vlaams Blok: Facts and Objectives*, p. 17.

of guarantor, the state has become a kind of exploiter<sup>608</sup> and argue that, in such a context, the independence of Flanders would put an end to endemic corruption, enabling the Flemish Republic to use the resources wasted by the Belgian state in order to promote a much more effective employment policy.<sup>609</sup> After having disappeared for slightly longer than a decade, the issues of the budget deficit and the public debt re-emerged on the wake of the financial and debt crisis. The VB thus started anew predicting a financial doom scenario and describing independence as the only way out of the crisis and the ‘suffocating Belgian straightjacket’.<sup>610</sup>

Yet, Belgium has not been the sole culprit. As previous quotes have shown, according to the party, the Walloons, and the Socialist Party in particular, have been deemed responsible because they have not accepted the idea that one should pay for one’s debts and live on one’s own resources. Being used to public help and subsidies, they have remained prisoners of short-term economic thinking and have built an unsustainable system.<sup>611</sup> Thus, for instance, in 1983, Dillen claimed that ‘Flanders thus becomes ever more the milk cow of a Wallonia that in a Khomeinist [*Komeinyaanse* (sic)] backwardness seeks all its welfare in a wasteful statism’.<sup>612</sup> What the VB has consistently implied with this account is that the economic difference between the two regions is culturally-driven and Wallonia’s future lies in the Walloons’ hands: if they drop their socialist mindset and work more, they will be better off eventually.<sup>613</sup> Flanders, in contrast, has been the engine of the country’s economy, thanks to its hard-working population and its competitive small and medium sized enterprises.<sup>614</sup> Nevertheless, ‘it gets poorer because of an excessive

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<sup>608</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1993) ‘Grondslagen van een sociale politiek’, in VB, Congres: ‘Arm Vlaanderen?’, Hasselt, 5 December, p. 19. Later the VB reported the findings of a study of the European Central Bank saying that the efficiency of the Belgian government was 20% lower than the European average and that the same services could be provided with 35% fewer resources. VB (2005) Synthesetekst - t.b.v. het economisch congres van het Vlaams Belang - ‘Ondernemend Vlaanderen: welvaart voor iedereen!’, VB Congress, 26 November, p. 21.

<sup>609</sup> WYMEERSCH, FRANS (1993) ‘Tewerkstelling: een nationalistisch thema’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 6, June, p. 10.

<sup>610</sup> PAS, BARBARA (2009) ‘Financieel doemscenario’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 5-6, May-June, p. 11. See also: VB (2010) ‘Uitstel als oplossing’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, pp. 18-19; and VALKENIERS, BRUNO (2011) ‘Grieks scenario’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 12, December, p. 3.

<sup>611</sup> LAITEM (1980) *op. cit.*; PEETERS, JAAK (1982) ‘Devaluatie het zoveelste bewijs’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 3, March, p. 2.

<sup>612</sup> DILLEN, KAREL (1983) ‘Wij staan niet alleen’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 4. It is not clear why Dillen here chose the regime of Ayatollah Khomeini as an example of backwardness. This might be due to the VB’s criticism of Islam, although this would become clearer in following years. More likely, the Islamic revolution was seen as a reaction against modernity – because of its rejection of secularism and its willingness to re-instate the religious fundamentals of Islam at the centre of society – and the party wanted to compare this to the perceived lack of modernity of a Wallonia that kept sticking to purportedly failed welfarist and statist policies.

<sup>613</sup> PENRIS, JAN (1994) ‘Allen Vlaamse Onafhankelijkheid biedt de oplossing’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 13; ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK, KOEN et al. (1997) *100, op. cit.*, pp. 21-22; VAN OVERMEIRE, KARIM (2002) *Le Vlaams Blok, le parti nationaliste flamande*, Vlaams Blok, p. 10; VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 21; VALKENIERS (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>614</sup> VANHECKE, FRANK (1979) ‘Terug naar de middeleeuwen’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 10, November; ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK, et al. (1997) *100, op. cit.*, p. 15; VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 6. In recent years, the emphasis on the hard-working ethos has given way to one on the dynamic, highly-skilled and creative character of the Flemish workforce. Also, the reference to SMEs is much more visible in the recent literature. See for instance: VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 37; VB (2009) *Vleerst, op. cit.*, pp. 54-56.

“solidarity”<sup>615</sup>. As a consequence, the party has consistently declared itself not to be against solidarity in principle, but ‘the Wallons are deaf to the Flemish requests. They take always more, never give anything. This is no solidarity, but brutal theft. Only through complete partition will Flanders be solidary with Wallonia, to the same extent as it will be solidary with the surrounding countries’.<sup>616</sup> As we will see later, in the VB’s mindset, true solidarity is possible only within the national community, where people are more homogeneous and ethnically committed. Some degree of solidarity is possible outside it, but this must be voluntary, transparent, efficient and negotiated. The fact that the transfers have not helped the Walloon economy to be competitive again has often been mentioned as an additional reason to scrap them, all the more so when after the financial transfers the Walloons would be even relatively richer than the Flemings.<sup>617</sup>

Some have argued, however, that Flanders was and currently is paying a ‘debt of honour’ to Wallonia, because the former profited from the latter's support in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Already in the early 1980s, the *Blokkers* dismissed this as ‘a shameless lie’.<sup>618</sup> In more recent years, they have quoted academic studies suggesting that, in fact, Flanders had been fiscally exploited already in the nineteenth century.<sup>619</sup> More fundamentally, according to them, the idea that Wallonia was generous with Flanders ‘is nonsense’ because ‘in that past social security did not exist and there was even less mentioning of the effect of the public debt’.<sup>620</sup>

On the contrary, along the lines of the narrative of *Arm Vlaanderen*, the party spilled much ink denouncing the political dominance of the francophone elite, especially in the government and the banking sector. In 1980, the VB calculated that, despite accounting for about 60% of the population, Flanders received only 50% of the top government jobs, 47% of the top civil servants and 49% of state spending for business. Furthermore, the party estimated that 61% of the money deposited in Belgian banks came from Flanders, but there were only three major Flemish banks, all the others being branches of institutions that were exclusively, or in any case at the top level, managed by Francophones. It thus concluded that ‘the Francophones are money-wolves and lose no time in investing the money of the honest Fleming, in the first place in Walloon affairs. They keep the enormous yearly profits on the other side of the linguistic border, and the small Flemish saver and shareholder therefore only see the top of the profit iceberg’.<sup>621</sup>

<sup>615</sup> VB (2010) *Vlamingen Ist*, federal election manifesto, p. 32. An earlier example of this argument can be found in VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (1989) ‘Vlaanderen by the bok gezet’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 3.

<sup>616</sup> ANNEMANS, BULTINCK et al. (1997) *100*, *op. cit.*, p. 22. In 1989, with reference to Wallonia’s generous spending, the party had declared that ‘it is obviously very easy to play Santa Claus with somebody else’s money’. VB (1989) ‘Doen!!!’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 1. For later comments along these lines see: VANHECKE (2000) *op. cit.*

<sup>617</sup> VAN HAUTHEM (1989) *op. cit.*; ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 21; D’HAESELEER, GUY and BULTINCK, KOEN (2003) *Vlaams Blok, sociale volkspartij*, Vlaams Blok, p. 5; VB (2009) *VLeerst*, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4. The party has also made reference to Walloon politicians and francophone economists arguing that the transfers have had a negative effect on Wallonia in terms of preventing endogenous growth and structural adjustment. VB (2005) *op. cit.*

<sup>618</sup> DECOSTER, F. (1980) ‘La Belgique, qu’elle crève’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 6, June.

<sup>619</sup> They have recently quoted the controversial study of Professor Hannes: HANNES, JUUL (2007) *De mythe van de omgekeerde transfers. Fiscale prestaties van Vlaanderen, Wallonië en Brabant 1832-1912* (Roeselare: Roularta). See: JOSEPH and LEEN, *op. cit.*; and VB (2009) *Vlaams*, *op. cit.*

<sup>620</sup> ANNEMANS (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 20; See also: VB (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>621</sup> LAITEM (1980) *op. cit.* The same claim was repeated in ANNEMANS and SMOUT (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 14.

Since the late 1990s, the narrative about the financial exploitation of Flanders has been enriched by a further argument that we find in all the other case studies, i.e., the idea that an independent Flanders will be as successful a community in the globalised economy as many other small states.<sup>622</sup> Thus, in 2005, one could read on a VB brochure that ‘small economies with international ambitions perform well. They are often more competitive and creative than big states which, because of their size and cultural diversity, can pursue no coherent policy’.<sup>623</sup> Not surprisingly, the Scandinavian countries and Ireland were mentioned as the examples to follow. By contrast, they pointed out that ‘one constant is clear from all recent economic reports and rankings: Belgium's economic decline’.<sup>624</sup>

As a consequence, according to the party, the split of the social security, in the short term, and of Belgium, in the longer term, are the necessary prerequisites of any social policy in Flanders. They would also be the triumph of good governance, as they would allow every community to better tailor its policy to its own characteristics and needs. The money of the Flemings could thus be used to promote an active programme of employment and to improve pensions, family policy and healthcare.<sup>625</sup>

**Figure 4.2 – ‘The Evolution of the PS (Socialist Party), Homo Walloniensis’ (no date)**



Source: [www.vlaamsbelang.org/index.php?page=34&ipp=10&p=30#!fotonen](http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/index.php?page=34&ipp=10&p=30#!fotonen) (accessed on August 31, 2013).

<sup>622</sup> WIENEN, WIM (1998) ‘Werk, Identiteit, Veiligheid’, *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, April, p. 4.

<sup>623</sup> VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 7. See also: VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 11. In another publication, the party also recalled that Flanders' size coincide with the average of the EU member states and that on a GDP per capita basis it would rank 6th in the World. LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *Vlaamse onafhankelijkheid, Deel II, op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>624</sup> VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>625</sup> ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 20; VB (1997) *op. cit.* p. 41; D'HAESELEER and BULTINCK, *op. cit.*, p. 8. The party summarised this last principle with the phrase ‘who manages its own pennies, deals with them more carefully’. See also, LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *175 jaar België, Deel I, op. cit.*, p. 22.



**Figure 4.3 – ‘Flanders Pays, Wallonia Wastes’\* (first published in 1981, but reprinted several times)**



\* The literal translation would be ‘Flanders yields profits, Wallonia consumes’.

Source: VB (1981) ‘Maar één Uitweg: Onafhankelijkheid!!’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 7, September, p. 1.

### 4.2.3 The Powerless Majority

As in the other case studies, the VB’s argument about economic victimisation has been accompanied by accusations of political marginalisation. The peculiarity of Flanders is that such arguments concern a demographic majority, which in a democratic system should instead hold the levers of power. In this context, the VB’s starting point has been the artificial nature of the Belgian state, which it has deemed to be the result of a historical accident. According to the party’s narrative, Flanders and Wallonia belonged to different cultural areas, but were put together by the European major powers in a new state on the French centralised administrative model.<sup>626</sup>

A compendium of the VB’s interpretation of Belgium and its history can be found in a text issued from the 1990 congress *Onafhankelijkheid: moet en kan* (Independence: We Must and Can). There the party argued that, in order to talk about a people, there must be something specific about it. Culture and language are often among the most important elements, yet culture in Belgium is divided between Flemings and Walloons, each endowed with its own distinct identity. Therefore, ‘it looks patently clear that different

<sup>626</sup> VB (1980) ‘Belgie, een misverstand?’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 2, February. See also: OVERMEIRE (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 9. The idea that there is no Belgian people was used again in 2007 to criticise the proposal to introduce a unique federal constituency. VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (2007) ‘Een unitaire kieskring?’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 4, April, p. 6.

peoples inhabit the Belgian territory'.<sup>627</sup> Historically, the Walloons claimed tutelage over the country, but since the Flemings had a stronger 'consciousness of kinship' (*stambewustzijn*) some of them opposed such tutelage.<sup>628</sup> The ensuing clash made the Flemish movement naturally anti-Belgian as 'Belgium repressed the Flemish identity with violence'.<sup>629</sup> The humiliation and sacrifice experienced by Flemish soldiers under francophone command during the Great War, as well as the two post-war repressions of the Flemish movement, would be only some of the many injustices experienced by the Flemings.<sup>630</sup> Another major injustice would consist in the Frenchification of large swathes of originally Flemish territory. Language policy has always been a sensitive topic in Belgian politics, but in the VB's, and before it, the VNP's propaganda, it has often been treated as a territorial fight between sovereign states. In January 1978, for instance, the VNP wrote that 'with the VNP Flanders goes onto the offensive, aware of its intellect, confident in its own strength, conscious of its financial affluence and economic power, proud of its past and with knowledge of its own culture to protect its territory and TO RECONQUER THE LOST TERRITORY' (emphasis in the original).<sup>631</sup>

As seen in the introduction to this chapter, since the interwar years the Flemish movement struggled to make Flanders a Flemish monolingual region. By the early 1960s, Belgium had been divided into three linguistic areas: the Francophone one coinciding with the territory of Wallonia, the Flemish one over that of Flanders and the bilingual one in Brussels.<sup>632</sup> Nevertheless, issues arose in border areas. Territorial swaps were carried out in the early 1960s. Between the late 1970s and early 1980s, the VB contested the transfer of some previously Flemish municipalities to the French-speaking area. Likewise, the party strongly opposed the demands of some Flemish municipalities with sizable francophone minorities (often in fact local majorities) to be incorporated into Wallonia.<sup>633</sup> Especially in the municipality of *Voeren/Fourons*, where there were violent clashes between Flemings and Walloons, the VB campaigned under the slogan *Walen buiten* (Walloons out). It also strongly criticised the then head of the electoral list *Retour à Liège* (Return to Liège), José Happart, who, after having been elected mayor in 1982, not only aimed at transferring the municipality to Wallonia, but also refused to sit at a formal examination of Dutch as imposed by the 1970 reform.<sup>634</sup> These minorities, and those

<sup>627</sup> VAN HAUTHEM and VERREYCKEN (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>628</sup> This argument however is contradictory as in the same text the party decries the lack of national consciousness of the Flemings, which explains its weakness before the Francophones, and claims the role of national 'awakener'. *Ibidem*, pp. 5 and 93.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 84.

<sup>630</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>631</sup> VAN HAVER *op. cit.* See also: VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6 and 15; VAN HAUTHEM and VERREYCKEN (1990), *op. cit.*, p. 90. The request to re-conquer the gone territory, however, gradually disappeared, provided that one does not consider Brussels as such of course.

<sup>632</sup> More precisely, also a German speaking area was created in the Eastern part of the country. But given its small size (about 70,000 people) and nearly total absence of claims against the institutional structure of the country, we will largely ignore it in this chapter.

<sup>633</sup> See: VERCAUTEREN, GERDA (1978) 'Geen Woord Frans meer in de Vroer', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 5, March; DILLEN (1979) *op. cit.*; VB (1981) 'Kongresbesluiten', *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>634</sup> JVS (1979) 'Walen buiten! En België meel!', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 5, May; WOUTERS, LEO (1982) 'Happart aan de poorten van Brussel', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2., February, p. 2; VB (1984) 'Happart eruit!', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 8; VERREYCKEN, WIM (1992) *Voeren is geen pasmunt*, VB. The 1970 reform introduced facilities for the municipalities with minorities of the other language group in each region, but also imposed to elected representatives to be proficient in the official language. The issue was resolved in 1988, when full powers in language policy were transferred to the communities, the right to vote in a

living in the Flemish territory around Brussels, were granted a special derogation (commonly called linguistic facilities) to the otherwise strictly monolingual character of the region. The party has denounced such facilities as a way to perpetuate the Frenchification of Flanders, arguing that, while having been conceived as a temporary measure to give the Francophones time to integrate into the local Flemish society, they turned them into permanent privileges and a threat to the Dutch character of the region.<sup>635</sup> The rhetoric has not changed much over time and, in the last decade, the party has still pointed out that the Francophones<sup>636</sup> living around Brussels do not make the least effort to learn Dutch and do whatever they can to sabotage the language laws.<sup>637</sup> The VB has thus highlighted a difference between the Flemish and the francophone mentalities: *'un Flamand qui s'établit en Wallonie s'adapte aux us et coutumes de son pays d'accueil. Un Francophone qui vient vivre en Flandre exige des privilèges. Dès l'instant où les francophones (sic) forment une majorité dans telle ou telle commune, ils exigent le transfert de cette commune vers la Wallonie ou vers le grand Bruxelles bilingue'*.<sup>638</sup>

Since through the facilities the Francophones would enjoy rights that Flemings in Wallonia do not,<sup>639</sup> the VB has consistently declared the facilities to be discriminatory and

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French-speaking constituency was granted to the French-speakers of *Voeren/Fourrons* and a few other municipalities, and knowledge of Dutch was 'assumed' rather than tested. See: WITTE, ELS (1993) 'Language and territoriality. A summary of developments in Belgium', *International Journal on Group Rights*, 1(3), p. 206.

<sup>635</sup> VNP (1979) 'De laatste', *op. cit.*; WOUTERS (1982) 'Happart', *op. cit.*; DE LOBEL, ERIC (1987) 'In Voeren het Leger Inzetten', *Vlaams Blok*, p. 6; VB (1992) *The Vlaams Blok*, *op. cit.*, p. 9; VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (1994) 'Vlaams ramp in de Rand', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 11 November, p. 5; VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (1998) 'Franstaligen worden zenuwachtig', *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 8; VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>636</sup> The term 'Francophone' is not to be understood as synonymous of Walloon. The former includes also the French-speaking community in Brussels that is neither geographically located in Wallonia, nor shows to feel Walloon. Such a nuance makes that the VB usually talks about Francophones when referring to language issues and about Walloons when dealing with economic matters. Furthermore, the threat to the Dutch character of the Flemish periphery does not come only from francophone Belgians moving there, but also from Northern African immigrants and EU officials whose second or third, if not first, language is French and can therefore enjoy the better services of the Flemish region without language transition costs thanks to the facilities.

<sup>637</sup> DE MAN, FILIP, LAEREMANS, BART and VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (2005) *Zwartboek Splitsing*, Vlaams Belang, pp. 11-17; MICHIELS, AN (2007) 'Naturlijk Vlaams!', *VB Magazine*, n. 4, April, p. 19.

<sup>638</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12. The author suggests that such a behaviour is consistent with an historical feeling of superiority felt by the Francophones with regard to the Flemings: 'Comme ils parlaient une langue mondiale, la plupart des Francophones estimaient ne pas être obligés d'apprendre le néerlandais. Aujourd'hui, c'est toujours le cas. Même si beaucoup de Francophones admirent et estiment la Flandre aujourd'hui, d'autres jettent encore un regard parfois méprisant et raciste sur la Flandre et les Flamands. Beaucoup de ministres fédéraux et certains membres de la Cour parlent à peine quelques mots de néerlandais'. Ibidem, p. 9. Along the same lines see: VANHECKE (2007) 'Anti-Vlaamse', *op. cit.*

<sup>639</sup> The party has indeed denounced the fact that Wallonia does not subsidise any Dutch-speaking school in Wallonia, while Flanders does subsidise francophone schools on its soil. This, however, is incorrect. Although there are many more francophone schools financed by the Flemish community in Flanders (ten, although one, in the municipality of Renaix, has a special status and is co-managed by the Flemish and French communities) than Dutch-speaking ones in Wallonia, there is one primary Dutch-speaking school financed by the French community in the Walloon municipality of Mouscron. Francophone schools in Flanders are financed by the Flemish community, and Dutch-speaking schools in Wallonia by the French community, because this is in line with the territorial character of the two regions, whereby the local community is responsible for education and cultural policy. Such schools only exist in the so-called municipalities with facilities. See COMMISSION DE L'ÉDUCATION DU PARLEMENT DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ FRANÇAISE (2015) 'Question de M. Jean-Luc Crucke à Mme Joëlle Milquet, vice-

against the constitution. The same argument was made regarding the division of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde arrondissement (BHV) that allowed French-speakers in the Flemish administrative arrondissement of Halle-Vilvoorde to vote for the francophone lists of the Brussels administrative arrondissement, thus *de facto* extending the bilingual area of the capital into monolingual Flanders for electoral purposes.<sup>640</sup> After having lain dormant for more than 40 years, the BHV issue flared up again in 2003, when the Court of Appeal ruled the electoral arrondissement illegal in light of the new electoral law approved a year before.<sup>641</sup> The VB therefore campaigned for an immediate split of BHV that, being against the Constitution, should be non-negotiable. Yet, it has also made clear that the other Flemish parties were the main culprits, as they never had the courage to bang their fist on the table against the francophone opposition.<sup>642</sup> In this connection, the *Blokkers* have recently stressed that while the Francophones clearly adopted a conflict-like mentality and thought in terms of ‘us vs. them’, most Flemish parties kept sticking to a ‘consensus model’.<sup>643</sup> In the midst of the 2010 government crisis, the party also suggested that the Francophones were getting ready for the split of the country and aimed at integrating Brussels into a Walloon state through the ‘trojan horse’ of the linguistic facilities and of BHV. It thus called on the other Flemish forces to make their own plans for the independence scenario.<sup>644</sup>

However, the most important political argument made by the VB with regard to the relationship between Flemings and Francophones within the Belgian state has concerned the use of the safeguards introduced in the 1960s. Through these, the Francophones are considered to have forced upon the Flemings an undemocratic constitutional structure that provides a minority with unlimited resources to block the decisions adopted by the majority of the country. Therefore, Belgium would not be a democracy, as the principle of ‘one man one vote’ is not respected.<sup>645</sup> The safeguards granted parity of representation between Francophones and Flemings in the federal government, a majority in each linguistic group to modify special laws and a special procedure that either francophone or

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présidente et ministre de l'Éducation, de la Culture et de l'Enfance, intitulée “Écoles francophones en territoire flamand”, in *Compte Rendu Intégral*, 16 March, <http://archive.pfwb.be/10000000200d0c8> (accessed on May 2, 2015); GÉRARD, LAURENT (2007) ‘La Wallonie a aussi ses écoles à facilités’, *La Libre.be*, 26 December, <http://www.lalibre.be/actu/belgique/la-wallonie-a-aussi-ses-ecoles-a-facilites-51b89748e4b0de6db9b12cfb> (accessed on May 2, 2015).

<sup>640</sup> The BHV electoral district included both the administrative district of Halle-Vilvoorde, which is in monolingual Flanders, and the one of Brussels, which is bilingual. This made that, at the federal elections, the French-speakers of Halle-Vilvoorde could vote as if they were resident in Brussels, which violated the linguistic territoriality of the Belgian electoral system. The VB accused the francophone parties of defending the unity of BHV for electoral reasons as this ensured them 70,000 more votes and about 200,000 euros per year in public funding for their political activity there. Furthermore, BHV was also a judicial and police arrondissement.

<sup>641</sup> The Constitutional Court found that the electoral reform, which had made the electoral circumscriptions coincide with the provinces except for Flemish Brabant – where Halle-Vilvoorde lies – but, at the same time, had introduced a complex system to *de facto* add the votes of Halle-Vilvoorde and Leuven (the two districts making up Flemish Brabant), created a discrimination against the citizens of the Leuven arrondissement, because these were not guaranteed an adequate proportional representation in the federal Parliament.

<sup>642</sup> DE MAN, LAEREMANS and VAN HAUTHEM (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 5-10.

<sup>643</sup> See: DEVOS, CARL and BOUTECA, NICOLAS (2008) ‘Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde: Voeren van de 21ste eeuw’, *Fédéralisme Régionalisme*, 8(1); GOVAERT, SERGE (2007) *Bruxelles-Hal-Vilvoorde: du quasi-accord de 2005 à la procédure en conflit d'intérêts*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2007/29, n. 1974.

<sup>644</sup> VB (2010) ‘Op weg naar Wallo-Brux?’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 10, October, pp. 4-5.

<sup>645</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, p. 5; LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *175 jaar België, Deel I*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Flemish deputies can use to delay laws deemed to be detrimental to their interests (see section 4.4.2 for more details). Hence the francophone minority would be endowed with disproportional resources to oppose the will of the Flemish majority. Furthermore, the latter's representation in Parliament would in fact be less than proportional, since, in 2003, a Flemish seat was worth 45,000 votes, while a francophone one 37,000.<sup>646</sup> The Flemish majority would thus be 'minoritised' as a result of such guarantees. It would be a powerless majority that, because of the cowardice of the traditional parties and the VU, constantly accepts to compromise and back down.<sup>647</sup> As asserted in 1996: 'the Vlaams Blok rejects the Belgian federalism as a government system that is used to prevent Flanders from ever being able to assert its rights of majority in Belgium. It has as its only purpose the continuous minorisation of the Flemish majority and the maintenance of Wallonia's privileged position at the political, financial and social levels'.<sup>648</sup>

This would be all the more frustrating because, according to the party, Flanders and Wallonia are two different worlds that cannot agree on almost anything. Their cultural difference would thus be reflected in politics whereby 'Wallonia thinks and votes left, Flanders thinks and votes right'.<sup>649</sup> Hence – the VB has argued – Belgium is a blocked country, where not only democracy does not work, but governance is highly inefficient and in which the Walloons can afford not to worry about these problems because Flanders foots the bill.<sup>650</sup>

The logical conclusion drawn by the *Blokkers* is that Belgium is unreformable, while Flanders deserves more democracy and it needs better governance to compete in the global economy.<sup>651</sup> Independence is the only way to ensure this. But how to bring it about? Would it not entail violent clashes and put in jeopardy the economic viability of the region? When in the 1990s the party began gathering a sizable proportion of the Flemish votes all these questions became extremely relevant. Therefore, the VB began providing

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<sup>646</sup> LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *175 jaar België, Deel I, op. cit.*, p. 31. In fact, as established by article 63 of the Belgian Constitution, the number of seats per electoral circumscription is proportional to the size of the relative population, and is updated every ten years. Distorsions can be due: to the proportion of registered voters to the total population of each circumscription (Flanders having an average older population is likely to have a slightly higher number of registered voters per seat); and to the influence of abstention and blank or invalid votes, as the higher their number, the lower the number of valid votes per seat. For instance, in the case of the 2003 elections, using data from the Chamber of Representatives and excluding the BHV electoral district, there was one Flemish seat every 52,893 registered electors, 49,383 voters, and 47,243 valid votes. The same figures for Wallonia were 48,708, 44,000, and 40,745. The number of blank and invalid votes per seat was substantially higher in Wallonia (3,254) than in Flanders (2,139). Our calculations on CHAMBER OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF BELGIUM (n. d.) *Election Data*, <http://www.electionresources.org/be/data/> (accessed on May 8, 2015).

<sup>647</sup> DILLEN (1983) *op. cit.*; VB (1989) 'Doen!!!', *op. cit.*; ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1989) 'Het Sociaal Europa en de Zetelverdeling', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, pp. 4-5;

<sup>648</sup> ARCKENS, ERIC (1996) 'Het Volk beslist', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 8, September, pp. 10-11. For a recent exemple of this argument see: VALKENIERS, BRUNO (2012) 'Buitenspel', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 1, January, p. 3.

<sup>649</sup> LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *175 jaar België, Deel I, op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>650</sup> Idem and pp. 37-38. See also: ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 14; VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 16; VB (2007) *Toekomstplan, op. cit.*, p. 3; DE SMEDT, DIRK (2008) 'Nog verder uit elkaar', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 11; VB (2009) *VLeerst, op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>651</sup> Both the arguments about the unreformable character of Belgium and Flanders' need for good governance because of its export-oriented economy are highly stressed in the most recent literature, but were already there in the party's early propaganda, although adapted to the context of the time. See for instance: FAVERE (1979) 'Unser Willy: Een groot economisch denker', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 6, June; DILLEN (1979) *op. cit.*; VLAAMS BELANG (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 6; VB (2010) *Vlaamingen, op. cit.*, p. 30.

some answers. First of all, it pointed out that Belgium was not in the least like Yugoslavia and that peaceful secessions, with minor economic and social disruptions, had successfully been carried out in the past. Norway and Sweden, as well as the Czech and Slovak Republics, were the examples to follow.<sup>652</sup> Furthermore, the party has argued that the country is already irremediably divided and ‘no revolution is needed to dissolve Belgium. One day, the system will simply get stuck by itself’.<sup>653</sup>

However, until very recently, the VB did not outline a truly comprehensive strategy to overcome the constitutional obstacles on the way to independence. This has been attempted in a book published in 2011 by Gerolf Annemans and Steven Utsi. The authors propose a two-step strategy called ‘click and boomerang’. The main argument is that the Flemings must present their case on the international stage stressing the long-lasting injustices experienced as well as the impossibility of any reform. In this connection, it would be very important to present the move as a case of dissolution of an artificial federation (along the lines of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union) rather than as one of secession. They should then engage in negotiations with the francophone parties in a way that enables them to blame any failure on francophone opposition to a legitimate Flemish right. A unilateral declaration of independence should be left as a last resort. The split should also happen according to the principle of *uti possidetis*, whereby existing administrative borders will be the basis of the future state demarcation. This would indeed assure that Brussels remains within Flanders, as the split would recognise the borders of the communities and not of the regions as the legitimate ones.<sup>654</sup>

Along with the division of the public debt,<sup>655</sup> Brussels would certainly be the hardest issue to solve in case of Flemish independence. Since its establishment, the VB’s basic principle has consistently been that, no matter its linguistic configuration, Brussels is a Flemish city lying entirely in the territory of Flanders and will be the capital of the Flemish independent state. Therefore, the defeatist thinking of the Flemish movement, whereby Brussels would be irremediably given to the Francophones in exchange for independence, would not be warranted. In this connection, the VB has argued that Brussels is the epitome of the Francophones’ imperialism, as it has been transformed from a completely Flemish to a majority French-speaking city in about a century and a half.<sup>656</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also, VB (2001) *Congres 'Vlaanderen Onafhankelijk'*, Gent 15 December, p. 22.

<sup>653</sup> LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *Vlaamse onafhankelijkheid, Deel II, op. cit.*, p. 3. This argument is in fact very similar to the ‘evaporation’ of the Belgian state suggested by the N-VA and later criticised by the VB itself.

<sup>654</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF and UTSI, STEVEN (2011) *After Belgium, the orderly split-up* (Brussels: Uitgeverij Egmont) pp. 167-213.

<sup>655</sup> With regard to the debt, the party has made several calculations and drawn different scenarios based on a per-capita, GDP or liability criteria for its attribution. In all cases, the conclusion is that Flanders should deal with it through negotiations and its starting point in these should be the principle whereby debts have to be paid by those who make them. Therefore, Wallonia would be responsible for the bigger share. ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.* pp. 19-20; VB (2001) *op. cit.*, pp. 35-37; ANNEMANS and UTSI (2011) *op. cit.*, pp. 325-332.

<sup>656</sup> VAN NIEUWENHUYSEN, LUK (1978) ‘1000 jar trots en schande’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 11, September; LAITEM, JOHAN (1979) ‘Vlaanderen, Wallonie en de pendel naar Brussel’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 5, May; VB (1981) ‘Kongressbesluiten’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 10, November; VB (1989) ‘Doen’, *op. cit.*; VAN HAUTHEM and VEREYCKEN (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6; LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *Vlaamse onafhankelijkheid, op. cit.*, p. 13-14; ANNEMANS and UTSI (2011) *op. cit.*, pp. 186-195. The party has also suggested that despite speaking French, the *Bruxellois* are Flemings that have

Totally rejecting the Brussels autonomous region, the party has excluded its existence in an independent Flanders, but has also assured that the city would be the capital of the future state. Furthermore, it has contended that, not only Flanders needs Brussels, but also Brussels needs an independent Flanders in order to improve its services and the quality of life offered to its citizens. Brussels is inextricably tied to Flanders, both socially and economically, and Flanders represents the best, and only, future for the city, as Wallonia does not have the means to cater for it.<sup>657</sup> From the second half of the 2000s, however, the party has begun to admit the difficulty entailed by the integration of Brussels in an eventual independent Flemish Republic and, despite stressing that it would fight in order to have it as the country's capital, it started contemplating alternative solutions.<sup>658</sup>

**Figure 4.4 – The Federalism Straitjacket (2005)**



Source: LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

However it may be, according to party plans, in an independent Flanders, Francophones in Brussels will be allowed to use their own language in all official communications, but

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gone through a process of Frenchification. Paradoxically, they thus argued against the principle whereby linguistic regions must coincide with political ones and that language and nationality coincide.

<sup>657</sup> DILLEN (1983) *op. cit.*; VAN HAUTHEM and VEREYCKEN (1990) *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31; ANNEMANS and KOEN (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 29. Brussels is often represented as a degraded and dangerous city, inhabited by poor migrants and unemployed people. See for instance: VB (2004) 'Appel aux francophones', *Vérités Bruxelloises*, n. 36, June, p. 14.

<sup>658</sup> VB (2007) 'Vlaanderen onafhankelijk? Hoe moet dat dan?', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 10, October, pp. 14-15; WAN DER MERSCH, WOUTER (2009) 'Een lastige bruid', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 10, October, pp. 6-7. In their plan, Annemans and Utsi argued that the party would also accept a confederation between Flanders and a Brussels-City-State as a second best. ANNEMANS and UTSI, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-195. To understand the massive change made by the party on this issue, suffice it to read the emotional appeal of Karel Dillen in the aftermath of the establishment of the Brussels region in 1989: 'Brussels lies in Flanders. Brussels belongs to Flanders. Brussels IS a piece of Flanders. The remaining rump-Flanders shall not forget this'. DILLEN (1989) *op. cit.*

the city will finally become truly bilingual. The facilities around it, instead, will be definitively abolished. In return for this, the party would be open to sign the EU Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, although its application would be limited to the area of the capital.<sup>659</sup>

#### 4.2.4 A Right-Wing Party

In a famous manifesto published in 1990, *Zeggen wat u denkt* (Saying what you think), the party clearly stated that ‘the Vlaams Blok is a right-conservative party concerned with values and it demands respect for the traditional values of our civilisation’.<sup>660</sup> Five elements lie at the core of the VB right-wing conservative thinking:<sup>661</sup> the concept of solidarity, the demand for amnesty for the Second World War collaborators, its conservative stand on ethical issues and family policy, its tough approach to law and order, and its rejection of multicultural society (which will be treated in the next section).

By solidarity the VB has meant ethnic solidarity and the principle has accompanied the nationalist ideal at the core of its ideology. In the *Grondbeginselen*, the party defined it as the basis for coexistence of big and small communities and argued that it ‘is possible only in a social system where the individual and the community live and grow in a balanced way’.<sup>662</sup> Therefore, the community and the individual are in a mutual relationship bestowing rights and duties upon each other: the individual has the duty to contribute to the material and spiritual well being of the community – which is defined as a ‘community of performance’ (*prestatiegemeenschap*), that is, a competitive community – through his/her work and by respecting its laws; the community has the duty to help its members who are in need and to curb the ‘excesses of performance’ that are required of the individual in such a competitive environment. In its formative years, the VB thus claimed to represent a third way between Marxism and liberalism: ‘as a solidary party the VLAAMS BLOK [upper case in the original, EDM] rejects the uncontrolled trade union party as well as the uncontrolled excesses of liberal capitalism. As a solidaristic party the VLAAMS BLOK stands for a balanced economy, where the rights of the individual as well as of the community are guaranteed’.<sup>663</sup> Accordingly, political considerations should have priority over economic ones and goods should not be evaluated on the basis of their market value, but according to the function that they perform for the community.<sup>664</sup>

In the early 1990s, the VB’s electoral success mainly relied on a transfer of votes from the Socialist Party. In this context, the party loudly asserted the social dimension of nationalism. It claimed that the Flemish movement had always been a phenomenon of

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<sup>659</sup> ANNEMANS, BULTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 32; VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 11. Until the mid-1990s, however, the party still seemed to suggest that bilingualism would only be a transition phase towards the establishment of Dutch monolingualism in the city.

<sup>660</sup> VB (1990) *Zeggen, op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>661</sup> Nationalism is another mainstay of the party's ideology but, as it should be clear from a comparison of the two case studies conducted until now, nationalism is not right-wing or left-wing *per se*. Here, we do not suggest that the elements listed above are necessarily typical of right-wing ideologies, but rather that the VB highlights them as fundamental components of its right-wing beliefs.

<sup>662</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen, op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10. This is repeated in many other propaganda pieces of the early 1980s: TRUYENS, EDWIN (1980) ‘Sociaal-ekonomische rubriek. Nationalisme en ekonomie’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 8, August-September-October; VB (1981) ‘Kongresbesluiten’, *op. cit.*, p. 3; TRUYENS, EDWIN (1982) ‘Het Neoliberalisme van Ayn Rand’, *Vlaams Blok*, n.3, March, p. 3.

<sup>664</sup> VAN GORP et al. (1980) *op. cit.*, p. 10.



social emancipation, but that this feature had been hidden by the rise of socialist and communist parties, which posited the incompatibility between nationalism and socialism. According to the party, in the 1980s and 1990s, people began to rediscover the social dimension of nationalism for two reasons. First, unchecked immigration confronted the ‘little man’ living in big cities with the inadequacy of Marxist and socialist thinking. Second, the ideologies that had until then supported solidarity collapsed. The idea of national solidarity thus answered the thirst for material and spiritual certainties of the little man: ‘the West-European citizen is in search of a measurable and conveniently arranged domain for his own ethical needs and thus his desire for solidarity. Nationalism, here, offers an alternative. It deems solidarity with the family and, thus, with the people, central’.<sup>665</sup> Therefore, true solidarity is only, or chiefly, possible within the ‘cozy’ limits of the ethnonational community, in accordance with the principle of ‘own people first’ (*eigen volk eerst*).<sup>666</sup> Hence in the late 1990s, the then leader Frank Vanhecke could present the VB as a ‘social party’ that, contrary to the traditional trade unions which had lost touch with their bases and were only concerned with maintaining their privileges, knew the real problems of the people and catered for them, making the national and social struggles coincide.<sup>667</sup>

The party has further supported the coincidence of national and social struggle with the claim that poverty, understood in relative terms, is still a reality in Flanders. In this context, the main obstacle to the implementation of a strong Flemish social policy remains the Belgian state. Hence, ‘any social policy in Flanders can only be aimed at the dismantling of the transfers and the transition to an independent Flemish state’.<sup>668</sup> The abolition of the transfers has thus been used as a sort of a ‘trump card’ that would allow the Flemish Republic to reduce taxes and labour costs without entailing an equal reduction of social services.

Some authors have argued that the VB’s claim to be a solidaristic party is in fact a rhetorical exercise and that, especially in the last decade, neoliberalism has been its true ideological template.<sup>669</sup> Here we do not want to argue against such hypotheses, but simply to suggest that the two are not necessarily in contradiction in the VB’s official propaganda. The key is that, in the VB’s mind, solidarity is a right that stems from a duty. This is clear when examining the party arguments against the Left and class struggle more in general. In an early publication, one could read, for instance, that while strikes were significant instruments to get better working conditions against capitalist exploitation in the nineteenth century, their legitimacy was much more doubtful in the context of the 1980s. Already in the early 1980s, when solidarism was unmistakably a pillar of its discourse, the

<sup>665</sup> ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>666</sup> Ibidem, p. 15. See also D’HAESELEER and BULTINCK, *op. cit.*, p. 5. From other statements, it seems that this is not only a matter of ethical imperative towards the members of one’s own community, but also a natural conclusion stemming from the observation that ethnic commitment reduces free-riding and thus improves the efficiency of solidarity. This argument would be proved *a contrario* by Belgium: ‘it is the lack of Belgian sense of public responsibility, impossible however within the Belgian situation, that provided enormous tax fraud, increasing flight of capital, political super-profiteering’. VAN HAUTHEM and VERREYCKEN, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>667</sup> VANHECKE, FRANK (1998) ‘Vlaamse strijd, sociale strijd!’, *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 4, April, p. 3.

<sup>668</sup> ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 20. See also: FAVERE (1979) ‘Barst’, *op. cit.*; WYMEERSCH, *op. cit.*; VANHECKE, FRANK (2000) *op. cit.*; VB (2005) *op. cit.*; DILLEN, MARIJKE (2012) ‘Een menswaardig pensioenstelsel voor alle Vlamingen’, *VB Magazine*, n. 5, May, pp. 34-35.

<sup>669</sup> GIJSELS, HUGO and VANDER VELPEN, JOS (1992) *Le Chagrin des Flamands* (Brussels: EPO); GIJSELS, HUGO (1994) *Ouvrez les yeux* (Brussels: Luc Pire); ERK (2005) ‘From’, *op. cit.*;

VB believed that ‘a healthy national economy can come into being when the right to work is replaced by the duty to work. Every member of the community has the duty, according to his/her competence, to contribute to the necessary production of goods and services that can provide the national community with the desirable standard of living. No member of the community has the right to live as a parasite off the work of others’.<sup>670</sup> Similarly, in the mid-1990s the party proposed ‘community work’ for the long term unemployed and, ten years later, argued in favour of a living wage (*leefloon*) that, however, should be a temporary measure to help people to get back to work, rather than a subsidy making individuals dependent on political parties for clientelist purposes.<sup>671</sup> Along similar lines, the VB has consistently rejected the privatisation of social security and only asked to restrict it to the Flemings, by dividing the Belgian one into a Flemish social security, a Walloon one and one dedicated to the immigrant population.<sup>672</sup> Although it is true that the party has supported a supply-side economic model, opposed protectionism and demanded a reduction of taxes, it has also recently called for the defence of strategic Flemish sectors from foreign acquisition,<sup>673</sup> proposed the creation of a Popular Bank (*Volksbank*) to use Flemish money for Flemish projects,<sup>674</sup> to provide rent subsidies for the needy<sup>675</sup> and to accompany job flexibility with more family leaves.<sup>676</sup>

Despite assuming a much lower profile through the years,<sup>677</sup> the theme of amnesty for Flemish Second World War collaborators ranked among the party’s top priorities in the first years of its existence. The core of the VB’s argument was that the post-war repression had been a political persecution that made no distinction between idealists and criminals on each side of the fence. Amnesty would be the best way to put an end, in an adequate way, to a painful process that saw some accusing others and granting themselves their own amnesty. Furthermore, the party has not recognised the right of Belgian ‘nationalist’ (sic) courts to judge individuals who thought they were serving the interests of the Flemings. Accordingly, the repression was aimed at the Flemish movement, as the much more selective prosecution of Walloon collaborators would bear witness. The VB denounced the fact that many innocents were sentenced to prison or deprived of political rights, some even without being tried. Finally, in line with the party’s staunch anti-communism,<sup>678</sup> it

<sup>670</sup> TRUYENS, EDWIN (1980) ‘Sociaal-ekonomische rubriek. Plicht to arbeid’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 6, June. See also: SMETS, JAAK (1979) ‘Neen aan de klassenstrijd!!’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 6, June; TRUYENS, EDWIN (1981) ‘Staking: het slechtste verweermiddel tegende ekonomische krisis’, *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 2, February.

<sup>671</sup> WYMEERSCH, *op. cit.*; D’HAESELEER and BULTINCK, *op. cit.*, p. 23. The authors of the latter text added that ‘it is our duty to give a second chance in our society to people who have slipped through the net, who, by their own fault or not, have fallen into trouble’.

<sup>672</sup> ANNEMANS, BULTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 28; D’HAESELEER and BULTINCK, *op. cit.*, p. 5; VB (2007) *Toekomstplan*, *op. cit.*, p. 17; VB (2010) *Vlaamingen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33. In a 2004 text, the party also declared to be against the privatisation of pensions and the railway company. VB (2004) *Programmaboek 2004*, pp. 49 and 69.

<sup>673</sup> Mainly regarding basic goods such as water, gas and electricity. VB (2010) *Vlaamingen*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>674</sup> VB (2009) *VLeerst*, *op. cit.*, pp. 57 and 132.

<sup>675</sup> VB (2007) *Toekomstplan*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>676</sup> VB (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 5 and 13-14. Here, the party has suggested that public spending is not a problem *per se*, as witnessed by the Scandinavian countries. The problem they pointed to was that in Belgium spending was highly inefficient.

<sup>677</sup> This was mentioned in the 2007 programme and recently flared up again after a bill proposed by the party’s MP Bart Laeremans. See VB (2007) *Toekomstplan*, *op. cit.*, p. 5; VB (2011) ‘Vergeten en Vergeven?’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, 8(7-8), pp. 28-31.

<sup>678</sup> Anti-communism was an important part of the party’s discourse in the 1980s, but then became almost irrelevant. See for instance: DILLEN, KAREL (1985) ‘Komt het Ijzeren Gordijn aan de Ijzer?’, *Vlaams Blok*,

argued that some were condemned because they legitimately fought against the communist danger, as, for instance, the Eastern-Front fighters, i.e. volunteers who enrolled with the Nazis to fight against the USSR.<sup>679</sup> The issue of amnesty, however, has not been an isolated VB demand, but was a former major point of the *Volksunie*'s programme and has been supported by other important Flemish organisations such as the *Ijzerbedevaartcomité*.<sup>680</sup> What has been controversial is the ambiguous stand of the party, and especially of some of its senior members, concerning fascism as a political doctrine as well as their contacts with fascist organisations and supporters of revisionist theories.<sup>681</sup> Dillen, for instance, acknowledged that he used to make the Roman salute at some popular Flemish events after the Second World War.<sup>682</sup> Commenting this episode in *Wij Marginalen* (We the Marginals), he replied that it was a sign of rebellion against the Belgian establishment and did not imply any direct affiliation to Nazism.<sup>683</sup>

Regarding family policy, the social and ethical conservatism of the party is clear from its total rejection of abortion<sup>684</sup> and its definition of the family. In 1991, the party stated that 'the monogamous, as unbreakable as possible, open to kids and institutionalised marriage is the social form that standardises the domain of personal and social life of man in our civilisation in a complete and balanced way'.<sup>685</sup> Hence, the family is the cornerstone of society. For this reason, it has an intrinsic value and a natural ethical content represented by the principle of responsibility, under the form of both fidelity and trust inherent to the bond subscribed to by the couple through the public act of marriage. An unmarried couple does not embody these values to the same extent, as the commitment can be broken at any time. Society relies on the stability of the new entity that arises from the wedding for its own stability. Hence, 'in a nationalist view, the people do not get married only for themselves',<sup>686</sup> but through marriage the couple declares that it has an engagement also with the wider society. Therefore, the party has been consistently in favour of an active family policy including the provision of a salary for the mothers who decline to pursue a professional career to take care of the children.<sup>687</sup>

The VB has also assumed a conservative stance on law and order – since 1999 under the slogan *Recht op veiligheid* (right to security) – especially regarding drug dealing. It has

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n. 6, June-July, p. 1; SMOUT, WILLY (1988) 'Glasnost!?' De terreur gaat verder', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 7, July-August, pp. 4-5.

<sup>679</sup> DILLEN (1979) 'Tussenkomst', *op. cit.*; VERREYCKEN, WIM (1993) *Amnestie*, *Vlaams Blok*, pp. 5-22.

<sup>680</sup> This is the Committee that organises the commemoration of the Yser battle (October 1914), in which Belgian troops halted the advance of the German army for about two months and underwent heavy losses.

<sup>681</sup> GOVAERT (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>682</sup> GIJSELS, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>683</sup> DILLEN (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>684</sup> VB (1982) 'Vruchtafdrijving is moord', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 3, March, p. 1; VB (1992) *Dit leven is in gevaar*; VB (1996) *De moord op Beethoven*; VB (2009) 'De Vlaamse gezinnen, onze toekomst', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 12, December, p. 28.

<sup>685</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1991) 'Grondslagen van een gezinspolitiek', in GEROLF, ANNEMANS, PHILIP, DE MAN, MARIJKE, DILLEN and WILLY, SMOUT, *De Gezinspartij*, *Vlaams Blok*, p. 13.

<sup>686</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16. In the same publication, the party argued that the moral content of the family arising from marriage is of the utmost importance for the wider society because 'the ethic (in the largest sense of the term) brings order in the human life' and such order coincides with culture. The reproduction of the basic values within the family therefore ensures the reproduction of a specific culture.

<sup>687</sup> VB (1990) *Zeggen*, *op. cit.*, p. 13. While in later publications the party talked about 'parent', here, it clearly wrote 'mother', thus revealing its traditional view of the family. See also: WIENEN, WIM (1998) 'Huwelijk fiscaal bestraft!', *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 17; VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 15; VB (2010) *Vlaamingen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

then called for zero tolerance in problematic urban areas, such as some neighbourhoods of Brussels, as well as defended policemen when accused of excesses in the exercise of their functions.<sup>688</sup> In the party's mind, crime and drug addiction directly stem from moral decay and immigration, whereby the need for a stronger defence of traditional values, as seen above, and a resolute policy of repatriation, as we will see in the next section.

Finally, the VB has often been accused of being authoritarian and of rejecting democratic institutions.<sup>689</sup> Although it is true that in its *Grondbeginselen* the party deprecated the cliquish mentality of 'democratism' and 'the malady of parliamentarism',<sup>690</sup> this seemed to be more a critique of the corrupted state of Belgian democracy rather than a rejection of democracy *per se*. On the contrary, taking advantage of the corruption scandals that hit the country in the first half of the 1990s, the party presented itself as the most vocal detractor of the state of Belgian democracy and the only valid alternative to the rotten traditional parties. With the 1991 campaign *Uit Zelf-Verdediging* (in self-defence), the *Blokkers* openly recognised their role as a 'whip party', setting themselves apart from the old political elite that no longer defended the interests of the people and forcing it to borrow their own programme from the opposition.<sup>691</sup> The 1994 campaign for the European elections, conducted immediately after the outbreak of the Agusta Affair,<sup>692</sup> was in fact run under the – almost totally domestic-oriented – slogans *Grote Kuis* (spring-cleaning) and *Eén tegen allen* (one against all).<sup>693</sup> In that context, Gerolf Annemans could state that 'for decades, the three political big ones (yellow, red and blue) [Christian-Democrats, Socialists and Liberals EDM] neatly divided the power cake among themselves. They were hardly concerned with the voters: they would get them in any case. In this way, they ended up in a situation where they did not realise that politics should serve the public interest. They did not take care anymore of the governance of the country nor take care in spending tax money (for a reasonable fee) for the people, or for the voter. Eventually they were acting as if it was their own money'.<sup>694</sup> The deliberate adoption of a 'whip role' was not only the result of the party's radical ideas, but also a strategy to turn the *cordon sanitaire* into a political weapon. The VB could thus accuse the traditional parties of being undemocratic because they refused to deal with a force expressing the will of a sizable, and growing, share of the Flemish people. In this connection, the party moved from an early elitist conception of democracy – in the *Grondbeginselen* it quoted the aristocratic ideal of natural hierarchy<sup>695</sup> – to a populist

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<sup>688</sup> VB (1990) *Zeggen, op. cit.*, p. 8; VB (1999) *Johan Demol: un pour tous!* (Brussels: Samizdat); LAEREMANS, BART (1996) 'Criminaliteit "Leve de zachte aanpak!"', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 8, September, pp. 8-9; PAS, FREDERIK (2008) 'Weer een "incident"', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 5, May, p. 8; VB (2012) 'Politie: looslopend wild?', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 9, September, pp. 18-19.

<sup>689</sup> SWYNGEDOUW and IVALDI, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14; GIJSELS, *op. cit.*; GIJSELS and VANDER VELPEN (1992), *op. cit.*; SPRUYT, MARC (2000) *Wat het Vlaams Blok Verzwijgt* (Leuven: Van Halewick) pp. 84-118.

<sup>690</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen, op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>691</sup> ANNEMANS (1991) 'Uit', *op. cit.* See also: ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1994) 'Stem ook deze keer Vlaams Belang', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, p. 3.

<sup>692</sup> This was a widely broadcast corruption scandal involving members of the Walloon and Flemish socialist parties, who were accused of having been bribed by the aviation enterprises Agusta and Dassault to secure an order of Agusta helicopters for the Belgian army.

<sup>693</sup> VB (1994) *Grote Kuis*, European election manifesto.

<sup>694</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1994) 'Geen Vlaams Blok-pottekijker by Augusta', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 2, February, p. 3. See also: VAN HAUTHEM, JORIS (1996) 'Verkiezingen broodnodig', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 12, December, p. 1.

<sup>695</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen, op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

outlook entailing active support of popular referenda and the depillarisation of the Belgian consociational democracy.<sup>696</sup> Such accusations were repeated in the first half of the 2000s, when the *Blokkers* had to face a trial for violations of the law against racism, which they defined as a political process designed by their opponents to delegitimise the party and stop its electoral progresses. They thus tried to spread a martyrdom narrative.<sup>697</sup>

Nevertheless, whatever kind of democracy the party is willing to support, it will necessarily be an ethnic democracy, where out-groups, and especially non-European immigrants, are heavily discriminated against.

#### 4.2.5 Ethnopluralism

Ethno-pluralism, or cultural differentialism, is one of the mainstays of the VB's ideology. As defined by Cas Mudde, ethnopluralism is 'the belief in permanent (natural or hereditary) differences between groups of people (races and/or ethnic communities) with the centrality that all groups are equivalent but different; people should live within their own group and the groups should live separated; people have both the right and the duty to live according to their own "natural way"'.<sup>698</sup> Its policy on immigration directly descends from this principle.

It is often argued that the focus on immigration and the assisted return of migrants stemmed from the ideas of the new generation of activists that joined the party in the mid-1980s, especially the group around Filip Dewinter. This is true only if one refers to the relative weight of these themes and proposals as compared to more traditional arguments, such as independence, the criticism of the VU and amnesty. Those ideas were already there earlier, but were granted much less space and visibility.

Accordingly, already in 1979 the party expressed criticism against mass immigration, affirming that 'Flanders will not become Brussels or New York. Flanders remains Flemish, entirely free to people who want to pass through [*doorreis*] and entirely free to those who adapt themselves to it. Not to foreigners who want to remain foreign and yet want to obtain the privileges of the host'.<sup>699</sup> At its Second Congress, in 1981, the VB already agreed on the removal of the foreigners in excess, with special reference to non-Europeans,<sup>700</sup> while the *Grondbeginselen*, whose first version had been written a year before, demanded, 'within a reasonable term, the return of the non-European migrant workers to their own fatherland' and 'the immediate return of all unemployed, clandestine and [...] criminally convicted non-European foreigners'.<sup>701</sup> Furthermore, throughout the 1980s, the *Blokkers* repeatedly sided with the white population of South Africa, especially the Afrikaners, in the debate about *apartheid* there. These, they argued, were cognate of

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<sup>696</sup> DEWINTER, FILIP and PENRIS, JAN (1993) 'Naar een directe democratie', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 10, November, pp. 8-9; ER, *op. cit.*; VANHECKE, FRANK (2000) *op. cit.*

<sup>697</sup> JORIS, MARC (2001) 'Het proces van de haat', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 5, May, pp. 4-5. Similar arguments have been used in coincidence with more recent attempts to bring the party to court. See: VALKENIERS, BRUNO (2009) 'Partijfinanciering: veldslag gewonnen', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 2.

<sup>698</sup> MUDDE, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>699</sup> VAN DURME, FRANS (1979) 'Vlaams Blok...racisten?', *De Vlaams Nationalist*, n. 7, July.

<sup>700</sup> VB (1981) 'Kongressbesluiten', *op. cit.*

<sup>701</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. See also: VB (1982) 'Nog over gastarbeiders', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, p. 3 where the party clearly argued against 'massive racial mixing'; and DILLEN, KAREL (1986) 'Stop gastterrorisme', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 7, July, p. 1.

the Dutch population, had a right to self-determination and defended European culture in the African continent.<sup>702</sup>

However, the first complete thematic brochure on the subject was published only in 1988, by Gerolf Annemans and Filip Dewinter. There, the authors tackled the issue of immigration head-on: 'there are particular moments in history in which a specific civilisation, a specific culture must resist foreign overgrowth. The Vlaams Blok is the only political party that openly says that, over time, migrant labour (the way it was set up by irresponsible politicians in the sixties) is a danger to the individuality of the Flemish people and to the European culture'.<sup>703</sup> The risk, they suggested, lay not in the foreigners themselves, who might also enrich a culture, but in their quantity, which was an 'invasion' rather than a 'touch of exoticism'. By 'culture' they meant civilisation or way of life, therefore not single elements like art, music and language, but rather the whole range of a people's features and they made a clear distinction between European and non-European migrants: the former could easily adapt to the Flemish culture because they shared common European elements, while the latter could hardly do so. Islam, in the authors' opinion, was the culture that deviated most from the European one, so much so that conflict would be unavoidable.<sup>704</sup> In this connection, in an article written some years later, Dewinter directly linked the previous struggle of the Flemish movement for the defence of the Flemish identity against Frenchification to that against islamisation.<sup>705</sup>

Annemans and Dewinter also harshly criticised the then slogan of the progressive political parties *integratie met behoud van cultuur* (integration with preservation of culture). As they argued, people either preserve their culture, in which case they do not integrate, or they abandon it. Yet, they were not in favour of assimilation, since this would create irreparable damages to the migrants' identity. Such damage was clear when looking at the poor performance of non-European pupils in school, or even more so when reading the statistics about higher crime rates among migrants.<sup>706</sup> As they suggested, 'no people is more criminal than another. The most important reason [for the high crime rates among migrants EDM] is certainly the dissatisfaction that many guest workers of the second generation feel with the situation in which they have found themselves. Many are jobless and live at the margins of society. The expensive and greatly swollen integration project remedies this distress very little. The guest workers themselves do not want to be integrated after all. They want to remain themselves. They have that right...in their country'.<sup>707</sup> Therefore, 'the only possible humane solution' would be 'the return of the great majority of the non-European foreigners to their fatherland'.<sup>708</sup>

In the following years, the theme of immigration grew into one of the party's landmarks. After having campaigned for a stop to immigration at a time when there were

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<sup>702</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also, DILLEN (1979) 'Tussenkomst', *op. cit.*; VB (1986) 'De Boerstaat, een oplossing voor Suid-Afrika', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 9, p. 5.

<sup>703</sup> ANNEMANS, GEROLF and DEWINTER, FILIP (1988) *Dossier Gastarbeid*, Vlaams Blok, p. 3.

<sup>704</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>705</sup> DEWINTER, FILIP (1991) 'De Eindafrekening: Paula D'Hondt', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 10, November, p. 3.

<sup>706</sup> The connection between immigration and crime has often been quoted by the party throughout its history. For a recent example see VB (2011) 'Allochtonen en criminaliteit', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, pp. 19-20.

<sup>707</sup> ANNEMANS and DEWINTER, p. 14. In a later publication, Karim Van Overmeire wrote: '*les étrangers ne sont pas criminels parce qu'ils sont des étrangers mais le déracinement culturel des immigrants et la formation de ghettos augmentent le risque d'un comportement criminel*'. VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>708</sup> ANNEMANS and DEWINTER, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

400,000 Belgian unemployed,<sup>709</sup> Dewinter brought to their extreme conclusions the ideas exposed above in what probably is the most controversial VB publication, the 1992 *Immigratie, de oplossingen* (Immigration, the Solutions), a 70-point plan for the repatriation of all non-European migrants up to the third generation. There, Dewinter aimed at showing that the programme of massive assisted return was feasible. It therefore does not contain much theorisation, but rather a series of measures to be adopted before, during and after the implementation of the plan.<sup>710</sup> The text goes a long way to proposing a series of restrictions and separation mechanisms to be applied to non-European migrant workers such as: a separate social security system, separate classes for children, toughening of the law on citizenship, elimination of family reunification mechanisms, rejection of the coming Schengen agreement and increasing border controls, a tax on labour charged to employers who hire non-European migrants, restriction on property ownership, unemployment benefits reduced to three months and forced inter-sectoral immobility for the unemployed.<sup>711</sup> Dewinter then envisaged three phases of the repatriation plan: first, the unemployed, the criminally convicted and the illegals; second, the first-generation migrants; and third, the second and third generations. These last categories would be repatriated after their children had completed their school curriculum, which, Dewinter argued, would be extremely advantageous to the countries of origin.<sup>712</sup>

The repatriation of the second and third generations has been justified, also in later texts, in response to the alleged persistence of the original cultural identity among the migrant communities of longer residence on Belgian soil. In this connection, language has not been considered a sufficient element to judge integration as many long-term migrants have been thought to stick to their cultural habits despite speaking Dutch fluently. Furthermore, even if they wanted to assimilate, for most of them, and especially for Muslims, their culture would be so distant from the European one that they could not properly integrate.<sup>713</sup> The party has also provided data showing that immigration is a net loss for society in economic terms, as immigrants contribute less to social security, are disproportionately more unemployed, often work in the informal sector and do not spend their money in the local economy but send remittances back home.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> VB (1990) *Zeggen, op. cit.*, p. 1. The party has openly suggested that there is a causal link between immigration and unemployment, as well as that migrants are a cause of social dumping, as they accept lower salaries than Belgian citizens, especially in manual low-skilled positions. See also ANNEMANS (1993) *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>710</sup> Nevertheless, in the introduction they recall that multiculturalism is to be rejected because it causes the uprooting of both the migrants and the local population.

<sup>711</sup> Forced inter-sectoral immobility was expedient to constrain migrants' capacity to find a new job once unemployed. The rationale is that migrants would be hired only to serve specific economic sectors in need of workforce. Thus, if such need was satisfied at some point, they would not move to other sectors, but simply be forced to go back to their country of origin.

<sup>712</sup> DEWINTER, FILIP (1992) *Immigratie: de oplossingen. 70 voorstellen ter oplossing van het vreemdelingenprobleem*, Vlaams Blok, pp. 3-30.

<sup>713</sup> In another piece written in 1991, Dewinter also mentioned a 'deliberate strategy of confrontation' on the part of Islam, in order to explain a series of riots arisen in several metropolitan neighbourhoods with a high density of immigrant population. DEWINTER, FILIP and DE MAN, FILIP (1991) 'De confrontatie-strategie van de Islam', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 6, June, pp. 6-7.

<sup>714</sup> ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.*, pp. 54-76. On the economic costs of immigration see also: DE MAN, *op. cit.*; VB (2012) 'Factuur loopt up', *VB Magazine*, n. 5, May, pp. 26-27.

These arguments were held until the early 2000s,<sup>715</sup> but have been considerably softened after 2004. In the 2004 *Programmaboek*, for instance, the party restrained repatriation to illegal migrants and opened, although reluctantly, the possibility of integration. It pleaded for a compulsory integration programme entailing a ‘citizenship test’ composed of an examination of the migrant's Dutch language skills and knowledge of Flemish laws and European values, followed by a declaration of loyalty. Those who failed the test would be repatriated along with those who would not respect Flemish laws, in accordance with the new slogan ‘aanpassen of terugkeren’ (adapt or go back). Furthermore, while the party had formerly argued that Muslims could in no way adapt to European society, in the 2004 text mentioned above, it suggested that ‘the burden of proof concerning the reconcilability of Islam with our institutions and our rights and our freedoms lies with the Muslims’, which, despite eliciting scepticism about this possibility, nevertheless did not rule it out completely.<sup>716</sup> The party seems to be currently sticking to such a ‘moderate’ version of its extreme anti-immigration policy, although its recent campaigns have still played hard on the clash of civilisation's argument (Figure 4.5; Figure 4.6).<sup>717</sup>

**Figure 4.5 – ‘Freedom or Islam? Dare Choose’ (2012)**



Source: [www.vlaamsbelang.org/campagnes/11/](http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/campagnes/11/) (accessed on August 31, 2013).

Once again, throughout the 1990s, the party profited from its profile as an outsider, purportedly providing the only alternative to the corrupted political class, in order to depict its arguments as shared by the majority of the Flemish population. In this way, it has been able to label traditional parties as undemocratic lobbies upholding their

<sup>715</sup> See for instance: VB (1998) *Immigration, ouvrez les yeux!*; VB (2000) *De Wil van het volk*; and VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*

<sup>716</sup> VB (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 28. They also softened their policy on family reunification, talking about a toughening of the law, rather than its total interdiction. See also the more recent VAN HAUTHEM (2009) *op. cit.*, where the party talked about a ‘strict but fair policy of integration’.

<sup>717</sup> In the 2010 manifesto for the Flemish election the VB suggested that the compulsory integration courses and tests should be taken in the country of origins, therefore toughening its previous position on the subject. VB (2010) *Vlaamingen, op. cit.*, p. 26.



‘progressive dogmas’ against the will of the people.<sup>718</sup> More recently, it has also accused the political establishment of deliberately easing the nationalisation process in order to use the vote of the ‘new Belgians’ against the VB. In this connection, the *Blokkers* have shown once again their ethnic conception of the nation, as they argued that nationality should be reserved to the members of the people (*volk*), implicitly suggesting the impossibility for foreigners – at least non-European ones – to obtain it.<sup>719</sup>

**Figure 4.6 – ‘Stop Islamisation’ (2010)**



Source: [www.vlaamsbelang.org/affiches/](http://www.vlaamsbelang.org/affiches/) (accessed on August 31, 2013).

#### **4.2.6 Europa Ja, Maastricht Neen**

As the title of this section suggests, the position of the *Vlaams Belang* on the process of European integration is quite straightforward. The party has always recognised the existence of an overarching European culture unifying the nations of the continent as well as the advantages of collaboration in some specific policy sectors. Nevertheless, it has also harshly criticised the process of European integration.

Already in the early 1980s, the VB called for the constitution of a ‘Europe of the peoples’, instead of the existing states, on a federal model focused on collaboration in the economic and military sectors leading to a strong Europe, able to recover the independence lost in the Cold War.<sup>720</sup> The best clarification of the party's position on the

<sup>718</sup> DEWINTER, FILIP (1989) ‘Paula, ‘t is van den Hondt!’, *Vlaams Blok*, n. 11, December, p. 7; VB (1998) *op. cit.*; LEEN, LUDO (2009) ‘Hoe tolerant zijn wij?’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 5-6, May-June, p. 9.

<sup>719</sup> DE SMEDT, DIRK (2009) ‘Alle records gesneuveld’, *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 2, February, p. 4. On nationality, see also DE MAN, *op. cit.*

<sup>720</sup> VB (1981) ‘Kongresbesluiten’, *op. cit.*, p. 3; VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8 and 15. Some further elaborations on the subject were provided in the late 1980s: DILLEN, KAREL (1989) ‘Ons Europa’,

subject, however, came in 1992, with a thematic press conference on the recent signature of the Maastricht Treaty. There, the party strongly asserted pride in its European identity, but complained that the process had not taken into account the reality of the differences among the peoples of the continent. 'Since the foundational treaties of Paris and Rome the European Community has evolved into a centralistic and bureaucratic instrument of interest groups which have all the interest in seeing that the cultural differences in Europe give way to the big, anonymous market of 1993 where only the law of demand and supply may apply'.<sup>721</sup> According to the party, this centralistic character ran counter to the subsidiarity principle enshrined in the Treaties, thus violating the sovereignty of the European peoples. In addition, homogenisation would put an end to the positive competition between the European nations that made Europe so rich and advanced.

The party also questioned the idea that a monetary union could precede the political one. The critique against the adoption of a common currency mainly rested on practical considerations. First, the VB wondered whether institutions like the European Central Bank would stand in the way of Flemish independence, for instance, by placing normative and technical constraints on the division of the Belgian public debt. Second, it subscribed to the idea that the risks greatly outweighed the advantages: the weaker members would lose their capacity to devalue their currency or restructure the debt, with repercussions on their economic and social policy.<sup>722</sup> Similarly, the *Blokkers* opposed any European citizenship, refused to transfer competences on culture and education, and rejected the Schengen treaty.<sup>723</sup> Europe should remain a confederal power with limited responsibilities for certain sectors, such as defence and foreign policy.

But Europe has been a threat to the Flemish cultural specificity in a more concrete way, that is, through the establishment of its capital in Brussels. Despite having declared in the *Grondbeginselen* to be willing to have Brussels as the capital of the future Republic of Flanders and Europe,<sup>724</sup> at the turn of the 1990s, the VB changed its mind and openly rejected this idea.<sup>725</sup> The first risk identified by the party consisted in the danger posed by an international Brussels to the Dutch language and culture, already weak in the capital. 'Brussels lies at the southern border of the Dutch cultural area, and the Dutch culture is now simply a much smaller culture than the German, French and Anglo-Saxon culture. The Dutch culture would not be able to stand the pressure that will be put at the border of the Dutch cultural area by those cultures'.<sup>726</sup> This was all the more undesirable as the likelihood that Eurocrats spoke French, if not as their first, as their second or third language, was certainly higher than that they spoke Dutch, thus giving an advantage to the

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*Vlaams Blok*, n. 5, May, p. 2; ANNEMANS, GEROLF (1989) 'Europa Europees', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 6, June, pp. 4-5.

<sup>721</sup> VB (1992) *Europa ja, Maastricht neen*, press conference, 10 July, p. 12. Here, the party defined Europe in pretty Christian and anti-Muslim tones: 'we are proud of the Crusades, even though we know that there were flaws. We are proud of Europe's victory achieved by Charles Martel at Poitiers. We are proud of Europe's victory at Vienna where the Turks were stopped. We are proud of Europe's victory, the Reconquista, five hundred years ago'.

<sup>722</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 23-25. In this connection, the party also bet that Belgium would not be able to fulfil the Maastricht criteria.

<sup>723</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>724</sup> VB (1990) *Grondbeginselen*, *op. cit.*, p. 15. This was still in the party's programme for the 1989 EU election, see: VB (1989) 'Vlaanderen in Europa', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 6, June, p. 4.

<sup>725</sup> For one of the first examples of such a rhetorical change see: SMOUT, WILLY (1991) 'Wordt de Vlaams-Brabander weldra dakloos?', *Vlaams Blok*, n. 6, June, p. 8.

<sup>726</sup> VAN HAUTHEM and VERREYCKEN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

francophone parties at the European elections as well as contributing to the further Frenchification of the Flemish area around Brussels. But the threat also had an economic dimension, as the Eurocrats settling in Flemish Brabant pushed real estates prices up, luring local owners to sell and driving out less wealthy Flemish tenants.<sup>727</sup>

In the early 2000s, a more conciliatory publication denied that the party intended to drive all the EU institutions out of Brussels and rather suggested that the city should not be the only capital of the Union. Furthermore, they supported the Eastern enlargement, arguing that a wider Europe would probably also be a lighter one. Yet, security concerns about the mobility of Eastern Europeans did arise and the party proposed temporary measures to reduce them. Moreover, any further enlargement had to be limited to the countries belonging to the European civilisation, hence Turkey and the other states of Northern Africa should never be let in, even if human rights, democracy and other standards would be respected within their borders.<sup>728</sup>

The VB also rejected the idea of a European Constitution as useless at best, because people were sufficiently protected by national legislations, and dangerous at worst, since it could run counter to the members' charters.<sup>729</sup> In this context, the EU – the *Blokkers* affirmed – should have as few and well-defined competences as possible, although it should not be dismantled altogether.<sup>730</sup> The party has therefore assumed a clear Eurosceptic profile. Similarly, regarding the debate on the euro crisis, it first suggested letting go of the weakest countries, for instance Greece, and creating a stronger monetary union, made up of healthy European economies such as Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and, of course, Flanders.<sup>731</sup> Since mid-2013, however, the VB has advocated a dismantling of the common currency, as it would only represent a cost for Flanders, and clearly marked its distance from the N-VA's support for the euro.<sup>732</sup> Furthermore, the party highlighted how the crisis had once more shown that the process of European integration furthered, rather than hampered, the process of state dissolution along internal national lines.<sup>733</sup> The VB already made this point in the late 1990s, when it suggested that 'only independent states can put their seal on European policy-making. The political influence of the so-called regions on European decision-making is almost nil'.<sup>734</sup> As the Council remains the gatekeeper – the reasoning goes – one needs statehood to have a say

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<sup>727</sup> Ibidem, pp. 51-53; SMOUT (1991) *op. cit.*

<sup>728</sup> VANHECKE, FRANK and VAN OVERMEIRE, KARIM (2001) *Het Vlaams Blok en Europa: 10 aandachtspunten naar aanleiding van het Belgisch voorzitterschap*, Vlaams Blok, 24 June, pp. 1-4.

<sup>729</sup> Ibidem, pp. 1-2.

<sup>730</sup> Yet, this has recently been advocated in conjunction with the demand to break up the monetary union (from mid-2013 on). The scenario of a dismantling of the EU has not been clearly outlined by the party, though. The VB has also left open the possibility of the simultaneous creation of a new structure of European cooperation – and a new euro including only strong (northern) economies – in which, in any case, Flanders will take part as an independent state. See: VB (2013) 'Europa(Dag): Gekaapt door de EU', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 6, June, pp. 20-21; VB (2014) 'Een greep uit onze voorstellen', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 4, April, pp. 6-7; VAN ROOY, SAM (2014) 'VLexit?', in *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, n. 4, April, p. 15.

<sup>731</sup> VB (2011) 'Peperdure euroramp', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, 8(9), September, pp. 20-21; VB (2011) 'Einde euro kan einde België betekenen', *Vlaams Belang Magazine*, 8(12), December, pp. 9-13. The party had already been sceptical about the adoption of the euro, lest it would recreate the Belgian conditions, whereby Flanders would have to pay for more inefficient countries. VANHECKE, FRANK (1998) 'Vlaanderen en Europa', *Vlaams Blok Magazine*, 5 May, p. 3.

<sup>732</sup> VB (2013) *op. cit.*

<sup>733</sup> VB (2010) *Vlaamingen, op. cit.*, p. 43; ANNEMANS and UTSI, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

<sup>734</sup> ANNEMANS, BUILTINCK et al. (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 16.

and this is ever more true in the context of globalisation, because states must be ever more efficient in managing phenomena such as migrations, economic competition and brain drain.<sup>735</sup>

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<sup>735</sup> LEEN and VAN DEN TROOST (2005) *Vlaamse onafhankelijkheid, Deel II, op. cit.*, pp. 18-19. See also VANHECKE and VAN OVERMEIRE, *op. cit.*, p. 3. Furthermore, the party has not questioned retaining power within the Council, but only argued that Flanders should figure among its members. See VB (2007) *Toekomstplan, op. cit.*, p. 5.

### 4.3 Discourse and Strategy: the N-VA

We repeat here the same exercise made in the previous section. The structure of this part is similar to the one concerning the VB (economic victimisation, political marginalisation, immigration and Europe), but differs for the lack of a section on principled arguments about the creation of the party, which is virtually absent in the party's propaganda. Also, we have not included a section on the right wing profile of the Alliance, because this is much less emphasised than the VB's. We have, however, added a section on the party's cultural and social policy as well as on the novelty represented by its 'instrumental nationalism'.

#### 4.3.1 Geldstroom

The arguments concerning economic victimisation made by the N-VA are not very different from those of the VB. The party has similarly claimed that 12 billion euros (about 7% of Flemish GDP) are transferred from Flanders to Wallonia, through social security, the interests on the Belgian debt and the regional budgets. It has also dismissed the argument whereby this would be a payment of honour to Wallonia for her previous solidarity with Flanders, as it has argued that this never occurred.<sup>736</sup> Thus – the N-VA has concluded – the transfers are an injustice and 'Flanders is a milk cow' which pays to maintain undemocratic and opaque subsidies that only help to prop up a clientelistic socialist state in the South of Belgium.<sup>737</sup> Furthermore, Wallonia does not benefit only from direct allocations, but also from a wider public sector (about 40% of the population)<sup>738</sup> and free-riding practices such as laxer controls on unemployment benefits and lower rates of traffic fine payments.<sup>739</sup>

As the party has consistently lamented, these resources could be used to finance better social policy and investments in Flanders. At the beginning of the years 2000, the N-VA claimed that contrary to what was often believed, Flanders did not have the money to make the improvements needed to re-launch growth and the spirit of enterprise.<sup>740</sup> It further complained that the region was slowly adapting to the transition to a knowledge economy and the money that was being siphoned off by Wallonia could play a crucial role to boost research and development.<sup>741</sup> In more recent years, instead, the Alliance has rather underlined the management prowess of the Flemish government as compared to the rest of Belgium<sup>742</sup> and pointed to an increased urgency to bring about reform in order to

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<sup>736</sup> N-VA (NIEUW-VLAAMSE ALLIANTIE) (2004) 'Jaarlijks 11,3 miljard euro Vlaamse 'solidariteit'', *Volle Manen*, November, p. 4.

<sup>737</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie in vraag en antwoord - Deel I*, September, p. 4; N-VA (2003) *Waarom N-VA? 18 redenen voor zes miljoen Vlamingen*, federal election manifesto, 18 May, p. 19.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

<sup>739</sup> N-VA (2004) 'Om over na te denken voor u in het stembokje stapt!', *Volle Manen*, May, p. 3.

<sup>740</sup> N-VA (2002) 'Ondernemen, bouwsteen voor onze samenleving', *Volle Manen*, October, p. 8.

<sup>741</sup> N-VA (2004) *Voorstellen voor het Vlaanderen van de 21ste eeuw*, regional election manifesto, 13 June, p. 27.

<sup>742</sup> N-VA (2009) 'Vlaamse begroting: besparen en investeren', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, December, p. 11; N-VA (2012) 'Vlaamse begroting in evenwicht', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, October, p. 11; N-VA (2008) 'Federale overheid armlastig door paars begrotingsbeleid', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, February, p. 8.

avoid being dragged down by Wallonia and Brussels in the context of the financial crisis (Figure 4.7; Figure 4.8).<sup>743</sup>

**Figure 4.7 – ‘Don’t Let Flanders Choke’\* (2007)**



\*The bow tie refers to the then leader of the Walloon PS Elio Di Rupo, who often wears it.  
Source: *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*. March 2007, pp. 10-11.

**Figure 4.8 – ‘Exit Flanders, Out of the Crisis’ (2009)**



Source: N-VA (2009) *Afrist Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*

<sup>743</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrist Vlaanderen, uitrit crisis*, regional and European election manifesto, pp. 4-7.

A further reason mentioned to stop the current transfers, is that they have not been effective. According to the N-VA, Wallonia has fallen into a poverty trap and ‘instead of stimulating the endogenous Walloon development, the flow of money keeps Wallonia stuck in the role of eternal beggar’.<sup>744</sup> Thus, what the party has suggested is that the problem is not so much about solidarity, which even in extreme forms can be justified, but rather that solidarity should not turn into dependence.<sup>745</sup> The side effect of the current situation – it has argued – is that ‘social security systems already lack the support of important groups of the population’<sup>746</sup> and this mainly because costs increase but performances do not improve. Therefore, the Alliance is willing to conclude ‘a new socio-economic agreement with Wallonia, whereby we make measurable and time-bound commitments to bring employment to a higher level and within which we organise solidarity’.<sup>747</sup> Wallonia would also profit from an economic policy more tailored to its own characteristics, with, for instance, a lower corporation tax and lower salaries that would enable it to attract more investments. According to the N-VA, the two regions have very different industrial structures, hence, it does not make sense to apply homogenous solutions. In the short term, this would require regulating unemployment benefits better, and devolving labour and fiscal policies to the regions, otherwise Wallonia would keep suffocating the productive Flemish economy.<sup>748</sup> In the longer term, in turn, the party seeks independence for Flanders. According to the Alliance federalism is not the answer because the war of numbers around the transfers hides a more fundamental conflict: “‘there is a communitarian difference, as so often in our country. On the one hand, people in the north of the country want to go to work much more rigorously, are much more concerned with healthy government finances. On the other hand, in the South of the country – and that has always been pretty much the case – they look at that with indifference’”.<sup>749</sup> Therefore, the diverging economic performances of Flanders and Wallonia result from their cultural differences. Solidarity, in its current form, has failed, thus, Flanders is justified in seeking independence as an alternative way to remain among the top regions in Europe.<sup>750</sup>

As in all the other case studies analysed in this work, the party has subscribed to the idea that small countries with sound executive systems often perform better than big ones in the global economy. Quoting the Harvard economists Spolaore and Alesina, the N-VA has suggested that globalisation, aimed at providing economies of scale, goes together with localisation, as a means to reduce heterogeneity costs, which would mean that

<sup>744</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>745</sup> Idem and N-VA (2008) ‘Federale overheid’ *op. cit.*, p. 11. Another problem that the party highlights in this piece is the nature of Belgian federalism, which is a consumption federalism presenting clear problems of accountability. Regions and communities account for most of the spending but not for the collection of taxes and this prevents citizens from making a clear connection between what they pay and the services they get. It has thus suggested turning the system upside down, with the federated states collecting all the taxes and paying the federal government a fee for the services it carries out.

<sup>746</sup> N-VA (2010) *Nu durven veranderen. En sterk sociaal en economisch perspectief voor Vlaanderen en Wallonië*, federal election manifesto, p. 25.

<sup>747</sup> Ibidem, pp. 14 and 66.

<sup>748</sup> N-VA (2007) ‘Nu hervormen of morgen verdrinken. Sociaal-economische hefboomen voor deelstaten’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, December, p. 8. See also, N-VA (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>749</sup> DE WEVER, BART (2009) ‘Er zijn verschillen...’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, October, p. 3. In fact, De Wever quoted the then liberal minister of the budget Guy Vanhengel, but he totally subscribed to his interpretation and rather criticised the traditional Flemish parties because they keep collaborating with the francophone ones, although they already know that it is useless.

<sup>750</sup> N-VA (2007) *Voor en sterker Vlaanderen*, federal election manifesto, p. 6. See also, N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, p. 4.

Belgium no longer makes sense, because scale problems can be moved up to the EU, while heterogeneity costs can be reduced by transferring competences to Flanders.<sup>751</sup>

### 4.3.2 The Sum of Two Democracies

One of the first party brochures read as follows: ‘in almost every issue that is regulated at the Belgian level, Flemings and Walloons are at loggerheads [...] due to these unworkable conditions a great many things get endlessly stuck or, too often, half-hearted steps are the result. All Flemings may well agree on something, it is sufficient that the PS [*Parti socialiste*] says ‘non’ for the issue to get jammed’.<sup>752</sup> Two considerations have stemmed from this acknowledgment.

On the one hand, the N-VA has concluded that Belgium is an irremediably divided country whose communities should simply accept their separation and get a consensual divorce.<sup>753</sup> As confirmed by the party a year later, ‘Belgium is a brake on the development of the prosperity and welfare of both Flanders and Wallonia. Both live in their own socio-economic reality, they have their own public opinion and parties and media that express this attitude. The separation of the souls has been there for long, people only do not dare extend it to the facts’.<sup>754</sup> On the other, the party has highlighted the country's democratic flaws. The main problem pertains to the rules regulating the relation between the Flemish majority and the francophone minority. In this respect, the N-VA does not fundamentally differ from the VB, although the tone and the solution proposed are somewhat less radical.<sup>755</sup> Similarly to the *Blokkers*, the Alliance has argued that in Belgium votes have different weights according to their regional origin. While francophone representatives get a seat for every 35,000 votes, the Flemish get one for every 47,000 votes. Thus, in 2003, the francophone *Ecolo* with 1.2% fewer votes than the N-VA obtained 3 more seats than the N-VA.<sup>756</sup> In a recent manifesto, the party has even claimed that ‘whenever a minority has at its disposal endless resources to block a majority, we call it a democratic crisis. With six million Flemings, we make up about 60% of the Belgian population and provide three quarters of the prosperity. Nevertheless, this country is ruled by a francophone majority [in Parliament EDM]’.<sup>757</sup> The Alliance has recognised that this situation stems from the safeguards that were introduced in the 1960s to defend the rights of the Francophones as a consequence of the rising community conflict, but it has also argued

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<sup>751</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*, p. 68. See also, N-VA (2010) *Nu durven*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>752</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>753</sup> Idem. See also: N-VA (2010) *Nu durven*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>754</sup> N-VA (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>755</sup> In an early publication the party made a clear reference to the VB when arguing that the answers until then given to the ‘vague discontent’ with the functioning of the Belgian democracy had threatened the erosion of democracy through cult of personality and ‘emocracy’. Accordingly, the Alliance has consistently defended representative democracy against participative democracy. The recurrent use of referenda vocally demanded by the VB has been rejected on the ground that the result would be ‘a sham democracy, driven by flat emotion and popular rousing’. N-VA (2001) ‘21 haakse ankerpunten voor en nieuw beleid. Manifest van de N-VA’, *Volle Manen*, n. 10, November, p. 11.

<sup>756</sup> N-VA (2004) ‘Om over na’, *op. cit.*, p. 3. For an explanation of possible distortions in the proportionality of seats see note 646.

<sup>757</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.



that these guarantees have been abused by French-speakers.<sup>758</sup> Accordingly, the Francophones have been depicted as the true conservatives who always block any Flemish attempt to reform the moribund Belgian system.<sup>759</sup> Furthermore, the N-VA has pointed out an inherent contradiction in the francophone discourse, especially of those who propose to create a federal electoral circumscription,<sup>760</sup> i.e.: either French-speakers think that Belgium is divided into two different communities, therefore, a consensual divorce would make much more sense; or they believe in the existence of a unitary Belgian constituency, but in that case they should scrap the safeguards and accept the rule of the majority.<sup>761</sup>

Despite being willing to bring about the break-up of Belgium, the party has adopted a gradualist policy, whereby independence is not necessarily an event, but rather a process of ever more transition of powers from the federal to the regional and European level. This goes along with the idea, seen in the previous section, that small communities fare better in the contemporary world: 'our party believes that the challenges of the 21st century can best be answered by the establishment of strong communities on the one hand and by means of a well developed international cooperation on the other hand. In between these two levels, the level of the Belgian government will evaporate, while already now good governance seems out of reach at the Belgian level'.<sup>762</sup> More recently, answering a controversy about the supposed will of the party to split Belgium after the 2014 federal election, the current leader, Bart de Wever, stated 'I believe in evolution, not in revolution'.<sup>763</sup> At the same time, the party has shown a flexible strategy, whereby it has held government positions in partnership with other parties at the local and regional level, while it has assumed a much more uncompromising stand concerning state reform at the federal level.<sup>764</sup> Here, the alliance has argued that constitutional reforms cannot be delayed anymore, especially in time of crisis.<sup>765</sup> Thus, in the short term, the N-VA has advocated a move to a confederation with all the competences for economic and social policy, as well

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<sup>758</sup> N-VA (2011) 'Bart de Wever: Vlaams-nationalisme, de grondstrom van Vlaanderen', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, September, p. 9.

<sup>759</sup> N-VA (2004) 'Geert Bourgeois: Samen de Vlaamse staat dichterbij brengen', *Volle Manen*, April, p. 8.

<sup>760</sup> Apart from Brussels, and until July 2012 Halle-Vilvoorde, Belgium is divided into monolingual Flemish (in Flanders) and francophone (in Wallonia) electoral districts, which means that people on one side of the language border cannot vote for parties on the other.

<sup>761</sup> N-VA (2010) *Nu durven*, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>762</sup> N-VA (n. d.) *New-Flemish Alliance*, presentation of the party on the English version of the official website, <http://www.n-va.be/english> (accessed on April 21, 2013). See also the 2010 manifesto for the federal election where the party wrote 'small states, as parts of a bigger entity (for instance a monetary union), can often make use of an efficient decision-making system to quickly and efficiently take bold but thoughtful decisions to deal with new socio-economic challenges. The paralysed federal administrative level is not able to take on the transition to a globalised economy'. N-VA (2010) *Nu durven* op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>763</sup> DE STANDAARD (2013) 'Geloven in evolutie, niet in revolutie', *standaard.be*, 18 March, [www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20130318\\_00508607](http://www.standaard.be/artikel/detail.aspx?artikelid=DMF20130318_00508607) (accessed on July 2, 2013).

<sup>764</sup> The N-VA has taken part in a federal government coalition for six months in 2008 (from March to September, holding no ministry though) and since 2004 in the regional government (with a short break between the end of 2008 and mid-2009). The party has also shown to be quite resolved to achieve its own objectives, as September 2008, when it opposed the government in a confidence vote on account of the lack of results on the agreed agenda. See ROCHTUS, op. cit., pp. 274-275. After the 2014 federal election, the party has decided to take part in a 'Flemish-dominated' federal government, which seems to coincide with a strategical change whereby the party would aim to make a more muscular use of the Flemish majority in Belgium as a whole. See section 4.4.2 for more details.

<sup>765</sup> See: N-VA (2007) 'Rien ne va plus', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, September, pp. 8-9; N-VA (2010) 'Het is hoog tijd voor duidelijkheid', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, October, pp. 6-7; DE WEVER, BART (2012) 'In Dorps- én Wetstraat', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, November, p. 3;

as the collection of the relevant taxes, devolved to the confederated states.<sup>766</sup> In the long term, however, the Alliance deems independence the only solution to overcome the irremediably compromised Belgian system. In this connection, the 2007-08 and 2010-12 government crises would epitomise Belgium's *impasse*.<sup>767</sup>

Finally, regarding Brussels, the party's position is not much dissimilar from the VB's. The Alliance has strongly claimed Brussels role as the capital of Flanders, although it has stressed the cultural divide between the city and many Flemings who do not feel at home there.<sup>768</sup> For the same reason, the party has advocated measures to reinforce the 'Dutch character' of the Flemish area around the city, as well as to improve its quality of life in terms of housing, education and welfare. However, the party has been less radical than the VB. While the abolition of the francophone facilities was a constant demand in the party's manifestos up to 2004, it has not appeared in later texts. Furthermore, in 2007, commenting the lack of Flemish control over the schools in these municipalities, the party member of the Flemish Parliament, Kris Van Dijck only asked that the regional executive be in charge of quality checks in order to assure a correct teaching of Dutch along with French. He did not question French as a language of instruction, but simply suggested that francophone children needed efficient tools to get integrated in the Flemish society where they lived.<sup>769</sup>

On the other hand, on the issue of the Brussels-Hal-Vilvoorde arrondissement, the N-VA has joined the VB in support of an unconditional split and opposed the agreements found in 2012 as expensive deals that 'strengthen francophone arrogance further'.<sup>770</sup>

### 4.3.3 Instrumental Nationalism, Culture and Globalisation

For most of its history the VB has used a propaganda largely informed by arguments about the fight for principles of the most radical and pure wing of the Flemish movement. The distance from the N-VA's rhetoric is quite clear when reading one of the Alliance's first statements: 'our Flemish nationalism is not a goal, but a means to get to more democracy and better governance'.<sup>771</sup> The N-VA has thus consistently argued in favour of independence, not so much on the basis of romantic arguments about culture and the nation, but rather on account of the better governance and economic performances that would result therefrom. Even the supposed sufferings undergone by the Flemings are seldom mentioned. While the party clearly denounces the transfers to Wallonia, it almost never refers to the memories of the nineteenth century, the interwar years and the post-

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<sup>766</sup> The terms confederation and confederal system with regard to Belgium are curiously absent from the party manifestos until 2007, while they appear in the party papers at the beginning of 2003. It is true, however, that already the VU had adopted a resolution on confederalism in the mid 1990s, the difference being that the VU never advocated separation. See GOVAERT (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>767</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*, p. 4; PEUMANS, JAN (2012) *Kieskoorts in gemeenten is geen excuus voor een leeg Vlaams Parlement*, N-VA, press release, [ww.n-va.be/nieuws/opinie/kieskoorts-gemeenten-geen-excuus-voor-een-leeg-vlaams-parlement](http://ww.n-va.be/nieuws/opinie/kieskoorts-gemeenten-geen-excuus-voor-een-leeg-vlaams-parlement) (accessed on July 3, 2013).

<sup>768</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>769</sup> On the early calls for abolition of the facilities see N-VA (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 9; N-VA (2004) *Voorstellen voor*, *op. cit.*, p. 5. On Van Dijck statement see N-VA (2007) 'N-VA initiatief brengt faciliteiten-onderwijs volledig onder Vlaamse bevoegdheid', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, April, p. 4.

<sup>770</sup> N-VA (2012) *BHV splitst à la Belge. Franstaligen de lusten, Vlamingen de lasten*, p. 3.

<sup>771</sup> N-VA (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 9. See also: N-VA (2002) 'N-VA – Ledencongres zet Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie op Politieke Landkaart', *Volle Manen*, n. 5, p. 9; N-VA (2004) 'Meteen en krachtig', *Volle Manen*, November, p. 1.

Second World War repression, as, on the contrary, the VB has largely done. For instance, even when proposing to reform the unjust transfers, the N-VA has stated that ‘given the current difference in wealth between Flanders and Wallonia, **a solidarity transfer between the two parts of the state is sensible** [emphasis in the original, EDM] and necessary. The N-VA cherishes no historical rancour and is not a party that aims at organised Flemish group selfishness’.<sup>772</sup>

The Alliance has thus mainly used instrumental arguments that we have already discussed, such as: the malfunctioning of the Belgian democracy, its divided character that would warrant a peaceful divorce, its declining economic performance, its unjustified fiscal imbalances, and the idea that small dynamic regions perform better in the global economy. Some others should be added. The party has suggested that social justice is more easily achievable in places where people share a strong sense of belonging to the same community. Therefore, nationalism plays an important role in making society cohesive and reinforcing solidarity, although the N-VA has been open to an inclusive definition of nationality as something that can be acquired by everybody who subscribes to some basic values and cultural features of the Flemish community.<sup>773</sup> In this connection, the party has declared itself to be in favour of the strengthening of social security for the members of the national community, rather than its dismantling, although this goes along with a conception of the right to work as stemming from the duty to contribute to the community and with a rejection of an unconditional basic income for everybody.<sup>774</sup>

The ‘instrumental discourse about nationalism’ was recently further discussed by Bart De Wever in an interview to the party paper, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*. There, De Wever argued that the notion of global citizenship, so much in vogue during the Cold War, proved to be a hollow concept. ‘It is good to feel equally connected to everyone in the world – the N-VA leader said – so long as you are not asked to share your income with anybody and so long as you need not accept that through a democratic vote poorer citizens of the world could compel you to do something’.<sup>775</sup> For decades, he suggested, nationalism was seen as the source of all evils and any discourse about identity, especially in relationship with immigrants, was considered, notably by the Left, as entailing an automatic effect of exclusion of newcomers. In this way, the far right was left with a monopoly on the issue.<sup>776</sup> Yet, people slowly came to realise the usefulness of national identity as a prerequisite for democracy, since it makes it possible to define who enjoys democratic rights. According to De Wever, this awareness has mainly been triggered by massive immigration whereby the local population was confronted with people who spoke different languages and had distinct social habits, which made national identity much more salient, as we shall see in the next section.<sup>777</sup> Implicit in the idea that nationalism is a

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<sup>772</sup> N-VA (2007) *Voor een sterker Vlaanderen*, federal election manifesto, p. 11.

<sup>773</sup> N-VA (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 14-15; N-VA (2009) ‘7 juni is niet het eindpunt’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, June, p. 11.

<sup>775</sup> N-VA (2009) ‘Een Vlaming bestaat wel’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, December, p. 5. As explained in other texts, however, the rejection of a world citizenship is not only an economic question. On the contrary, the party rejects a purely materialist understanding of society and deems it impossible that the individual could participate alone in a world society. It therefore defends a ‘liberal communitarian’ ideology whereby it does not refuse participation in the global community, but it asserts that ‘the local community remains the framework in which we fully participate and in which we can best protect our cultural, social, economic and environmental achievements’. N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>776</sup> In this connection, quoting the historian Eric Defoort, he stated ‘to reject identity because racism exists, is like rejecting sex because pornography exists’. N-VA (2009) ‘Een Vlaming’, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>777</sup> *Idem*.

means to achieve better democracy and good governance is the argument that the quality of government can be a rationale for independence. Whereas this has been already contemplated by ‘remedial secession’ theories,<sup>778</sup> the secessionist scenario has usually been limited to extreme cases of major violations of human rights. That is also why separatist movements generally make abundant reference to past harm and grievances inflicted by the parent state. In the N-VA rhetoric, instead, we find very little reference to major harm. There are economic grievances, of course, but the party's reasoning is more about the prospects of Flanders in an aggressive world economy where an efficient and transparent government is an essential component of a country's competitiveness.<sup>779</sup> Accordingly, especially under the leadership of Bart De Wever, the party has tried to send out a positive message for independence, centred around a bright future for a Flemish Republic as well as the ideas of a ‘positive alternative’ and a ‘positive revolution’ (Figure 4.9).<sup>780</sup>

**Figure 4.9 – ‘Now Dare Change’ (2010)**



Source: [www.n-va.be](http://www.n-va.be) (accessed on July 5, 2013).

In this way, despite representing a toughening of the mainstream Flemish movement, as it made its pro-independence stand much clearer than the *Volksunie*'s, the N-VA has succeeded in making Flemish separatism acceptable to the Flemings, by filling a gap in the Belgian political scene and stealing from the extremist VB the monopoly over Flemish independence. As De Wever proudly announced after the N-VA's first landslide victory in 2009, ‘the Flemish call for independence again becomes a negotiable and honourable

<sup>778</sup> See for instance BUCHANAN, ALLEN (1998) ‘What's So Special About Nations’, in MARGARET, MOORE (ed.) *National Self-Determination and Secession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>779</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*, p. 21. See also, N-VA (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>780</sup> DE WEVER, BART (2010) ‘Weg van het chaos-denken’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, May, p. 3. In this connection the titles of the 2009 and 2010 manifestos are eloquent. The former *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *utirit crisis* portrays the image of a car running on the highway (Belgium) that can go at full speed and get out of the crisis only taking the exit Flanders. The latter is entitled *Nu durven veranderen* (now dare change) and the subtitle reads ‘a stronger social and economic prospect for Flanders and Wallonia’.

endeavour'.<sup>781</sup> This is also largely due to the party's more moderate positions on the issue of immigration.

#### 4.3.4 Inburgering

Contrary to the VB, the N-VA has centred its immigration policy around the concept of integration (*inburgering*). While for the VB the culture of non-EU migrants is inherently at odds with the Flemish and European ones, and therefore integration is extremely hard, even impossible, the N-VA has argued that immigration can be an enriching phenomenon, but it must be managed.

The party has early on tried to distance itself from the VB. In 2002, it affirmed that anybody could become a Fleming and contribute to the Flemish public culture, yet, immigrants have a duty to make an effort to integrate, while the government must provide them with the tools to do that, especially language courses. It thus criticised the VB's repatriation policy, pointing out that it would be unfair to hold immigrants accountable for not having integrated into the Flemish society while they were called to fill the gaps in the labour market and no means of integration were offered to them.<sup>782</sup> Such integration instruments would boil down to courses of Dutch language and Flemish institutions and laws at the end of which one gets an 'integration certificate'.<sup>783</sup> This would also allow immigrants without criminal convictions, to obtain, after five years, the right to vote in local elections.<sup>784</sup> As suggested by the party MEP Frieda Brepoels, such a programme would not only target non-European migrants, but also European ones, with special reference to language courses for Eurocrats moving to Flanders.<sup>785</sup>

Therefore, in the party's ideology multicultural society is not a problem *per se*, what has failed instead is multiculturalism meant as 'the policy of looking away and living side by side'.<sup>786</sup> According to the N-VA, identity is more than a civic commitment, it entails a cultural basis. However, newcomers can acquire it through a process that is necessary for the society as well as for the newcomers, since it improves their social mobility and prevents *de facto* apartheid (Figure 4.10). At the same time, integration would not involve any breach of the freedom of expression, as people must only learn the language and accept some basic values, such as freedom, equality, solidarity, pluralism and respect.<sup>787</sup>

What the party has clearly opposed is illegal immigration. As it has consistently argued, this should be fought because it causes the bad image that immigration often suffers from and because illegal migrants are often exploited by criminal gangs. Here, the N-VA has pointed to a curious paradox: despite having officially banned non-EU immigration since

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<sup>781</sup> Quoted in ROCHTUS, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

<sup>782</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>783</sup> N-VA (2004) *Voorstellen voor*, *op. cit.*, p. 15; N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35. It is not clear, however, what would be the sanction for those who drop out or fail the integration course.

<sup>784</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie*, *op. cit.*, p. 7. After 10 years without criminal convictions, immigrants can then apply for citizenship.

<sup>785</sup> N-VA (2006) 'EU-onderdanen weinig betrokken bij verkizingen', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, October, p. 7. In this case, however, the courses would only be offered to the Eurocrats. No compulsory character is hinted at there.

<sup>786</sup> N-VA (2011) 'Multikulti is gescheitert...', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, March, p. 8.

<sup>787</sup> N-VA (2009) 'Een Vlaming', *op. cit.*, p. 7.

1974, Belgium has not been able to substantially reduce the flow of immigrants.<sup>788</sup> Instead of a ‘fake ban’, as it has defined it, the Alliance has thus advocated opening official channels to let people in without social, economic or intellectual discrimination, but in a regulated and controlled manner. The corollary of such a system would be the establishment of quotas and the repatriation of clandestines.<sup>789</sup> Regarding the former, these should be coordinated at the EU level and demands should be addressed to EU emigration offices in the countries of origin.<sup>790</sup> As far as the latter is concerned, instead, the Alliance has justified sending back illegal migrants on the basis of fairness to those incomers who would go through all the legal procedures, as well as by referring to the lack of rights and the impossibility of integration that the illegals would suffer from.<sup>791</sup> The party has therefore been very careful to present its immigration policy as providing the best opportunities to the migrants in the first place. Yet, its programme also foresees a ‘community preference’ principle, whereby employers should give priority to EU candidates and, only then, look for employees from outside the EU.<sup>792</sup>

**Figure 4.10 – ‘Own People Together’ (2007)**



Source: *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, May 2007, p. 4.

As in many other policy fields, the N-VA’s preference has lain in getting rid of the Belgian framework, which prevents Flanders from adopting its own policies. Without control over who has the right to come in, Flanders cannot implement its integration plans

<sup>788</sup> The party refers to the ban on low-skilled migrants that was adopted in the 1970s and, despite not directly targeted at non-Europeans, it affected them disproportionately. The immigrant population from outside Europe has since kept increasing, although considerably less in the 1980s, through family reunification, high birth rates of the immigrant families already in the country and, especially in the 1990s, asylum seekers.

<sup>789</sup> N-VA (2007) *Voor een sterker*, op. cit., pp. 26-30.

<sup>790</sup> N-VA (2001) op. cit., p. 13. The party has also suggested organising the integration courses in the countries of origin, an idea that has been picked up by the VB as well in its 2010 manifesto. N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>791</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen*, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

<sup>792</sup> N-VA (2007) *Voor een sterker*, op. cit., p. 30.

and this is especially the case because, with its extremely lax policy,<sup>793</sup> Belgium ‘turns the tap on through an uncontrolled migration policy that makes no connection whatsoever with what has since long been achieved in other modern Western countries and what Flanders itself is now developing: a good reception policy that makes cultural and socio-economic integration possible’.<sup>794</sup>

#### 4.3.5 Europe

As compared to the VB, the N-VA has held a more favourable stand regarding the European Union. In 2009, for instance, in the midst of the financial crisis, the party declared itself to be strongly pro-European and not willing to grab the opportunity for populist anti-EU propaganda (with a clear reference to the VB that defended a much less supportive position).<sup>795</sup> This does not mean that everything goes well in Brussels, but the party has opted for a constructive criticism aimed at improving the existing institutions.<sup>796</sup> In this connection, it has campaigned for deeper political integration, rather than further enlargement, suggesting that otherwise the EU would lose its soul and become paralysed.<sup>797</sup> In a somewhat contradictory way, however, such requests for further integration have gone along with a call for less centralisation and the transfer of a limited amount of competences to the EU, or the reshuffling of those already devolved in order to make the EU less based on economic policy and more concerned with social, cultural and environmental issues. Furthermore, in the party's view, the EU should not have a homogenising effect. It should instead remain plurilingual and allow any member to defend its language and culture.<sup>798</sup>

The N-VA has also subscribed to the widespread criticism concerning the EU's democratic deficit. It has defined the EU as a ‘civil-servant state’ that is not directly accountable to the people. It has thus supported the direct election of the President of the Commission and demanded a clearer division of competences between the Union and its members to avoid its undemocratic expansion.<sup>799</sup> Yet, the Alliance has at the same time stressed how state governments tend to hide behind the EU's democratic deficit when enforcing unpopular measures, while their representatives negotiate and approve them.<sup>800</sup> In this connection, it has pointed out that the democratic deficit is much stronger in the case of Flanders because, as a region, it does not even have its own representatives at the

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<sup>793</sup> This might seem contradictory with the ban on immigration just mentioned above. The party, however, mainly refers to state control of illegal immigration and the handling of asylum requests that, in its opinion, would be too lax and open up an avenue to unchecked migrant flows.

<sup>794</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>795</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>796</sup> N-VA (2007) ‘De N-VA is de enige Vlaams-Europese partij’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, April, p. 6.

<sup>797</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, pp. 69-74. In this connection, the party has opposed Turkey's accession. However, while in 2002 it used cultural arguments to justify that, in 2004 it referred to the lack of respect for democracy and human rights and since 2009 it has argue that the large and very different economic structure of the country would put the absorption capacity of the EU under strain.

<sup>798</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, pp. 5-6; N-VA (2004) *Vlaanderen en de Europese Unie, Verkiezingsprogramma N-VA*, European election manifesto, 13 June, pp. 1-4; N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, 69. With regard to the reshuffling of competences, the Alliance has particularly supported cooperation in the defence sector, where it has argued that major economies of scale can be realised.

<sup>799</sup> N-VA (2004) *Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, pp. 1-4. N-VA (2009) ‘Europa boven’, *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, May, p. 6.

<sup>800</sup> N-VA (2002) *De Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, pp. 5.

Council, where decisions are taken.<sup>801</sup> The N-VA has thus made clear that, contrary to common wisdom, the EU is an additional reason for independence rather than a dissuasive device and this because, in order to have a say in it, a community necessarily needs to be a state.<sup>802</sup> Even more paradoxically, due to the especially complex division of powers in Belgium, state ministers negotiate in Europe matters for which they would not be competent within the country because this has been devolved to the regions. Therefore, according to the party, Flanders' autonomy is violated by the state via the EU<sup>803</sup> and the situation is made worse by the often-diverging demands of Flanders and Wallonia. As a solution, the Alliance has asked to allow split votes in the Council of Ministers, which would permit member state representatives to vote according to the instructions of the regional governments. It has also asked that 'constitutional regions' such as Flanders, Catalonia, Scotland and the Basque Country be allowed to vote in the Council of Ministers on matters they are responsible for.<sup>804</sup> In the long term, however, the solution advocated by the N-VA lies in the establishment of an independent Flanders as a member state of the EU, which it presents as a choice for democracy, good governance and prosperity, rather than a move back to a distant nationalist past.<sup>805</sup> After all, as the party suggested right after the 2004 enlargement, 'if the 2 million Slovenes, the 3 million Lithuanians and the 5 million Slovaks just now can sit at the European decision-making table, why then do the 6 million Flemings have no say there?'.<sup>806</sup>

Finally, during the recent crisis the party has turned into one of the most vocal supporter of austerity. This should be no surprise since the division between thrifty northern economies and extravagant southern ones defended by the supporters of fiscal sobriety clearly echoes the N-VA's discourse about Flanders and Wallonia. Hence, the party has sided with Germany within the Eurozone. As stated by Bart De Wever in a visit to the University of Heidelberg: 'solidarity is required, but it looks impossible to relate it to the concepts of moral and financial responsibility without being immediately accused of being selfish'.<sup>807</sup> In domestic terms, this means that Belgium should put its balance sheet in order, thus avoiding becoming the Greece of the Meuse.<sup>808</sup>

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<sup>801</sup> In fact, ministers of the Flemish government are allowed to take part in the meetings of the Council of Ministers of the EU relating to policy areas on which they exercise exclusive competence. For contrasting views on the benefits of such participation see: KEATING, MICHAEL and HOOGHE, LIESBET (2006) 'Bypassing the Nation-state? Regions and the EU Policy Process', in RICHARDSON, JEREMY (ed.) *European Union: Power and Policy-Making* (London: Routledge) 2<sup>nd</sup> edition; and TATHAM, MICHAËL (2008) 'Going Solo: Direct Regional Representation in the European Union', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 18(5), pp. 493-515.

<sup>802</sup> N-VA (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 10. The party calculated that between 70% and 90% of the laws enacted in 2009 at the regional level stemmed from European directives. N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.

<sup>803</sup> N-VA (2004) *Vlaanderen en de Europese Unie, op. cit.*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>804</sup> N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>805</sup> Ibidem, pp. 71-74. N-VA (2004) *Vlaanderen en de Europese Unie, op. cit.*, pp. 1-4.

<sup>806</sup> N-VA (2004) *Voorstellen voor, op. cit.*, p. 6. In a later text, they also underlined the economic and cultural contribution of Flanders to the wider European trade and civilisation. N-VA (2009) *Afrit Vlaanderen, op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>807</sup> N-VA (2012) 'Bart De Wever spreekt aan Heidelbergse Universiteit', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, September, p. 14.

<sup>808</sup> N-VA (2011) 'Een Griekse tragedie', *Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine*, November, p. 16. Although, we do not treat it here in detail, because it goes beyond the temporal limit fixed for this in-depth inquiry of the propaganda, it should be noted that since late 2013, the party moved to a slightly more sceptical position that it defined as 'Eurorealism' and that was confirmed by the party's decision to join the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament. On this see: LERUTH, BENJAMIN (2014)



## 4.4 Examining the VB's and N-VA's Discourse and Strategy

The most important grievances denounced by the VB and the N-VA pertain to the fiscal exploitation of Flanders, on the one hand, and the malfunctioning of Belgian democracy, which perpetuates the 'minoritisation' of the Flemish majority on the part of the francophone minority, on the other. This part is divided in three sections. The first examines the supposed Flemish economic victimisation of Flanders, while the second analyses the claims of political marginalisation. In these two sections, we try to explain why the nationalism of the rich arose at the end of the 1970s in Flanders and how it is still relevant today.

### 4.4.1 Economic Victimisation

Several authors interpret the rise of Flemish nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century as stemming from the increased self-awareness acquired by the new Flemish elite that originated in the region's formidable economic performance after the Second World War.<sup>809</sup> Before discussing in detail such a hypothesis, and the specific claims concerning the transfers from Flanders to Wallonia, it is necessary to briefly describe the economic development of the Belgian regions.

As of 1846 the provinces corresponding to today's Flanders<sup>810</sup> were more industrialised than Wallonia. At the time, 48.1% of workers in the northern part of Belgium were employed in manufacturing, versus 46.9% in the South. By 1880, however, the roles had been completely reversed, with 56.3% of the industrial workforce in Wallonia and 36.3% in Flanders.<sup>811</sup> Thanks to its large coal deposits, Wallonia profited from industrialisation and established itself as a leading manufacturing region that exported all over the world until the early twentieth century. The decline of the Flemish textile and agricultural sectors, outpaced by cheaper products coming from Great Britain and the United States left a large pool of workers jobless unleashing migrant outflows. Yet, the port of Antwerp benefited from its connection with the surrounding industrial areas of Wallonia, northern France and Western Germany. Likewise, Brabant, including its Flemish part, showed sustained growth due to the presence of the service firms located in Brussels.<sup>812</sup>

Already at the beginning of the twentieth century the northern regions began improving their economic performance, especially thanks to lower wages and rapid mechanisation of the textile industry. Moreover, the exhaustion of the first coal deposits in Wallonia increased ore imports that favoured the rise of chemical and steel plants around the ports

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'The New Flemish Alliance decision to join the ECR group says more about Belgian politics than it does about their attitudes to the EU', *LSE Blogs*, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2014/06/23/the-new-flemish-alliances-decision-to-join-the-ecr-group-says-more-about-belgian-politics-than-it-does-about-their-attitude-toward-the-eu/> (accessed on December 15, 2014).

<sup>809</sup> See MEYNEN, ALAIN (2009) 'Economic and Social Policy since the 1950s', in WITTE, CRAEYBECKX and MEYNEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-277; WITTE (2009) *Increasing, op. cit.*, p. 365; NAGELS, JACQUES (2002) 'La situation économique de la Flandre et le Mouvement Flamand', *Brussels Economic Review*, 45(4), p. 109.

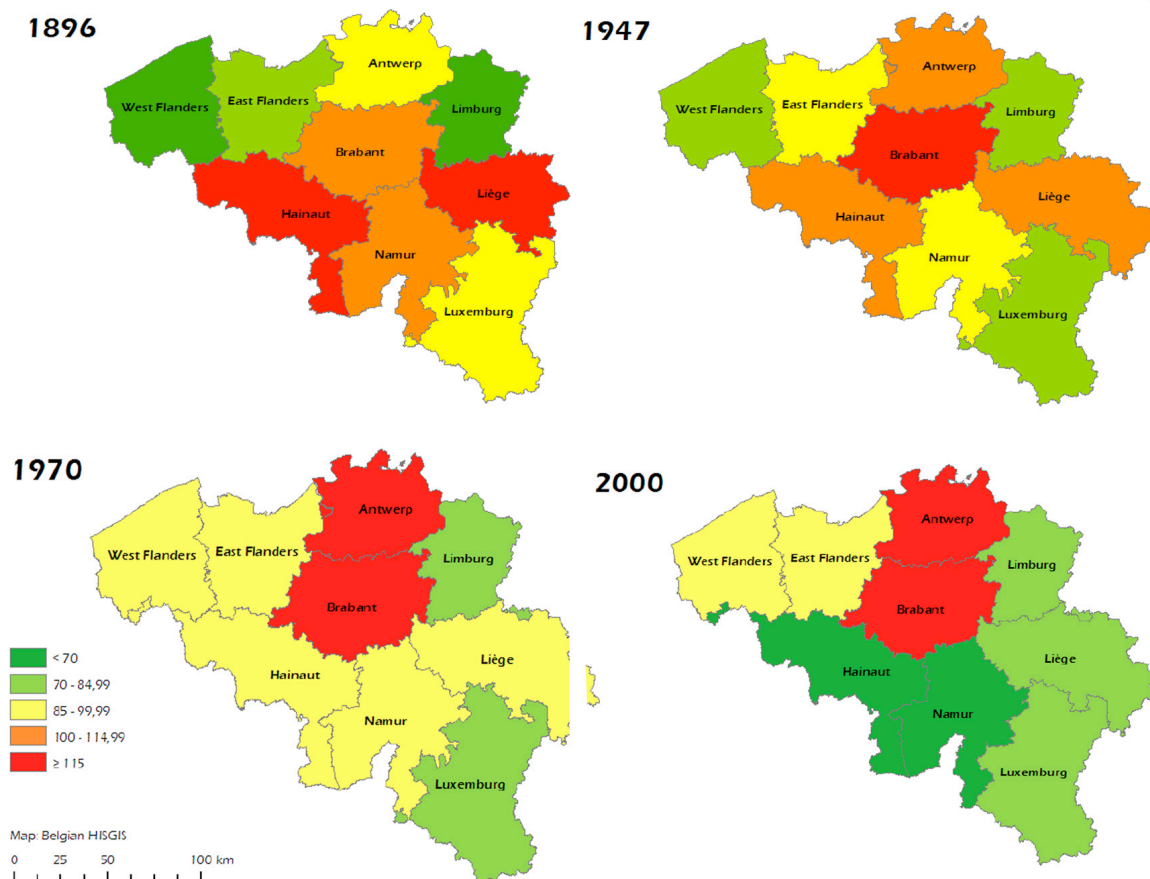
<sup>810</sup> Flanders is composed of five provinces: West and East Flanders (coinciding with the former County of Flanders), Antwerp, Flemish Brabant and Limburg.

<sup>811</sup> NAGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>812</sup> BUYST, ERIK (2009) *Reversal of Fortune in a Small, Open Economy: Regional GDP in Belgium, 1896-2000*, Vlaams Instituut voor Economie en Samenleving discussion paper n. 8, September, pp. 7-10.

of Antwerp, Ghent and Zeebrugge. Thus, although Wallonia was still more prosperous on average, by 1947, the geographical distribution of GDP in the country had changed substantially (Figure 4.11).

**Figure 4.11 – Relative Regional GDP per Capita, 1896-2000 (Belgium = 100)**



Source: BUYST, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 and 13.

The post-war boom of the oil industry accelerated the decline of Wallonia and the contemporary relative rise of Flanders. Between 1959 and 1967, 61,000 people lost their job in the former against only 25,000 in the latter, whereas, in the meantime, 58,000 new positions were created in the North against only 16,000 in the South.<sup>813</sup> Furthermore, during the 1950s and early 1960s political parties in Flanders campaigned under the slogan *Werk in eigen streek* (work in your region) calling for state intervention to boost the Flemish economy. The 1959 laws of economic expansion met such requests by providing subsidies to domestic and foreign investments. These led to sustained growth – around 5% a year – throughout the decade, but with striking regional differences: while Flanders attracted most foreign investments, state subsidies to Wallonia only prolonged the agony of its collapsing manufacturing sector.<sup>814</sup> In this process, Flanders was certainly

<sup>813</sup> BAUDHUIN, FERNAND (1970) *Histoire économique de la Belgique, 1957-1968* (Brussels: Emile Bruylant) p. 76.

<sup>814</sup> MEYNEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 279-281.

advantaged by its strategic location along the coast and in the centre of the newborn common Western European market. It is hardly surprising, thus, that two thirds of foreign investment entering Belgium in the 1960s targeted the North.<sup>815</sup> However, next to the ‘Fordist’ model of development<sup>816</sup> strongly sustained by foreign capital concentrated in the area around Antwerp, the region experienced the emergence of a robust array of endogenous SMEs in the Western provinces of Courtrai, Roulers, Tielt and Ypres. The real overtaking occurred in 1965 and the gulf widened in the second half of the 1970s, when Flanders became much more export-oriented and focused on research and development, while Wallonia remained stuck in declining industrial sectors and largely undercapitalised.<sup>817</sup> These were years of Walloon mobilisation for economic autonomy. As suggested by André Mommen, ‘the Wallons imputed the economic decline of Wallonia to the Belgian state which had become colonized by Flemish pressure groups. Although it was widely admitted that the decline of Walloon industry was due to the defensive investment policy of the big holding companies, the industrial workers in Wallonia felt themselves threatened by an ever-growing Flemish majority imposing its own will on the Walloon minority’.<sup>818</sup>

In the mid-70s the country experienced a sudden fall in productivity not followed by wage restraint, which caused high unemployment – especially in Wallonia – and fast-growing public expenses (34% of GDP in 1960, 42.7% in 1973, 50% in 1976).<sup>819</sup> The government started cumulating budget deficits year after year, until the public debt attained 127% of GDP in 1987 and 137.8% in 1993 (Figure 4.12). In order to balance the books, the government resorted to higher direct taxation (revenue went from 38% to 48% of GDP between 1970 and 1985) and foreign borrowing, since debt service requirements outpaced domestic savings.<sup>820</sup>

The first systematic studies on the transfers began being produced in Flanders in 1979 at the Centre for Economic Studies of the Catholic University of Leuven. Paul van Rompuy was the first to calculate them. Using a mix of monetary and benefit-flow methods, he found that during the 1975-78 period, Flanders and Brussels contributed 3.5% and 1.5% of their regional GDP, on average, to finance Wallonia’s fiscal deficit (equal to 7.8% of the latter’s GDP on average).<sup>821</sup> In later years, Van Rompuy carried out further studies culminating in the 1988 *Tien jaar financiële stromen tussen de gewesten in België* (Ten Years of Financial Transfers between the Flemish Regions) that highlighted a consistently growing transfer from Flanders to Wallonia throughout the 1975-1985 period,

<sup>815</sup> Between 1959 and 1969 the region of Antwerp alone attracted more foreign direct investment than the entire Wallonia. NAGELS, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

<sup>816</sup> By ‘Fordism’ we refer here to large industrial sites of standardised mass production.

<sup>817</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 115-119.

<sup>818</sup> MOMMEN, ANDRÉ (1994) *The Belgian Economy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge) p. 129.

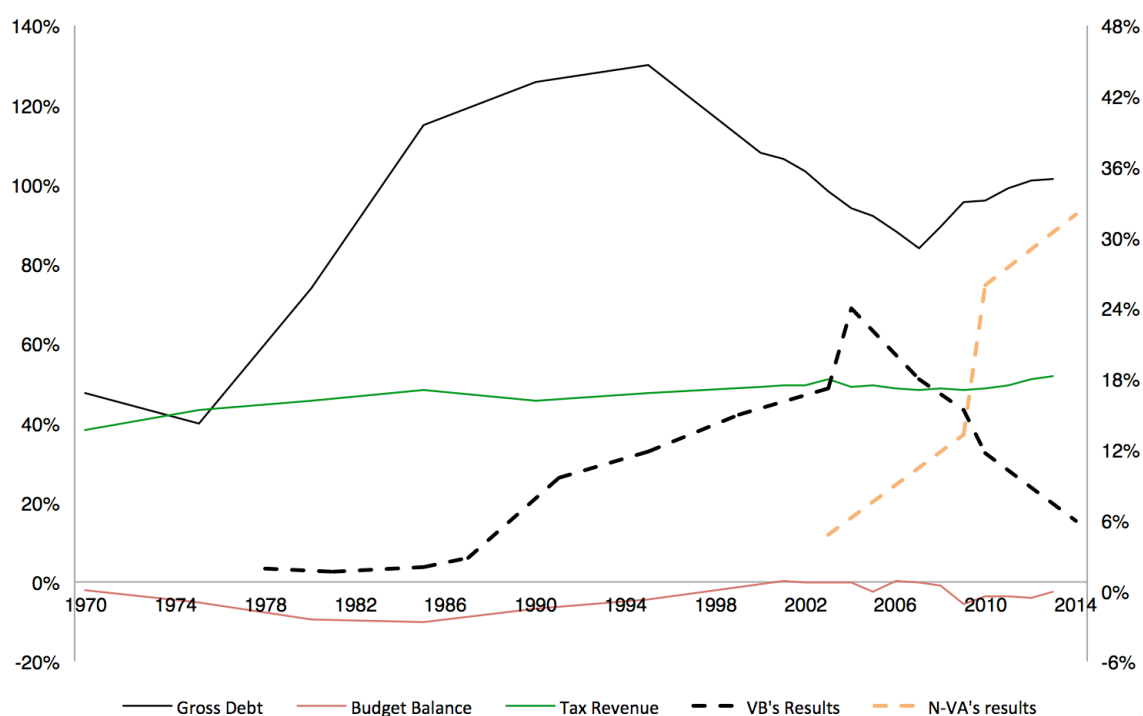
<sup>819</sup> MEYNEN, *op. cit.*, 285-296. Other factors that contributed substantially to the rise of public spending were: a deliberate expansion of the body of civil servants (to 24% of the dependent working population in 1974 and 28.5% in 1979) aimed at reducing unemployment, the indexation of unemployment benefits to inflation and the high interests on the debt (12% of public spending in the yearly 1980s). See MOMMEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-158.

<sup>820</sup> MOMMEN, *op. cit.*, p. 158; CALLATAY and THYS-CLEMENT, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

<sup>821</sup> VAN ROMPUY, PAUL and VERHEIRSTRATEN, ALBERT (1979) ‘Regionale herverdelings- en financieringsstromen’, *Leuvense Economische Standpunten*, n. 14; VAN ROMPUY, PAUL, VERHEIRSTRATEN, ALBERT and UYTTEBROUK, FRANCIS (1980) *De regionalisering van de overheidsontvangsten en -uitgaven en de interregionale financiële stromen 1975-1978* (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven) p. 48.

going from 2.4% of Flemish GDP in 1975 to 10.4% a decade later.<sup>822</sup> The steepness of the hike, however, was largely due to the introduction of a methodological change in the calculation of the interests on the debt. He argued that the impressive size of the Belgian debt was clearly due to a share of the budget deficit financing current expenses. In this context, allocating the interests on the debt according to the benefit principle as he had done until then – i.e. to the region where government spending or investments financed through debt was realised – did not make sense. Thus, he replaced it with the ‘accrual principle’, by correcting the benefit one through an evaluation of the contribution of each region to the cumulative budget deficit.<sup>823</sup> This greatly increased the evaluation of the transfers, as according to the benefit method the growth of Flanders’ solidarity stopped at 5.9% of GDP, rather than the 10.4% mentioned above. The accrual principle was later contested by other scholars, yet this did not stop the VB from adopting the figures based on it in its own calculations at the beginning of the 1990s.

**Figure 4.12 – Belgium’s Gross Debt, Budget Balance and Tax Revenue (left y-axis) vs. the VB’s and N-VA’s Electoral Results\* (right y-axis) (percentage of GDP and percentage of regional vote), 1970-2014**



\* Data for the VB and the N-VA relates to Flemish and Belgian elections in percentage of total votes in Flanders. Data for 1995 and 1999 when these two were held together are equal to the mean of the Flemish and Belgian elections results.

Source: IMF-FAD; CALLATAY, ETIENNE and THYS-CLEMENT, FRANCOISE (eds.) (2012) *The Return of the Deficit. Public Finance in Belgium over 2000-2010* (Leuven: Leuven University Press) p. 314; and Belgian National Bank for 2011-2013 data on debt, deficit and tax revenue.

<sup>822</sup> VAN ROMPUY, PAUL and BILSEN, VALENTIJN (1988) *10 jaar financiële stromen tussen de gewesten in België* (Leuven: KUL) p. 24.

<sup>823</sup> Ibidem, pp. 7-8.

Most other analyses carried out in the 1980s focused on transfers within the social security system. This is the case with the *Gewestelijke Economische Raad voor Vlaanderen* (Regional Economic Council for Flanders), which mandated a first study in 1982.<sup>824</sup> A year later, Michel Dethée refined it and then repeated the same exercise, with updated data, in 1990. According to his calculations, between 1979 and 1989, Flanders recorded increasingly larger positive social security balances – when adding subsidies from taxation to social charges – against ever-larger deficits in Wallonia. By 1989, the Flemish population was contributing 30% more per head and spending 19% less, thus realising a total transfer of 86 billion Belgian francs, equal to about 3% of GDP – almost twice as much as the same figure in 1976.<sup>825</sup> While Dethée’s and Van Rompuy’s works almost exclusively aimed at gauging the size of the transfers, in 1989, some researchers at the Centre for Social Policy of the University of Antwerp tried to identify the reasons behind them. Their conclusion was that these mainly lay in economic, demographic and labour structural differences between Flanders and Wallonia resulting from historical processes that could not be easily reversed, but warned that ‘the existence of a historical border between the two federal regions lends a political meaning to this solidarity transfers; similar transfers can (and probably will) occur within one political sphere’.<sup>826</sup> The politicisation of the results was clear from the treatment of one of their most striking findings, i.e., that, despite recording higher unemployment and lower salaries, after taxes and social benefits the Walloons were on average better off than the Flemings. This was an inheritance from the time when Wallonia was the richer region in the country, whereby higher salaries in the past translated into higher pensions even at a time when the positions of the two areas had reversed. Hence, it was a temporary effect, but it had a lasting impact on the Flemish demands for autonomy, especially because similar results were disseminated a year later by another, and much more widely publicised, publication: the report of the Club van Leuven entitled *Vlaanderen op een Kruispunt* (Flanders at a Crossroads).<sup>827</sup>

The appearance of such academic interest in the solidarity between Flanders and Wallonia at the end of the 1970s was not accidental. At least, three interrelated factors influenced Flemish scholars’ attention: the process of federalisation initiated in 1970, the economic crisis that hit the country after the first oil shock and the very different structures

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<sup>824</sup> GERV (1983) *Regionalisering van de uitgaven en de ontvangsten inzake sociale zekerheid – periode 1975-1981* (Antwerp: GERV). The GERV is today called *Sociaal-economische Raad van Vlaanderen* and it is a consultative organ of the Flemish social partners (mainly trade unions and business organisations), but it also advises the Flemish Government and Parliament.

<sup>825</sup> DETHEE, MICHEL (1990) *Regionale analyse van de Sociale Zekerheid 1985-1989*, Genootschap for Sociale Zekerheid, Antwerpen, 5 April; and DETHEE, MICHEL (1984) ‘Een regionale Analyse van de Sociale Zekerheid in België’, *GERV-Berichten*, n. 45. Results reported in LEBLANC, SIMON (1990) *La fédéralisation de la sécurité sociale*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, n. 1282-1283, pp. 28-38. Figures in percentage of regional GDP based on our calculations.

<sup>826</sup> DELEECK, HERMAN, DE LATHOUWER, LIEVE and VAN DEN BOSCH, KAREL (1989) ‘Regional Differences in the Distribution of Social Security Benefits in Belgium: Facts and Causes’, *Cahier économique de Bruxelles*, n. 123, p. 268.

<sup>827</sup> ALEN, ANDRÉ et al. (1990) *Rapport van de Club van Leuven. Vlaanderen op een Kruispunt* (Lannoo: Universitaire Pers Leuven) pp. 141-151. On the importance of this publication see: BELAND, DANIEL and LECOURS, ANDRÉ (2005) ‘Nationalism, Public Policy and Institutional Development: Social Security in Belgium’, *Journal of Public Policy*, 25(2), p. 273; POIRIER, JOHANNE and VANSTEENKISTE, STEVEN (2000) ‘Le débat sur la fédéralisation de la sécurité sociale en Belgique: le miroir du vouloir-vivre ensemble?’, *Revue belge de sécurité sociale*, 2, pp. 347-348.

of the Flemish and Walloon economy.<sup>828</sup> On the Flemish side, the federalisation of the country had mainly been sought for cultural reasons pertaining to the protection of the Dutch language and culture. Yet, from the mid-1970s on, with the fixation of the linguistic border and the establishment of the communities, and despite the lingering of problematic exceptions in border areas, the linguistic issue progressively gave way to economic disputes between the two territories, as the rise of the notion of ‘economic federalism’ bears witness.<sup>829</sup> This built upon a socio-economic dimension embedded in the programme of the Flemish movement since the end of the nineteenth century, which had however been overshadowed by the linguistic struggle. During the interwar years, for instance, part of the Flemish movement formulated the accusation that the francophone elite was deliberately keeping Flanders poor in order to have a reservoir of cheap workforce for the Walloon industries, a theme that could be easily adapted in the context of the 1970s to the ‘fiscal exploitation’ of Flanders.<sup>830</sup> In this way, an issue of interpersonal solidarity was increasingly framed as an interterritorial one.

The establishment of the regions also coincided with the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, in which economic regionalism arose as a powerful recipe to relieve the malaise of Western economies and that was seized upon by the Flemish political and economic elite to call for further autonomy. Between 1973 and 1980 the unemployment rate grew from 2.2% to 7.8%, more than in most other OECD countries. As seen above, the government reacted with a mix of Keynesian policies based on increasing public employment, unemployment programmes and other forms of aid to suffering industries that made public debt soar without bringing an end to the economic slump.<sup>831</sup> Yet, the very different structures of Flanders and Wallonia favoured the adoption of diverging tactics. Since the five national sectors mostly hit by the structural transition of Fordist modes of production were more heavily concentrated in Wallonia – especially coal mining and steel manufacturing – local actors pushed for renewed state support. The adoption of alternative strategies was discouraged by the fact that the consequences of adjustment could hardly be absorbed by other economic sectors. By contrast, as argued by Stijn Osterlynck, ‘because of the sector and job diversity of its industrial structure, the Flemish economy was more open to alternative economic imaginaries’.<sup>832</sup> These were provided by theories of

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<sup>828</sup> Furthermore, according to Paul Van Rompuy his first study on the matter was inspired to the report mandated by the Commission of the European Communities in 1974 to a panel of experts, among whom Van Rompuy’s colleague at KUL Theo Peeters, on the role of public finance in European integration and known as the ‘McDougal Report’. See COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (1977) *Report of the Study Group on the Role of Public Finance in European Integration*, Brussels, April, vol. 1 ; and VAN ROMPUY, PAUL (2007) ‘Measurement and Practice of Fiscal Flows: the case of Belgium’, in BOSCH et al., *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>829</sup> GOVAERT, SERGE (1983) *Le Vlaams Economisch Verbond (VEV) dans la Belgique des régions*, Courrier Hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 1003-1004, 12 August, p. 2. By 1976, the *Vlaams Economisch Verbond* (Flemish business organisation - VEV) considered the ‘Dutchification’ of enterprises as an achieved goal. Some years later, in 1983, the leader of the *Volksunie*, Hugo Schiltz, argued that ‘hors des difficultés qui subsistent à Bruxelles, aux Fourons et à Comines, la question linguistique est close en pays flamand’. Ibidem, p. 43.

<sup>830</sup> BOEHME, *op. cit.*, p. 558; LUYTEN, DIRK (2010) *L’économie et le mouvement flamand*, Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 2076, pp. 5-46. For an example of a text linking old and new claims of Flemish economic exploitation see VAN HAEGENDOREN, MAURITS (1978) *Het Geld van de Vlamingen* (Leuven: Davidsfonds).

<sup>831</sup> MOMMEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-174.

<sup>832</sup> OOSTERLYNCK, STIJN (2009) ‘The political economy of state restructuring and the regional uneven transition to after-fordism in Belgium’, in HUYSSSEUNE, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

economic regionalism, neoliberalism and the transition to new technological sectors, then in vogue at the international level. The first suggested that the key to economic growth resided in factors such as innovation, entrepreneurialism and craft-based industrial districts that were ‘territorially embedded’, a notion very suitable for the kind of culturally-determinist argument about economic success made by the VB; the second prescribed the rejection of direct state intervention, especially through subsidies, and confined the government to the role of regulator and ‘facilitator’ of market processes, which could be pitted against the lingering Keynesianism of the central and Walloon institutions in order to warrant calls for further autonomy; the third projected the scenario of a prosperous and highly-skilled Flanders, but also lent legitimacy to the denunciation of unjust transfers, as the development of new technological sectors required heavy capital investments. It is in this context that, in 1979, the *Vlaams Economisch Verbond* (Flemish Business Organisation) produced a paper on the challenge of a transition to new technologies which inspired the action of the Flemish government led by the Christian-Democrat Gaston Geens. In 1982, as Minister-President of Flanders, Geens launched the DIRV Programme (*Derde Industriële Revolutie in Vlaanderen* – Third Industrial Revolution in Flanders) aimed at promoting industrial development in micro-electronics, biotechnology and new materials.

The ‘territorial embeddedness’ of the factors for economic growth and the focus on individual entrepreneurship, innovation and skills emphasised by theories of economic regionalism, along with increasing attention on the transfers and the lingering of Keynesian policies at the Belgian and Walloon level, favoured the creation of a discourse in which the Walloons were portrayed as lazy profiteers living off subsidies coming from Flanders. The VB has not been the only actor producing such a narrative. As already pointed out in section 4.2.2, Michel Quévit traces its origin back to the 1979 declaration of the Christian-Democrat Flemish leader Eric Van Rompuy who asserted he was tired of paying for the Walloons.<sup>833</sup> Similarly, in 1978, the *Volksonie* had used the slogan *Vlaams Geld in Vlaamse Handen* (Flemish Money in Flemish Hands) that was later adopted by the *Blokkers* in the 1990s and 2000s. Yet, until the formation of the N-VA, the VB has been the most radical political actor denouncing the transfers, furthering a cultural-deterministic interpretation of the economic imbalances between Flanders and Wallonia, and proposing a simple and radical solution to the problem, i.e., independence. Through its electoral success, it has played a role in hardening the position of the other Flemish parties, as shown by the debate over the ‘communitarisation’ of social security.<sup>834</sup>

While the VB has been in favour of splitting it all along, in the late 1970s there was a wide agreement among Flemish parties that social security should remain a federal competence. Such a consensus began showing fractures from the 1988 reform on. Since then, ever more actors have come to support a partial ‘communitarisation’, which found its final expression in the five resolutions on state reform approved by the Flemish Parliament in 1999.<sup>835</sup> The influence of the VB’s growth was especially strong on the VU, which in the early 1990s tried to abandon the strategy of ‘*détente*’ towards the Walloons adopted in

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<sup>833</sup> QUEVIT, *op. cit.*, p. 124-141.

<sup>834</sup> The literature on the subject often uses the terms ‘federalistaion’ and ‘defederalisation’ with the same meaning, that is, the devolution of competences to the federated entities. In order to avoid any possible misunderstandings, we prefer to use the term ‘communitarisation’. The term ‘regionalisation’ would also be misleading, as it could imply a devolution to the regions, including Brussels, that has been almost unanimously rejected by the Flemish parties.

<sup>835</sup> POIRIER and VANSTEENKISTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 347-352.

the previous decade. While in 1989 Schiltz had argued that the reform just implemented had put an end to the unjust transfers and there was no mention of the matter in the 1990 Congress, Bert Anciaux, elected party chairman in 1992 – right after the VB's electoral overtaking of the VU – imposed the suppression of the transfers as an overriding condition for approving the St Michael's Agreement that was being negotiated at the time.<sup>836</sup> The reform, in fact, left social security unchanged, but the VU obtained the creation of a working group on the issue, the *Vlaamse Onderzoeksgroep Sociale Zekerheid 2002* (Flemish Research Group on Social Security 2002). This drafted a plan for a redistribution of competences that constituted the basis for the 1999 Resolutions. The plea for homogenous competences and for an end to non-objective transfers became the new mantra. The latter element is particularly interesting in light of the discourse highlighted above because the 'subjective transfers' would depend on 'cultural differences' between Flemings and Walloons in the way they consume social services.<sup>837</sup> Hence, as argued by Beland and Lecours, 'Walloons are said to "cost" more to the health insurance system as a result of bad life habits and a propensity for readily consulting specialists rather than generalists'.<sup>838</sup>

In the last two decades further evaluations of the transfers have been conducted. In 1998, using a mix of the benefit and monetary-flow methods, and only excluding the interest on the debt, De Boeck and Van Gompel found a steady transfer equal to 3.5-3.7% of the Flemish GDP and 6.5-6.7% of the Walloon one for the period 1990-1996, with social security accounting for 63% of the total imbalance,<sup>839</sup> data that the authors confirmed in an update of the study conducted in 2002 and covering the entire decade of the 1990s.<sup>840</sup> In 2004, the Flemish Community commissioned a study from its finance administration with a view to estimate the transfers for the period 1990-2003. Using largely the same methodology of De Boeck and Van Gompel, the body claimed that, on average, Flanders contributed a constant flow of 4.2% of its GDP throughout the period (Figure 4.13), while Wallonia received a surplus of 7.4% of its own product and Brussels one equal to 3.2%.<sup>841</sup> Similar data, although somewhat lower, have recently been calculated by the Belgian National Bank for the 1995-2005 period. Defining a transfer as the difference between a region's per capita contribution to and/or subsidy from the central administration and the national per capita average, the authors found that Flanders' fiscal transfer to Wallonia remained stable around 2% of Belgian GDP (3-3.5% of the Flemish GDP), which would correspond to about 8-8.5% of the Walloon GDP – Brussels recording a very small positive contribution. In per capita terms, in 2005, each Fleming paid 967

<sup>836</sup> GOVAERT (1993) *La Volksunie*, Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 1416-1417, pp. 54-68. The St. Michael's Agreement was the agreement that led to the transformation of Belgium into a fully-fledged federal state in 1993.

<sup>837</sup> POIRIER and VANSTEENKISTE, *op. cit.*, pp. 349-350.

<sup>838</sup> BELAND and LECOIRS, *op. cit.*, p. 273. An objective transfer, by contrast, would be due to structural factors not directly influenced by the deliberate choices of individuals, as, for instance, the demographic structure of a specific region.

<sup>839</sup> DE BOECK, EDWIN and VAN GOMPEL, JOHAN (1998) 'Financiële Stroomtussen de Belgische Gewesten Opnieuw Bekenen', in CHRISTINE, VANDERVEREN and JEF, VUCHELEN (eds.) *Een Vlaamse Fiscaliteit binnen een Economische en Monetaire Unie* (Antwerp: Intersentia) p. 229.

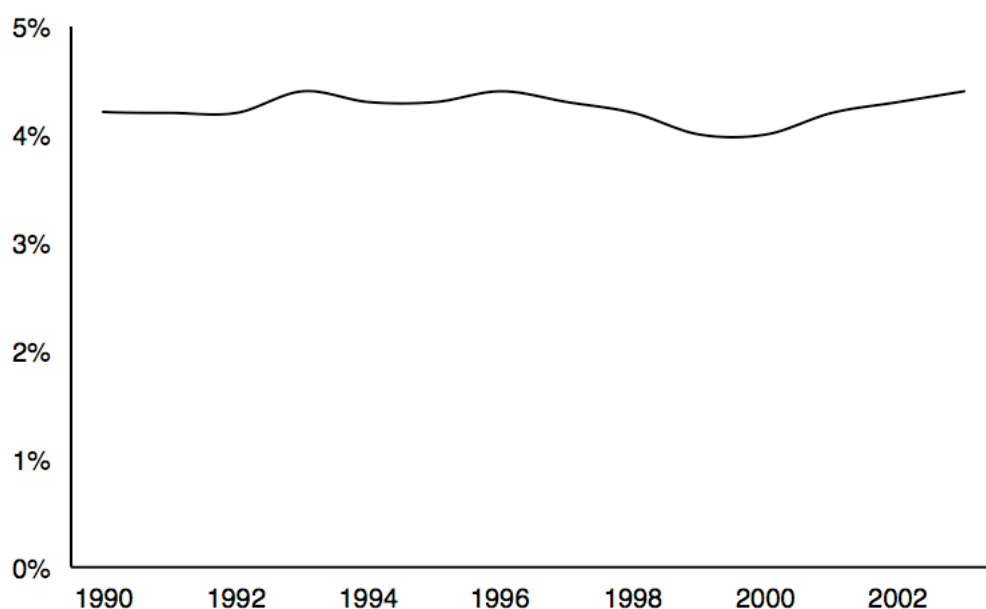
<sup>840</sup> DE BOECK, EDWIN and VAN GOMPEL, JOHAN (2002) 'Financiële Transfers tussen de Belgische Gewesten: Actualisering en Vooruitblik', in PHILIPPE, CATTOIR et al. (eds.) *Autonomie, solidarité et coopération, Autonomie, solidariteit en samenwerking* (Brussels: Larcier) pp. 355-374. These data were also roughly confirmed by a study conducted by researchers from the University of Namur included in the same book.

<sup>841</sup> Quoted in VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-121.



euros more than the average and each Walloon received 1783 euros. The study also broke down spending in its different components, thus showing, for instance, that while most of Wallonia's imbalance was due to lower personal income tax revenues and higher spending for unemployment benefits, Flanders recorded a sizable transfer in its favour concerning pensions, which had been on the increase since 2001. It also argued that about 80% of the transfers derived from the contribution, rather than the spending, side – hence they were to be chiefly attributed to the different contributory capacity of the regions – and that interregional transfers were accompanied by considerable intraregional transfers at the level of the provinces of each region.<sup>842</sup>

**Figure 4.13 – Flanders's Fiscal Transfer to the Rest of Belgium, 1990-2003 (percentage of regional GDP)**



Source: VAN ROMPUY, PAUL, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

More recently, the debate over the transfers has been also influenced by the studies of the Flemish economic historian Juul Hannes,<sup>843</sup> who has argued that these would go as far back in time as the very foundation of the Belgian state. After having analysed tax receipts and state investments from 1830 to 1914, he concluded that throughout this period Flanders contributed on average 44% to state revenues – in line with its demographic share of the country – but received only 35% of transfers from Brussels. Hence, despite denying the hypothesis of a deliberate and systematic discrimination, he refuted the

<sup>842</sup> DURY, DRIES et al. (2008) 'Transferts et mécanismes de solidarité interrégionaux via le budget des administrations publiques', *Revue économique*, Banque Nationale de Belgique, Septembre, pp. 97-118. Arguing that a transfer only originates in indirect transactions – for which there is no immediate good or service in return – the authors excluded all direct transactions from the study. Data on regional GDP are based on our calculations.

<sup>843</sup> HANNES, JUUL (2007) *op. cit.*. See also: HANNES, JUUL (2001) 'De prijs voor België was altijd hoog', *Secessie-Kwartaalblad voor de studie van separatisme en direct democratie*, n. 2, pp. 25-37; HANNES, JUUL (1994) 'Geven en nemen. Vlaanderen en de Belgische belastingen in de jaren 1830-1914', *Liberaal reflex*, 2/94, pp. 17-26.

argument whereby Flanders would today be compensating for a solidarity received when it was poorer than Wallonia. Hannes' data in part contradicted the findings of a study issued in 1997 by Gerd Dottermans on behalf of the Belgian Ministry of Finance. Using the same methodology applied by Van Rompuy and Bilsen in their 1988 study, but calculating interests on the debt through an average of the benefit and accrual principles, Dottermans found that Flanders did profit from interregional solidarity between 1955 and 1962, although the transfers came from Brussels rather than Wallonia.<sup>844</sup> Similar findings were obtained by studies conducted by Walloon scholars as a reaction to the publication of Hannes' book in 2007. Meunier et al., in particular, argued that Flanders and Wallonia's contributions were proportional to their demographic size, while the province of Brabant – which administratively included Brussels at the time – contributed much more than it received. Therefore, rather than showing any North-South transfers, what Hannes' data would suggest is that Brussels largely subsidised the rest of the country.<sup>845</sup> According to their own estimates of expenses related to unemployment benefits, in the 1954-1975 period Flanders, with 56.5% of the Belgian population, received 62.54% of benefits, Wallonia 30.02% (32.8% of the population) and Brussels 7.46% (10.7%).<sup>846</sup> Furthermore, the authors attempted a calculation of total transfers, based on the assumption that the regional distribution of revenues was proportional to regional GDP and that of expenses to the regional population. Their findings highlighted a net benefit for Flanders of about 3% of its GDP for the period 1955-1968, mainly financed by Brussels (to the average amount of 9.3% of its GDP).<sup>847</sup> Therefore, despite the methodological problems caused by the scarcity of the data, they claimed that, in a past when it was less prosperous, Flanders benefited from redistribution mechanisms similar to those that the VB and the N-VA have questioned – although mainly coming from Brussels rather than Wallonia – which would confirm their historical reversibility.<sup>848</sup> However, neither study managed to establish a consensus over the issue.

Similarly to the Catalan case, the existence and persistence over time of sizable transfers between Flanders and Wallonia is an undisputable fact. Their substantial stability, shown in Figure 4.13, is confirmed by our calculations on the relationship between per capita standardised disposable and primary income in the region. Using the same methodology explained in section 3.3.1, we calculated that the per capita standardised primary income of Flanders' residents has been constantly reduced by an amount

<sup>844</sup> DOTTERMANS, GERD (1997) 'Financiële stromen tussen de gewesten in België, 1955-1975', *Bulletin de Documentation*, 57(6), November-December, p. 145.

<sup>845</sup> The authors lamented the lack of precise references to the statistical sources used by Hannes. They also claimed that some of the sources did not include the data referred to, or they did, but in a different form and the methods used for manipulation were not explained. More specifically, they pointed out three major flaws: Hannes focused on direct taxes which, at the time, accounted for only 35% of the total; he used current prices for a long historical series and the same demographic figures for the entire time-span analysed (80 years); he only used data concerning infrastructure when assessing state expenses. MEUNIER, OLIVIER, MIGNOLET, MICHEL and MULQUIN, MARIE-EVE (2007) *Les transferts interrégionaux en Belgique: une approche historique*, Cahiers de recherche, Série politique économique, n. 11, 2007/1, Université de Namur.

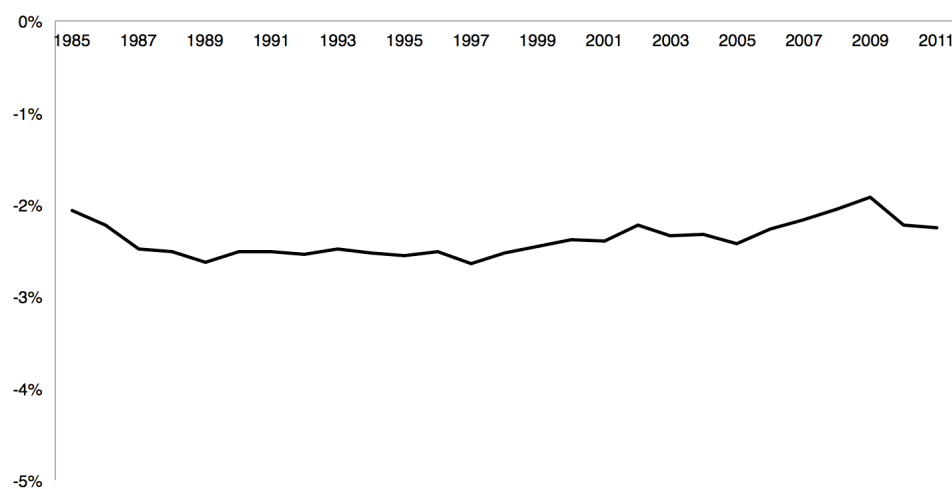
<sup>846</sup> If one takes into account only the 1954-1964 period, i.e. before the Flemish overtake of the Walloon per capita GDP, the break-down of unemployment benefits is: 67.94% for Flanders, 24.41% for Wallonia and 7.65% for Brussels. *Ibidem*, pp. 47-69.

<sup>847</sup> While the assumption concerning revenues seems underpinned by statistical evidence, they do not bring robust arguments supporting the validity of the connection between effective and pro-rata to population expenses. Therefore, these results are to be taken with caution.

<sup>848</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 82-84.

comprised between -1.9% and -2.6% (Figure 4.14). Compared to the Spanish region, however, the size of the transfers seems to be more modest – the VB and N-VA have clearly overestimated them in their propaganda – and, at least from the beginning of the 1990s, more stable, probably because social security, which accounts for about two-thirds of the transfers, has barely been touched by the various state reforms except for the most recent one, agreed upon in 2012.<sup>849</sup> Such stability would suggest that, despite being fundamental to explaining the rise of the argument of economic victimisation embedded in the nationalism of the rich of the VB in the late 1970s – and to some extent shared by other Flemish actors – the transfers are not by themselves a powerful factor in explaining the successive electoral evolution of the party as well as the rise and trajectory of the N-VA. On the other hand, the constancy of the transfers has certainly helped these parties criticise Belgian solidarity on account of the lack of convergence between Flanders and Wallonia in the last four decades, as well as support the claim that the many reforms undertaken did not bring any fundamental improvement. In light of these conclusions, it is necessary to briefly look at the efficiency of the Belgian social security system and its possible overcompensation effects, patterns of convergence (or lack of it), and overall growth.

**Figure 4.14 – Redistributive Effort per Capita, Flanders, 1985-2011 (percentage of standardised primary income)\***



\* Our measure of the regions' redistributive effort is based on a formula proposed by Lago-Penas et al. as a modification of the approach first suggested by Bayoumi and Masson. Accordingly, the redistributive effort of a specific region is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Effort} = ((D_i/D_n) - (P_i/P_n)) / (P_i/P_n)$$

where  $D_i$  is the region's disposable income per capita,  $D_n$  the country's disposable income per capita, while  $P_i$  and  $P_n$  are the regional and national primary incomes per capita respectively. In other words, a region's redistributive effort is equal to the difference between the region's per capita disposable and primary incomes both standardised by the corresponding national average. The difference is then expressed as a percentage of the region's per capita standardised primary income. See LAGO-PENAS et al., *op. cit.*; BAYOUMI and MASSON, *op. cit.*

Sources: our calculations on data from FLEMISH GOVERNMENT, *HERMREG Databank*.

<sup>849</sup> At a closer look such stability seems to have been characteristic also of previous years, yet, as influential studies conducted in the late 1980s calculated the interest on the debt with the accrual principle at a time when the Belgian government was recording unprecedented debt on GDP ratios, they could give the impression of an escalating contribution of Flanders to the Belgian social security.

Comparative studies show that Belgium has been one of the most effective countries, in the EU, in reducing inter-regional inequality. Bea Cantillon et al. calculated that, in 1997, pre-tax inequality between Flanders and Wallonia was reduced by 75% through social security and taxation.<sup>850</sup> At the same time, this has happened without overcompensations of family disposable income, as was the case during part of the 1980s. Although, in 2005, the gap between the per capita primary household income of Wallonia and Flanders shrank from 21.8% to 15% after taxation and social redistribution, Flanders still remained comfortably ahead.<sup>851</sup> Differences have been consistent regarding the composition of each region's income. On account of these and other findings, Cantillon et al. argued that, in terms of social efficiency, social redistribution should remain a federal competence and that the transfers would not be problematic *per se*, but rather that the way they are organised could be improved.<sup>852</sup> Other authors have, however, pointed out an overcompensation of the redistributive system as far as regional funding is concerned. According to Paul Van Rompuy, despite having a higher per capita fiscal capacity than the Walloon region, the Flemish Community consistently received lower per capita revenues. Discussing the results of the ABAFIM study mentioned above, he explained that the interregional fiscal flows were composed of federal fiscal transfers through federal taxes and primary expenditure (21.1%), social security payments (58.1%) and the financing of regions and communities including equalisation payments (20.8%).<sup>853</sup> Although they were modest in absolute terms (849 million euro in 2003), these equalisation payments had an important impact on the total per capita fiscal revenue of the regions. In 2006, because of such equalisation, the relative figure for the Flemish region decreased from 103% of the national average to 96%, while the Walloon one increased from 88.5% to 99.5%, hence overcompensating the fiscal difference between them.<sup>854</sup>

The most important criticism made in recent years – before the last state reform though – pertains to the lack of accountability and the ensuing disincentives to endogenous growth that would stem from the transfers. According to this view the financing system of the federal entities and the social security would be inefficient for two reasons: it lacks a clear link between policy and financial accounts that can act as a feedback mechanism; it causes a ‘development trap’ whereby any attempt of the lower income regions to increase their tax revenue is outpaced by the loss in the solidarity grant that they receive, hence there is little interest in enacting policies aimed at putting the region on a more sustainable

<sup>850</sup> CANTILLON et al., *op. cit.*, p. 1044; see also MERCADER-PRATS, MAGDA and LEVY, HORACIO (2004) *The role of tax and transfers in reducing personal income inequality in Europe's regions: Evidence from EUROMOD*, EUROMOD Working Paper Series, No. EM9/04, p. 21.

<sup>851</sup> DURY et al., *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>852</sup> CANTILLON et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 1047-1053; and CANTILLON, BEA and DE MAEESCHALCK, VEERLE (2007) *Sociale zekerheid, transferten en federalisme in België*, Centrum voor social beleid Herman Deleeck, University of Antwerp, p. 14.

<sup>853</sup> These were mechanisms introduced with the 1989 reform in order to compensate for the fact that, since 1990, regions would be mainly financed through a share of personal income tax. Being personal income quite different in the three regions, a compensation mechanism whereby poorer regions would receive 11.6 euros per inhabitant – pegged to yearly inflation – multiplied by the percentage difference between national average income tax per capita and the relative regional figure was introduced.

<sup>854</sup> VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-121. See also HEREMANS, DIRK, PEETERS, THEO and VAN HECKE, ANNELORE (2010) ‘Towards a more efficient and responsible mechanism for the Belgian federation’, in PAUL, DE GRAUWE and MAHIAS, DEWATRIPONT (eds.) *Towards a More Efficient and Fair Funding of Belgium's Regions*, Re-Bel e-book 5, August, p. 22.

path.<sup>855</sup> The former objection is an old argument that has especially characterised the debate over social security. Accordingly, the lack of any feedback mechanism, especially because of the unclear division of competences between the federal and community levels, would make citizens unable to easily attribute responsibility for the taxes they pay and the services they receive.<sup>856</sup> Yet, while the solution often envisaged is further decentralisation, a re-centralisation of competences already devolved would work as well. The ‘development trap’ instead could account for the lack of convergence between Flanders and Wallonia.<sup>857</sup> The latter argument has been denied by Quévit.<sup>858</sup> He has pointed out that Wallonia’s crisis is structural, has been experienced by other regions and is due to changing comparative advantages in the world economy. Using 2004 data, he has argued that, when compared to other former industrial regions, Wallonia was performing quite well, showing the highest productivity and productivity growth-rate of all traditional industrial regions of Europe (TIREs). Within Belgium itself, the highest level of productivity was to be found in Walloon Brabant and the rate of entrepreneurial activity<sup>859</sup> was substantially higher in the South than in the North of the country (4.7% instead of 2.7%). Thus, he concluded, the rhetoric produced in Flanders of a stagnant and backward Wallonia was not supported by evidence.<sup>860</sup> Quévit’s figures certainly help counter the picture portrayed by the VB and the N-VA. They do not seem, however, to disprove the argument that the policies enacted so far have not led to convergence. Quite the opposite, in fact. According to his data, Wallonia’s GDP per capita in the period 1989-1991 was 84.2% of the European average. Ten years later it had decreased to 77.1%. Flanders as well worsened its position relatively to the rest of Europe, but to a substantially lower extent (from 105.7% to 104.9%), so that the difference between the two regions increased by about 6%.<sup>861</sup> Similarly, although it is true that labour productivity was highest in Walloon Brabant, despite showing good growth figures, all other Walloon provinces were less productive than the Flemish ones. In addition, in 2005, Wallonia displayed the second-lowest GDP per capita among the TIREs listed by Quévit.<sup>862</sup> Yet, as recently shown by Paul de Grauwe, it is true that since the late 1990s the growth differential between Wallonia and Flanders has steadily shrunk and even reversed (with Wallonia

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<sup>855</sup> HEREMANS et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 24-25. DESCHAMPS, ROBERT et al. (2010) ‘A new structure for the financing of Belgium’s Regions and Communities through personal income tax: The CERPE Model’, in DE GRAUWE and DEWATRIPONT, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>856</sup> CANTILLON et al., *op. cit.*, p. 1050.

<sup>857</sup> HEREMANS et al., *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>858</sup> He also tried to show that the centre (i.e. Brussels and the province of Brabant, both Flemish and Walloon), rather than Flanders, drives growth, while all other provinces to some extent lag behind. He then concluded that, despite being rich, Flanders is not among the richest regions in Europe, but ranked around 40th.

<sup>859</sup> Quévit mentioned the Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity indicator of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, which is defined as the ‘percentage of 18-64 population who are either a nascent entrepreneur or owner-manager of a new business’. See <http://www.gemconsortium.org/data/key-indicators> (accessed on May 30, 2015).

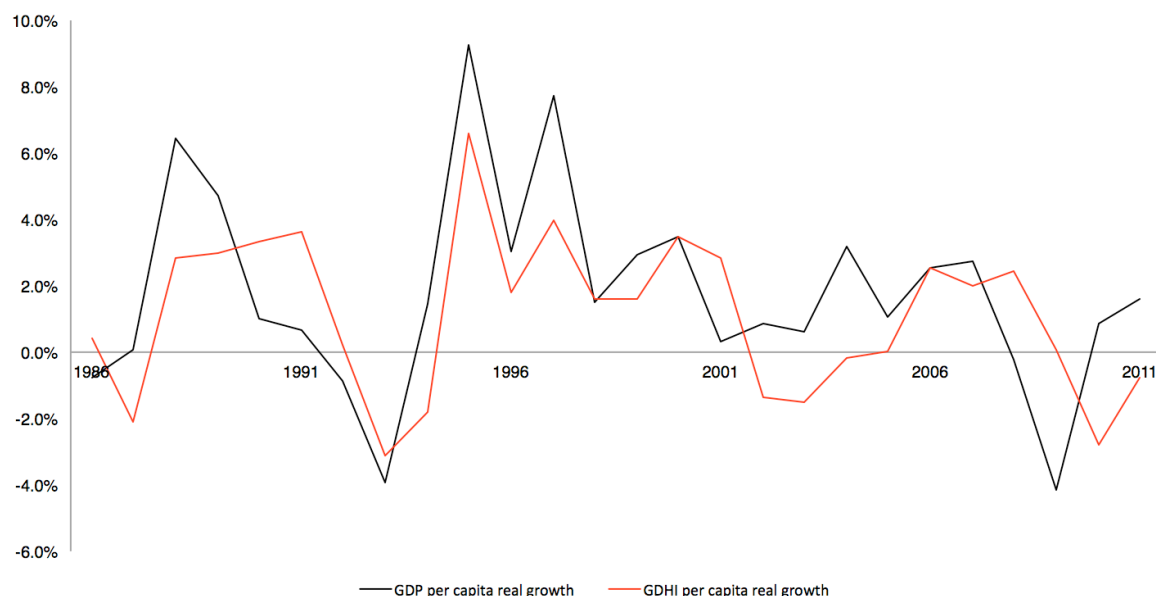
<sup>860</sup> QUEVIT, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-141. Quévit’s main point is that the stigmatisation of Wallonia has deliberately been produced by the rising Flemish bourgeoisie in order to mobilise the Flemish population along the friend-enemy cleavage. Accordingly, until the 1960s the enemy was the *Fransquillons* (the Francophone Flemish elite), but since then it has become the ‘lazy Walloon’ who lives off the Flemings’ back.

<sup>861</sup> *Ibidem*, table 5, p. 130.

<sup>862</sup> *Ibidem*, table 4 and 8, pp. 128 and 134. The argument about lack of convergence has been supported by Van Rompuuy as well, see VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

growing at a slightly faster pace) since 2006, although this is too recent a trend to conclude that convergence has been realised.<sup>863</sup>

**Figure 4.15 – Flanders’s Real GDP and GDHI per Capita Growth, 1986-2011**



Source: our calculations on FLEMISH GOVERNMENT, *HERMREG Databank*, using the Eurostat GDP deflator for Belgium (average of four quarters).

Overall, between 1986 and 2007, the Flemish economy has recorded stable GDP and GDHI per capita real growth at 2.2% and 1.4% per year on average, with only a few years of recession in the early 1990s (Figure 4.15). During the 1980s and 1990s, the region took advantage of its relatively high – by international standards – labour productivity and managed to remain at the top of the technological frontier, especially in the sectors of micro-electronics and biotechnology, although in the last decade it has lamented a loss in R&D investments and market share in high-tech sectors as compared to its direct competitors, which led the Flemish government to devise new approaches to industrial innovation.<sup>864</sup> Furthermore, the recent economic crisis has not had nearly the same devastating impact that it has had in Spain. As a matter of fact regional GDP has decreased only by 0.5% on average between 2008 and 2012, while unemployment has increased only slightly from 3.9% to 4.6% over the same period.<sup>865</sup> As we will see in section 4.3, this

<sup>863</sup> Quoted in THOMAS, PIERRE-HENRY (2014) ‘La Wallonie plus dynamique que la Flandres?’, *Trends-Tendances*, 23 Janvier, pp. 32-35.

<sup>864</sup> CAPRON, HENRI (2000) ‘The Sources of Belgian Prosperity’, in HENRI, CAPRON and WIM, MEEUSEN (eds.) *The National Innovation System of Belgium* (Heidelberg: Physica-Verlag) pp. 21-41; LAROSSE, JAN (2012) “New Industrial Policy” in Flanders: an Integrated Policy Framework for a New Productivity Revolution’, *Reflets et perspectives de la vie économique*, n. 1, pp. 99-115.

<sup>865</sup> Data from NATIONAL BANK OF BELGIUM, *National/Regional Accounts*, <http://www.nbb.be/pub/stats/na/na.htm?l=en> (accessed on October 26, 2014); DIRECTION GENERALE STATISTIQUE ET INFORMATION ECONOMIQUE, *Active, working and unemployed population* <http://bestat.economie.fgov.be/BeStat/BeStatMultidimensionalAnalysis?loadDefaultId=322> (accessed on October 26, 2014).

generally positive picture might well account for the lack of any radicalisation of support for independence in the region.

#### 4.4.2 Political Marginalisation

The VB's and the N-VA's main claim concerning the Belgian political system is that it is not a democracy, but the sum of two democracies in which the Flemish majority is endlessly blocked by the francophone minority. The parties have thus denounced a condition of political marginalisation suffered by the Flemings. In a broader perspective, such claims tap onto a much longer history of linguistic discrimination of the Dutch-speaking majority of the country that mainly relates to the peculiar features of Belgian nation-building in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. As made clear by the Flemish historian Louis Vos, at the time of independence 'there was no question of a Flemish and Walloon nation respectively. Consideration was given only to the establishment of a Belgian nation'.<sup>866</sup> The creation of Belgium reflected the interests and identity of the United Provinces' upper classes that had decided to use French as the national language because it was deemed intrinsically superior to the Dutch and Walloon dialects spoken in much of the country. This elite included about 3-4% of the Flemish population,<sup>867</sup> who had progressively switched to French in the second half of the eighteenth century and decisively so during the years of direct French rule (1795-1814). Yet, early on, a part of this elite began contesting the monolingual character of the country.<sup>868</sup> The later swelling of state bureaucracy and the advances of democracy made language discrimination more salient to those who spoke Dutch dialects, thus enlarging the popularity of the Flemish movement.<sup>869</sup> In particular, the electoral reforms of 1893,<sup>870</sup> first, and 1919, then, contributed to this process by integrating the Flemish masses into the political system.<sup>871</sup> Furthermore, the first achievements of the Flamingants pushed further the consolidation of a Flemish identity, as for example the introduction of primary, and later secondary, education in Dutch, which ensured the formation of a Flemish petty-bourgeoisie.<sup>872</sup> The reaction of the Belgian state to the demands for linguistic parity probably had an even greater impact on the radicalisation of the Flemish claims. Since independence, language policy was based on *laissez faire*, which clearly favoured French because the linguistic divide had a social connotation as well. Not only was Wallonia richer than Flanders, but also the economic and political elite in Brussels, which in the

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<sup>866</sup> VOS, *op. cit.*, p. 128. See also ZOLBERG, ARISTIDE (1974) 'The Making of Flemings and Walloons: Belgium: 1830-1914', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5(2), pp. 179-182.

<sup>867</sup> DESCHOUWER (1999-2000) *op. cit.*

<sup>868</sup> One of the reasons probably lay in the inheritance of the years of Dutch rule (1815-1830), during which the linguistic policy of William I certainly aroused discontent among the francophone elite, but also gained supporters among a small group of intellectuals attracted by the idea of a Dutch-speaking Flanders, who later became the first Flamingants. BEYEN, MARNIX (2009) 'Tragically Modern. Centrifugal Sub-Nationalisms in Belgium, 1830-2009', in HUYSSSEUNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-28.

<sup>869</sup> ZOLBERG, *op. cit.*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>870</sup> DEVOS and BOUTECA, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>871</sup> In 1893, universal male suffrage was formally adopted, although the introduction of a multiple voting system favouring richer social strata and, thus, the French-speaking part of the population (both in Wallonia and Flanders) moderated it. However, such a change helped reduce the until then unrivalled primacy of French culture over Belgian political life. See STENGERS, JEAN (2004) 'Histoire de la législation électorale en Belgique', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 82(1-2), p. 253.

<sup>872</sup> WITTE (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 206.

nineteenth century still counted a high percentage of Dutch-speakers,<sup>873</sup> was overwhelmingly francophone. Hence, according to Els Witte, ‘the area in which the lower-status language was spoken was also economically and socio-politically subordinate. Linguistic oppression and material and political discrimination coincided for more than a century. As elsewhere, this situation created a dominant linguistic group with deeply rooted feelings of superiority and a subordinated ethnic group with a marked inferiority complex’.<sup>874</sup>

The first laws recognising the use of Dutch in the courts and the administration were adopted only near the last quarter of the nineteenth century (1873) and culminated in the official linguistic parity in the promulgation of laws established in 1898. Yet, this was far from the official bilingualism that the Flemish movement was asking for Flanders. The First World War further radicalised these demands. As argued by Lode Wils, clear anti-Belgian sentiments within the Flemish movement appeared during the Great War, when the so-called activists took advantage of the *Flamenpolitiek* (Flemish policy) enacted by the German occupants to obtain many of the demands ignored by Belgian authorities until then and even proclaimed the constitution of an independent Flanders.<sup>875</sup> Although the collaboration had remained limited to a small number of extremists and, because of it, the image of the Flemish Movement had been tarnished, the *Flamenpolitiek* showed that long-standing Flemish goals could be achieved. When, in the early 1920s, some of these claims – such as the full Dutchification of the University of Ghent – were ignored by the Belgian political elite, the activists could be turned into martyrs of the newborn anti-Belgian cause. This radicalisation was also powerfully nourished by the experience of the front and the narrative that was crafted around it. The Flemings were largely overrepresented in the ranks of the infantry (up to 70%), and hence among the victims of the conflict. This was in part due to socio-economic reasons – Flanders being poorer, it contributed more unskilled men who filled the lower ranks – but also linguistic, as the disproportionately francophone higher echelons of the Army often disregarded the bilingualism that had, in principle, been imposed in 1913. All this nourished discontent, especially among Flemish students who had taken part in the War and tried to ‘raise the consciousness’ of their fellow Flemings at the front. During the interwar years, the *Front Partij* (Front Party), founded by some former soldiers, managed to become a Flemish nationalist party for self-government and by means of the electoral clout that it enjoyed since the late 1920s, it forced the achievement of some basic demands.<sup>876</sup> Hence, monolingualism in Flanders was practically obtained in this period. Dutch, however, was not deemed safe yet. After the Second World War, the 1947 census revealed that the linguistic border established in the interwar years was moving up, further extending the francophone area. While each municipality had been granted monolingual status, except for Brussels, such status could change according to the results of the censuses. Seeing their cultural perimeter shrinking,

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<sup>873</sup> In 1846 the number of people who exclusively spoke Dutch or French respectively were 66% and 32%. In 1880 they were 42% and 23.2%, in 1900, 25.5% and 22.3%. VAN VELTHOVEN, HARRY (1987) ‘Historical Aspects. The Process of Language Shift in Brussels: Historical Background and Mechanisms’, in ELS, WITTE and HUGO, BAETENS BEARDSMORE (eds.) *The Interdisciplinary Study of Urban Bilingualism in Brussels* (Clevedon/Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters), p. 25.

<sup>874</sup> WITTE (1993) *op. cit.*, p. 221.

<sup>875</sup> WILS, LODE (1992) ‘Introduction: A Brief History of the Flemish Movement’, in HERMANS, THEO, VOS, LOUIS and WILS, LODE (eds.) (1992) *The Flemish movement: a documentary history, 1780-1990* (London/Atlantic Highlands: Ahtlone Press) pp. 7-23.

<sup>876</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 17-23.



the Flemings began campaigning for the fixing of the border. The issue, however, did not flare up until the early 1960s.<sup>877</sup>

As shown in this brief historical overview, up until the 1960s at least, French was the dominant language holding cultural hegemony in the country. Furthermore, adaptation to a condition of equality for Dutch was consistently avoided by the, mostly francophone, elites that controlled state institutions and the economy in those years. Yet, as argued by Marnix Beyen, this did not coincide with active linguistic oppression: ‘in their attempt to Frenchify Flanders, the Belgian élites were never backed by an official state policy. Obsessed as it was with liberty, the Belgian constitution proclaimed that the use of language was free. As a matter of fact, the use of French has never been enforced by law. Repressive language policy certainly was a reality, but it was carried out at an intermediate level (school boards, enterprises, ...) rather than at state level’.<sup>878</sup> The Belgian state thus remained stuck between a formal *laissez faire* that naturally, but not actively, favoured French and a unitarist conception of the state that prevented any adaptations to a federal or confederal structure until the 1970s. ‘Hence – Beyen concludes – Frenchification, as a social process, was strong enough to foster frustration among Flemish speakers – both among the ordinary people who experienced the linguistic difference as a social barrier and among the intellectuals speaking in their name – but not strong enough really to create a unilingually French state, based on a homogeneous nation’.<sup>879</sup>

Similar considerations are valid for two other very powerful myths of Flemish victimisation that are referred to in the propaganda of the parties analysed, especially in that of the VB: the sacrifice of the Flemish soldiers in the Great War and the disproportionate repression of the Flemish collaborators after the Second World War. The former is based on two pillars, i.e., the claim that between 80% and 90% of Belgian soldiers at the front were Flemish and that many died because they could not understand the orders of their francophone superiors. The figures quoted above were launched by the activists already at the end of the Great War. They were later repeated at emotional events such as the commemorations of the Battle of the Yser – which became an important locus in the formation of the anti-Belgian strand of the Flemish movement – and often incorporated in Flemish history books. Yet, while Flemish soldiers were in effect overrepresented in the Army and among the victims, the most accurate calculations – obtained in the 1970s – reported a share between 65% and 70% of the total. The second claim, instead, took longer to come into being. Although its origins are unclear, what seems undisputed is its absence from the nationalist propaganda of the war and immediate post-war period, which would suggest its artificiality, as the then vocal radical nationalists would have had no reason to be silent on such a tragic accusation.<sup>880</sup>

Likewise, recent historical scholarship has questioned the claim that the post-Second World War repression of collaboration with the Nazi occupier was harsher in Flanders and specifically targeted the Flemish movement. Discrimination was rather based on the

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<sup>877</sup> SINARDET, DAVE (2008) ‘Territorialité et identités linguistiques en Belgique’, *Hermès*, 51, pp. 141-147. The 1947 census was the last one recording people’s mother tongue. Questions pertaining to language use have been forbidden in the official censuses since 1961.

<sup>878</sup> BEYEN, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>879</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>880</sup> VAN EVERBROECK, CHRISTINE (1995) “‘Une conscience née dans le feu’”. Divergences à propos du pourcentage de victimes flamandes de la Première Guerre mondiale’, in ANNE, MORELLI (ed.) *Les grand mythes de l’Histoire de Belgique, de Flandre et de Wallonie* (Bruxelles: Vie Ouvrière) pp. 233-242.

timing of the trials and the specific court that issued it. Thus, the collaborators sentenced in the first months of the prosecution, especially during the year 1945, were meted much harsher sentences for equal offences regardless of their being Flemings or Walloons. Furthermore, different judges showed different degrees of mercy, with huge variations within each region. Hence, the courts of Ypres and Liege delivered about half as many criminal sentences as those of Leuven and Mons. Examining the existence of different patterns of repression in the two regions, Huyse and Hoflack surprisingly concluded that *'l'on constate que les peines étaient, dans la généralité des cas et pour tous les types de délits, beaucoup plus sévères en Wallonie qu'en Flandre'*, but also stressed that *'les problèmes ne se situent en fait pas à ce niveau-là. Ce sont les différences importantes au sein d'une même région* [emphasis in the original EDM] *qui sont à l'origine de l'inégalité observée'*.<sup>881</sup> What however did change between the two areas is that while nationalists north of the border did politicise the repression by accusing the Belgian state of using the collaboration as a pretext to kill the Flemish movement, in the South the Socialist Party and the rising Walloon movement were keen on forgetting the extent of a phenomenon that – although probably less important than in Flanders – still had been a reality.<sup>882</sup>

When evaluating the claims of political marginalisation of the VB and N-VA, however, we need to bear in mind that before the 1960s the linguistic fracture was not the main social cleavage cutting across Belgian society. In a longer historical perspective, the history of Belgium can indeed be divided into three major periods according to the social conflicts dominating politics at each time: between 1830 and 1900 the religious/free-thinkers divide was prevalent; from 1900 to about 1960 class struggle swept the country; afterwards, the linguistic confrontation took over. This corresponded to three different party systems: a two-party one (Catholic vs. Liberals) in the first; a 'two and a half' one (Catholic, Socialists, Liberals) in the second; and extreme fragmentation, mainly due to the split of traditional parties along the linguistic line and the rise of new ones, in the third.<sup>883</sup> Thus, Belgium was a divided country already before the community conflict broke out and had already developed consociational mechanisms<sup>884</sup> that were just adapted to the new circumstances. This was made easier by the partial overlapping of old and new cleavages, since Flanders had historically been more Catholic and less socialist than Wallonia.<sup>885</sup> The persistence of consociational arrangements, however, also paved the way to the VB's and N-VA's claims of 'minoritisation of the Flemish majority'.

<sup>881</sup> HUYSE, LUCK and HOFACK, KRIS (1995) 'Quelques aspects de l'"épuration" après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale', in MORELLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-262.

<sup>882</sup> On the Walloon collaboration see: PLISNIER, FLORE (2011) *Ils ont pris les armes pour Hitler. La collaboration armée en Belgique francophone* (Brussels: Renaissance du livre/CEGESOMA).

<sup>883</sup> DE WINTER, LIEVEN, SWYNGEDOUW, MARC and DUMONT, PATRICK (2006) 'Party System(s) and Electoral Behaviour in Belgium: From Stability to Balkansation', *West European Politics*, 29(5), p. 934.

<sup>884</sup> In 1971, Huyse was the first one to refer to Belgium as a consociational democracy. HUYSE, LUC (1971) *Passiviteit, pacificatie and verzuimdheid in de Belgische politiek* (Antwerpen: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij). Deschouwer, however, nuanced this assessment arguing that the period analysed by Huyse (1944-1960) showed violent crises that only at the very end were solved through consociational procedures. DESCHOUWER, KRIS (2006) 'And the peace goes on? Consociational democracy and Belgian politics in the 20 first century', *West European Politics*, 29(5), p. 899.

<sup>885</sup> DESCHOUWER (2006) *op. cit.*, pp. 895-904. In 1961, the Christian-Democrats polled 50.3% in Flanders and 31% in Wallonia, while the Socialists obtained 46% in Wallonia and 29% in Flanders. See also: DE SMAELE, HENK (2011) 'How 'real' is Right-Wing Flanders?', in BRUNO, DE WEVER (ed.) *Right-Wing Flanders, Left-Wing Wallonia? Is This so? If so, Why? And, is it a Problem?*, Re-Bel e-book n. 12, December, pp. 6-10.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the clash between the two communities came to a head. This can partly be explained by the fact that, despite the reversal in the economic fortunes of Flanders and Wallonia, still in the 1960s, companies' 'boards of directors were French-speaking in 80 per cent of cases'<sup>886</sup> and 'in 60 per cent of companies, knowledge of French was a condition for employees' promotion'.<sup>887</sup> Despite the Flemish new economic vigour, French remained the higher status language. On the one hand, this limited the Flemings' career opportunities, especially considering that then most of them had been taught for the greatest part of their school curriculum in Dutch.<sup>888</sup> On the other, it threatened the Dutch character of Flanders, as the border could move in line with the share of francophone citizens living along the border.<sup>889</sup> The linguistic frontier was fixed in 1963 dividing the country into four areas (Figure 4.16, map above).<sup>890</sup> As a counterpart to the division of the country into rigid linguistic territories and the adaptation of seats to make Parliament more representative of the true demographic weight of each community, in 1970, the Francophones obtained the introduction of a set of consociational guarantees including: the requirement of a two-thirds majority in the Chamber of Representatives, and an absolute one in each linguistic group, to modify special laws; an 'alarm bell procedure' whereby 75% of the MPs of a linguistic group can defer the adoption of a bill for 30 days, if they deem it especially harmful to their own interests; linguistic parity in government, Prime Minister excluded. In addition, similar safeguards were later extended to the Flemings in Brussels, who ended up being overrepresented in the capital-region's institutions.<sup>891</sup> As Dave Sinardet made clear, 'the end result is a parliament in which the representatives are supposed to represent their own language group'.<sup>892</sup>

In the 1960s, the Flemings had demanded the establishment of cultural communities with a view to protecting the Dutch language, while the Walloons had sought fiscal autonomy to secure support for their declining industry against the austerity measures favoured in the North, but, as seen in the previous section, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Flemings began giving priority to economic concerns.<sup>893</sup> This bargaining game ended up producing a bipolar and asymmetric federal structure with three communities

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<sup>886</sup> WILS, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>887</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>888</sup> VAN GOETHEM, HERMAN (2010) *Belgium and the Monarchy. From National Independence to National Disintegration* (Brussels: UPA) pp. 197-198.

<sup>889</sup> See the considerations on the Laponce Law as well as the mechanisms of maximin communication and probability-sensitive learning made in the previous chapter. See also VAN PARIJS (2011) 'The Linguistic Territoriality Principle', *op. cit.*, p. 8-14. To understand the effect of these processes it might be helpful to mention that, in 1830, 75% of the population of Brussels spoke exclusively Dutch. Today that figure stands at about 9%.

<sup>890</sup> Exceptions were allowed for significant minorities along the border and around Brussels, in the form of linguistic facilities. For more details on the conflict about the facilities in this area see: DELCORPS, VINCENT (2012) 'La violence communautaire en Belgique', *La Revue Générale*, 10, pp. 26-40.

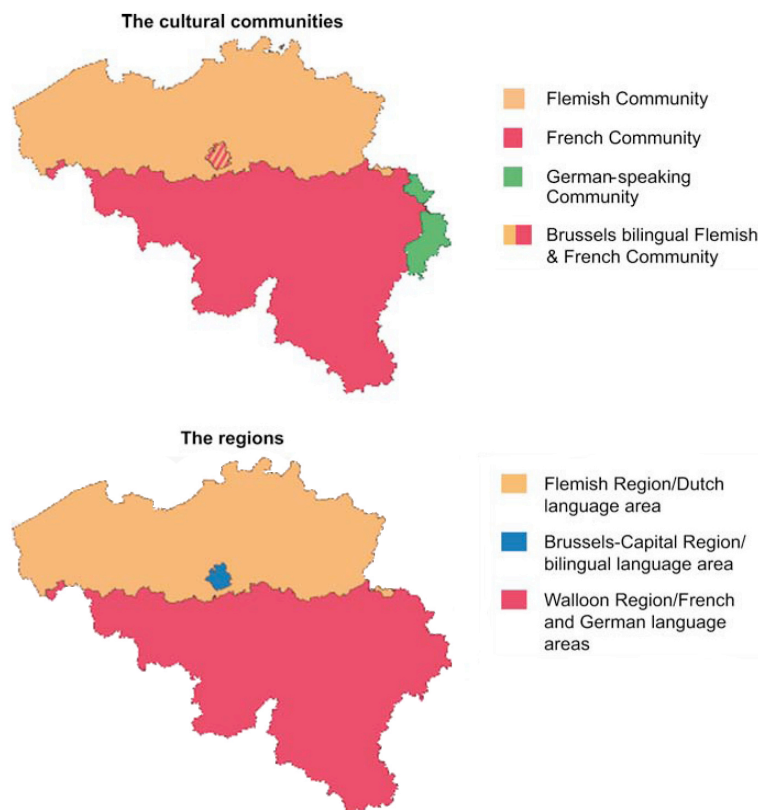
<sup>891</sup> DEPREEZ, KAS (1999) 'Belgium: A Post-National State?', in HANSPETER, KRIESI et al. (eds.) *Nation and National Identity: The European Experience in Perspective* (Chur: Ruedger) pp. 135-151.

<sup>892</sup> SINARDET, DAVE (2010) 'From Consociational Consciousness to Majoritarian Myth: Consociational Democracy, Multi-Level Politics and the Belgian case of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde', *Acta Politica*, 45(3), p. 352. In Flanders and Wallonia the territoriality principle prevails, therefore, in each region, people cannot vote for parties registered in the other region. In Brussels, the personality principle holds, therefore, both set of parties compete for votes.

<sup>893</sup> VERDONCK, MAGALI and DESCHOUWER, KRIS (2003) 'Patterns and Principles of Fiscal Federalism in Belgium', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 13(4), p. 92.

(the Flemish, the French and the German-speaking)<sup>894</sup> catering for individual matters in the realm of culture, education, language-use and welfare; and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels-Capital) in charge of territorial competences relating to, among others, regional economy, agriculture, infrastructure and the environment (Figure 4.16). Only the communities were immediately implemented.<sup>895</sup> The regions had to await the 1980 reform to be fully operational (the Brussels one was not introduced until 1988), but their financial means quickly increased. While, in 1980 the portion of the federal budget transferred to regions and communities amounted to 9%, by 1989 it had reached 32%, although they still had limited financial autonomy and no fiscal one.<sup>896</sup> The 1993 reform completed Belgium's transformation into a federal country.

**Figure 4.16 – Belgium's Communities and Regions**



Source: CORTHOOTS, JAN et al. 'Impala 1991-2011: 20 years of ILL in Belgium', *Interlending & Document Supply*, 39(2), pp. 101-110.

<sup>894</sup> The German-speaking community represents the germanophone population of 75,000 people (0.75% of the Belgian population) in 9 municipalities in the Eastern part of the country. Its modest size contributes to the bipolarity of the federation. Similarly, on the regional level the triadic division of the country in fact hides a dyadic structure, as the government of Brussels often sides with Wallonia because of its largely francophone population. The divisions between Walloons and *Bruxellois*, however, should not be ignored, as shown by the fact that they did not merge community and region as the Flemings did. Hence the bipolarism and asymmetry of the federation.

<sup>895</sup> HOOGE, LIESBET (2004) 'Belgium: Hollowing the Center', in UGO, AMORETTI and NANCY, BERMEO (eds.) *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press), p. 21-22, pre-published version available at [www.unc.edu/~hooghe/research\\_books.php](http://www.unc.edu/~hooghe/research_books.php) (accessed on February 27, 2013).

<sup>896</sup> VERDONCK and DESCHOUWER, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

Yet, by the late 1990s, the Flemish parties lamented that the autonomy they had obtained was illusory and, therefore, campaigned for a further reform of the federal system,<sup>897</sup> a move that reached its peak with the five Resolutions calling for increased fiscal powers, a partial communitarisation of the social security and the devolution of competences in a wide range of policy areas approved by the Flemish Parliament in 1999. At the same time, the accounts of the French community had worsened throughout the decade, hence francophone politicians reluctantly gave in to Flemish requests in exchange for a modification of the sub-state institutions' financing system.<sup>898</sup> The 2001 Lambermont agreement increased federal transfers to the communities – and pegged them to economic growth – but also made the apportioning of their budget more proportional to their tax raising capacity. Moreover, regions were granted the power to reduce or increase the federal personal income tax levied on their territory by 3.25% until 2003 and by 6.75% thereafter.<sup>899</sup> Finally, the most recent reform, in 2011, has substantially improved the regions' fiscal autonomy. The quota of the federal level on personal income tax has been reduced by 25% and given to the regions, which can decide to vary it by that same amount. In this way, regions are now able to finance themselves with their own taxes by about 70% of their budget. A compensation mechanism has been set up for Brussels – as capital and seat of the EU – and for the poorer regions – Wallonia – but this latter will progressively decrease in the next 10 years and eventually disappear.<sup>900</sup>

Therefore, as a reaction to demands coming from both linguistic groups, in the last 40 years Belgium has gone a long way to devolving powers to its regions and communities. Nevertheless, looking at the entire process, Deschouwer and Verdonck concluded that 'the present financing system is fashioned less by economic rationality than by the very specific characteristics of the Belgian federation: bipolar and centrifugal, double and asymmetrical'<sup>901</sup> and added that the mechanisms are remarkably complex 'because they reflect the subtle compromises reached after negotiations in which other issues causing conflict between the language communities had to be resolved'.<sup>902</sup> Belgium has gone from one non-majoritarian system, non-territorial consociationalism,<sup>903</sup> to another one, federal consociational, in a chaotic fashion, without a clear plan in mind or a consensus on the final outcome of the process. As a consequence, 'federal consociationalism' has fuelled the hollowing of the centre. One of the main tools of elite accommodation in a consociational system is the transfer of resources from the state to the segments. These

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<sup>897</sup> Verdonck and Deschouwer quote several examples where the Flemish government could not use its powers because they conflicted with federal or European competences. *Ibidem*, pp. 95-96. Furthermore, as mentioned above, until the 2001 reform Flanders' fiscal autonomy was very limited. DESCHOUWER (2012), *op. cit.*, pp. 69-72.

<sup>898</sup> The problem was that the communities' budget was pegged to the consumer price index while the regions' one to economic growth. Such difference did not affect the Flemish government, which, having merged community and region already in 1980, could easily pool resources, but, as inflation increased less than growth, it hit hard the French community.

<sup>899</sup> They cannot however modify tax progressivity or exercise unfair tax competition with regard to the other regions, although what constitutes 'unfair tax competition' has not been defined. VERDONCK and DESCHOUWER, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-108.

<sup>900</sup> DESCHOUWER (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 69-72.

<sup>901</sup> VERDONCK and DESCHOUWER, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>902</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108.

<sup>903</sup> Consociationalism is government by elite bargaining where elites represent societal segments and is founded on four main features: each segment governs itself as much as possible; each obtain a proportional share of public resources; group leaders bridge segments, the state and citizens; citizens are passive. See HOOGHE, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

were first given resources, but since this strategy grew too expensive, they were given competences.<sup>904</sup> In other words, political parties across the linguistic border agreed to disagree and divided political responsibilities among the federated units created since 1970. Parity in the decision-making process, whereby each time that a community has a problem it cannot act unilaterally, has assuaged conflict and avoided the break up of the country.<sup>905</sup> The side effect, apart from the initial skyrocketing costs for the federal budget due to the transfer of resources and competences without an adequate devolution of fiscal responsibilities seen above, was the furthering of the claims of political marginalisation and the activation of centrifugal forces.<sup>906</sup> Consensus has been forced upon the two communities provoking frustration when the system has fallen into joint-decision traps producing non-decision. It has especially been the case in Flanders because Flemish parties have more vocally called for reform, although such calls do not seem to coincide strictly with wider popular attitudes (Table 4.3).<sup>907</sup> This has generated some fatigue with non-majoritarian politics among Flemish political actors, especially as they represent the majority that would profit from a different style of democracy.<sup>908</sup> Consequently, as pointed out by Deschouwer, a sizable part of the Flemish population ‘perçoit la Belgique comme un pays dans lequel les francophones les empêchent de vivre leur vie’.<sup>909</sup>

In this connection, the division between Flemings and Walloons has also been framed by the VB and the N-VA as a difference in individual values. This argument is very important because it is precisely such divergence in preferences among the relevant populations that would make the Flemish political marginalisation so detrimental and warrant the ‘consensual divorce’ advocated by both parties. Yet, research by Jaak Billiet has shown that, although there are some differences in attitudes between the residents of the two regions, these are much smaller than the political debate would suggest and sometimes vary in unexpected ways. If one focuses on some aspects usually associated with the left-right ideological divide such as income inequality, the responsibilities of the government, and the social, moral and economic consequences of social benefits only some of them are significantly different across the linguistic border and, still, less than expected. Between 1991 and 2007 for instance, while 76% of Wallonia’s population on average thought that the government should reduce income inequality and 28% found large disparities in revenues to compensate merit unacceptable, the relative figures in Flanders were 66% and 21%. More surprisingly, people south of the border were significantly more prone (53%) than north of it (31%) to condemn the bad moral consequences of social benefits (i.e., they would make people less willing to work and to

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<sup>904</sup> Ibidem, pp. 34-35.

<sup>905</sup> DESCHOUWER, KRIS (1997) ‘Une fédération sans fédération de partis’, in SERGE, JAUMAIN (ed.) *La réforme de l’Etat...et après: L’impact des débats constitutionnels en Belgique et au Canada* (Brussels: Edition de l’Université de Bruxelles) pp. 77-83.

<sup>906</sup> We will deal with these centrifugal forces more in detail in section 4.5.

<sup>907</sup> SINARDET (2008), ‘Belgian Federalism’, *op. cit.*, p. 1027.

<sup>908</sup> The 2003 Flemish vote in the legislative commission on the issue of the split of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde electoral arrondissement clearly violated the consociational praxis established in the country since the 1960s, as the split was adopted through a vote that pitted Flemish MPs against francophone ones. Yet, the same safeguards criticised by the Flemish nationalists when referring to Belgium at large are vigorously defended in the context of Brussels.

<sup>909</sup> DESCHOUWER (1999-2000), *op. cit.*, p. 6. Deschouwer seems to interpret the continued strength of Flemish nationalism in a way similar to David McCrone’s explanation for the persistency of Scottish nationalism, that is the result of cumulated collective *ressentiments* towards the parent state (Belgium or the UK) and the rival national/cultural groups within it (the Walloons/Francophones and the English).

take care of each other).<sup>910</sup> Obtaining similar findings in a previous study, Billiet et al. had concluded that, although being a consequence rather than a cause of the social fracture between the linguistic segments, the division of the country into two ‘circuits of communication’ and political spheres had reinforced such divergence and the centrifugal dynamics affecting the country.<sup>911</sup> In this connection, as argued by Dave Sinardet, media reporting would have played an important role by tending ‘to “homogenise” the two large language communities of Dutch-speakers and French-speakers’ and pushing ‘internal differences within the communities to the background’.<sup>912</sup>

**Table 4.1 – Evolution of Territorial Identities in Flanders, hierarchical question, 1979-2004 (percentage of regional population)**

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1986	1992	1995	1996	2000	2003	2004
<b>Belgium</b>	34	40	37	35	44	43	39	53	57	55	42
<b>Flemish Community</b>	45	44	47	49	33	41	24	25	27	29	39
<b>Province</b>	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	2	4	6
<b>Municipality</b>	19	14	13	14	20	13	34	17	14	12	12

Source: DE WINTER (2007) *op. cit.*, p. 580.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, by addressing the demands for a rebalance of power within the state structure, federalisation directly aims at curbing perceptions of political marginalisation and, in this way, it is also likely to have an impact on people’s national identification. When considering the electoral success of the VB and the N-VA, as well as the rising demands for autonomy of the other Flemish parties, one would expect a progressively stronger Flemish identity. This is only in part true. Despite remaining stronger in Flanders than in Wallonia, since 1979, the regional identity north of the linguistic border consistently dropped as the first site of identification of the local population. While until 1982 more people identified with the Flemish region/community than with Belgium, since 1986 the relationship has been inverted (Table 4.1). This would suggest that the nation-building purpose of devolution, hypothesised in the previous chapter with regard to Spanish devolution, has worked in Belgium to some extent. This would be even more reasonable in the Belgian context, where despite having for decades been considered as a ‘sociological minority’, the Flemish population is in fact a demographic and political majority, and, since the 1960s, an increasingly assertive one. Hence, as Belgium became ‘more Flemish’, a progressively bigger share of the region’s

<sup>910</sup> BILLIET, JAAK (2011) ‘Flanders and Wallonia, Right versus Left: is this Real?’, in BRUNO, DE WEVER (ed.) *Right-Wing Flanders, Left-Wing Wallonia? Is this so? If so, why? And is it a Problem?*, Re-Bel e-book 12, December, pp. 11-24.

<sup>911</sup> BILLIET, JAAK, MADDENS, BART and FROGNIER, ANDRE-PAUL (2006) ‘Does Belgium (Still) Exist? Differences in Political Culture between Flemings and Walloons’, *West European Politics*, 29(5), p. 930.

<sup>912</sup> SINARDET, DAVE (2009) ‘Direct Democracy as a Tool to Shape a United Public Opinion in a Multilingual Society? Some Reflections based on the Belgian Case’, in DAVE, SINARDET and MARC, HOOGHE (eds.) *Is Democracy Viable without a Unified Public Opinion? The Swiss Experience and the Belgian Case*, Re-Bel e-book 3, June, p. 34.

population came to identify with the country.<sup>913</sup> At the same time, such conclusion should be nuanced, since other data partly contradict those displayed in Table 4.1, and suggest an overall strengthening of the Flemish identity since 1995, but especially between 2003 and 2010 (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 – Subjective National Identities in Flanders, 1995-2004 (percentage of regional population)**

	1995	1999	2003	2007	2010	2014
<b>Predominantly Flemish</b>	26.5	28,5	29.7	34.7	35.4	31.1
<b>As Flemish as Belgian</b>	45.5	42.8	43.4	35.5	41.3	38.7
<b>Predominantly Belgian</b>	28	28.7	27	29.7	23.3	29.8

Source: SWYNGEDOUW, MARC, ABTS, KOEN, BAUTE, SHARON, GALLE, JOLIEN and MEULEMAN, BART (2015) *Het Communautaire in de Verkiezingen van 25 Mei 2014. Analyse op basis van de postelektorale Verkiezingonderzoeken 1991-2014* (Leuven: ISPO).

Finally, the theme of political marginalisation has not been limited to the wider conflict between linguistic communities, but it has also pertained to the participative character of the Belgian and Flemish democracies. Belgian politics was based on an oligopolistic system of pillars (Catholic, liberal and socialist) or, in other words, a network of organisations linked to political parties and roughly coinciding with the two lines of conflict prevalent before the federalisation of the country (clerical/anti-clerical, labour/capital). Particracy helped stabilise the system, but only in periods of sustained economic growth. In periods of stagnation or recession it was hardly tenable, because inefficient and expensive. Furthermore, while the saliency of the traditional fractures has progressively decreased (depillarisation) the old structures have remained in place, offering an opportunity for contestation to political parties on the fringe.<sup>914</sup> This has been intensified by the corruption scandals of the 1990s that greatly contributed to the de-legitimation of the traditional parties and the state institutions.<sup>915</sup> As Deschouwer has recently asserted, ‘the 1991 elections clearly marked the beginning of the debates about what was wrong with democracy in Belgium. The next two decades were to see a mixture of scandals, clear examples of the malfunctioning of the public authorities and a number of attempts to reform the functioning of the state’.<sup>916</sup> Successive Eurobarometer polls showed that between the 1989 and the mid-1990s, Belgians’ satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy decreased from beyond 60% to below 30%.<sup>917</sup> Other polls, would confirm an

<sup>913</sup> DE WINTER, LIEVEN (2007) ‘La recherche sur les identités ethno-territoriales en Belgique’, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 14(4), p. 579.

<sup>914</sup> WITTE, ELS (2009) ‘Mechanisms of Post-War and Present-Day Political Systems’, in WITTE et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 420-432.

<sup>915</sup> DELWIT, *op. cit.*, 232-316. For instance, at the 1999 elections, the main traditional party families did not reach 50% of the aggregate share of the vote and the Christian-Democrats were not in government, which had happened only twice since 1884. And yet, although, as mentioned above, the mid-1990s were characterised by high popular distrust in political parties, by 2004, when the VB recorded its best electoral result ever, trust was at its highest since the mid-1970s. This result has been explained with reference to two events occurred right before the election: the ruling of the Court of Appeal of Ghent, which enabled the party to present itself as the victim of a conspiracy; and the approval of a law granting immigrants the right to vote at the municipal elections that set the issue of immigration at the core of the debate.

<sup>916</sup> DESCHOUWER (2012) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.



increased perception of corruption as a major problem in the country peaking around 1997-98.<sup>918</sup> At the political level, the break-through of the VB in the early 1990s was interpreted as a sign of a ‘confidence gap’ between the citizens and the political elite. As seen in section 4.2.4, the VB actively shaped the debate using the frequent scandals to fuel conflict and framing them in terms of the opposition between a clean Flanders and a corrupt Belgian (francophone) state.<sup>919</sup>

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<sup>918</sup> MAESSCHALCK, JEROEN and VAN DE WALLE, STEVEN (2006) ‘Policy Failure and Corruption in Belgium: Is Federalism to Blame?’, *West European Politics*, 29(5), pp. 999-1003.

<sup>919</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 1012-1013; DESCHOUWER (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 244-245.

## 4.5 Support for Independence and Electoral Results

Unfortunately, data based on direct questions concerning the independence of Flanders are not as abundant as in Catalonia or Scotland. The *Instituut voor Sociaal en Politiek Opinieonderzoek* (ISPO) of the Catholic University of Leuven, which co-manages the Belgian Election Study Series, did not ask a straightforward and consistent question about future constitutional scenarios offering a series of options ranging from recentralisation to independence until 2007. According to these data, the percentage of the Flemish population supporting the splitting of Belgium was equal to 9.6% in 2007, 11.9% in 2010, and 6.4% in 2014.<sup>920</sup> These figures, along with those provided by previous electoral studies by means of different questions, show that no more than 12% of Flanders' population has supported independence since 1991.<sup>921</sup> Such a portrayal is consistent with that depicted by the data presented in Table 4.3, which were obtained through a more general question concerning the 'preferred level at which decisions should be taken in the country'. They allow us to conclude that in the last two decades support for independence in Flanders has remained limited and has not substantially radicalised. Furthermore, Table 4.3 suggests that between 1991 and 2003, at a time when the Flemish parties were pushing for further autonomy, Flemish voters seemed to move towards a preference for recentralisation, although this situation has been inverted since 2003, as confirmed by a study conducted by Beyens et al. with regard to the 2009 Flemish election and by the figures quoted by Swyngedouw et al. with regard to the 2010 elections.<sup>922</sup> Other data would confirm such an inversion since at least 1999. Indeed, presented with several options for the evolution of the Belgian state, 60.7% and 48.1% of Flemings expressed a

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<sup>920</sup> SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2015) *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>921</sup> In both 1991 and 1995, voters were first asked to locate themselves along a 0-10 scale in which 0 meant that 'Flanders should decide everything' and 10 that 'Belgium should decide everything'. Those who located themselves on the Flemish side of the scale (from 0 to 5) were further asked whether Flanders should become an independent state, merge with another country or become an independent part of Belgium. In 1991, 14.9% chose the first two options and 85.1% the third, while in 1995 the figures were 18.8% and 77.5% respectively. The two data correspond to 6.3% and 5.4% of the total sample. ISPO/PIOP (1991) *1991 General Election Study Belgium. Codebook and Questionnaire*, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve; ISPO/PIOP (1998) *1995 General Election Study Belgium. Codebook and Questionnaire*, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve. Data quoted by Billiet et al. regarding the 1999 election would suggest a higher share, about 12%, although still much lower than in other regions discussed in this study and much lower than support for either the VB or the N-VA. BILLIET et al., *op. cit.*, p. 918. In the 2003 survey there was no direct question about independence ISPO/PIOP (2004) *General Election Study Belgium. Codebook: Questions and Frequency Tables*, Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve, p. 118.

<sup>922</sup> The authors found that the average value for Flemish voters on the 0-10 scale had gone from 5.52 in 2003 to 4.30 in 2009. BEYENS, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 8. Swyngedouw et al. provided the same data quoted in Table 4.3, updated with figures for the 2010 federal elections, but collapsed into three categories: prevalently pro-Flanders (positions 0-4 on the scale), middle (5) and prevalently pro-Belgium (6-10). The results were as follows: 38.3% chose the pro-Flemish side, 27.2% the middle one, and 34.5% the Belgian one. Furthermore, 52% of Flemings asked for more powers to be devolved to the Flemish community, 5% more than in 2007. SWYNGEDOUW, MARC, ABTS, KOEN and GALLE, JOLIEN (2014) 'Vlamingen en de communautaire kwestie', in KOEN, ABTS, MARC, SWYNGEDOUW, JAAK, BILLIET and BART, MEULEMAN (eds.) *Vlaanderen kiest. Trends in stemgedrag en opvattingen over politiek, staatsvorming en kerk* (Leuven: Lannoo Campus) p. 225-229. The figures concerning the 2014 elections, however, show a trend in the opposite direction, as support for more devolution to the region and communities decreased from 52% to 36.4%, mainly to the advantage of the 'status quo' option (gone from 14.1% to 32.8%). Yet, it should be noted that the election came right after a reform of the state that had transferred substantial powers to the regions and communities.

clear wish for further autonomy in 1999 and 2003 respectively.<sup>923</sup> Similarly, opinions about the split of the social security collected in 1995 and 2007 suggest the existence of a sizable body of the Flemish population in its favour, although not reflecting at all the near unanimity shown by the Flemish parties on the devolution of part of it in 1999.<sup>924</sup> In the first, 40.7% of the interviewees supported the split – high but still not a majority – and 25.2% clearly opposed it. Twelve years later still 42% preferred a split, but about as many (41.2%) opted for its recentralisation, which suggested the existence of an unexploited pro-Belgian constituency in Flanders.<sup>925</sup>

**Table 4.3 – Preferred Level at Which Decisions Should Be Taken, 1991-2007, 11-points scale: 0=Flanders; 10=Belgium (valid percentage of total sample)**

	<b>Only Flanders (0)</b>	<b>Mostly Flanders (1-4)</b>	<b>Both Equally (5)</b>	<b>Mostly Belgium (6-9)</b>	<b>Only Belgium (10)</b>
<b>1991</b>	9	26.1	15.6	28.9	20.5
<b>1995</b>	5.8	27.1	21.1	31.0	15.0
<b>1999</b>	5.3	22.7	19.1	35.6	17.3
<b>2003</b>	7.8	23.4	20.1	37.1	11.7
<b>2007</b>	10.3	32.0	17.1	24.8	15.8

Source: SWYNGEDOUW and RINK, *op. cit.*

Therefore, what is clear is that, since the 1990s, despite the electoral success of separatist parties, there has been no sign of radicalisation in favour of independence at the level of the Flemish population. Furthermore, up to at least 1999, there seems to have been a trend towards a general support for the recentralisation of some competences and, then, a reversal towards an increased support for further autonomy up until about 2010. Although this would need to be tested more rigorously, one might argue that the process culminating in the 1993 reforms placated the demands of the Flemish population, causing a strengthening of the Belgian identity (seen in the previous section) and of unitarist tendencies, while, from about a decade later on, the trend reversed, which would help explain the success of the N-VA at the end of the 2000s. This poses the problem of accounting for the success of the VB throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s as well as for the radicalisation of the demands of the Flemish parties more in general in the late

<sup>923</sup> The two questions are not exactly comparable, as, apart from the recentralisation scenarios, the 1999 one included the options of ‘more powers for the communities and regions’, ‘as many powers as possible for the communities and regions’ and ‘separatism’, while the 2003 one mentioned the possibilities of ‘more powers for the communities and regions’, ‘keep the present situation’ and ‘other’. ISPO/PIOP (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 118; BILLIET et al. (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 918.

<sup>924</sup> On the occasion of the vote on the already mentioned five resolutions, that concerning the transfer of competences in the realm of social security was approved by 14 votes out of 15 in the legislative commission and by 70 out of 106 (1 against and 35 abstentions) in the plenary session. PAGANO, GIUSEPPE (2000) *Les résolutions du Parlement Flamand pour une réforme de l'état*, Courier hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 1670-1671, pp. 33-67.

<sup>925</sup> ISPO/PIOP (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 71; SWYNGEDOUW, MARC and RINK, NATHALIE (2008) *Hoe Vlaams-Beglijshgezind zijn de Vlamingen?*, CeSO/ISPO/2008-6, p. 15.

1990s.

Several surveys found that the impact of nationalist beliefs in predicting VB voting for the decade of the 1990s, albeit present and higher than average, was not decisive. Hard-line nationalists made up the hard-core of the supporters and the backbone of the militant structure, but represented only about 5% of the overall party's electorate. The main reason for voting the VB mentioned by a relative majority of voters in several surveys concerned its immigration policy, followed by the critique against the traditional parties and the corrupted Belgian political system.<sup>926</sup> These were mainly blue-collar, low-educated, young and non-believer people living in large urban areas with few prospects of upward mobility, quite a different group from the educated middle class that made up most of the traditional nationalist constituency, and would make up most of the N-VA's voters some years later.<sup>927</sup> Later studies have however also suggested a change in the party's electorate and nuanced some of the previous findings. Rink et al., for instance, found a curvilinear relation between the size of the immigrant population in a given municipality and party voting throughout the 1990s – whereby the latter increased along with the former until a certain threshold and would subsequently flatten – thus supporting the hypothesis of a 'preventive voting behaviour'. This is consistent with Faniel's suggestion that, in the early 2000s, the party was able to tap rich and semi-rural constituencies unexploited before. Similarly, Poznyak et al. in particular have recently shown that the effect of immigration progressively decreased over-time.<sup>928</sup> This points to the need not to consider the VB as a single-issue party solely living off its extreme immigration policies. The *Blokkers* have been able to record 20 years of continuous electoral growth, in part, because, until the rise of the N-VA, they have been left free to exploit an electoral niche on the right-side of the Belgian political spectrum, but also because they have elaborated a complete ideological profile. Although it has not been the major element of its formidable electoral growth, its Flemish nationalist discourse has provided it with fundamental organisational strength – thanks to the already existing network of Flemish nationalist right-wing organisations – and ideological consistency. First, there is a clear continuity between the claims of economic victimisation made against the Francophones and the welfare chauvinism embedded in the 'own people first' principle used against foreign migrants. Second, as

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<sup>926</sup> SWYNGEDOUW, MARC (1992) *L'essor d'Agalev et du Vlaams Blok*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, n. 1362, pp. 10-18; BILLIET, JAAK and DE WITTE, HANS (1995) 'Attitudinal Dispositions to Vote for a 'new' extreme right-wing party: The case of 'Vlaams Blok'', *European Journal of Political Research*, 27, pp. 191-193; BILLIET, JAAK (1995) 'Church Involvement, Ethnocentrism and Voting for a Radical Right-Wing Party: Diverging Behavioral Outcomes of Equal Attitudinal Dispositions', *Sociology of Religion*, 56(3), p. 308; SWYNGEDOUW, MARC (2001) 'The subjective cognitive and affective map of extreme right voters: using open-ended questions in exit polls', *Electoral Studies*, 20, pp. 228-238. Yet, this should not be interpreted as meaning that VB voters did not support Flemish independence, but only that they did not identify it as the main reason to vote for the party. For instance, ISPO data for the 2007 elections show that 28.5% of VB's voters supported the split of Belgium and they represented 57% of the total body of electors in favour of Flemish independence. SWYNGEDOUW and RINK, *op. cit.*, p. 7

<sup>927</sup> SWYNGEDOUW (1992) *op. cit.*; BILLIET and DE WITTE, *op. cit.*, p. 185. In those years, the Socialist Party, along with the VU, was the one losing most votes to the VB, which explains the extensive use of the slogan *sociale partij* (social party).

<sup>928</sup> RINK, NATHALIE, PHALET, KAREN and SWYNGEDOUW, MARC (2009) 'The Effects of Immigration, Population Size, Unemployment, and Individual Characteristics on Voting for the Vlaams Blok in Flanders 1991-1999', *European Sociological Review*, 25(4), p. 417; FANIEL, *op. cit.*, p. 42; POZNYAK, DMITRY, ABTS, KOEN and SWYNGEDOUW, MARC (2011) 'The dynamics of the extreme right support: A growth curve model of the populist vote in Flanders-Belgium in 1987-2007', *Electoral Studies*, 30, pp. 672-688.

Hilde Coffé pointed out, an analysis of individual and social variables in Flanders and Wallonia during the 1990s would have predicted more support for a xenophobic right-wing party in the latter. What made a difference was that ‘the radical wing of the Flemish nationalist movement did indeed provide ideological and organizational coherence for Flemish [right-wing EDM] extremists. Francophone extremists on the other hand have no distinctive nationalist tradition to appeal to and no notion of national betrayal to play on’.<sup>929</sup>

The VB, and the N-VA later, have also profited from the peculiarities of the country’s institutional architecture mentioned in the previous section. These mainly boil down to the extreme separation and bipolarity of the Belgian federation, which results in the fact that, at the federal election, politicians compete for votes in an exclusively subnational arena but then have to strike deals with parties from the other side of the linguistic border. Such a configuration is weak in the face of the escalating demands of extremist nationalist parties presenting themselves as the champion of the Flemish interest without having to keep faith with their promises, since they will very unlikely take part in a government coalition at the federal level. This dynamic forces the other parties to compete with more radical offers to the regional electorate, which are then inevitably disregarded because of the need to compromise at the centre, thus furthering frustration and even more support for the parties on the fringes.<sup>930</sup> The uncoupling of the simultaneous holding of regional and federal elections, introduced with the electoral reform of 2003 and ending with the agreement on state reform reached in 2011, further exacerbated the radicalisation of the political arena around the community conflict by favouring the spread of asymmetric ruling coalitions. While previously governing parties had organised symmetric alliances at both the federal and regional level and, therefore, had had to be more accommodating on both in order to avoid disruption, between 2003 and 2011, non-collaboration on one level did not have major consequences on the other and regional elections could be used to advance majoritarian arguments in the federal arena without virtually any risks. This created an especially favourable environment for the N-VA, which, not bearing the stigma imposed on the VB, was able to take part in two ruling coalitions at the Flemish level (in the 2004-08 and 2009-14 period), while at the same time disrupting negotiations for the formation of a new federal government by advancing its radical demand on community issues. Furthermore, as shown by the 2008 and 2010 government crises, these parties seemed to realise that they could make do with a caretaker government for a while without paying a heavy price. On the contrary, for both the VB and the N-VA, the longer the impasse the truer their claim that Belgium does not work anymore.<sup>931</sup>

But there is also a more ‘sociological’ and less institutional effect of the process of federalisation. As argued by de Grauwe and Dewatripont, ‘there was a time when the Flemish elite had a strong affinity with French culture and mixed easily with the Belgian establishment. This created a glue that helped keep the country together. Today the Flemish and French elites have drifted apart. There is no such thing as a Belgian elite anymore’.<sup>932</sup> This process of separation is not new and is rather consistent with the

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<sup>929</sup> COFFÉ, HILDE (2005) ‘Do Individual Factors Explain the Different Success of the Two Belgian Extreme Right Parties’, *Acta Politica*, 40, p. 91.

<sup>930</sup> DESCHOUWER (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 251. He calls this mechanism the ‘majoritarian illusion’.

<sup>931</sup> SINARDET (2010), *op. cit.*, pp. 363-369.

<sup>932</sup> DE GRAUWE, PAUL and DEWATRIPOINT, MATHIAS (2010) ‘Introduction’, in DE GRAUWE and DEWATRIPOINT, *op. cit.*, p. 5. This point is confirmed by Devos and Bouteica, who have argued that,

consociational mechanisms already existing before federalisation, but its adaptation to a territorial conflict threatens the integrity of the state.<sup>933</sup> In addition, the political elite active in the late 1990s and early 2000s had mostly been socialised at a time of heated political conflict – roughly from the late 1960s to the early 1980s – that later abated at the grassroots level, but remained institutionalised at the political one.<sup>934</sup>

The above considerations might explain the gap between the importance taken by the communitarian issue at the political and grassroots levels, especially between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s. Yet, one should not forget that despite ups and downs, a consistent and substantial body of the Flemish population – roughly between 30 and 40% – has called for more powers for the regions and communities. Second, the rise of the N-VA has coincided with a revived demand for change towards more devolution, although not for independence.<sup>935</sup> Hence, in a way similar to that seen in the case of ERC in the early 2000s, the gradualist strategy of the N-VA is an important factor explaining its success. This is confirmed by data concerning the electorate of the party. At the 2010 elections for instance, the communitarian issue has been the party's strongest selling point,<sup>936</sup> with about 40% of voters – twice as many as those of the other parties – indicating it as the main reason for choosing the Alliance and 80.3% of them pleading for a further transfer of competences to Flanders, while only 16.8% declared they preferred separation over further autonomy.<sup>937</sup> Also, electoral analysis showed that the Alliance is not a single-issue party either. It has been able to steal voters from the liberals of the Open VLD<sup>938</sup> around the themes of taxation and the economy, as well as from the VB by proposing a tough, but not extreme, immigration policy. The party has thus expanded to include a larger audience than in previous years and its constituency is now representative of the overall Flemish

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contrary to the former, the current political elite does not share a common federal history anymore. DEVOS and BOUTECA, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>933</sup> DESCHOUWER (2006), *op. cit.*, p. 903.

<sup>934</sup> DESCHOUWER (1999-2000) *op. cit.* This would be in part confirmed by interviews conducted for this research project, in which many of the politicians interviewed mentioned the linguistic struggles in *Voeren* and around Brussels as one of the main reasons for their political involvement. See interviews with Filip Dewinter, Bart Laeremans and Kris Van Dijck in Annex 2. A slightly different hypothesis was provided by Maddens et al., who argued that the Flemish nationalist minority attached much more importance to its cause, thus being more vocal and probably disproportionately represented in the Flemish parties and institutions, than the wider, but silent, pro-Belgian part of the population. MADDENS, BART, BERTEEN, ROELAND and BILLIET, JAAK (1998) 'The National Consciousness of the Flemings and the Walloons. An Empirical Investigation', in KAS, DEPREZ and LOUIS, VOS (eds.) *Nationalism in Belgium. Shifting Identities, 1780-1995* (Basingstoke: Macmillan).

<sup>935</sup> Whether this revived interest is the result of the persisting importance of the communitarian issue at the political level is hard to say. The change in peoples' perception of differences between the 'mentalities of Flemings and Walloons' – a longstanding point of the VB and, later, the N-VA, which, as we have seen in the previous section, was clear in the wider debate over the communitarianisation of social security during the 1990s – would point in this direction. While in 1991 and 1995, only 39.5% and 38.5% of the Flemish interviewees declared that there were major differences between Flemings and Walloons (in both years the proportion was in fact higher among the Walloons), in 2003, 61.6% believed in their existence. ISPO/PIOP (1991) *op. cit.*, p. 183; ISPO/PIOP (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 187; ISPO/PIOP (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>936</sup> BEYENS, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 8. This is confirmed also with regard to the 2009 elections by PAUWELS, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>937</sup> SWYNGEDOUW, MARC and ABTS, KOEN (2011) *Les électeurs de la N-VA aux élections fédérales du 13 juin 2010*, Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP, n. 2125, pp. 13-20.

<sup>938</sup> The *Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* (Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats) is a liberal party founded in 1992 by members of the former Party for Progress and Freedom and of other parties. Under Guy Verhofstadt, it has led the government from 1999 to 2008.

population.<sup>939</sup> Its rise has particularly been damaging for the VB, as about 15% of former VB voters moved to the N-VA between 2007 and 2009, thus helping explain its first electoral breakthrough.<sup>940</sup>

Unfortunately, survey data in suitable format for statistical manipulation is not available as it is in the Catalan case. Hence, we cannot easily check for the relationships between support for independence and national identity or between support for independence and perception of its economic consequences that we have highlighted in a previous chapter with reference to the literature on the demand for sovereignty in Quebec. Also, secondary sources on the issue are lacking.<sup>941</sup> However, using data from the 2010 Belgian Election Study, Swyngedouw et al. found a strong correlation between support for independence and a critical attitude towards the transfers between Flanders and Wallonia, thus suggesting, at least partially, the importance of economic considerations found in the Quebec and Catalan cases.<sup>942</sup> Furthermore, what is clear from a comparative analysis of the data – we will come back on this in a more systematic fashion in chapter seven – is that support for independence and exclusive Flemish identity have been consistently lower than in Catalonia.<sup>943</sup> This should be weighed against the fact that, contrary to the Catalans, Flemings are a majority within the country, thus, although there is the perception of a problem with continuous francophone vetoes, alternatives to the break-up of Belgium are available, notably to make a more assertive use of the autonomy that Flanders already has – as proposed by the political scientist Bart Maddens in the so-called ‘Maddens doctrine’ – and to limit the resources transferred to the federal level in order to force the francophone parties to demand a change in the system; or to impose a more majoritarian style of politics at the federal level, as the current ‘Flemish-dominated’ government might be willing to do. Furthermore, as shown in section 4.4.1, in light of the economic evolution of Flanders since the early 1990s, a risky option such as independence might have been discouraged by the sustained, although decreasing, growth of the region and the limited impact of the recent economic crisis.

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<sup>939</sup> SWYNGEDOUW and ABTS, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-12.

<sup>940</sup> PAUWELS, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>941</sup> Figures on the 2003 federal election from ISPO do show that a higher support for independence among people feeling exclusively Flemish (17.8% instead of 7.8%), but this is much lower than in the Catalan case and it does not seem to decisively shape attitudes on independence, as within the same group about 13% of interviewees chose the ‘Belgium must decide everything option’, which is actually higher than the same figure for the total Flemish sample (11.7%).

<sup>942</sup> SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2014) *op. cit.*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>943</sup> Data are not necessarily comparable because the questions have been asked in different ways, but the average of those indicating independence as their preferred constitutional option, among a few others, in the period 1991-2010, has averaged less than 10% in Flanders against 20% in Catalonia. As far as, exclusive Flemish/Catalan identification is concerned, in the 1995-2010 period – for which we have data for Flanders in Moreno question format – this has averaged 7% in Flanders, while the same figure in Catalonia has been equal to 13%.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In December 2006, the Francophone public TV channel RTBF broadcast a fake special news report in which it announced that the Flemish Parliament had declared the independence of Flanders. The timing of the programme was not accidental. At the previous regional elections, in 2004, the VB had become one of the most important parties in Flanders, preceded only by the CD&V-N-VA cartel<sup>944</sup> that, ahead of the 2007 federal elections, indicated its willingness to initiate a new state reform. Between 1978 and 2010, the total nationalist vote in Flanders did not stop increasing. As the VU had continuously lost ground in the 30 years between its electoral zenith, in 1971, and its dissolution, in 2001, such progression has been driven by the VB, first, and the N-VA, later. The growth has also been qualitative as, compared to the VU, the two parties studied in this chapter have firmly declared their willingness, albeit through different strategies, to dissolve Belgium. This has surprisingly occurred in a context in which the number of people willing to demand a break-up of the country has been very limited (no more than 12%) and without showing any signs of major increase.

As in the previous chapter, the analysis carried out here has concerned three levels of analysis concerning: the parties' discourses and strategies; the critical examination of the socio-economic conditions favouring the formulation of the arguments of economic and political marginalisation making up the nationalism of the rich; and the analysis of trends in support for independence and electoral results.

To begin with the first, the VB and the N-VA have both consistently denounced the fiscal exploitation and political marginalisation of Flanders as central themes in their propaganda. Although the VB produced its most complete brochure on the transfers going from Flanders to Wallonia only in 1992, the issue featured in the party papers since its foundation and was the subject of a thematic congress already in 1980. During such a period, estimates have varied from the 50 billion Belgian francs of the early 1980s to the current 12 billion euros per years (equal to about 7% of regional GDP). The forms of economic plundering denounced by the party have also changed. While in the early years the VB still referred extensively to the subsidies given to Walloon dying enterprises, the main concern progressively became the Belgian public finances – a theme that has resurfaced in the context of the euro crisis – and the social security system. What has remained constant is the idea that the economic differences between the two regions is culturally-driven. Accordingly, Flanders has been the engine of the country's economy thanks to the hard-working ethos of its population – epitomised by its competitive SMEs – while Wallonia, on the contrary, has remained stuck in a statist conception of the economy and has lived off the Flemings' back through the profligate Belgian solidarity system, which has furthered dependency rather than endogenous growth to the advantages of the PS and its clientelist network. Given the size of the transfers and the steady decline of Belgium, independence would be the necessary prerequisite of any social policy in Flanders, since cutting the ties with the rest of the country would make enormous resources available to invest in welfare for the Flemings and promoting full employment. From the late 1990s, this narrative has been further enriched by the idea that an independent Flanders will be as successful a community in the globalised economy as many other small states that can take advantage of their higher flexibility and homogeneity.

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<sup>944</sup> The combined result of the CD&V-N-VA cartel was higher than the VB's one, but their individual scores were lower. Hence, when looking at the votes of each single party, the VB in fact ranked first.



According to the VB, the fiscal exploitation of Flanders has mainly resulted from its political marginalisation within the Belgian state. While historically this condition took the form of a social and political domination on the part of the francophone elite that founded and led the country – and thus was in part Flemish – since the 1960s, it has revolved around the privileged position enjoyed by the Francophones because of the consociational safeguards granted at the beginning of the federalisation of the country. The party has been very vocal in denouncing linguistic oppression, even accusing the Francophones of imperialism in border areas such as *Voeren* and the Brussels periphery. In the 1990s, it played heavily on the corruption scandals that hit the traditional establishment in order to highlight the rotten character of the Belgian (francophone) democracy pitting it against cleaner Flanders and presenting itself as the voice of the people. However, the most important argument has consisted in the minoritisation of the Flemings because of the absence of the principle of ‘one man, one vote’ and the continuous vetos posed by the Francophones, which makes governance impossible at the Belgian level since Flemings and Walloons would hold different positions – more rightist the former, more leftist the latter – on a number of crucial issues. As Flanders pays the price of the ‘status-quo’ through the transfers, the Walloons have no interest in reforming the country. Splitting it would thus be the logical conclusion to be drawn from the malfunctioning of the system.

The N-VA has made very similar arguments, although with different tones and emphasising some aspects over others. For instance, the Alliance has been much less concerned with linguistic issues and has never accused the Francophones of imperialism, although it has sometimes pointed out their ‘arrogance’. In economic terms, it has been open to a smoother transition envisaging the maintenance of the transfers for a while after independence. More generally, it has proposed a less ‘romantic’ and ‘principled’ nationalism, focusing more on an instrumental idea of independence as a means to get better democracy, more effective governance and improved welfare for the Flemings. It has also adopted a gradualist strategy envisaging an intermediate step with the formation of a confederation, which has instead been generally rejected – although with some openings especially in the second half of the 2000s – by the VB.

Other major differences between the two parties relate to their wider ideological profiles. The VB has proudly defined itself as a right-wing party with very conservative positions on ethical issues, a total rejection of multicultural society with very clear xenophobic – and especially Islamophobic – accents, an essentialist definition of the Flemish nation and a stiff Eurosceptic position. The N-VA, instead, has accepted its positioning on the right-wing of the political spectrum, but as a modern conservative party. It has held tough positions on clandestine immigration and is critical of multiculturalism, but open to setting up legal channels and promoting integration. Despite underlining the ‘cultural content’ of the Flemish identity, it has seemed to espouse a more flexible definition of it, less prone to essentialising tendencies and open to foreign contributions. And, overall, it has assumed an Euro-enthusiastic profile – albeit criticising some specific aspects and, very recently, showing a more sceptical position with the adoption of a self-avowedly ‘Eurorealist’ approach. Both parties have, however, contributed to spreading stereotypical representations of the differences between the populations of the two regions and to framing issues pertaining to interpersonal solidarity as interterritorial ones.

All studies on the transfers confirm their existence and stability over time – at a rate of about 4% of the Flemish GDP for the entire period 1990-2004 at least – although they consistently moderate the VB’s and N-VA’s estimates, which often take into account a

very problematic calculation of the interests on the debt. Social security accounts for most of the financial flows between the North and the South – in a share between 55% and 65% of the total – thus in part explaining why they have remained substantially unchanged despite the extensive federalisation of the country, since social security has been almost untouched by the process until the last reform agreed upon in 2012.<sup>945</sup> In historical perspective, the transfers mainly result from the reversal of economic fortunes between Flanders and Wallonia, with the latter definitively entering a phase of structural decline from the late 1950s on and the former taking over as the economic engine of the country. Recent studies would not uphold the parties' claim that Wallonia was not solidary with Flanders when this was the poorer region. Although the social security system was certainly expanded during the decades following the Second World War, its bases were already laid down in the interwar years and, more decisively so, in 1944. The current system, however, shows shortcomings concerning the lack of economic convergence and incentive to growth, as well as with regard to overcompensation effects. The latter was a topical issue in the late 1980s, when some studies found that the Walloons enjoyed a higher per capita disposable income than the Flemings despite a lower primary income.<sup>946</sup> Yet, as this was a temporary effect linked to the richer Walloon past, in later years the focus has mainly been on the lower revenues per head of the Flemish community, despite a higher taxing capacity, as a consequence of state redistribution. The lack of economic convergence has been linked by the parties to the argument whereby the transfers would discourage growth – through a 'poverty trap' effect – and sustain clientelist practices, potently fed by the widely broadcast corruption scandals of the 1990s. In this connection, the constancy of the transfers – which on the one hand might suggest that they have not been decisive in determining the electoral evolution of the parties – could be used to confirm arguments about their counter-productive effects in terms of convergence between the two regions, as well as the negligible effect of federalisation over them.

Experiences of both linguistic and social discrimination in a francophone-led country were a fact among the Flemish population at least until the interwar years, whereby the Flemish majority could be considered as a 'sociological minority'. However, as noted by Beyen, linguistic oppression was never actively implemented by the state, but rather the result of spontaneous social dynamics that the state protractedly refused to stop. The result was a situation in which this social process frustrated the Flemish majority without homogeneising it completely. The current major source of political minoritisation of the Flemish majority, however, lies in the constitutional safeguards for French-speakers adopted in 1970 with the adaptation of the former consociational mechanisms to the linguistic-territorial conflict. As the differing economic structures of the two halves of the country have for a long time entailed divergent interests and agendas, joint decision traps between the two segments have fuelled frustration among some of the federated entities. All this has been exacerbated by some peculiar characteristics of the Belgian federation. Its bipolarity makes it that tensions tend to be framed as a direct confrontation between Flemings and Francophones/Walloons, while the duality and asymmetry increase complexity and further an imbalance between the 'apparently' unified image of Flanders and the more divided one of Wallonia and the French community. But, above all, the problem has lain in the centrifugal forces unleashed by the adaptation of consociationalism to the linguistic segments, which results in the fact that there are ever fewer actors capable

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<sup>945</sup> However another reason is that financial autonomy was very limited until the 2001 reform.

<sup>946</sup> For the distinction between disposable and primary income see note 424.

of, and with an interest in, bridging the gap between the two groups, thus threatening the unity of the country. As argued by many authors, there is no longer a Belgian elite and there is a very thin common public sphere – in this connection the ‘hard’ linguistic boundary between French and Dutch has certainly contributed to increase the costs of bilingualism, as compared, for instance, to the Catalan context. These forces rather than any serious differences in individual values between Flemings and Francophones would be the main engine of the tensions that have pushed the process of federalisation ever farther.

In order to trace the origin of the formation of the nationalism of the rich in Flanders one has to look at the crucial years of the second half of the 1970s and especially the period 1978-1982, when the publication of the first systematic studies on the transfers coincided with the adoption of an economic strategy based on ideas of ‘economic regionalism’ and neoliberalism which, with their emphasis on the ‘territorial embeddedness’ of skills and on free enterprise, favoured the development of cultural-determinist arguments about growth and legitimated the demand for further autonomy on account of the Keynesian consensus still dominant in Wallonia and the need for financial resources to invest in the transition to an economy based on the ‘new technological sectors’. The economic crisis following the second oil shock and the appalling situation of state finances, with debt skyrocketing between the late 1970s and mid-1980s, increased the salience of the transfers and the urgency of ‘economic federalism’. While the VB, and later the N-VA, have represented the most radical embodiment of such a discourse, this has been shared, to varying extent, by other parties and institutional actors and it has built on a previously existing dimension of economic victimisation within the wider Flemish movement that had until then been overshadowed by the linguistic struggle. Thus, the VB, first, and the N-VA, later, have only represented the most radical vision of a wider phenomenon. Nevertheless, helped by the peculiarities of Belgian federalism, they have been able to drag the public debate ever further towards their own positions as seen by the evolution of discussions over the split of the social security.

However, data on support for independence do not show any radicalisation. Figures on support for further autonomy, in turn, do show a consistent body of the Flemish population in favour of the devolution of more powers, but they are also ambiguous, seemingly showing pro-recentralisation tendencies up to the late 1990s, with a successive move towards demands for decentralisation. An explanation would be that, with the transformation of the country into a federal state, the Flemish majority identified more with Belgium, yet conflict remained high at the political level for the institutional reasons seen above and on account of some sociological peculiarities of the Belgian political elite. Then, by the early 2000s, more grassroots demand for change seemed to revive. The rise of the VB would, however, be mainly explained by other factors, such as, its tough immigration policy and anti-system rhetoric, as well as the near monopoly on immigration left by other Belgian parties. Although Flemish nationalism is not the main factor in its electoral rise, the VB did profit from the organisational and ideological consistency offered by the Flemish right-wing nationalist tradition. The N-VA has instead more decisively attracted the Flemish nationalist electorate with an interest in constitutional change, having in state reform its best selling point. The gradualist strategy adopted by the party with the idea of confederalism, its instrumentalist conception of independence and its clear liberal-conservative ideological profile enabled it to attract voters on account of demand for further autonomy short of independence – supported by the majority among its own voters – but also to steal voters from the Liberals, on account of more moderate

market-oriented economic policies, and from the VB, thanks to a tough but not extreme immigration policy.



## 5 The Scottish National Party

### 5.1 Origins and Evolution of the SNP

‘Stop the World! Scotland wants to get on!’<sup>947</sup> Winifred Margaret Ewing shouted to a cheering crowd in Hamilton, Lanarkshire, after winning one of the safest Labour seats in Scotland in the 1967 by-election. It was an exceptional event, especially considering that it came just a year after Labour had recorded a landslide victory in the region with 47 out of 71 seats, and according to many it marked the beginning of ‘modern Scottish politics’.<sup>948</sup> It was certainly a watershed in the history of the Scottish National Party (SNP). From that election on, the SNP has been continuously represented in Westminster, while the major parties were forced to confront the issue of devolution. In 1968, Ted Heath, then leader of the Tories, declared to an astonished Conservative Assembly in Perth that they were ‘pledged to give the people of Scotland genuine participation in all the decisions that affect them’.<sup>949</sup> A year later, the Labour government led by Harold Wilson set up a Royal Commission on the Constitution tasked with inquiring into the structure of the Kingdom and whether any changes were needed. But Hamilton did not come out of the blue. The SNP had undergone a slow but remarkable transformation all through the 1960s that allowed the party to play a critical role on the political scene in the 1970s.

Born in 1934 of the merger of the National Party of Scotland and the Scottish Party, the SNP's major feature at that time was its divisiveness. This ran along two major fractures: the independence-devolution and the pressure group-political party ones. Such rifts can be traced back to the Scottish National League and the Scottish Home Rule Association, the two organisations that, in 1928, had merged into the National Party of Scotland. Founded in 1920, the League was for independence and contested elections, while the Association, initially created in 1886 and then reformed after the Great War, was a pressure group campaigning for administrative devolution. The failure of the Association led to the creation of the National Party of Scotland, where, at the beginning, the fundamentalists<sup>950</sup> had the upper hand. In the 1928-32 period, however, their strategy failed giving way to the devolutionist majority represented by John MacCormick. He believed that the party had to widen its appeal to a broader audience. For this reason, and for considerations of prestige, he approached the Scottish Party.<sup>951</sup>

The Scottish Party was a right-wing organisation founded to counter the (perceived) separatist claims of the National Party of Scotland by some notable members of the Scottish establishment such as Andrew Dewar Gibb, Duke of Montrose, and Sir Alexander MacEwan. According to them, Westminster would not devote enough attention to Scottish

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<sup>947</sup> BBC ALBA (2009) *Madame Ecosse*, 1'28"-1'35".

<sup>948</sup> HASSAN, GERRY (2009) ‘The Making of the Modern SNP: From Protest to Power’, in *The Modern SNP: From Protest to Power* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) p. 1.

<sup>949</sup> BBC ALBA, *op. cit.*, 27'25"-27'50". The statement was astonishing because the Tories had consistently been against any forms of devolution of powers.

<sup>950</sup> By fundamentalists, here, we refer to the uncompromising wing of the movement, which campaigned for outright independence and was against collaboration with other parties.

<sup>951</sup> FINLAY, RICHARD J. (1994) *Independent and Free, Scottish Politics and the Origins of the Scottish National Party 1918-1945* (Edinburgh; John Donald Publishers).

matters and, at the same time, these matters stole precious time from imperial business. Therefore, they argued for devolution of powers in order for Scotland to manage more efficiently its domestic affairs.<sup>952</sup> Despite the small membership of the Scottish Party – it resembled more a think-tank – MacCormick was convinced that these notables were key to attract popular support. Hence, the SNP was founded in April 1934. It aimed at a Scottish Parliament dealing with Scottish affairs, while foreign policy, defence and imperial issues would be treated by England and Scotland together.<sup>953</sup> Yet, the party had serious built-in contradictions that undermined its policy-making and credibility throughout the decade.

Things partially changed after the Second World War, when Sir Robert McIntyre brought in discipline and strong leadership. He prohibited dual party membership and focused policy on economic rather than cultural matters.<sup>954</sup> In 1946, he also produced a policy statement that constituted the bedrock of party policy until 1966. However, broadly speaking, during the period 1934-1964 the party was mostly concerned with surviving and often was the junior partner among a number of organisations fighting for self-government. This started changing at the beginning of the 1960s, when a group of enthusiastic members joined the SNP and improved its structure and policy-making.<sup>955</sup> Among them, Ian Macdonald played a momentous role. In 1961, after having achieved one of the best electoral performances for the SNP in many years, he sold his farm in Ayrshire and, living on the revenue realised plus a small amount paid by the party, he became SNP's full-time National Organiser. To the party it was a godsend. Macdonald travelled throughout Scotland founding branches and extending membership, which immediately turned into increased capacity to contest seats. While in 1959 the SNP could fight only 5 out of 71 seats, these rose to 15 in 1964, 23 in 1966<sup>956</sup> and 65 in 1970<sup>957</sup>. The party was gathering momentum and Hamilton served as a precipitating event: not only was it a major victory, but it also pushed the SNP to the centre of Scottish politics, convincing thousands of Scots to join. People came in flocks and membership rose from the 2-3,000 of the early 1960s to the official 120,000 – more probably there were 60-70,000 truly active members – of the end of the decade.<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>952</sup> FINLAY, RICHARD J. (1992) 'For or Against?': Scottish Nationalists and the British Empire, 1919-1939', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 71(191-192), pp. 184-206.

<sup>953</sup> Finlay makes clear that, with respect to the issue of self-government, the creation of the SNP was a retrogressive step because it stressed continuation of relations with England and that the Scottish Parliament would be responsible solely for internal affairs, while the National Party had sought Dominion status. Hence, the SNP of the time 'can be seen as the culmination of the moderates' campaign to establish their vision of what was meant by Scottish nationalism' and, in this respect, it was clearly different from the SNP of the 1960s, although, by 1942, the fundamentalists regained control of the party. FINLAY, RICHARD J. (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 155.

<sup>954</sup> He also shaped the party as an anti-intellectual movement with 'distaste for elitist styles and attitudes'. MITCHELL, JAMES (1996) *Strategies for Self-Government. The Campaign for a Scottish Parliament* (Edinburgh: Polygon Press) p. 193.

<sup>955</sup> The reasons why this inflow of new members occurred precisely at this time are varied. On the one hand, the Scottish Covenant Association eventually dissolved after the death of its leader, and former SNP chairman during the 1930s, John MacCormick. On the other, the Scottish economy had entered the process of structural adjustment that lasted until the late 1980s. See BRAND, JACK (1978) *The National Movement in Scotland* (London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul), pp. 257-258.

<sup>956</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 257-264.

<sup>957</sup> KELLAS, JAMES G. (1971) 'Appendix V. Scottish Nationalism', in DAVID, BUTLER and MICHAEL, PINTO-DUSCHINSKY (eds.) *The British General Elections of 1970* (Basingstoke: Macmillan), p. 460.

<sup>958</sup> WILSON, GORDON (2009) *SNP: The Turbulent Years 1960-1990* (Stirling: Scots Independent) p. 40.

Nevertheless, after another good result at the 1968 local elections – it obtained 34% of the vote with 101 wins – <sup>959</sup>the party already began losing ground, inaugurating a long history of boom and bust. At the 1970 general elections, despite doubling its overall share – from the 5% scored in 1966 to 11.4%<sup>960</sup> – it won only one seat.<sup>961</sup> It is in this context that the first oil fields in the North Sea were struck in 1971. Already before this discovery, the SNP had claimed that Scotland was subsidising the Union by some million pounds a year. To counter this argument, in 1968, the British Treasury published a separate Scottish budget with the aim of showing that government spending in Scotland was higher than the average. A year later, the analysis was confirmed by the economist Gavin McCrone, who calculated that the region was in deficit with the central administration to the tune of £56-93 million per year. But, when estimates relative to future oil revenues were published, the same data were used to show the scale of wealth that would flow from Scotland to the rest of Britain.<sup>962</sup> As Andrew Marr has suggested, oil blew ‘away the central anti-Nationalist argument, made by Labour three years earlier, that Scotland was simply too poor to go it alone’.<sup>963</sup>

In actual fact, the SNP's ‘It's Scotland's Oil Campaign’ was slow to start, but, once set in motion, it was extremely effective. It served to usher in the debate on a Scottish Parliament, which was the maximum and the minimum that the SNP, Labour and the Conservatives could agree upon. The Tories had already committed to a Scottish assembly in 1968, although they did nothing towards achieving it during their time in government in 1970-1974. Labour's approach was much more controversial. Believing that committees of inquiry ‘spend years taking minutes’<sup>964</sup>, Harold Wilson had tried to halt the debate setting up the Kilbrandon Commission on the Constitution. Yet, in October 1973, with a new general election approaching and the SNP reaping the oil campaign's harvest – benefiting from the dramatic rise in oil prices – the Commission released a report in favour of a Scottish parliament.<sup>965</sup> Labour could no longer ignore devolution but fully endorsed it only in August 1974, after the SNP had scored an impressive 21.9% in February. This, however, did not stop the nationalists’ growth. When the new Labour government called an early election to strengthen its position, in October that year, the SNP hit 30.4%, seizing 11 seats and 42 second places, while Labour did not obtain the majority it sought and embarked on a tottering minority government.<sup>966</sup> As many among Labour's ranks admitted back then, ‘before October 1974, it might have been difficult to suppress the issue of

<sup>959</sup> DEVINE, THOMAS MARTIN (2008) ‘The Challenge of Nationalism’, in THOMAS MARTIN, DEVINE (ed.), *Scotland and the Union 1707-2007* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), p. 143. He also reports that Ted Heath noted in his diary that nationalism ‘was the biggest single factor in our politics today’.

<sup>960</sup> However comparing the share of the vote in the seats contested, the SNP went down from an average of 14.5% in 1966 to 12.2% in 1970. See KELLAS, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

<sup>961</sup> With only 1.4% of seats on account of 11.4% of overall votes, the party was clearly underrepresented. This was due to the first-past-the-post electoral system, which prized vote concentration. The SNP showed a steady tendency to spread its support and this remained a major weakness until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, which is partly elected on a proportional basis.

<sup>962</sup> HARVIE, CHRISTOPHER (1995) *Fool's Gold. The Story of North Sea Oil* (London: Penguin), p. 122.

<sup>963</sup> MARR, ANDREW (1992) *The Battle for Scotland* (London: Penguin), p. 132.

<sup>964</sup> Quoted in MITCHELL (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 205.

<sup>965</sup> Gordon Wilson had obtained a second place in March 1973 at the Dundee East by-election, while in November Margo MacDonald won one of the safest Labour seats, Glasgow Govan. See LYNCH, PETER (2002) *SNP. The History of the Scottish National Party* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press), pp.127-128.

<sup>966</sup> The Labour MP Michael Foot revealed to Winifred Ewing: ‘It is not the eleven of you that terrify me so much, Winnie, it is the 42 seconds’, quoted in DEVINE (2008) *The Challenge, op. cit.*, p. 145.



Scottish government, and success could not be guaranteed. But after [Labour's] own behaviour in 1974, failure can now be guaranteed. The issue can no longer be ignored'.<sup>967</sup>

Despite all the expectations generated by the favourable outcome of the elections, the 1974-1979 years ended up in disappointment. On the one hand, lack of leadership and poor communication between the MPs in London and the National Executive in Edinburgh led to contradictory decisions and internal fights. The party did not project a clear identity and ambiguously positioned itself between Labour and the Tories. On the other hand, the SNP was ambivalent on devolution. Despite embracing it at the 1976 meeting of the National Assembly, the party's main deliberative body, (42% of participants voted against though), later the SNP did not even manage to agree on a referendum manifesto and some of its members campaigned for outright independence. It thus sent out inconsistent messages and refused to join a cross-party platform in favour of the assembly.<sup>968</sup> In all fairness, however, the SNP was also a victim of history, as it polled really well between 1974 and 1978, peaking at 36% in March 1977, and yet there was no by-election in the two years before the referendum that could help it gather momentum. Elections came when Labour had gotten the bill on devolution through and the SNP had run out of steam.<sup>969</sup> On March 1, 1979, 52% of Scots voted in favour of devolution, but they represented only 32.9% of those registered on electoral rolls and, thus, failed to cross the 40% threshold that had been introduced by Labour backbencher George Cunningham in January 1978.<sup>970</sup> The SNP asked the government to respect the will of the majority, threatening to bring it down on a no confidence vote, which it did on March 28. At the ensuing elections, the party lost 9 seats and shrank to 17.3% of the vote in Scotland. As Margaret Thatcher took office the devolution issue was gone and the party fell into a period of factionalism and transition.<sup>971</sup>

After the referendum *debacle*, the party underwent two opposite but related reactions. On the one hand, there was a fundamentalist backlash, embodied by the decision taken at the 1979 annual conference – held some months after the vote – not to engage anymore in talks for devolution.<sup>972</sup> On the other, some members concluded that the party had lost because it did not attract the working-class vote, hence the party had to move to the left. The Interim Committee for Political Discussion, dubbed the 79 Group, was set up for this purpose and included distinguished leaders such as Margo MacDonald, Stephen Maxwell, the former leader of the Scottish Labour Party, Jim Sillars, and the young Alex Salmond.<sup>973</sup> The ideological pillars of the group were socialism, nationalism and republicanism. They advocated civil disobedience and were divided along the gradualist-fundamentalist fracture. Their influence peaked in 1981, when they were able to get the

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<sup>967</sup> KEATING and BLEIMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>968</sup> LEVY, ROGER (1986) 'The Search for a Rational Strategy: the Scottish National Party and Devolution, 1974-79', *Political Studies*, 34(2), pp. 236-48.

<sup>969</sup> LYNCH (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>970</sup> The amendment was one of the clearest signs of Labour's division over devolution. Similarly, the party split over the referendum campaign, with a considerable amount of Labour Scottish MPs and branches joining the No camp.

<sup>971</sup> HUTCHISON, IAIN G. C. (2001) *Scottish Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), pp. 145-147.

<sup>972</sup> MITCHELL, JAMES (2009) 'From Breakthrough to Mainstream: the Politics of Potential and Blackmail', in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 38.

<sup>973</sup> TORRANCE, DAVID (2009) 'The journey from the 79 Group to the Modern SNP', in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-166.

assembly of the party to approve civil disobedience. This, however, failed clarmorously.<sup>974</sup> As a reaction, an opposing faction, the Campaign for Nationalism in Scotland, was set up. Afraid that the unity of the SNP was in jeopardy, at the 1982 Ayr Conference, Gordon Wilson successfully filed a motion to ban all factions within the party, which eventually led to the expulsion of some members.<sup>975</sup> At the 1983 elections the party recorded one of its worst recent performances, with 11.8% of votes.<sup>976</sup>

From 1983 on, however, the SNP slowly recovered, positioning itself more comfortably on the centre-left and started revising its European policy, fully embracing the goal of 'Independence in Europe' in 1988.<sup>977</sup> The 1987 election marked a moderate improvement – from 11.8 to 14% but no additional seats – and was followed by Jim Sillars' enthusiastic victory at a by-election in Glasgow Govan. The party kept building support around the issue of the 'democratic deficit' – whereby an English-based Conservative government ruled an increasingly anti-Conservative Scotland – and the impotence of Labour MPs to do anything about it. Anti-conservative feelings peaked in 1989 when the Thatcher government introduced the poll tax – an individual flat-rate charge replacing property rates and aimed at financing local government – one year in advance of England.<sup>978</sup> At about the same time, the SNP refused to join the Scottish Constitutional Convention launched by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly,<sup>979</sup> and backed by Labour, a move strongly criticised by media and members of civil society. The SNP polled well at the turn of the decade, especially after Alex Salmond took the leadership in 1990, but, as oftentimes in its history, the 21.5% obtained at the 1992 elections translated into only 3 seats.<sup>980</sup>

Salmond spent the rest of the 1990s modernising the party and improving its financial resources. While in 1992 the SNP's expenses for campaigning were equal to £130,000, in 1997 it could rely on four times as much. The situation improved again in 1998, when a group of Scottish businessmen founded Business Scotland and began financing the party.<sup>981</sup>

On May 2, 1999, 32 years after her victory in Hamilton, Winnie Ewing could pronounce the historical sentence: 'the Scottish Parliament adjourned on the 25th day of

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<sup>974</sup> They tried to occupy the Royal High School at Calton Hill (where the Scottish Assembly had to be hosted), but they were not able to open any of the windows. Hence, they tried to break one, but it took a long time, as the window was double-glazed. Once in, Sillars and his fellows were arrested and fined with £100 for vandalism. See MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 187.

<sup>975</sup> TORRANCE (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172. Among them there was Alex Salmond.

<sup>976</sup> The result was disappointing in terms of votes obtained, but, in terms of seats, it kept the ones gained in 1979. Furthermore, the SNP showed to have consolidated its 'minimum support' around the 11% threshold achieved in 1970.

<sup>977</sup> MITCHELL, JAMES (1988) 'Recent Developments in the Scottish National Party', *The Political Quarterly*, 59(4), pp. 473-477.

<sup>978</sup> CURTICE, JOHN (2012) 'Why no Tory Revival in Scotland?', in DAVID, TORRANCE (ed.) *Whatever happened to Tory Scotland?* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) p. 117.

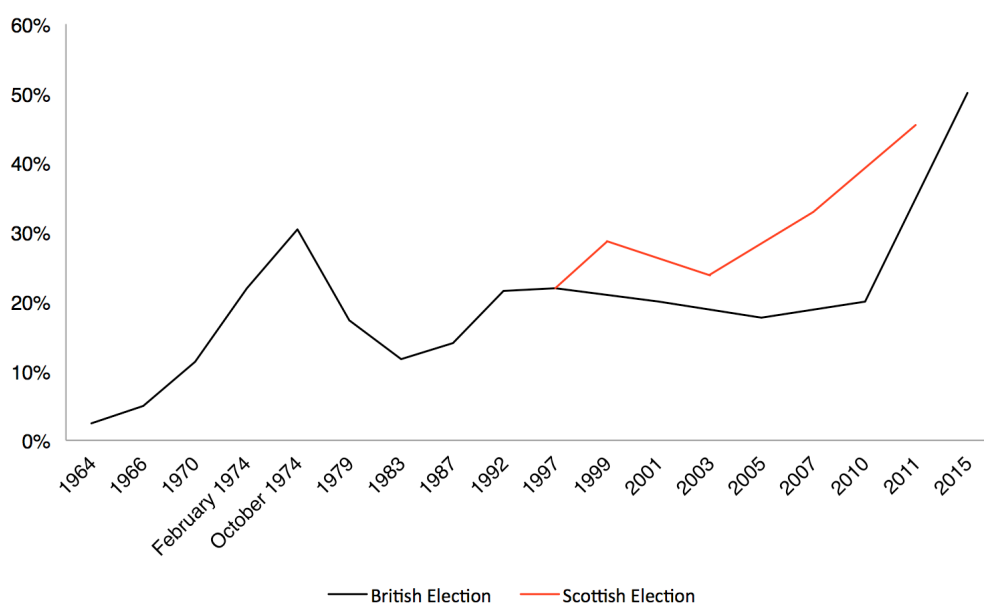
<sup>979</sup> The Campaign for a Scottish Assembly was a civil society initiative launched in the aftermath of the 1979 referendum that advocated some form of self-government for Scotland. During the 1980s, it organised a committee that drafted a Claim of Right for Scotland, arguing that the Scottish people had a right to 'determine the form of Government best suited to their needs'. In 1989, it was replaced by the Scottish Constitutional Convention, a forum in which many pro-devolution parties and civil society organisations participated drafting a blueprint for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

<sup>980</sup> BENNIE, LYNN, BRAND, JACK and MITCHELL, JAMES (1997) *How Scotland Votes. Scottish Parties and Elections* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press), pp. 76-78.

<sup>981</sup> LYNCH (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 203-204.

March, in the year 1707, is hereby reconvened'.<sup>982</sup> Two years before, the Labour party had recorded a landslide victory in the general election and put an end to 18 years of anti-devolution Conservative rule.<sup>983</sup> At the referendum, held on September 11, 74.3% of the Scots supported the establishment of a Parliament and 63.5% agreed that it should have tax-varying powers<sup>984</sup> – the overall turnout was 60.4%. Unlike 1979, the yes camp was united and well organised, but, above all, it enjoyed a much stronger grassroots support. Thus, the 1998 Scotland Act established a Scottish Assembly of 129 members – 3/5th elected through the first-past-the-post system and the rest by proportional representation – in what has been considered the most important constitutional change since Ireland's independence. It appoints a government and is responsible for all matters except foreign policy, defence, macro-economic policy, social security, abortion and broadcasting. It also has limited tax-varying powers, as it can raise or lower the basic tax rate by 3p in the pound.<sup>985</sup>

**Figure 5.1 – SNP's Electoral Results, UK and Scottish Parliament Elections\*, 1964-2015 (percentage of Scottish vote)**



\* For the Scottish election the constituency vote, referring to the proportional quota of the mixed Scottish electoral formula, has been taken into account.

Sources: STEWART LEITH, MURRAY and SOULE, DANIEL P. J. (2011) *Political Discourse and National Identity in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) pp. 26-35 for 1964-2010 data; The Scottish Parliament Result Analysis <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps/29398.aspx> (accessed on February 12, 2014) for 2011 data.

<sup>982</sup> BBC ALBA, *op. cit.*, 0'12"-0'22".

<sup>983</sup> The SNP polled 22.1% and gained 6 seats, while the Conservatives were wiped out despite 17.5% of the vote. Labour ranked comfortably ahead with 45.6% and 56 seats. LYNCH, PETER (2009), 'From Social Democracy back to No Ideology? – The Scottish National Party and Ideological Change in a Multi-level Electoral Setting', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 19(4-5), p. 621.

<sup>984</sup> 'Tax-varying powers' was the expression used in the second of the two referendum questions and referred to the possibility that the Scottish Executive could vary (upwards or downwards) the UK basic rate of income tax by three percentage points.

<sup>985</sup> DEVINE, THOMAS MARTIN (2012) *The Scottish Nation. A Modern History* (London: Penguin).

The first elections, in 1999, saw the victory of Labour, while the SNP became the main opposition party, but, as Gerry Hassan has pointed out, ‘the Scottish Nationalists have been transformed by the Scottish Parliament’.<sup>986</sup> First, the new assembly took the sting out of the standard Labour argument that a vote for the SNP was wasted because it could not challenge the Tories in Westminster. Second, proportional representation strengthened the party’s position *vis-à-vis* Labour. Third, becoming the main opposition party, the SNP acquired a range of staff and resources that allowed a level of professionalisation unprecedented until then.

The first years of the Scottish Parliament were not an easy time for the SNP, though. Weakened by the change of the leadership – Salmond stepped down in 2000 and was replaced by John Swinney – and lacking the mechanisms necessary to manage a big Parliamentary representation, ‘between the 1999 and 2003 Scottish Parliament elections, the SNP was uneasy with itself and unsure of its direction. There were constant battles between the old fundamentalist wing, who wanted “Independence, nothing less”, and the gradualists, who sought to use devolution to build towards independence through referendum’.<sup>987</sup> Despite disappointing electoral results, however, Swinney went a long way to improving the internal functioning of the party and turning it into a professional organisation, which in part set the ground for the following success. Salmond took over again in 2004, accompanied by a rising Nicola Sturgeon as deputy and SNP leader at Holyrood,<sup>988</sup> and continued working on the party’s professionalisation.<sup>989</sup> This resulted in a narrow victory in the 2007 Scottish election, one seat ahead of Labour, followed by a four year minority government and a landslide in the 2011 one, with 69 out of the 129 Holyrood seats to Labour’s 37, despite the hard blows of the financial crisis.<sup>990</sup> The new Scottish Executive immediately started negotiations with the Conservative government of David Cameron for a referendum on independence. On October 15, 2012, an agreement was signed, in Edinburgh, by the British and Scottish executives. It provided for a referendum to be held with a simple yes or no question on Scotland’s independence.<sup>991</sup> On October 18, 2014, Scottish residents aged 16 or more with British, EU or Commonwealth nationality voted by 55.3% to remain part of the United Kingdom – turnout was very high at 84.6%.<sup>992</sup> As a consequence of the promises made during the campaign, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, charged Lord Smith of Kelvin with overseeing the process that would deliver the powers over taxation and welfare pledged to Scotland.<sup>993</sup> While some expected that the SNP would be negatively affected by the loss in the referendum, the

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<sup>986</sup> HASSAN, GERRY (2011) ‘Anatomy of a Scottish Revolution: The Potential of Postnationalist Scotland and the Future of the United Kingdom’, *The Political Quarterly*, 82(3), July-September, p. 368.

<sup>987</sup> MACKAY, COLIN (2009) ‘The SNP and the Scottish Parliament: The Start of a new Sang?’, in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>988</sup> Holyrood is the area of Edinburgh where the Scottish Parliament lies, and has come to informally stand for this latter. In 2001, Salmond had been elected MP at Westminster and thus could not lead the party at the Scottish Parliament until 2007.

<sup>989</sup> MACKAY, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-87.

<sup>990</sup> HASSAN (2011) *op. cit.*, pp. 365-378.

<sup>991</sup> BLACK, ANDREW (2012) ‘Scottish Independence: Cameron and Salmond Strike Referendum Deal’, *BBC News*, 15 October, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-19942638> (accessed on October 24, 2012).

<sup>992</sup> Data from the Electoral Management Board for Scotland, <http://scotlandreferendum.info/> (accessed on November 13, 2014).

<sup>993</sup> ‘David Cameron’s Statement on the Scottish Result’, *Financial Times*, 19 September 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/68686a20-3fc5-11e4-a381-00144feabdc0.html> (accessed on November 13, 2014).

ensuing British Election, held in May 2015, saw a ‘seismic change’ in the distribution of the 59 Scottish seats at Westminster. With 50% of votes the SNP obtained all but three of the available seats, hitting not only a record in terms of share of the total vote, but also realising a ‘vote concentration’ similar to that enjoyed by Labour for many decades. The latter in contrast recorded an unprecedented defeat, both in terms of share of the vote (24.3%) and, especially, seats (one from the previous 41).<sup>994</sup> Yet, the new SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon – who took over from Alex Salmond shortly after the referendum – made clear that the British elections were not about independence, thus ruling out the organisation of another referendum on the issue until, at least, after the next Scottish elections, in 2016.<sup>995</sup>

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<sup>994</sup> BBC (2015) *Elections Results: Mapping Scotland’s Dramatic Change*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/election-2015-scotland-32621862> (accessed on May 10, 2015)

<sup>995</sup> STACEY, KIRAN and DICKIE, MURE (2015) ‘Sturgeon Offers to Help Miliband into Number 10’, *Financial Times*, 7 April, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/379a7bd0-dd50-11e4-975c-00144feab7de.html> (accessed on May 10, 2015).

## 5.2 Discourse and Strategy

As in the other case studies, the thematic analysis of the SNP's discourse will be organised around the issues of economic victimisation, political marginalisation – mainly the idea of the 'democratic deficit – cultural identity and the party's ideological profile, and finally the relationship with Europe. As the economic dimension is very important and the arguments have changed over time in the party's publications – although mainly in terms of emphasis – we have divided their study into two sections. The first mainly deal with the claims connected to the issue of oil, although a brief description of the 'pre-oil' discourse is also provided. The second details the more recent and developed narrative of Scottish economic victimisation, that, since the end of the 1970s, found its best interpreter in Alex Salmond – former leader of the party and former economist of the Scottish Office and the Royal Bank of Scotland. As immigration has never been a major campaigning theme of the SNP, contrary to other cases, there is no *ad hoc* section on it. We however cover the subject in the section dealing with the cultural identity proposed by the party.

### 5.2.1 It's Scotland's Oil

The rise of Scottish nationalism is often associated with the discovery of oil and, at least in part, rightly so. It was oil that brought for a while Scottish nationalism to the forefront of international politics. Nevertheless, the SNP had been claiming long before the successful strikes in the North Sea that Scotland was getting a rough deal in the Union.

Shortly after having won Hamilton in 1967, Winifred Ewing made clear that a priority in her agenda was to ask how much money was collected in Scotland and where it went.<sup>996</sup> In 1961 her party had complained that Scotland handed over £100 million<sup>997</sup> every year to subsidise England, which became £150 million out of 800 million of total Scottish tax revenue in 1965.<sup>998</sup> The 1968 policy statement *SNP&You* quite emphatically argued that 'as things are, Scotland is a more complete serf or satellite of England than Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Roumania [sic] are of the USSR. She is almost the last satellite left under English control, and England is making the most of it. Year in, year out – you and your fellow Scots have paid hundreds of millions of pounds in taxation to be spent at the discretion of the London Government Treasury for the benefit of the majority of the electorate and that means Birmingham to Brighton'.<sup>999</sup>

The argument was not only about taxes, but also about structural factors. Scotland was deemed to be rich in natural resources and skilled, hard-working labour. It therefore had a balance-of-payment surplus and accounted for a third of UK exports, at a time when the UK was experiencing huge trade deficits. Some party members also stressed the strength of its financial sector, recording a third of UK investment trusts and a sixth of saving

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<sup>996</sup> BBC ALBA (2009), *op. cit.*, 18'00"-18'30".

<sup>997</sup> SNP (1961) *Vote McDonald for Bridgeton*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 10090/176, National Library of Scotland (NLS). See also, HALLIDAY, JAMES (1959) *Don't Waste Your Vote on London Controlled Politicians*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 7295/23, NLS.

<sup>998</sup> MACINTOSH, SANDY (1966) *100 Home Rule Questions* (Forfar: SNP) p. 11.

<sup>999</sup> SNP (1968) *SNP&You* (Edinburgh: SNP).

banks, and argued that, in terms of exports per head, Scotland was second only to Germany.<sup>1000</sup>

The party however lacked evidence to make the argument compelling and this obviously exposed it to the critiques of the London governments. The account of expenditure for Scotland published by the Treasury in 1968 showed that the per capita public spending was 20% higher than in the rest of the UK.<sup>1001</sup> Oil enabled the SNP to counter this argument, but after the first half of the 1970s, when the debate was disproportionately about oil revenues, the SNP re-balanced its rhetoric in order to avoid the accusation that an independent Scotland would be too dependent on the North Sea fields.<sup>1002</sup>

At the same time, in the 'pre-oil age', the SNP made another strong argument that would echo in later publications, that is, the United Kingdom was a declining power and Scotland was being dragged down with it. The decline was economic and political, it involved the end of Empire as well as Labour and Tory mismanagement. The SNP had asserted the inevitable demise of the British Empire from its very foundation<sup>1003</sup> and this belief did not change much thereafter. On the contrary, it was reinforced by the troubles that the Scottish economy experienced from the end of the 1950s on, as the nationalists suggested that the resources spent to maintain a 'delusional' imperial structure could have been invested in the modernisation of Scottish industry.<sup>1004</sup> The list of grievances in terms of economic policy results was long. Since the mid-1950s Scotland had seen prices soaring, unemployment and emigration increasing, industrial production and salaries stagnating, housing conditions deteriorating and railway lines being shut down.<sup>1005</sup> In light of this, Whitehall could well assert that Scotland was subsidised but, in any case, the recipe was not working. As the SNP suggested, this was not only due to a lack of investment in the region, but also to the centralised nature of the United Kingdom. Scotland was ruled by a decrepit and inefficient machine of government, a centralising Moloch that, despite its abysmal performance was supposed to know better.<sup>1006</sup>

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<sup>1000</sup> SNP (1971) *A man of vision, experience & integrity, he works for Scotland. Vote Robert McIntyre*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 7295/23, NLS.

<sup>1001</sup> MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 228.

<sup>1002</sup> In 1999, for instance, the nationalists argued that an independent Scotland would respect the Maastricht criteria even without taking oil revenues into account. SNP (1999) *Taking Scotland into the 21st Century. An Economic Strategy for Independence* (Edinburgh: SNP). Again, in the recent row over the 2014 Independence Referendum, they pointed to Norway's higher dependence on oil revenues (about 30% of state revenues against 20% for an independent Scotland) as proof that independence would be viable. See 'Norway's reliance on oil cash boosts SNP's case for independence', *Scotsman.com*, 25 November 2012, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/top-stories/norway-s-reliance-on-oil-cash-boosts-snp-s-case-for-independence-1-2658572> (accessed on November 25, 2012).

<sup>1003</sup> In fact, the situation was more complex as the Scottish Party was rather indulgent with regard to the British Empire, while the National Party of Scotland was extremely critical of it. Since the representatives of the latter took over in the early 1940s, their anti-Empire rhetoric lived on through the 1960s. See FINLAY, RICHARD (1992), *op. cit.*

<sup>1004</sup> In 1966, for instance, the party declared that 'the days when being a Great Power meant riches are gone. If England would realise that she is no longer a Great Power, or even a rich country, she might be less prodigal in spending the hard-earned money of all the people of Britain'. MACINTOSH, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>1005</sup> SNP (1965) *Thirteen Dreadful Years: The Tory Record in Scotland - 1951/64*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 10090/140, NLS; SNP (1971), *Dr Robert McIntyre Speech in Stirling, May 31*, SNP press release, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1006</sup> SNP (1972) 'Another Paper Tiger?', *SNP Research Bulletin*, 2(11), January/March, p. 2.

At a more basic level, the Union was detrimental because there was no time in Whitehall to properly address Scottish issues.<sup>1007</sup> The solution clearly lay in the establishment of a sovereign Parliament that would have ruled Scotland from Edinburgh in the interest of the Scots, while at the same time keeping a friendly relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom. This clearly ran contrary to the interests of Whitehall, but also of the Scottish unionists. ‘If independence is so desirable why are Tory-Labour politicians so bitterly opposed to it?’ – asked an SNP leaflet in 1967 – ‘they are scared of losing the positions of privilege they enjoy under Westminster rule’ was the answer.<sup>1008</sup>

Whatever claim the SNP may have made before the discovery of the North Sea fields, however, it is widely recognised that, as the then SNP party chairman, William Wolfe, declared at the 1972 party conference: ‘oil has added a whole new dimension to the cause of freedom [...] with control over our own affairs we will be among the most prosperous countries in Europe – with economic strength to right the social wrongs and to play a constructive and generous part in all sorts of international affairs’.<sup>1009</sup> The oil campaign organised later that year had the precise goal of making the Scots understand the formidable potential represented by an independent oil-rich Scotland. Furthermore, it turned the SNP into the most proficient and reliable party on the issue. It also meant, however, that the SNP came under fire from traditional parties eager to undermine its popularity and credibility, especially after the successful 1974 elections.

The first to realise that oil was debated with interest by the population was Dr. Robert McIntyre during his campaign for the September 1971 by-election in Stirling. As President of the SNP, McIntyre wrote a letter to then Prime Minister, Edward Heath, claiming that ‘Scottish oil will once and for all dispose of the old wrong-headed notion that Scotland does not have the resources for prosperity’.<sup>1010</sup> At the end of the year, the party published a briefing on oil that claimed revenues of £350 million a year. The oil campaign began in September 1972. It broke down the party arguments on the issue into a series of releases and declarations coordinated between local and central branches to make them echo all around Scotland. Its best compendium is to be found in Nicholas Dekker’s ‘The Reafilty of Scotland’s Oil’, a booklet published at the end of that year. By focusing on the concept of ‘relative decline’, Dekker argued that, while at the beginning of the century the Scots enjoyed the highest per capita income in the world, they had been overtaken by several other countries. Oil constituted a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to improve Scotland’s relative wellbeing again, but, ‘without independence for the Scottish Nation, the bulk of oil-based benefits will pass Scotland by’ and ‘Scotland’s share of the wealth produced will provide only a temporary diversion from the general pattern of decline’.<sup>1011</sup>

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<sup>1007</sup> In this connection a Scottish Parliament would have been beneficial to England too, since more time could be devoted to English affairs. MACINTOSH, *op. cit.*, 15.

<sup>1008</sup> The leaflet went on arguing that Willie Ross, then Scottish Secretary, ‘alone has 366 statutory appointments in his gift – at salaries ranging from £500 (part-time) to £9500. Add to this all the similar appointments in the patronage of other Ministers, plus all the many perks available in other forms, and it can be seen that Tory-Labour politicians have much to lose’. SNP (1967) *Independence and your job*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 10090/170, NLS.

<sup>1009</sup> WOLFE, WILLIAM (1972) *Scotland Now. Conference Speech*, SNP press release, 27 May, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1010</sup> MILLER, WILLIAM (1981) *The End of British Politics? Scots and English Political Behaviour in the Seventies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press) p. 59.

<sup>1011</sup> DEKKER, NICHOLAS (1972) *The Reafilty of Scotland’s Oil* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 2.



Dekker pointed out that the government in London was desperate to get the oil going in order to redress its bottomless balance-of-payments deficit and, therefore, had granted extremely generous conditions to the oil companies.<sup>1012</sup> According to his calculations, the 150-250 million tons of reserves estimated would generate at least £1 billion a year in revenues, at a time when Scotland's total public spending amounted to £2 billion.<sup>1013</sup> The SNP pledged to use this money to improve services for the Scottish people, building schools and hospitals, with the aim of making Scotland a more just society.<sup>1014</sup> Nevertheless, the party had no plans to make the Scots dependent on state hand-outs. The SNP wanted to invest revenues in capital assets<sup>1015</sup>, rather than financing current expenditure, thus boosting long-term growth. In this way, 'Scotland's economy will still be one of the world's strongest for generations after the last oil has gone'.<sup>1016</sup> It also committed to slowing down the pace of extraction, in order to spread the benefits on a longer time-span, and to forcing oil companies to acquire at least 50% of their labour and equipment in Scotland.<sup>1017</sup>

Norway – 'a social-democratic utopia financed by oil' –<sup>1018</sup> was the SNP's model, both in terms of extraction policy and use of revenues. Similarly to what had been done in the Scandinavian country, the National Party planned to set up a state-owned petroleum company that would work in partnership with foreign corporations and local universities to build up the knowledge and technology required to compete in oil exploration and extraction worldwide.<sup>1019</sup>

In its first phase, the campaign stressed the amazing economic possibility offered by North Sea fields. The choice between 'Rich Scots and Poor British' (Figure 5.2) required a radical step because England was ready to swallow Scotland's oil (Figure 5.3). Nevertheless, this approach exposed the SNP to accusations of selfishness. Hence, the second phase of the campaign, launched about a year later, stressed the extent of Scotland's deprivation and pleaded the case for independence on the basis of social justice. The images used – showing a poor kid, an unemployed man, a young woman living in bad housing conditions and an old lady suffering from lack of proper heating and undernourishment under the banner 'it's her/his oil' – deliberately set the tone in strongly emotional terms (Figure 5.4). At the same time, party members used data about the dire state of Scotland's economy to substantiate their argument, data that – they concluded – 'should shame into silence those who have accused SNP of selfishness in claiming the control of Scottish oil for the Scottish people'.<sup>1020</sup>

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<sup>1012</sup> These amounted to cheap exploration fees and royalties at 12.5% instead of the 16.7% demanded by the USA and Canada. *Ibidem*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>1013</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>1014</sup> SNP (1972) *Oil Campaign Action Pack*, 11 August, Acc. 10090/160, NLS.

<sup>1015</sup> They suggested that education and health could be considered as investment in human capital.

<sup>1016</sup> SNP RESEARCH DEPARTMENT (1975) *Scotland's Oil: The Background*, August, Acc. 10090/140, NLS.

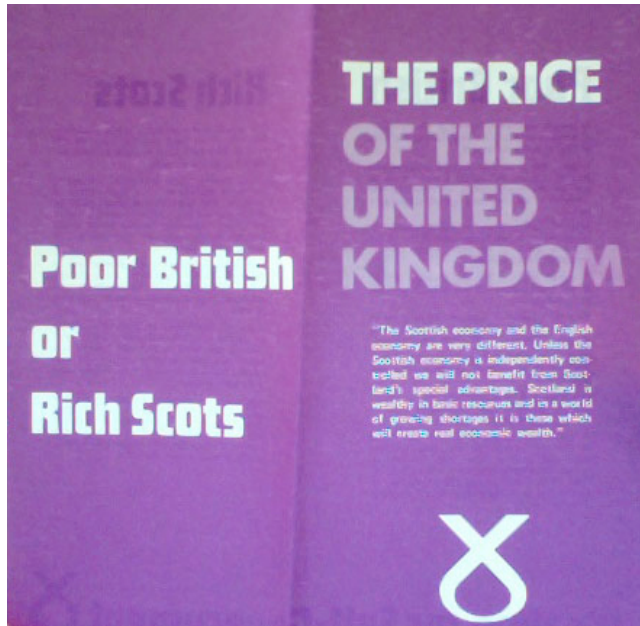
<sup>1017</sup> SNP (1974) *Scotland's Future*, SNP Manifesto, Acc. 10090/200, NLS.

<sup>1018</sup> The definition was given by *The Economist*. 'Decline and Fall', *The Economist*, 3 January, 1976.

<sup>1019</sup> DEKKER, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-9; SNP (1972) *Oil*, *op. cit.*; SNP (1974) *Scotland's Future*, *op. cit.* Robert McIntyre, then SNP's President, visited Norway in the early 1970s in order to draw lessons for Scotland. The parallels with the Scandinavian country extended further, as the SNP underlined the fact that Norway had obtained its independence from Sweden in 1905 by voting for it in a referendum. MILLER, ALEXANDER (1979) 'The Norwegian Parallel', *Focus*, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1020</sup> BAIN, MARGARETH (1975) *Scotland - Europe's Industrial Slum*, 21 April, SNP's press release, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

**Figure 5.2 – ‘Poor British or Rich Scots’ (1972)**



Source: NLS.

**Figure 5.3 – ‘England Expects your Oil’ (1972)**



Source: University of Stirling, Scottish Political Archives, <http://www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/wb/> (accessed on February 2, 2014).

Figure 5.4 – ‘It’s the Scots’ Oil’ (1973)



Source: University of Stirling, Scottish Political Archives, <http://www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/wb/> (accessed on February 2, 2014).

In the second half of the 1970s, as the political debate focused on the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, oil became a secondary item.<sup>1021</sup> Yet, it remained a mainstay of the SNP’s discourse and was played upon in different moments, according to the need of the time. This was the case in the mid-1980s, when oil revenues skyrocketed against the background of Margaret Thatcher’s austerity agenda. In 1984, the SNP pointed out that, on the one hand, ‘oil revenues have soared over the last decade to stand this year at £11,500 million’ while regional aid had been ‘cut dramatically over the same period to stand, in real terms, at only 40% of the 1975 level’.<sup>1022</sup> Hence – the party claimed – oil revenues were equal to almost fifty times total regional aid.<sup>1023</sup> Unsurprisingly, Margaret Thatcher was portrayed as a vampire sucking Scotland’s oil (Figure 5.5). Even more recently, the oil issue has kept informing the SNP’s discourse. In the early 2000s, the party revived, and partially modified, its proposal, first made in the late 1970s, to create a national investment fund where part of oil revenues would be channelled every year. While in 1978, it proposed to use the fund in order to boost industrial development and improve health, education and housing,<sup>1024</sup> in 2001 it rather referred to a generational fund on the model of Norway, which would generate interests to be invested in infrastructure

<sup>1021</sup> WILSON, GORDON (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>1022</sup> SNP (1984) ‘Nats Expose Watford Gap’, *Free Scot*, autumn, Acc. 13099/50, NLS.

<sup>1023</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>1024</sup> SNP (1978) *Return to Nationhood* (Edinburgh: SNP) pp. 7 and 19.

projects.<sup>1025</sup> In 2003, it revealed that, since the beginning of extraction, the UK Treasury had taken £160 billion in taxes from the North Sea, i.e., about £32,000 per Scot,<sup>1026</sup> while in 2005 it announced that new discoveries had brought the estimates of reserves to 28 billion barrels, equal to £600 billion, or £100,000 per Scot.<sup>1027</sup> In 2006, then, it produced a video clip where it accused the UK government of having lied, in the 1970s, about the true estimates of oil in order to undermine the SNP's drive for independence.<sup>1028</sup>

**Figure 5.5 – ‘No Wonder She’s Laughing. She’s Got Scotland’s Oil’ (no precise date but released in the 1980s)**



Source: University of Stirling, Scottish Political Archives, <http://www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/wb/> (accessed on February 2, 2014).

Despite this bonanza, however, already in the 1970s, the SNP realised that ‘Scotland might be the first country in history to discover oil and yet be no better off than before as a

<sup>1025</sup> SNP (2001) ‘Policy Question Time’, *Snapshot*, Spring, p. 9.

<sup>1026</sup> SNP (2003) *Talking Independence* (Edinburgh: SNP).

<sup>1027</sup> SNP (2005) *If Scotland Matters to You Make it Matter in May*, SNP Manifesto.

<sup>1028</sup> In this video the SNP calculated oil reserves at £850 billion, or £170,000 per Scot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KH0EEEnLpYP8> (accessed on November 24, 2012). The 2011 manifesto illustrates quite well how oil has remained a fundamental pillar in the party’s argument for independence without being emphasised too much. Until the penultimate page the document barely mentions the word ‘oil’ and never in direct connection with independence. Yet, at the end, in a section tracing the history of the party, one can read that: ‘in 1970 North Sea Oil was discovered, with 90% of it lying in Scottish waters. This led to one of the our most successful campaigns – It’s Scotland’s Oil. With new oil fields still being found to this day, there is no doubt that Scotland should be responsible for its own natural resources. During 2008-09, in the middle of the recent severe recession, Scotland was in surplus to the tune of £1.3 billion, compared to a UK deficit of £48.9 billion – just think what we could do to tackle poverty and create jobs in Scotland with responsibility for these resources’. SNP (2011) *Re-elect. A Scottish Government Working for Scotland*, Scotland's Parliament Election Manifesto, p. 40.

result'.<sup>1029</sup> Even worse – as the nationalists argued – oil revenues were to be sucked up by the terrible conditions of the UK balance of payments, reducing Scotland's benefits to zero, and, given Britain's large budget deficit, they would directly go into the pockets of foreign creditors.<sup>1030</sup> This was tantamount to English imperialism. Yet, after the October 1974 victory and, especially so in the run-up to the 1979 devolution referendum, the SNP tried to avoid the label of 'separatist' that Labour and the Conservatives were eager to attach to it. In return, the party accused the Unionists of wanting Scotland isolated from the rest of the world, and clarified that it did not seek 'the break up of the UK' but 'a new relationship under the Crown with the other nations of the United Kingdom'.<sup>1031</sup> Yet, this was only a rhetorical device. In practice the party sought independence, although it was open to collaboration within a kind of council of the Isles. This is clear when considering the contradictory messages sent out during the campaign for the Scottish Assembly, in which some members were eager to reassure their voters that independence was the true objective of the party.<sup>1032</sup>

## 5.2.2 The Economics of Independence

Although it had already supported left-wing measures through most of the 1960s and 1970s, the SNP comfortably assumed a social-democratic profile only from the mid-1980s on.<sup>1033</sup> This depended on a number of factors among which: the legacy of the 79 Group, more in terms of personalities who took part in it and later played an important role within the party than of ideology itself; and the rise and prolonged strength of Thatcherism in England, which made an 'oppositional' move to social democracy very convenient.<sup>1034</sup> While the groundwork was laid down already by Gordon Wilson, Alex Salmond substantially contributed to the consolidation of the process from 1990 on.<sup>1035</sup> This coincided with a clarification of the economic arguments in favour of Scottish independence. Already in 1987, as vice-chairman for publicity, Salmond helped establish the Scottish Centre for Economic and Social Research, a think tank focusing on social and economic issues which released papers on the economic prospects of independence and aimed at challenging the myth that Scotland was subsidised by the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>1036</sup> Since the 1990s, then, Salmond strove to show that 'increasingly the argument for the union is rooted in prejudice. It is an emotional argument which, when stripped to its core, amounts to a sentiment for the past'.<sup>1037</sup>

Bits of the economic case for independence were there long before. The reasoning boils down to the acknowledgement that Scotland and England have different economic structures and, for this reason, need different policies. Successive UK governments,

<sup>1029</sup> MURRAY, GORDON (1977) 'Scotland's Oil Wealth Enigma', *The Free Scot*, May, p. 7.

<sup>1030</sup> MCKINNEY, ALAN (1976) 'Scotland Trade Surplus', *Dundee East Gazette*, October, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1031</sup> SNP (1978) *Return to, op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>1032</sup> On this see: LEVY, *op. cit.*; HEPBURN, EVE (2009) 'Degrees of Independence: SNP Thinking in an International Context', in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>1033</sup> MITCHELL (1988) *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>1034</sup> MAXWELL (2009) 'Social Justice and the SNP', in HASSAN, *op. cit.* p. 123; TORRANCE (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>1035</sup> LYNCH (2009) *op. cit.*

<sup>1036</sup> LYNCH (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 206-211.

<sup>1037</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1998) 'Speech to the Scottish Council Development & Industry', in SNP, *A Collection of Recent Economic Speeches* (Edinburgh: SNP), p. 4.

instead, applied to the entire country policies tailored only to the South-East of England. Similar ideas were already aired at the end of the 1960s, when some party leaflets complained about the government's restrictive credit policy at a time when the Scottish economy was stagnating.<sup>1038</sup> Similarly, noting that 'other countries comparable to Scotland in size and resources have expanded', the 1974 manifesto concluded that 'Scotland as a province or region of the United Kingdom has been kept back'.<sup>1039</sup> The critique was formulated again by Douglas Crawford in a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey, in 1975,<sup>1040</sup> but its best elaboration came at the end of the 1970s and precisely from the young Alex Salmond. In an article entitled 'The Economics of Independence' – a headline that he re-used 20 years later for a more complete publication on the subject – he argued that, contrary to the Tories' and Labour's belief that Scotland was structurally poor, the region only suffered from too much reliance on traditional sectors and a chronic lack of investment. It therefore needed expansionary measures that could be easily financed by oil revenues. By contrast, the government had consistently clung to deflation, which was tantamount to 'putting a starving man on a diet of bread and water to cure his neighbour's obesity'.<sup>1041</sup> In other words, Salmond was proposing Keynesian policies to support Scottish demand and, at the same time, to convert the industrial structure from a focus on capital goods to one on consumer durables, from big to small and medium-sized firms.

In the early 1980s, mainly because of internal factionalism, the party had troubles producing clear policy proposals on the economic relationship with the rest of Britain.<sup>1042</sup> Even the 79 Group, which criticised the leadership for its lack of a clear ideological focus, failed to articulate a consistent and fully-fledge alternative. Things began changing in the later part of the decade. In 1989, Sillars pointed out that the UK regional policy had failed because 'it was never formulated in the nation or region which suffered, but in the Centre whose growth and increased power created the disparity'.<sup>1043</sup> In 1993, Salmond went further than that and argued the United Kingdom was not a 'level playing field' for Scottish companies. With so much power and first-class infrastructure concentrated around London, Scotland could only compete in attracting business by creating a new

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<sup>1038</sup> SNP (1967) *21 Wasted Years*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 10090/176, NLS.

<sup>1039</sup> SNP (1974) *Scotland's future*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>1040</sup> CRAWFORD, DOUGLAS (1975) *Letter sent to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Denis Healey*, SNP press release, April 7, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1041</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1977) 'The Economics of Independence', *West Lothian Standard*, Spring, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1042</sup> There were tensions within the party over the degree of state involvement in steering this process and the 79ers – Salmond was one of them – argued that Scottish private capital did not have the necessary strength. Therefore the state had to step in and provide the much needed resources. See: 79 GROUP (1980) *Has the Scottish Private Sector a Future?*, SNP 79 Group Papers, n. 5; MAXWELL, STEPHEN (1981) *The Case for Left-Wing Nationalism*, SNP 79 Group Papers, n. 6. The defeat of the 79ers avoided a move towards the far left and, in the late 1980s, most of them – Jim Sillars and Salmond among others – shifted to more market-oriented approaches that influenced the party's policy-making, as already reflected in the 1987 manifesto which it reads 'we respect the need to encourage entrepreneurial attitudes to allow Scots at home to create that thriving businesses which so many have done in London, the United States and Australia'. SNP (1987) *Play the Scottish Card*, General Election Manifesto, p. 12. At the same time, the party found a middle-ground between its left and right wings in the social-democratic profile adopted since then.

<sup>1043</sup> SILLARS, JIM (1989) *Independence in Europe* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 8.

centre of power in Edinburgh.<sup>1044</sup> At the same time, he committed to shattering some myths about the economy, first of all, that Scotland was a ‘subsidy junky’. The reasoning was straightforward: ‘the subsidy junkies of the UK live in the South East where even the cossetting of transport subsidies, Docklands development, civil service concentration and mortgage tax relief has proved inadequate to support an economy totally vulnerable to consumer demand and the decline of the defence budget’.<sup>1045</sup> Salmond also argued that all the talks about Scotland’s budget and higher spending were nonsense. According to him, fiscal and economic policies were contingent issues, what really mattered was growth and whether Scotland had the necessary comparative advantages. Scotland did have them in oil and gas, engineering and textiles, food and fish, electronics and finance. And yet, in historical perspective, growth had been the chronic weakness of the Scottish economy. Thus, since Scotland had no fundamentally worse economic factors than other small European nations that had grown at a substantially quicker pace, the problem had to lie with management. What Scotland really needed was control of ‘the economic forces which can make or destroy communities’ and ‘the empowerment which only independence in Europe can offer’.<sup>1046</sup>

In the first half of the 1990s, the party set up a research team in charge of working out the economic case for independence. The results were presented in a series of three papers published in 1995 under the title ‘For the Good of Scotland’. The first, *Paying our Fair Share and More*, was a static budget showing that Scotland already was recording a surplus siphoned off by the rest of Britain; the second, *Counting the Benefit of Independence*, was a study from a consultancy firm calculating the advantages that the process of independence itself would bring about – mainly in terms of jobs and investments attracted by creating a new seat of government; the third, *Towards a Better Scotland*, presented the first four-year budget of the future independent state and concluded that: ‘Scotland is a wealthy country with a large and varied resource base, a traditionally good education system, and an export performance 30 per cent ahead of the rest of the UK. In terms of GDP per head, Scotland is the twenty-first richest country in the world – with a similar per capita gross national product as that of Sweden. Independence will enable us to advance from our subordinate position within the UK and generate a new prosperity for Scotland’.<sup>1047</sup> As compared to the economic case that was inconsistently and less explicitly made already in the 1970s, here – and, as we shall show below, in following texts – oil was only one of a number of assets that Scotland could use in order to improve its standard of living.<sup>1048</sup>

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<sup>1044</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1993) ‘Towards a Prosperous Scotland’, in *Horizons Without Bars. The Future of Scotland. A Series of Speeches* (Edinburgh: SNP), p. 17. See also SNP (2002) ‘The Scottish Economy - Your Top Ten Questions Answered’, *Snapshot*, summer, p. 17.

<sup>1045</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1993) ‘Towards a Prosperous’, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>1046</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7. In this speech he also quoted studies estimating that an independent Scotland would grow by 3.8% a year, a Scotland with 50% of oil revenues by 2.9% and a Scotland within the Union by 1.8%. Thus, he concluded, not only is Scotland not subsidised but it would lose about £18 billion in five years by not being independent.

<sup>1047</sup> SNP (1995) *For the Good of Scotland – Towards a Better Scotland* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. i. See also: SNP (1995) *For the Good of Scotland – Counting the Benefits of Independence* (Edinburgh: SNP); SNP (1995) *For the Good of Scotland – Paying Our Fair Share, and More!* (Edinburgh: SNP).

<sup>1048</sup> Farbey et al. and Maxwell have confirmed that, in the 1970s, oil was often seen as the trump card that could solve all evils and pay for whatever level of public services, thus preventing any serious discussion of economic policy. FARBEY, B. A., MITCHELL, CHRISTOPHER and WEBB, KEITH (1980) ‘Change and Stability in the Ideology of Scottish Nationalism’, *International Political Science Review*, 1, p. 420;

In October 1995, the Scottish Office promptly issued a report detailing Scotland's expenses. As at the end of the 1960s, the goal consisted in showing that the region was in deficit towards the rest of the UK and thus counter the SNP's arguments. The party then accused the Conservatives of using a biased report to talk the nationalists down and, in September 1996, published a 'detailed rebuttal of the Tory argument' calculating that, taking into account 90% of oil and gas revenues, Scotland contributed 10% of UK revenues but received 9.8% of spending.<sup>1049</sup> In line with what was already highlighted above, the document stressed that this occurred even if 'the normal experience of "regional" economies – as Scotland is reduced to within the UK – is to be in a relatively weak fiscal position, due to the effect of discretionary expenditure being focused on the "metropolis"',<sup>1050</sup> by which it referred once again to the concentration of defence spending and civil service employment in the South East and to the gravitational pull that such concentration exercised on private business. As he had already done in the early 1990s, in the later part of the decade, Salmond kept repeating that in a globalised economy businesses tend to concentrate in few areas to exploit economies of scale. Peripheral areas must therefore offer something else to attract companies and a lower corporation tax was an attractive option. Small countries like Ireland, Sweden, Finland and Austria, that had adopted policies inspired by the Laffer curve model, became shining illustrations of what wonders an autonomous fiscal policy promised to Scotland.<sup>1051</sup> The underlying assumption also was that small countries, like small businesses, are better able to adapt quickly to the shocks of the global economy, while bigger countries are not, also because they often lack the cohesion required to make radical changes. After all – as the SNP was keen to recall – 25 out of 35 of the richest countries in the world had around, or fewer than, 10 million inhabitants and, on a per-capita basis, Scotland was deemed by the OECD to be the 8<sup>th</sup> in the developed world.<sup>1052</sup> More in general, the adoption of models such as that of the Laffer curve, and the use of Ireland as an example to follow, have signalled the shift to a more neo-liberal agenda in economic, if not in social, policy.<sup>1053</sup>

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MAXWELL (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123. More recently, Keating has made a similar accusation against the current SNP, when arguing that 'it presents a vision in which the attainment of statehood itself will resolve its problems, calling in aid the oil wealth when the sums get difficult'. Yet, such claim seems to confirm that the party no longer bases all of its argument on oil revenues, as the above authors instead claimed with regard to the party in the 1970s – also because seeing their declining value it would be counter-productive – but rather uses it to complement other arguments about the economic advantages of independence. KEATING, MICHAEL (2009) 'Nationalist Movements in Comparative Perspective', in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>1049</sup>In fact, this surplus towards the UK amounted to a budget deficit of £400 million (0.5-1% of GDP) to the rest of the world.

<sup>1050</sup> SNP (1996) *Scotland Pays Her Way* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 2.

<sup>1051</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (2003) *The Economics of Independence* (Edinburgh: SNP). The Laffer curve model shows that, in certain circumstances, a decrease in taxation can boost revenues by attracting businesses and thus expanding the tax-base. For instance – the SNP argued – between 1986 and 1997, Sweden and Austria reduced corporation tax by 24% and 16% respectively, but their revenues increased by 98% and 160%. See SNP (1999) *Taking Scotland*, *op. cit.*, p. 9. In this connection, a substantial change is noticeable between 1997 and 1998. In the 1997 manifesto the party proposed cutting corporation tax by 10%, from 33% to 30% for big companies and from 23% to 18% for SMEs, while in 1998 Salmond declared that an independent Scotland would progressively cut it to 12.5%, as Ireland did. SNP (1997) *Yes We Can Win the Best for Scotland*, General Election Manifesto, p. 8. SALMOND, ALEX (1998) 'Speech to the Scottish Council Development & Industry', *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>1052</sup> SNP (1997) *Yes op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>1053</sup> CUTHBERT, JIM and CUTHBERT, MARGARET (2009) 'SNP Economic Strategy. Neo-Liberalism with a Heart', in HASSAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-119.



In the late 1990s, some critics pointed out that an independent Scotland should have to take its share of the UK debt and this would be a huge burden for such a small economy. The party replied that there would be negotiations, but according to UK figures, between 1979 and 1995, when most of the UK debt was piled up, Scotland was in surplus to the tune of £39 billion. Therefore, it wondered why the Scots would have to assume a share of a UK debt that they did not contribute to. In any case, even on the basis of a population share of the debt – the SNP concluded – the debt/GDP ratio would be around 50%, i.e. a tolerable amount by European standards.<sup>1054</sup> After all, looking at history the future has promised to be rosy. As Salmond asked in 2003, ‘which of the following countries once run from London are now richer per person than the UK? Australia, Canada, America or Ireland? Answer: all of them’.<sup>1055</sup>

In the last decade, there has been no major changes to the economic case for independence made by the party. Although aimed at presenting the economic strategy of an SNP-led Scottish government rather than any post-independence scenarios, the 2007 economic strategy *Let Scotland Flourish* played on the usual themes of a Scotland rich in natural and human resources that has been penalised by London mismanagement and only need the right policy in order to increase its prosperity (we will come back on this in section 5.2.4).<sup>1056</sup> The onset of the crisis allowed the party to resume the old theme of austerity policies imposed by a Conservative government over a Scotland that would instead need more economic stimulus to accompany the recovery. The slogan for the 2010 British election – ‘More Nats, Less Cuts’ – well illustrates this position.<sup>1057</sup> Yet, the financial crisis has also imposed some changes in the foreign models proposed by the party. As the ‘arch of prosperity’ made up of, among others, Ireland and Iceland was renamed the ‘arch of insolvency’ – implicitly referring to Scotland’s weak financial position after the financial crack of Royal Bank of Scotland – those countries were removed from the list of examples to follow.<sup>1058</sup>

### 5.2.3 The Democratic Deficit

The economic subject matters that we have dealt with in the previous sections can be regarded as the result of a more general problem, i.e., the supposed political marginalisation of Scotland. Already before the victory at Hamilton, the party had claimed that Scotland was overwhelmed by England at Westminster. It was outnumbered, as the proportion of Scottish MPs was one eighth of the English ones, and it was neglected, as few bills of importance to the region were adopted and these often were adaptations of laws tailored to England.<sup>1059</sup> In the late 1970s, when the debate focused on the proposed Scottish Assembly, the SNP claimed that Scottish affairs were given only 47 hours of

<sup>1054</sup> SNP (1999) *Taking Scotland*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>1055</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (2003) *The Economics*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>1056</sup> SNP (2007) *Let Scotland Flourish. An Economic Growth Strategy for Scottish Success* (Edinburgh: SNP).

<sup>1057</sup> SNP (2010) *Elect a Local Champion*, General Election Manifesto.

<sup>1058</sup> While in the 2007 brochure *A Platform for Success: A Wealthier Scotland Benefiting All*, Ireland was still looked at one of the small countries who had grown more than Scotland, in the 2010 and 2011 manifesto there is no mention of it. See SNP (2007) *A Platform for Success: A Wealthier Scotland Benefiting All* (Edinburgh: SNP); SNP (2010) *Elect*, *op. cit.*; SNP (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>1059</sup> MACINTOSH, *op. cit.* The Welsh and the Northern Irish were not taken into account in the text.

Parliament discussion per year on average and it also strove to show that Westminster was a highly confused and divided place, where people constantly fought and screamed.<sup>1060</sup>

Apart from the mechanics of democracy, the other issue that stirred the nationalists' anger, giving credit to the thesis of Scotland's marginalisation, was the government decision to stock most UK nuclear arms in Scotland.<sup>1061</sup> The SNP explained that, in case of a nuclear war, each country involved would focus on a first-strike strategy, aimed at wiping out the enemy's nuclear weapons. Scotland, therefore, was extremely in danger. According to party calculations, an attack on the Holy Loch base, in the West of the country, would put 75% of the Scottish population at risk. This also extended to nuclear accidents, which had amounted to 32 between 1950 and 1968 throughout the world. Furthermore, with a £42 per head spending, Scotland's contribution to the UK's defence budget averaged 6.4% of Scottish GDP, an incredibly high proportion that an independent Scotland would more than halve.<sup>1062</sup> As the party made clear in its 1974 manifesto: 'existing nuclear bases were sited in Scotland without the consent of the Scottish people, and these are clear examples of how London makes use of Scotland for installations thought to be dangerous'.<sup>1063</sup>

But the issue was more fundamental. 'Scotland has never been regarded by British Governments as a free and equal partner in the Union with England but as a lesser province with reservoirs of manpower, ability, space and wealth which could be tapped as required'.<sup>1064</sup> This – according to the SNP – was reflected in the state presence in Scotland, which took the form of 'government by dinosaur',<sup>1065</sup> whereby the bureaucracy overwhelmed politicians. Only the establishment of a sovereign Parliament – it was argued in the 1970s – could rebalance the relation between administration and politics, as well as open up policy-making to public scrutiny.<sup>1066</sup> On a general basis, therefore, the party

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<sup>1060</sup> SNP (1979) 'Scottish Assembly. What are the Benefits', *Focus*, n. 5, February, p. 6, Acc. 10090/179, NLS. The idea that Westminster and English politics more generally are especially quarrelsome seems to persist today. By commenting on the recent debate over the 2014 independence referendum, the former Scottish Labour leader Henry McLeish urged his party to tone down its arguments pointing out that 'one of the main aims of Holyrood was to move away from the "yaboo politics" of Westminster'. MACNAB, SCOTT (2012) 'Labour "Should Stop Hating SNP", says Henry McLeish', *Scotsman.com*, 23 November, <http://www.scotsman.com/news/democracy-at-risk-from-hate-filled-holyrood-exchanges-warns-henry-mcleish-1-2653269> (accessed on November 26, 2012).

<sup>1061</sup> In the 1960s, Scotland was chosen as the site to host the UK nuclear fleet endowed with Polaris nuclear missiles, which were replaced with Trident missiles from 1994 on. Yet, Scotland became the sole site of all UK nuclear force only in 1998, when nuclear warheads used by the Royal Air Force were decommissioned. CHALMERS, MALCOM and WALKER, WILLIAM (2002) 'The United Kingdom, Nuclear Weapons, and the Scottish Question', *The Nonproliferation Review*, 9(1), pp. 1-15.

<sup>1062</sup> SNP (1972) 'A Military Complex Called Scotland', *SNP Research Bulletin*, 2(11), January/March, pp. 3-8, Acc. 10090/140, NLS.

<sup>1063</sup> SNP (1974) *Scotland's Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 11. The SNP has since campaigned for a nuclear arm-free Scotland.

<sup>1064</sup> SNP (1978) *Return to*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12. As seen in the previous section, the 1968 text *SNP&You* was much more radical in its claim that 'as things are, Scotland is a more complete serf or satellite of England than Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Roumania (sic) are of the USSR'. SNP (1968) *op. cit.*, p. 4. Although this statement reflects a longer tradition of denunciation of Scotland's marginalisation within the Union, the colonial metaphor was not frequently, and increasingly less, applied. On Stephen Maxwell's claim that Scotland had been 'provincialised', see next section.

<sup>1065</sup> REID, GEORGE (1975) *Speech at St. Andrews University*, SNP press release, 25 February, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1066</sup> In light of the parallel economic arguments seen in the previous sections, at about the same time, Douglas Crawford argued that the Parliament would have also assured that 'the political and social

supported the spread of power through different administrative levels in order to ‘reverse the harmful effects of centralising forces which have been at work in government and industry and finance, controlling Scotland from outside it’.<sup>1067</sup>

After the 1974 elections, the party was confronted with the possibility of partially reversing Scotland’s marginalisation. Yet the situation, and especially the debate on the establishment of a Scottish Assembly, put a fundamental question before the SNP concerning strategy: was the Assembly a step forward and should the nationalists seek compromise with the London parties over the issue? As seen in the first section, the fundamentalist/gradualist fracture originated in the very birth of the party in 1934. At the beginning of the 1970s, the fundamentalist wing was probably stronger, as Willy Wolfe made clear in 1972: ‘compromise is never an acceptable solution to the people of Scotland. That we will not compromise is a national trait the world has recognised for centuries. Agreement on (sic) consensus – yes, but compromise – no’.<sup>1068</sup> This partly changed during the second half of the decade and the party came to agree that, while being not enough, the Assembly was a step in the right direction. It would allow the Scots to address more efficiently their own problems and it would infuse self-confidence in the nation.<sup>1069</sup> Yet, with hindsight, some members judged the 1970s a fundamentalist decade and the half-hearted commitment of the party to the referendum as one of the major causes for its failure.<sup>1070</sup>

The 1980s were not a decade of compromise either. First, the immediate reaction within the party to the result of the 1979 referendum was a fundamentalist backlash. Second, even if the party had been open to collaboration with other forces, the Conservatives’ dominance in Westminster ruled out any constitutional reform.<sup>1071</sup> The Thatcher years therefore gave birth to the claim of a true ‘democratic deficit’ in Scotland, since many claimed that the region’s and the rest of the UK’s voting patterns increasingly diverged. The SNP portrayed the issue as a clash of civilisations. ‘We have had bad governments in the past [...] but we have never [...] until now had a government whose basic principles were so utterly against the most essential traditions and aspirations of Scottish life’.<sup>1072</sup> Scotland’s identity was at risk more than ever before because Thatcher had set out to change the Scots’ mindset from their higher belief in compassion and humanity to cold monetarism and individualism.

This was all the more unacceptable as the Scots – the SNP argued – ‘had consistently rejected the ethical, social and political values entailed in Thatcherism which Britain as a

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development of Scotland match its economic development’. CRAWFORD, DOUGLAS (1975) *Letter to the Prime Minister in visit to Scotland*, SNP press release, 26 February, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1067</sup> SNP (1974) *Scotland’s Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>1068</sup> WOLFE, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>1069</sup> SNP (1979), *Research Department Information Sheet*, issued for the campaign on the 1979 referendum, Acc. 10090/140, NLS.

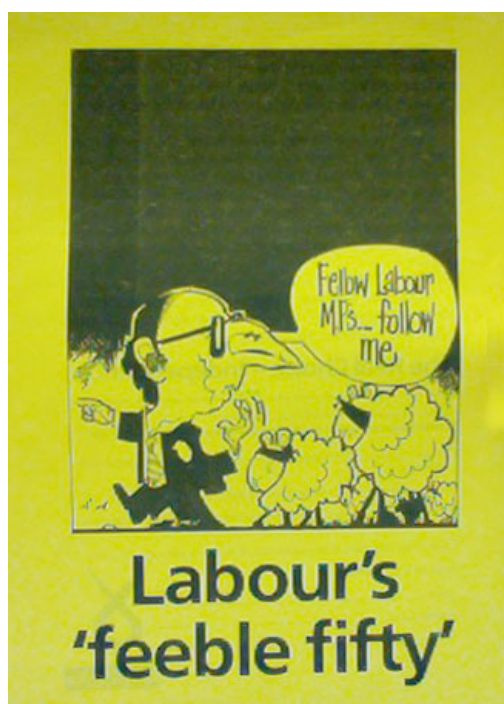
<sup>1070</sup> McCORMICK, NEIL (1988) *Constitutionalism and Democracy*, Third lecture chaired by Gordon Wilson, SNP Annual Conference. The contradiction of a party that declared its fundamentalism, but was forced by numbers to prop up a tottering Labour government was a major weakness, as confirmed by Gordon Wilson. WILSON, GORDON (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 150-160.

<sup>1071</sup> The decade, however, did open up windows of opportunities for collaboration with civil society movements and Labour over a campaign for Scotland’s self-rule that the party did not seize, thus confirming the lingering on of a fundamentalist mindset. Things changed only with the election of Salmond as party chairman in 1990.

<sup>1072</sup> McILVANNEY, WILLIAM (1987) *Stands Scotland Where it Did?*, Second lecture chaired by Gordon Wilson, SNP’s Annual National Conference, Dundee, p. 8.

whole has endorsed'.<sup>1073</sup> Even worse, Scotland was in a blind alley: the Scots could well vote for Labour, but the overwhelming sway of the Conservatives in England would make their vote a wasted one. The 'Feeble Fifty' (Figure 5.6), as the SNP labelled the 50 Scottish Labour MPs elected in 1987, could not do anything to stop Thatcher from humiliating Scotland. The poll tax, replacing the system of domestic rates previously in force from the financial year 1989-1990, was regarded as the best embodiment of the English merciless assault. To counter it the SNP mounted a 'Can Pay - No Pay' campaign (Figure 5.7), whereby electors who could afford the tax were asked not to pay it. They also invited citizens to take other disruptive measures, such as massively asking for rebates, so that bureaucrats had no time to chase non-payers, paying in cash with as low denomination coins as possible, paying in small amounts every three-months to delay enforcement procedures, and – in the case of well-off people – sponsoring poorer citizens who wanted to participate in the campaign but could not afford to pay the surcharges likely to be enforced upon non-payers.<sup>1074</sup>

**Figure 5.6 – 'The Feeble Fifty' (1987)**



Source: NLS.

Overall, the results were mixed, as many citizens joined only for selfish reasons, and the tax was eventually repealed because of the much more heated protests triggered by its introduction in England a year later.<sup>1075</sup> But the campaign certainly contributed to framing

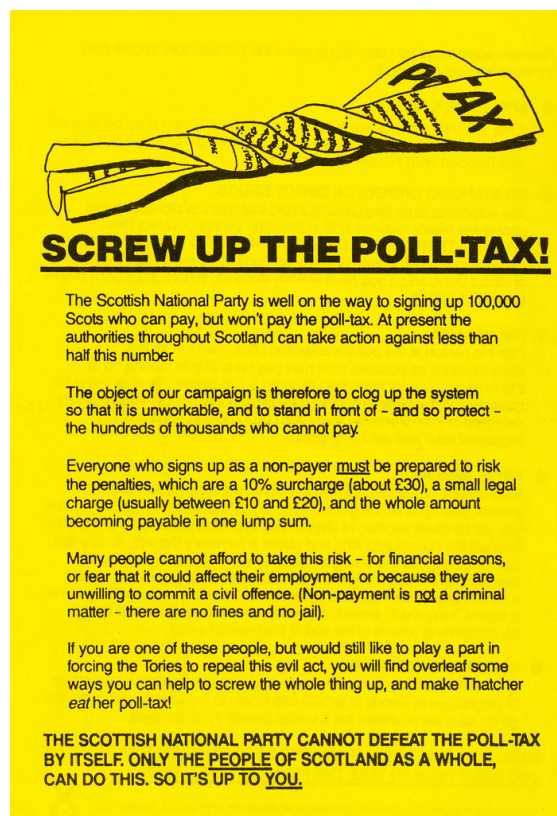
<sup>1073</sup> WILSON, GORDON (1988) *The Scottish Paradox*, Andrew Lang Lecture delivered at the University of St. Andrews, p. 11.

<sup>1074</sup> SNP (1989), *Screw up the poll-tax*, SNP campaign leaflet, University of Stirling, Scottish Political Archives, [www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/](http://www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/) (accessed on November 26, 2012).

<sup>1075</sup> The Community Charge, as the poll tax was officially called, entered into force during the financial year 1989 – 90 in Scotland and 1990 – 91 in England. The Council Tax replaced it in 1993.

the tax as a powerful symbol of English hostility to Scotland, which helped rally grassroots support for Scottish self-determination.<sup>1076</sup>

**Figure 5.7 – ‘Screw up the Poll Tax’ (1989)**



Source: University of Stirling, Scottish Political Archives, <http://www.scottishpoliticalarchive.org.uk/wb/> (accessed on February 2, 2014).

The end of Tory rule in 1997 opened up the possibility of constitutional change. In the party's discourse, the new assembly was inspired by a different conception of democracy. As the SNP claimed, Scotland's democratic tradition rested on the principle of popular sovereignty, rather than the British one of the Crown-in-Parliament, and this would involve proportional representation, a single elected chamber - no place for hereditary rights as in the House of Lords - and popular input in the legislative process through public committee hearings and referenda.<sup>1077</sup> Yet, the new Parliament was quickly judged insufficient: 'the Scottish Parliament has less power than practically any other legislative Parliament in Europe - devolved or independent - to decide how it raises its own income. Scotland has less control over its own affairs than Flanders, the Basque Country, or even the Isle of Man'.<sup>1078</sup> Paradoxically, even local councils had more financial independence than the Parliament as they raised 27% of their income, while the Parliament managed only around 15% of Scotland's tax revenues. An independent Scotland, on the contrary,

<sup>1076</sup> LYNCH, PETER (2002) *op. cit.*, pp. 161-190.

<sup>1077</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1993) 'Independence and Scottish Democracy', in *Horizons Without Bars*, *op. cit.*, p. 55-64.

<sup>1078</sup> SNP (2003) *op. cit.*

would have complete control of its own taxes, ‘leaving out the London middleman who takes his slice off first’,<sup>1079</sup> and a written constitution defending basic human rights, whereby the Scots would be citizens, not subjects. In an independent Scotland – the SNP concluded – there will not be any democratic deficit as there was under Margaret Thatcher.<sup>1080</sup>

But how to bring this about? Despite all the talk about independence since the 1960s, it is hard to find a clear blueprint for transition in the party’s publications until the early 1990s. Although it was largely clear that the SNP intended to engage in some kind of negotiations with the British government, once it received a clear mandate from the population, the 1992 manifesto for the UK general election filled this gap by detailing a six-step procedure. According to this, the election of a SNP majority at Westminster – relative to the Scottish quota of MPs, of course – would trigger talks between the SNP and the executive. In the meantime the Scottish Office would run as usual. Six months after a deal would be found, the agreement would be deposited at the UN, while – the party argued – Scotland would remain in the EEC (soon to become EU) as a UK successor state. A constitution would be drafted and submitted to popular vote. If approved, the first general election of an independent Scotland would be held.<sup>1081</sup> This policy however changed in 1999. Then, the party recognised the historic change brought about by the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and pledged to hold a referendum on the matter within the first four years in government.<sup>1082</sup> This promise could not be kept during the first SNP mandate at Holyrood, though, because the party did not have an absolute majority. As it did gain such a majority in 2011, it immediately began negotiating with the British government the terms of the independence referendum that was held on September 18, 2014.

#### 5.2.4 A Self-Confident Scotland

In the 1920s and 1930s a strong Scottish cultural revival took place, spurred by the works of artists such as Hugh MacDiarmid. This had political reverberations in the form of a culturalist-romantic nationalism that, for some time, affected the SNP as well. Reflecting upon the Hamilton victory, about forty years later, an old MacDiarmid could not recognise the metamorphosis undergone by Scottish nationalism: ‘too many people in the National Party have no concern with the things of fundamental importance, with the great spiritual issues underlying the mere statistics of trade and industry, with the end to which all other things should merely be means, that we don’t feel the destiny of Scotland lies with. At present they are anxious above all not to go too far, they deprecate Anglo-phobia, many do not envisage armed action’.<sup>1083</sup>

The citation leaves no doubt regarding the distance between MacDiarmid’s nationalism and the one promoted by the SNP since the 1960s. Although the cultural dimension has somehow been neglected compared to other European nationalist movements, this does

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<sup>1079</sup> SNP (2002) ‘Five Myths that Need to be Exploded’, *Snapshot*, summer, p. 18.

<sup>1080</sup> SNP (2003) *op. cit.*

<sup>1081</sup> SNP (1992) *Independence in Europe. Make it Happen Now*, General Election Manifesto (Edinburgh: SNP) pp. 2-3.

<sup>1082</sup> SNP (1999) *Enterprise, Compassion, Democracy*, Manifesto for the Scotland's Parliament Election, p. 10.

<sup>1083</sup> MACDIARMID, HUGH (1968) *A Political Speech*, 1320 Club Symposium, University of Glasgow, April, p. 9.

not mean that the SNP has not been concerned with culture and identity at all. The party did forge and project a Scottish self-understanding throughout its history and adjusted it to changing domestic and international circumstances. Furthermore, there is a constant thread running throughout its evolution: the idea that the Scottish nation lost its self-confidence and has somehow to regain it.

In the 1960s, the belief that Scotland suffered from an 'inferiority complex' towards her bigger neighbour, England, was widespread. According to this assumption, despite their long and magnificent history, the Scots tended to downplay all their achievements as under-standard and parochial. The situation had probably changed politically, with the rise of the SNP, but it lingered on unaltered in the arts and literature.<sup>1084</sup> The English and the Union clearly were the culprits and the SNP was seeking to liberate Scotland 'from the cultural and social stereotypes imposed on us by the imperialistic past with which the English are so obsessed'.<sup>1085</sup> Some even warned that the English had been trying to wipe out Scottish culture according to a deliberate plan of Scottish Anglicisation in all spheres of society.<sup>1086</sup> Accordingly, the 1973 booklet *The Scotland We Seek* declared that 'unless we, the people of Scotland, choose to have selfgovernment, the identity of the nation will be eclipsed and lost'.<sup>1087</sup>

The party reaction to such a drive lay in stressing the qualities of rural Scotland and proposing an identity somewhere in between tradition and modernity, where the national community could evolve in harmony.<sup>1088</sup> Here again, overcrowded urban England, especially the South-East, played an important role, as Scotland's image was modelled against it. Rural life had to be preserved along with agriculture and low-density, well-spread out industrialisation.<sup>1089</sup> It is no wonder that in the 1970s the SNP put great emphasis on restrictions to foreign property of land as well as on measures against speculation. At a time of economic crisis and with oil being pumped out of the seabed, the party still thought of land as Scotland's most important asset and defended a conception of agriculture based on family farms and diffused ownership.<sup>1090</sup> As stated in the 1974 manifesto, 'the SNP wants Scotland to avoid becoming over-industrialised and over-populated. The transition to independence is a necessary condition of a radically improved quality of life in Scotland'.<sup>1091</sup>

The defeat in the 1979 referendum and the purported Conservative onslaught on Scottish institutions dealt a huge blow to the nationalist self-understanding projected by the SNP.<sup>1092</sup> The 1980s saw two apparently contradictory trends: on the one hand, many within the party reflected upon the reasons for the failure and often deprecated Scottish

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<sup>1084</sup> MAIR, JOHN R. (1968) 'A Nation Mis-Represented. Scotland Needs Cultural Revival, *Nor'East Symbol*, p. 2, Acc. 7295/20, NLS.

<sup>1085</sup> WOLFE, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>1086</sup> MACINTOSH, *op. cit.*

<sup>1087</sup> SNP (1973) *The Scotland We Seek* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 4.

<sup>1088</sup> There were of course articles and other pieces of propaganda that emphasised the ancient history of the country and its cultural heritage, but they were not prominent, probably because, as the SNP itself recalled, 'the vast majority of the people of Scotland recognise that Scotland is a nation and that it could exercise privileges and responsibilities as other nations do'. SNP (1974) *Scotland Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>1089</sup> SNP (1970) *Murray for Kinross and West Perthshire*, SNP campaign leaflet, Acc. 7295/23, NLS.

<sup>1090</sup> SNP (1978) 'Scotland land is your future', *Focus on Kinross and West Perthshire*, n. 3, May, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1091</sup> SNP (1974), *Scotland's Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>1092</sup> MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 123.

timorousness; on the other, a grassroots process of Scottish national revival, embodied by initiatives like the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly and cultural events such as the *Scotch Myths* exhibition, set in.<sup>1093</sup>

The former trend is clear in the work of the 79 Group. In one of their first publications, its members interpreted the referendum *debacle* as stemming from the ‘defensive character of Scottish society’ or, in other words, its minority complex towards England, which derived from successive humiliations undergone during the industrial revolution, the inter-war years and the post-war de-industrialisation.<sup>1094</sup> However, as Stephen Maxwell pointed out, the minority complex mirrored a ‘provincialised’, but not an oppressed culture. ‘If only Scotland had been the victim of English armed might as Ireland was [...] If only history had treated Scotland with a less subtle cruelty, what a lion of a nation we might now be!’<sup>1095</sup> Since the Great Depression – Maxwell argued – the Scots had learned to prepare ahead for hard times. The middle-class had opted more widely than in England for public employment out of a lower faith in the economic turn. Thus, the Scots saw Labour as the best defender of Scottish interests, but this entailed that Scotland would remain subordinated to London. They had rewarded the SNP when oil came up in 1974, but confronted with a permanent state of crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they did not see any alternative but retreat into support for Labour.<sup>1096</sup>

The way out of this gloomy perspective was found in the ‘Independence in Europe’ agenda, that we will examine in the next section, and in the rejection of the Thatcher revolution, that we have analysed in the previous one. At the same time, the party seemed to sense the underground currents within Scottish society. It is remarkable, for instance, that the 1983 manifesto was the first one featuring a section on ‘safeguarding Scotland’s identity’.<sup>1097</sup> The 1980s were a decade of transition when the party did not perform well electorally but set the ground for future successes. As Gordon Wilson predicted in 1988, at the end of his mandate as party chairman, Scotland was in a chrysalis ready to emerge to its self-conscious adulthood.<sup>1098</sup>

Three themes, relating to the Scottish identity, dominated the SNP’s discourse in the last twenty years:<sup>1099</sup> the motif of compassion and enterprise, the positive case for independence and the idea of independence as a means rather than an objective.

Although since the mid-1970s the party was quite clearly left-of-centre – the 1974 manifesto defined it as ‘an introduction to a programme of social justice for the people of Scotland’<sup>1100</sup> – it remained torn between a more social-democratic and a more ‘agnostic’, catch-all strategy until the late 1980s.<sup>1101</sup> The rise of Thatcherism in England and the anti-Scottish feelings that her policy came to be associated with favoured the adoption of an

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<sup>1093</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL (2001) *Nations against the State: the New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave) 2nd edition; McARTHUR, COLIN (1982) *Scotch Reels, Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: British Film Institute).

<sup>1094</sup> 79 GROUP (1980) *Scotland and the British Crisis*, SNP 79 Group Papers, n. 3, p. 11.

<sup>1095</sup> MAXWELL (1981) *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>1096</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>1097</sup> SNP (1983) *Choose Scotland – The Challenge of Independence*, SNP manifesto, Acc. 10090/200, NLS.

<sup>1098</sup> WILSON, GORDON (1988) *The Scottish Paradox*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>1099</sup> It must be clarified however that they appeared in their fully-fledged form only towards the end of the 1990s.

<sup>1100</sup> SNP (1974) *Scotland’s Future*, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>1101</sup> This was also due to the shift of the English political spectrum to the right after the appearance of Margaret Thatcher.



openly social-democratic profile. Yet, as Stephen Maxwell has recently argued, ‘while Mrs Thatcher’s perceived social ethic was firmly rejected by SNP, her promotion of liberalised market as an indispensable source of economic dynamism struck a chord with sections of the party leadership looking for ways of injecting new vitality into the Scottish economy’.<sup>1102</sup> Already in the 1992 manifesto, along with its traditional defence of social services, the party declared resolved to turn Scotland into a high wage, highly skilled, extremely competitive economy.<sup>1103</sup> The concept was refined in the 1997 manifesto, where it alternated liberal claims based on a self-understanding of the Scots as hard-working, responsible and skilled – of Scotland as a business-friendly place<sup>1104</sup> – to more socialist arguments about the need to preserve a caring society.<sup>1105</sup> The document played on Scotland’s well respected educational system and manufacturing tradition as decisive assets to ensure the nation’s prosperity in the global economy. But, at the same time, it portrayed the nation as a community that helped its members in difficult times guaranteeing a good quality of life.<sup>1106</sup> In other words, the SNP was offering the best of both worlds. To make its commitment credible, it pledged to reduce waste in the public administration, setting out to show that it could efficiently deliver high quality public services.<sup>1107</sup> These arguments have been accompanied by the defence of a ‘competitive tax policy’, that have echoed neo-liberal arguments, especially with regards to the model of the Laffer curve seen in section 5.2.2. Along the same lines, two of the first five goals listed by the 2007 economic growth strategy *Let Scotland Flourish* in order to boost the Scottish economy had a distinctive neo-liberal flavour – ‘lower business taxes’ and ‘lighter regulation’ – while another one – ‘lead a more effective government’ – implied, among others, a ‘smaller’ government.<sup>1108</sup> Similarly, the consistent use of Ireland as an example was criticised because of the silence over the country’s poor record in terms of social policies.<sup>1109</sup> All this has then led some commentators to define the party’s economic policy as ‘neoliberalism with a heart’.<sup>1110</sup> What is interesting is that the party has directly addressed the claim and argued that there is no contradiction between competitiveness and social justice. As it argued in 2005, ‘in modern Europe, social justice and economic prosperity go hand in hand, and the most successful small nations are those that give equal weight to both. All of the Nordic countries are more competitive than the UK. And they also give greater priority to social justice and equality than the UK. An independent Scotland will follow their example’.<sup>1111</sup>

In this connection, unlike the VB, the SNP did not show any kind of ‘welfare chauvinism’ with regard to the foreign population of the region. On the contrary, since the mid-1990s, it openly conveyed an idea of inclusive and civic nationalism. The concept of the ‘New Scots’ meant that foreigners were regarded as a source of enrichment for

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<sup>1102</sup> MAXWELL (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>1103</sup> SNP (1992) *op. cit.* p. 6.

<sup>1104</sup> SNP (1997) *Yes, op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>1105</sup> See also the more recent 2005 manifesto, where they asserted that ‘it is through economic success that we will earn our aspiration to social democracy, that no-one in the world owes Scotland a living and that we must reap our own harvest and ring our own till’. SNP (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>1106</sup> SNP (1999) *Towards the Scottish Parliament: Enterprise, Compassion, Democracy*, Policy Intentions for the 1999 elections (SNP: Edinburgh).

<sup>1107</sup> SNP (1999) *Enterprise, op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>1108</sup> SNP (2007) *Let Scotland, op. cit.*, pp. 19-24.

<sup>1109</sup> MAXWELL (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>1110</sup> CUTHBERT and CUTHBERT, *op. cit.*

<sup>1111</sup> SNP (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Scottish society.<sup>1112</sup> Along the same lines, the party has consistently argued that all people resident in Scotland at the moment of independence, as well as those born in the country or with a parent who was born there, would become citizens of Scotland, regardless of their origins, if they wished so.<sup>1113</sup> It is also true, however, that compared to other topics, immigration has not been a major item of discussion in the party's propaganda, mainly because it has not been a fundamental issue in Scotland until now.

The second major theme emphasised by the party in the last two decades has consisted in the so-called 'positive message' on independence, which continued the tradition of boosting the self-confidence of the Scots.<sup>1114</sup> In a way, this argument was the necessary complement to the economic case for independence seen in section two. In the words of Alex Salmond, 'Scotland will be on its way to Independence when we stop defining ourselves relative to events South of the Border, whether on the economy or any other aspect of life. There is a great deal more to being Scottish than just being not-English'.<sup>1115</sup> More concretely, he suggested the SNP shift the focus of the campaign from blaming the others to showing citizens the advantages of independence and the potential of an independent Scotland.<sup>1116</sup> He argued that in 1979 the Scots, when asked whether they wanted self-government or not, had answered 'I don't know' probably because those who made the case for independence should have done it better. The power to change things lay with the Scots and the SNP had simply to explain to them that they could do so through the ballot box.<sup>1117</sup> In this connection – he pointed out – the Rubicon had been crossed in 1997, when Scotland voted for the Parliament and after 300 years accepted to assume government responsibilities, thus shattering the myth that it was too poor, too small and too stupid to do it.<sup>1118</sup>

Since the early 1990s, and more decisively so, from the end of the decade, the party has also emphasised an instrumental argument for self-determination, whereby independence is not to be conceived of as an end in itself, but as a means to improve the well being of the Scottish population and the competitiveness of the Scottish economy, in line with the

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<sup>1112</sup> SNP (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 13; and SNP (2003) *op. cit.* In the 1970s, Winifred Ewing had advocated a tight immigration policy in the 1970s. It is remarkable that the idea of inclusive nationalism came up at a time when anti-English sentiment increased in Scotland at large, as witnessed by the creation of organisations like Settler Watch and Scottish Watch. See LYNCH, PETER (2002), *op. cit.*, pp. 211-213.

<sup>1113</sup> SNP (1978) *Return to*, *op. cit.*, p. 15; SNP (1987) *op. cit.*, p. 8; SNP (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 4; SNP (1997) *Citizens not Subjects* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 2; SNP (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>1114</sup> Previous examples can be found in the party's acknowledgment that one of the major consequences of oil in the 1970s was to boost the self-confidence of the Scottish nation. Similarly, in 1984, Gordon Wilson urged the Scots to do away with the 'dependence mentality' that had until then plagued them. See, WOLFE, *op. cit.*, p. 6; WILSON, GORDON (1984) *Autumn Campaign News Release*, 4 October, Acc. 13099/107, NLS.

<sup>1115</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1999) 'Towards a Prosperous Scotland', *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>1116</sup> Salmond relied on insights from the American psychologist Martin Seligman who argued that positive messages, rather than victimisation, were much more effective in political electioneering. Gerry Hassan has suggested that the 'positive message' was applied to the party's rhetoric from 2004 on, when Salmond took over the leadership again. Although this might be true with regard to the party's canvassing techniques, as shown above, the need to change strategy had already been pointed out by Salmond in the early 1990s. See HASSAN (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>1117</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1993) 'The Awakening of Scotland', in *Horizon Without Bars. The Future of Scotland. A Series of Speeches* (Edinburgh: SNP) pp. 33-44.

<sup>1118</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1999) 'Scotland in the Process of Independence. Public Policy Lecture to the London School of Economics', in SNP, *'St. Andrew's Series' Speeches* (Edinburgh: SNP), p. 10.

economic arguments exposed in section 5.2.2.<sup>1119</sup> Even oil, from the 1990s on, has been depicted more as a decisive asset for ensuring future investments in an independent Scotland, than as an unjust misappropriation of the London government. Although the idea of the democratic deficit and the Thatcher years have carried a considerable emotional baggage, as well as memories of victimisation, since the 1990s, and arguably even since the end of the 1980s, the party has rather portrayed independence as the inevitable consequence of the different value systems of the Scottish and English societies, which would warrant a quiet divorce. Such a shift to instrumental arguments has been perfectly expressed by the Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, when, in the context of the debate on the independence referendum, she wrote: ‘the case for independence does not rest on identity or nationality, but rather on values of social justice, enterprise and democracy [...] my contention is that the UK has failed Scotland over the long term and under successive governments of all colours’.<sup>1120</sup> With these words, Sturgeon grounded the argument for independence on the disappointing results of the last British executives rather than on any fundamental and deliberate act of oppression or on any reference to the necessary connection between nationhood and statehood. This has gone along with the adoption of a gradualist policy contemplating intermediate steps on the way to full self-determination.<sup>1121</sup>

Finally, in recent years, the SNP has also raised the profile of Scotland as a green country, which is in line with its traditional love for the countryside although re-interpreted in light of the renewables revolution. Thus, the identity building effort regards both economic aspects, as Scotland is believed to possess an enormous potential in wind, tidal and wave power, as well as cultural ones, since the preservation of the scenery has been part and parcels of the SNP’s discourse ever since.<sup>1122</sup>

### 5.2.5 Independence in Europe

In light of recent events, one might assume that the SNP has been in favour of European integration since its inception. In fact, the subject has been much more problematic. When England joined the then European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, the party was not at all for entry. Two main positions co-existed: those who totally rejected membership and those who accepted it on a Scottish basis.

The former was based on two main observations. Firstly, the EEC was a gigantic bureaucratic structure remote from and largely unaccountable to ordinary citizens, which was probably doomed to collapse under the weight of its own overstretched, unmanageable size. This ran counter to the SNP’s ideal of small communities where

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<sup>1119</sup> See for instance SNP (2002) ‘Talkin' 'bout a revolution’, Snapshot, Summer, pp. 8-11.

<sup>1120</sup> STURGEON, NICOLA (2013) ‘No more “what ifs”’, in SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY, *Scotland Decides, the case for independence and the case for the UK*, 17 March, <http://www.scotsman.com/scotland-on-sunday/opinion/comment/scotland-decides-eight-essays-on-independence-1-2841425> (accessed on February 14, 2014).

<sup>1121</sup> SNP (2010) ‘SNP leader outlines “independence plan”’, Saltire, 10, Winter, p. 1. This is also confirmed by Andrew Marr. See MARR, ANDREW (2013) ‘Introduction to the 2013 Edition’, in *The Battle for Scotland* (London: Penguin) pp. xviii-xix; HEPBURN, *op. cit.*

<sup>1122</sup> SNP (2009) *We’ve got what it takes*, European Parliament Election Manifesto, pp. 10-11; SNP (2011) *op. cit.*, p. 3. Please note that in the big picture at page two Alex Salmond ‘happens’ to be standing before a windmill farm.

people were directly involved in public management and did not feel alienated.<sup>1123</sup> Secondly, being an exporting nation rich in natural resources and not a declining power desperate to find a substitute for Empire, Scotland did not need EEC membership, but it could negotiate a free trade agreement with it as the EFTA countries had done, all the more so because the Community accounted for less than a quarter of Scottish exports.<sup>1124</sup>

The second position became the official line in the 1975 referendum, under the slogan ‘No Voice – No Entry’ (Figure 5.8). In practice, this difference did not change much, as both positions advocated a No vote. In theory, it diverged from total rejection to the extent that it subjected membership to Scotland’s independent representation in the organisation and to the specific conditions that would be negotiated. In short, Scotland had first to be recognised as a sovereign nation and then it would bargain on the terms of its membership. As the UK had failed to recognise such a status to Scotland, membership was unacceptable.<sup>1125</sup>

Figure 5.8 – ‘No Voice, No Entry’ (1975)



Source: NLS.

The move to the ‘Independence in Europe’ policy was in large part due to the homonymous influential essay written by Jim Sillars in 1989,<sup>1126</sup> although the party had

<sup>1123</sup> EWING, WINIFRED (1974) *Speech in Glasgow*, SNP press release 5 December, Acc. 10090/141, NLS; CRAWFORD, DOUGLAS (1975) *Speech at SNP rally in Edinburgh's Music Hall*, SNP press release 27 April, Acc. 10090/141, NLS.

<sup>1124</sup> MAXWELL, STEPHEN (1978) ‘Does Scotland Really Need the EEC?’, *Focus on Kinross and West Perthshire*, n. 3, May, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1125</sup> SNP (1974) *Scottish Viewpoint*, campaign leaflet n. 8, Acc. 10090/147; SNP (1975) *Scotland & EEC, The Facts*, campaign leaflet, Acc. 10090/176, NLS.

<sup>1126</sup> Sillars had already anticipated the point fully exposed in *Independence in Europe*, in *Scotland: the Case for Optimism and Scotland Moving on and up in Europe*. SILLARS, JIM (1986) *Scotland: the Case for*

already made some steps in that direction some years before. The 1984 manifesto for the European election recognised that the EEC was not a transient phenomenon and that, although it had created some inconvenience, the overall balance had been positive. An independent Scotland would certainly be able to sit at the ‘top-table’ and stand up for its own interests. Apart from independence, it therefore supported a reinforcement of the European Parliament and an evolution towards a loose confederation.<sup>1127</sup>

In Sillars’ analysis the themes of independence and Europe stemmed from and reinforced each other. He argued that the Single European Act was a major political event that would generate forces impacting heavily on Scotland’s future. It would especially produce centralising dynamics, as the British common market had done. Hence, Scotland had to acquire independence to avoid being further marginalised. At the same time, an independent Scotland would benefit from EEC membership because it would retain most of its powers while avoiding isolation and provincialism: ‘Scotland lies on the geographical periphery of the European Community. We are also on its political periphery. We can do nothing about the former in physical terms, but we can and must act to move ourselves from the outer fringe of European politics to the centres of decision making’.<sup>1128</sup> Sillars also countered the critiques of those who suggested that a breakaway Scotland would never be accepted in the Community. Denying Scotland’s right to self-determination by expelling it after its citizens had expressed their will through the ballot box – he pointed out – would be against the principles of the Community. Furthermore, there were no official rules, nor any legal precedent, for the expulsion of a member. Therefore, Scotland would in all likelihood have to renegotiate its status in the Community from within.<sup>1129</sup>

At roughly the same time, other members of the SNP were trying to raise Scotland’s European profile by claiming a traditionally stronger connection with the continent than England’s. Gordon Wilson, for instance, stated that ‘prior to the Union of the Crowns, Scotland in cultural, social and economic relationships was part of the body of Europe’ and went on asking ‘is it not possible that the Scots can now see a European alternative and become a nation within Europe rather than a region within Britain?’<sup>1130</sup> As in other case studies, this claim was expedient to promote an identity-building process that continued in the following years and was based on a triangular relationship between Scotland and two relevant others: a negative one, England, and a positive one, Europe. This is especially clear when looking at the issue of the EU Social Chapter that the SNP was eager to sign while the Westminster government had rejected.<sup>1131</sup> The SNP itself

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*Optimism* (Edinburgh: Polygon); SILLARS, JIM (1985) *Scotland Moving on and up in Europe* (Edinburgh: SNP).

<sup>1127</sup> SNP (1984) *Scotland's Voice in Europe*, European Election Manifesto, Acc. 10090/195, NLS.

<sup>1128</sup> SILLARS, JIM (1989) *Independence in Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 5. Later, in other texts, the SNP pointed out that an independent Scotland in Europe would go from being an under-achiever to being an over-achiever, as it would get more MEPs and votes in the Council of Ministers, on a population basis, than bigger countries. This is due to the systems of apportionment of both seats and votes, that tend to overrepresent smaller countries.

<sup>1129</sup> This position has remained the party’s official one since today. It has been repeated in the party’s most complete publication on the subject – SNP (1997) *The Legal Basis of Independence in Europe* (Edinburgh: SNP) – and it has made up the core of its argument in the recent campaign for the 2014 referendum. See SNP (2012) *Choice: An Historic Opportunity for Our Nation* (Edinburgh: SNP) p. 13.

<sup>1130</sup> WILSON, GORDON (1988) *The Scottish Paradox*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>1131</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1993) ‘Scotland's Place in Europe’, in *Horizons Without Bars*, *op. cit.*; SNP (1997) *Citizens*, *op. cit.*

located its own party identity in Europe when claiming to belong to the European social-democratic tradition – all the more so at a time when England looked overwhelmingly conservative.<sup>1132</sup> Likewise, Alex Salmond was trying to connect the Scottish to the European identity away from Britain when he declared ‘the Prime Minister [Tony Blair, EDM] gave the first airing to his new slogan for Scotland – Stronger Together, Weaker Apart...For me it means that Scotland is weaker the longer it remains distant from the mainstream of Europe. Only by re-awakening our historic links with Europe, and our international outlook can we return to the strength of a normal, mature, informed democracy. If we remain separated from Europe and the world then we shall remain weak’.<sup>1133</sup>

Although officially supporting it in the 1990s, the party remained sceptical about the Europe of the Regions model. This is probably because, its claim of independence in Europe implied the institution of a sovereign state that would have been part of a confederal EU in which power would remain concentrated in the Council of Ministers. On the other hand, it reflected the realisation that in order to be ‘listened’ to in the EU, a nation needs to have an independent state.<sup>1134</sup> This understanding is shown by the party’s opposition to the EU Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty, an opposition fundamentally based on the classification of the ‘Common fisheries policy’ as an exclusive EU competence.<sup>1135</sup> Apart from this specific item, the party has been consistently in favour of EU membership and advertised a positive position on the Union. The economic crisis has not substantially changed the pro-EU attitude of the party, apart from a predictable move away from support for the euro. While in 2009 the SNP still claimed that ‘we are favourable to Scotland joining the euro when the time is right’,<sup>1136</sup> although the people would decide in a referendum, in 2012 it argued that, as the EU could not force it to adopt the common currency, an independent Scotland would keep the British pound.<sup>1137</sup> In the context of the 2014 referendum campaign, the party has effectively opposed this Euro-enthusiastic profile – portrayed as representative of Scotland as a whole – to English Euroscepticism and to David Cameron’s proposal to hold a referendum on EU membership after the 2015 election.

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<sup>1132</sup> SNP (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>1133</sup> SALMOND, ALEX (1999) ‘Making the Scottish Parliament Work. Scottish Democracy in the Process of Independence’, in SNP, ‘*St. Andrews Series’ Speeches, op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>1134</sup> See HEPBURN, *op. cit.*; SNP (2003) *op. cit.*, section 8; SNP (2004) *Vote for Scotland*, European Election Manifesto, section 2.

<sup>1135</sup> SNP (2004) *op. cit.*, section 3; SNP (2007) *It’s Time*, Scottish Election Manifesto, p. 72.

<sup>1136</sup> SNP (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>1137</sup> SNP (2012) *op. cit.*, p. 13.

## 5.3 Examining the SNP's Discourse and Strategy

As in the other case studies we discuss here the main arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation made by the party, trying to explain why and in what context the nationalism of the rich formulated by the SNP arose between the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### 5.3.1 Economic Victimisation

As Alex Salmond once noticed, 15 out of 25 of the articles of the 1707 Treaty of Union concerned economic matters, which underlines the fundamentally economic rationale underpinning the establishment of the United Kingdom, at least on the Scottish side.<sup>1138</sup> One of the SNP's major arguments, in contrast, has been that Scotland has been held back by its union with the rest of the UK and would be economically better off as an independent country. Hence, this is a fundamental critique of the core of the British-Scottish identity.

In the historical literature, there is a consensus that, at least until the Great War, Scotland did profit from the marriage with its southern neighbour. Albeit not immediately, at least from 1750 until the end of the nineteenth century access to the British domestic market and the colonies gave Scotland a decisive edge over its competitors that would have not been available had the country kept its independence, as most European markets were protected by tariff barriers.<sup>1139</sup> In a similar vein, David McCrone has proposed the concept of 'development by invitation' when referring to Scotland's impressive growth during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. According to him, out of security concerns, the English elites let the Scottish ones take advantage of participation in the British Empire. Hence, Scotland 'had been able to move from peripheral to semi-peripheral to core status because of its early "dependency"'<sup>1140</sup>, where dependency is not to be understood as establishing a colonial relationship between Scotland and England. On the contrary, criticising the internal colonialism theory proposed by Michael Hechter,<sup>1141</sup> McCrone and Kendrick showed that the structure of the Scottish economy was at any time the closest in the UK to the British average and, therefore, that there is no evidence of an attempt on the part of any London government to make her complementary to, and not competitive with, the English one.<sup>1142</sup> These views are confirmed by Andrew Marr who also points to two further elements: first, before the Union the Scots had tried, and failed, their own imperial adventure with the Darien scheme,<sup>1143</sup> which might have urged them to

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<sup>1138</sup> SALMOND (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>1139</sup> CLIVE, LEE (1995) *Scotland and the United Kingdom. The Economy and the Union in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), p. 50. Quoting recent studies of black market trade, Tom Devine even asserts that the Union was beneficial to the Scottish trading bourgeoisie from the very beginning in the 1710s. DEVINE, THOMAS MARTIN (2008) 'Three Hundred Years of Anglo-Scottish Union', in DEVINE (ed.) *op. cit.*

<sup>1140</sup> MCCRONE, DAVID (2001) *Understanding Scotland. The Sociology of a Nation* (London and New York: Routledge), p. 62.

<sup>1141</sup> HECHTER, *op. cit.*

<sup>1142</sup> KENDRICK et al., *op. cit.* We have already discussed Hechter's model in detail in chapter 2. For a critique see also PAGE, *op. cit.*

<sup>1143</sup> The Darien scheme was a Scottish colonial enterprise consisting in the establishment, in the 1690s, of a commercial colony on the Isthmus of Panama, in the Gulf of Darién. Yet, it resoundingly failed, bringing the economy of the Scottish Lowlands close to collapse.

find shelter under the British imperial umbrella; second, for about two hundred years the Union did not politically infringe upon the daily life of the Scots, as minimum government in London left a great deal of autonomy to local councils.<sup>1144</sup>

Although the Victorian era marked the peak of Scotland's development, it also set the ground for the massive structural adjustment experienced after the Second World War. The negative legacies of this golden age were two: an overdependence on heavy industry and the capital goods sector, and chronically low wages. The former stemmed from Scotland's comparative advantage in coal and iron-ore deposits in Lanarkshire and the cheap transport costs offered by the river Clyde. This favoured the creation of an enormous shipbuilding industry that, in turn, spurred the rise of steel and locomotive sectors highly dependent on the yards. Despite slowing competitiveness, and after having been hit hard by the Great Depression, Scottish shipbuilding performed well until the mid-1950s, mainly thanks to military tenders relating to the Second World War and the Korean War, as well as by the post-war reconstruction on the continent.<sup>1145</sup> Between 1950 and 1954, Scotland's global market share in shipbuilding was still equal to 12%. By 1968 it had collapsed to 1.3%.<sup>1146</sup> Adjustment would have needed huge investments for conversion and modernisation already at the end of the nineteenth century. These did not come for two main reasons: local ship-builders were reluctant to accept change and pool resources for modernisation and rationalisation;<sup>1147</sup> and the government war requirements prevented any industrial conversion in the first half of the century, while, later, regional policy prolonged the life of uncompetitive firms.<sup>1148</sup> Scottish low wages made the situation worse as they turned into lower spending and, therefore, hampered the development of a thriving consumer goods industry that could have helped the process of industrial adjustment as had happened in the South East of England.<sup>1149</sup> At the same time, they entailed bad housing

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<sup>1144</sup> MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 22. This does not mean that the Scottish Parliament enthusiastically voted itself out of existence. Bribes as well as economic and military pressures on the part of England did play a role in convincing the Scottish notables to vote in favour of the Union.

<sup>1145</sup> BRAND (1978) *op. cit.* pp. 68-88.

<sup>1146</sup> HARVIE, CHRISTOPHER (1998) *Scotland & Nationalism, Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present* (London: Routledge) first published in 1977, p. 122. In another book, Harvie points out that the Suez Crisis lay at the basis of the closure of two-thirds of the Clyde's yards. Not being allowed to go through the Suez canal, companies needed bigger tankers, but the Clyde was not equipped to produce them simply because the river was too small. HARVIE (1995), *op. cit.* Yet, in fact, Scottish shipbuilding had not evolved substantially since the 1930s, thus, despite being the industry as a whole in expansion globally, Scotland could not stand foreign competition. FINLAY, RICHARD J. (2005) *Modern Scotland, 1914-2000* (London: Profile Books) p. 261.

<sup>1147</sup> Another reason simply lay in the fact that the Scots could keep taking advantage of colonial markets and thus avoid competition with German and American firms. Likewise, the capital that could have been used for modernising the industry was consistently invested abroad. McCURRY, DAVID (1992) 'Towards a Principled Society: Scottish Elites in the Twentieth Century', in TONY, DICKSON and JAMES, H. TREBLE (eds.) *People and Society in Scotland*, vol. III 1914-1990, p. 176.

<sup>1148</sup> PAYNE, PETER (2003) 'The Economy', in THOMAS MARTIN, DEVINE and RICHARD, FINLAY (eds.) *Scotland in the 20th Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) pp. 13-45.

<sup>1149</sup> The shift to a consumer goods industry would have been beneficial because capital goods are generally hit harder by downturns, as clients can more easily delay the replacement of their machinery, while consumer goods have a shorter life-cycle. HARVIE (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 45. Lower wages were mainly due to the labour-intensive character of the Scottish manufacturing sector. Scotland's higher wealth concentration might also have played a role. In any case, the gulf between Scottish and English salaries shrank during the nineteenth century hitting 5% at its end. See LEE, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-40.



and health conditions, which translated into a demand for more government intervention.<sup>1150</sup>

As David McCrone has pointed out, before the Great War Scotland's economy had been based on the dominance of private local capital, while in the interwar years and, especially, in the post-Second World War decades, the state became the major economic actor in the region.<sup>1151</sup> The establishment of the welfare state brought an unprecedented level of wellbeing in Scotland. People were now assured decent housing, healthcare and other services, such as unemployment benefits, that, when confronted with downward economic cycles, would not plunge them into the severe conditions of relative deprivation experienced before the Second World War. According to the *Clydesdale Bank Annual Survey of Economic Conditions in Scotland*, at the end of the 1950s, real income per head was 75% higher than it had been in 1934.<sup>1152</sup> Between 1950 and 1960, total earnings doubled and wealth became better spread, favouring the expansion of the middle-class. By 1954, the government had removed all restrictions linked to war rationing, thus, mass consumption reached the country. Unsurprisingly, unionism remained a hegemonic force in the region throughout this period.<sup>1153</sup> Things started to change in 1957. Between then and 1961, Scottish per capita GDP shrank from 91.7% of the British average to 86.1%.<sup>1154</sup> This was mainly due to a slower rate of growth than the rest of the UK. Furthermore, although at historical low levels – 2-3% since 1945 – unemployment had remained about twice as high as in the rest of the UK and increased to 4-4.5% in the 1958-1960 period. Migration also remained quite constant, with an average outflow of about 25,000 Scots during the 1950s, which increased to about 35,000 in the first half of the 1960s.<sup>1155</sup> To address these issues, from 1960 onwards, regional policy, which had in fact existed since the 1930s, was transformed. A committee of inquiry appointed by the Scottish Office carried out a study of the Scottish economy in 1960-1961 and suggested a change from distressed areas relief to the promotion of growth in adjacent locations that could then absorb the labour excess in the surroundings. This meant the investment of huge sums in so-called 'growth points' in order to increase their attractiveness to private investors.<sup>1156</sup> The policy was stepped up from 1963 on. Public expenditure rose by 900% between 1964 and 1973, 20% more than the British average. The entire country except for Edinburgh obtained special development status, the number of universities doubled, jobs in teaching increased by a fifth, and the Scottish Development Department was created along with the Highland Development Board and the Scottish Development Agency. Scottish per capita GDP stopped decreasing relatively to the rest of the UK and between 1965 and 1975 it caught up (Figure 5.9).<sup>1157</sup>

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<sup>1150</sup> In 1974, 52% of Scottish people lived in council-owned houses, against 27% in the UK as a whole. MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>1151</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (2001) *op. cit.*, pp. 5-29.

<sup>1152</sup> BRAND (1978) *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>1153</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>1154</sup> McCRONE, GAVIN (1965) *Scotland's Economic Progress, 1951-60* (London: Allen&Unwin) p. 32; FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 255-261.

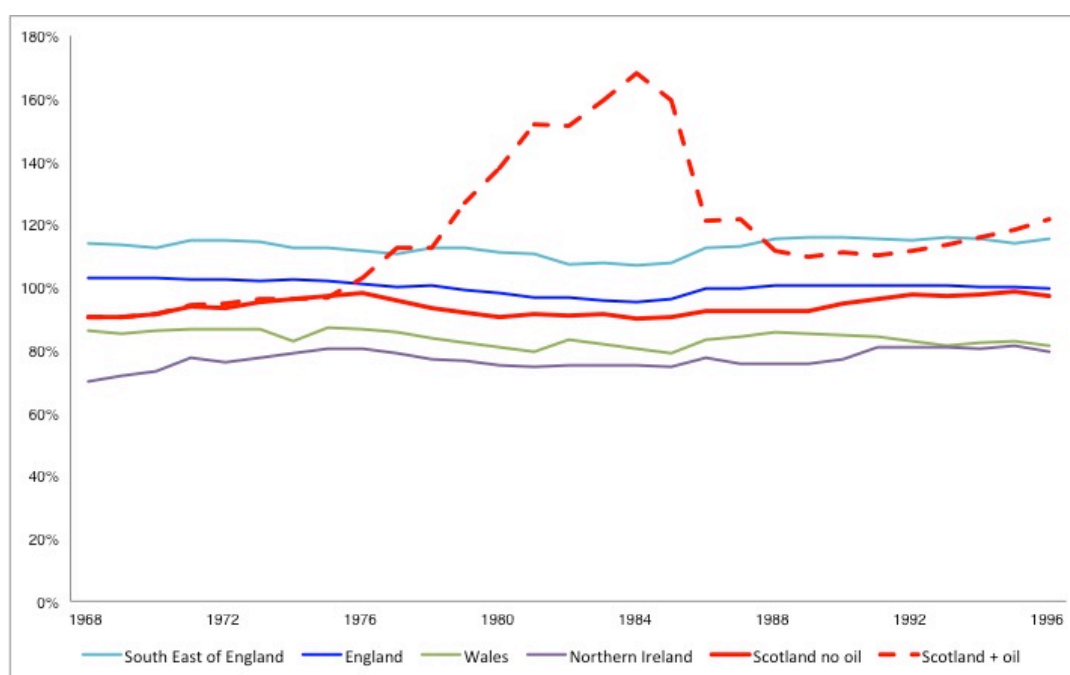
<sup>1155</sup> Figures from SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND (1966) *The Scottish Economy, 1965 to 1970. A Plan for Expansion* (Edinburgh: Scottish Office) p. 154.

<sup>1156</sup> TOOTHILL, JOHN (1961) *Inquiry into the Scottish Economy, 1960-1961* (Edinburgh: Scottish Council).

<sup>1157</sup> DEVINE (2008) *The Challenge, op. cit.*, p. 148-150; BUXTON, NEIL (1985) 'The Scottish Economy, 1945-79: Performance, Structure and Problems', in RICHARD, SAVILLE (ed.) *The Economic Development of Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: John Donald) pp. 69-78; McCRONE, GAVIN (1969) *Regional Policy in Britain* (London: Allen&Unwin).

Such lavish expenditure had also downsides, though. On the one hand, planning was perceived as an imposition from above – the *Scotsman*, for instance, described the Highland Development Board as ‘an almost perfect example of Voltairean enlightened despotism’.<sup>1158</sup> Similarly, the government strategy to attract foreign investment by contributing 10% to the construction of new productive plants certainly helped reduce unemployment, by bringing in 87,730 new jobs between 1964 and 1969, but, as only 250 of these targeted highly-skilled professionals, it furthered accusations of turning Scotland into a low-wage branch-plant economy.<sup>1159</sup>

**Figure 5.9 – GDP per Capita, selected regions, 1968-1996 (percentage of UK average, including continental shelf revenues)\***



\* The ‘Scotland + oil’ series is the result of our calculations. We have added 90% of ONS continental shelf GDP data to Scottish GDP, divided by ONS population data and divided by UK GDP without continental shelf revenues per person data (so that it would reflect an independence scenario).

Source: Our calculations on UK Office of National Statistics (ONS), regional accounts data. The base year used for real figures is 2012.

On the other, planners’ promises were simply too big to be realised and thus nourished discontent once not met by facts. Structural change was under way but it was a slow process requiring decades and, although regional policy could soothe it, it could not avoid it. While standards of living remained quite high, unemployment kept creeping up. Moreover, regional policy certainly provided Scotland with disproportionate resources, but

<sup>1158</sup> Quoted in HARVIE (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 131. The article also concluded that ‘Labour was preparing the soil “in which the seeds of nationalism could take root”’.

<sup>1159</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124. In 1973 there were 148 American-owned plants employing 14.9% of the Scottish workforce. The branch-plant economy argument underpinned those theoretical frameworks inspired to Hechter’s internal colonialism model, which, while not confirmed by empirical data, were still influential in public debates in the second half of the 1970s. McCURRY DAVID (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 64.

other government policies did not suit its economy equally well. This was especially the case with the stop-go strategy adopted by successive Conservative governments for electoral purposes between 1951 and 1964, whereby taxes were decreased before a general vote and then a squeeze came after re-election had been secured. The policy deterred new business formation and had a stronger impact in Scotland because the region was more dependent on public spending. More fundamentally, the UK based most of its post-war economic policy on austerity measures to contain inflation and balance of payments deficits. This was heavily influenced by the labour shortages and strong consumer demand of the South, which ran counter to the labour surplus and need for economic expansion of Scotland.<sup>1160</sup> What was probably most important, however, is that the ever-widening role of the state in the economy since World War II focused people's attention on the fulfillment of materialist objectives. As Richard Finlay pointed out 'it was the role of the government to fix things, and it was upon this criterion that governments were judged. In part, the politicians had only themselves to blame for this state of affairs, because each party actively encouraged the electorate to think that it could remedy all social and economic problems. When a government failed, the electorate took its revenge'.<sup>1161</sup> The rising affluence of the post-war years and the promises of political parties had nourished optimism and demands. It is not a coincidence that in 1975 the *Financial Times* described the surge of nationalism as a 'revolt of rising expectations'.<sup>1162</sup>

In 1964, the Labour leader Harold Wilson had won an election promising an end to deflationary policy and a solution to the recurring sterling crises faced by the country since the end of the war. By July 1966, the promise had to be broken and the government passed a series of cuts to public spending and a wage freeze that *The Economist* defined as 'the biggest deflationary package that any advanced industrial nation has imposed on itself since Keynesian economics began'.<sup>1163</sup> The following year, two weeks after the victory of the SNP in Hamilton, confronted with another balance of payment crisis, the government had to accept the humiliation of sterling devaluation that it had tried to avoid since it came into office. It is in this context of policy failure and general sense of British decline that nationalism arose as an alternative to the traditional parties, not only in Scotland, but also in Wales, where Plaid Cymru won a by-election in July 1966.<sup>1164</sup>

The rise of the SNP to prominence forced a debate over the fiscal position of Scotland with regard to the rest of the UK. It is not clear where the claim that the Scots were contributing to the Union more than they received came from. There is no trace of it in the

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<sup>1160</sup> McCrone, GAVIN (1969) *Scotland's Future. The Economics of Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell) pp. 66-67. He pointed out that although the British post-war fiscal policy had certainly damaged, to some extent, Scotland's economy, allowing it to de facto run a budget deficit, regional policy had precisely this purpose of differentiating policy across the UK.

<sup>1161</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 262.

<sup>1162</sup> Quoted in BROWN, GORDON (1975) 'Introduction: The Socialist Challenge', in GORDON, BROWN (ed.) *The Red Paper on Scotland* (Edinburgh: EUSPB) p. 7. As pointed out by Hanham, expectations were also raised by the ambitious plans for growth published by successive British governments throughout the 1960s. HANHAM, H. J. (1969) *Scottish Nationalism* (London: Faber&Faber) pp. 181-182. See: TOOTHILL, *op. cit.*; SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND (1963) *Central Scotland: A Programme for Development and Growth* (Edinburgh: Scottish Development Department); SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND (1966), *op. cit.*;

<sup>1163</sup> Quoted in MARQUAND, DAVID (2008) *Britain since 1918. The Strange Career of British Democracy* (London: Weidenfeld&Nicolson) Kindle edition, loc. 4383.

<sup>1164</sup> HASSAN, GERRY (2007) 'Labour, Britishness and the Concepts of "Nation" and "State"', in GERRY, HASSAN (ed.) *After Blair. Politics after the New Labour decade* (London: Lawrence&Wishart) pp. 75-93.

party's 1946 *Statement of Aim and Policy* and, as seen in section 2.1, it started appearing in the party's propaganda in the early 1960s. London centralisation of economic policy certainly contributed to its formation, along with the disappointing performances of both Labour and Conservative governments from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s. Enticed by the nationalists' breakthrough, the *Scotsman* published a Scottish budget on July 4, 1968, followed by a Scottish budget from Her Majesty's Treasury and the Scottish Office in October 1969. The latter calculated Scotland's deficit towards the Exchequer at £466 million for the fiscal year 1967-1968, or 42% of its fiscal revenues.<sup>1165</sup> A more complete account was provided the same year by Gavin McCrone, who, using figures for 1967, found Scotland to be in deficit by a sum included between £93 and £56 million, depending on what criteria for the distribution of unallocated UK expenditure one chose.<sup>1166</sup> Hence, despite differing with regard to the precise amount, all authoritative studies published at the end of the 1960s gave a blow to the SNP's claim. It does not surprise that, despite still recording a good performance in 1970, the SNP was a declining force by then.

It is at that moment that oil came to the rescue of the party. Surprisingly, there was initial reluctance among its members to take up the issue. Both William Ross and Michael Noble, former Secretaries of State for Scotland, called for using oil revenues for Scottish purposes at about the same time. Thus, when the SNP conference met in 1972, there was fear that the party would be seen as too close to either Labour or the Conservatives, or, worse, as a pressure group begging for a little of the oil money. Gordon Wilson convinced his colleagues to organise a campaign on the theme, but his proposal was accepted by only 93 vs. 76 votes at the SNP conference.<sup>1167</sup> A year later oil prices soared, plunging Britain into its worst balance of trade deficit ever. The nationalist argument that resources were being drained away from Scotland and that independence would afford the Scots a higher standard of living seemed now beyond doubt. The very same studies that had aimed at talking the SNP down were used to confirm it. On the micro-level, the peculiar situation of the 1973 winter, with a miner's strike made worse by the increased reliance on coal after the oil hike, a three-day working week and inflation at 18% certainly contributed to the impressive result of the SNP in February 1974.<sup>1168</sup> But, more generally, as Milton Esmen commented in 1975, 'economic prospects in Scotland, for the first time since the turn of the century, had become far more promising than in England, where the economic outlook was gloomy [...] attitudes were shifting dramatically from relative deprivation to rising expectations. Scotland's prospects had never seemed brighter'.<sup>1169</sup>

The argument that it was 'Scotland's oil' depended on and, at the same time, reinforced the claims of existence of a Scottish nation entitled to special rights within the Union. It depended on it because only the recognition of the Scottish right to self-determination could legitimate the SNP's assertions of Scotland's sovereignty over the resources of its continental shelf. It reinforced it because, being a territorially-defined issue, the question of ownership and use of oil revenues made the issue of Scottish statehood especially

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<sup>1165</sup> Figures reported in BEGG, H. M. and STEWART, J. A. (1971) 'The Nationalist Movement in Scotland', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 6(1), pp. 149-150. The *Scotsman* budget was preceded by a study by K. J. W. Alexander, that, unfortunately, we were not able to consult. See, ALEXANDER, K. J. W. (1968) 'Scotland's National Balance Sheet', *Scotland*, May.

<sup>1166</sup> McCRONE, GAVIN (1969) *Scotland's*, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-66.

<sup>1167</sup> MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>1168</sup> DEVINE (2008), *The Challenge*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>1169</sup> ESMAN, MILTON (1975) *Scottish Nationalism, North Sea Oil and the British Response*, The Waverley Papers, n. 6, pp. 40-41.

salient. North Sea oil also blew away the main unionist argument that an independent Scotland would go bankrupt in a fortnight because of its substantially higher levels of per capita government expenditure. This engendered a battle of numbers that is probably insoluble, because while 70% of spending is easily attributable, there is a 30% that is hard to disentangle. In the early 1990s, Midwinter et al. argued that the then existing studies on the subject confirmed a per capita spending 20% above the UK average for the period 1967-1989 – and probably also from 1960-1961. Nevertheless, they pointed to some flaws and wondered whether such higher spending reflected need rather than preferential treatment. The studies reviewed by the authors only included what the British government labelled as ‘identifiable public expenditure’ – i.e. all those expenses that could be precisely classified as having been incurred in a specific territory.<sup>1170</sup> As they suggested, however, other expenses, such as defence and mortgage tax-relief, that were higher south of the border and could have partially offset the gap were not taken into consideration.<sup>1171</sup>

This account has recently been confirmed by Gavin McCrone. According to his calculations, Scotland’s spending has been higher than the British average since the 1960s, and probably even before, although it has progressively narrowed, from about 20% until the 1990s, to 15% in the 2000s and 10% in the last years. However, he also pointed to the fact that the methodology of the studies progressively improved, so that higher figures for previous years could simply be due to inaccurate calculations overestimating Scottish expenses.<sup>1172</sup> On the revenue side, however, the SNP has consistently claimed that oil revenues have largely compensated for higher spending. This is only partially true and mainly depends on the historical period considered. Oil did not bring in substantial revenues until the end of the 1970s (Figure 5.10), whereby an independent Scotland would have recorded budget deficits between 7 and 10% of its GDP up to 1979. The situation would have dramatically changed in the 1980s, when, with oil production in full swing, Scotland would have recorded a massive surplus equal to 30-40% of its GDP, on average, for most of the decade. Therefore, on a purely arithmetical basis, Scotland would have probably been better off in the Union in the 1970s, and out of it in the following years, although falling oil prices in the second half of the 1980s would have exposed the country to wide deficits from the beginning of the 1990s, all else being equal.<sup>1173</sup> This is, however, pure speculation, as it is impossible to gauge the effect of oil revenues on endogenous growth in an independent Scotland. Elaborating upon more recent data though – and in the context of the debate over the independence referendum – McCrone has calculated that Scottish public expenditure per capita was still £1,197 higher than the British average in 2011-2012. With such an imbalance, an independent Scotland would have recorded a fiscal deficit of 14.6% of GDP in 2011-2012. If oil and gas tax revenues were included according to an allocation of 90% of resources to Scotland, the deficit would have shrunk to 5% for 2011-2012, which would still be high, but lower than the UK one (7.9%).<sup>1174</sup> In

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<sup>1170</sup> Although the authors do not make this clear, it seems to coincide with the benefit flow method mentioned in previous chapters.

<sup>1171</sup> MIDWINTER, ARTHUR, KEATING MICHAEL and MITCHELL, JAMES (1992) *Politics and Public Policy in Scotland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 98-114.

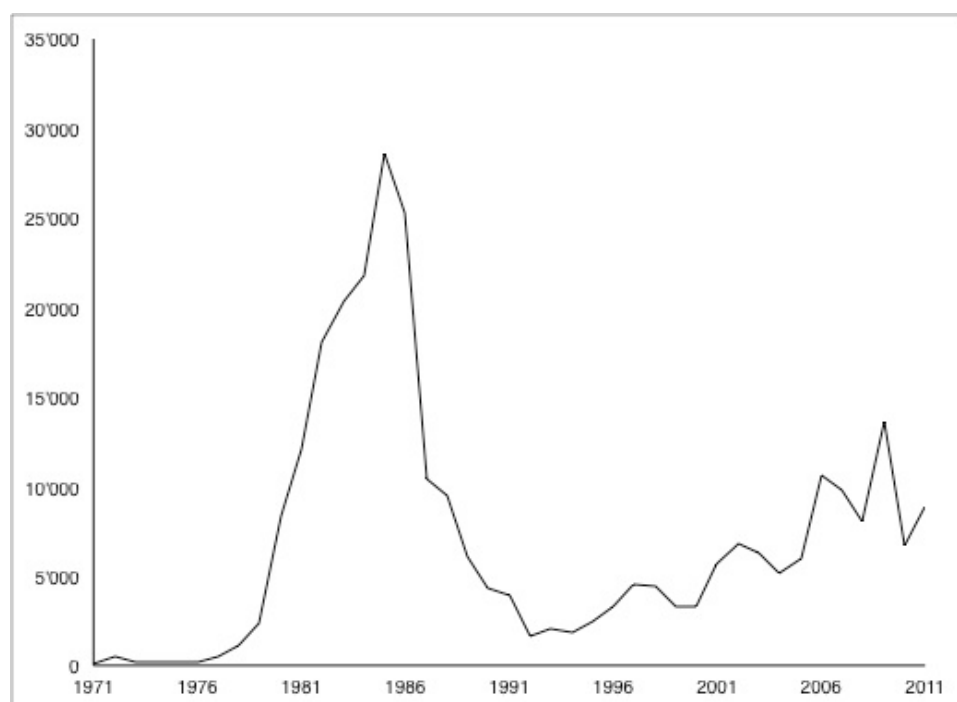
<sup>1172</sup> McCRONE, GAVIN (2013) *Scottish Independence: Weighing up the Economics* (Edinburgh: Birlinn) Kindle edition, location 188-284.

<sup>1173</sup> LEE, *op. cit.*, p. 150-151. Nevertheless, as Harvie suggests, the massive influx of revenues in the 1980s would have certainly pushed up the value of the Scottish pound thus making Scotland’s exports less competitive and potentially offsetting a part of the trade surplus. HARVIE, (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>1174</sup> McCRONE, GAVIN (2013), *op. cit.*, location 188-284. The high deficits of both Scotland and the UK are unusual and mainly due to the extraordinary context of the recent financial and debt crisis.

other words, despite having a sizable deficit, Scotland would still be in a better financial position as compared to the rest of the country.

**Figure 5.10 – UK Oil Revenues, 1971-2011 (million pounds constant 2011)**



Source: UK GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE (2012) *Government Revenues from UK Oil and Gas Production*, <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/statistics/prt/table11-11.pdf> (accessed on February 2, 2014).

Similarly, McCrone has confirmed the SNP's claim that an independent Scotland would be the 6<sup>th</sup> richest country in Europe according to OECD data.<sup>1175</sup> Oil and gas indeed would increase Scottish GDP by 21%. Yet, the OECD figure is based on the assumption that 90% of North Sea Oil revenues will be allocated to Scotland. As shown by Professor Alex Kemp, this is the most credible estimate, but in the event of Scottish secession it would still be subject to negotiation between the two countries and, given the weight of oil revenues on Scottish GDP and government revenues, even a marginal difference might have a large impact on the economy of a future Scottish state.<sup>1176</sup> Furthermore, the GDP increase due to oil-related activities would not necessarily accrue to the Scottish economy, as the figure includes the profits of oil companies working in Scotland but divided among shareholders largely located outside the region. Also, oil prices are by nature highly volatile thus making tax revenues quite unpredictable. Even in recent years these hugely varied, from £12.9 billion in 2008-2009, to £6.5 billion in 2009-10, to £8.8 billion in

<sup>1175</sup> McCrone referred to the most recent claims made by the party, rather than the one that we quoted in the previous section and that were made in 1997. See BBC (2011) 'Scotland could be sixth richest in the world, says Swinney', *BBC News*, 23 October, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-15423494> (accessed on February 14, 2014).

<sup>1176</sup> KEMP, ALEX (2011) *The Official History of North Sea Oil: The Growing Dominance of the State* (London: Routledge) Vol. 1, pp. 62-85.

2010-11. Thus, although in 2013 reserves were estimated to run for another 30-40 years, oil's real impact on the Scottish economy is hard to estimate.<sup>1177</sup>

In light of the peak in tax revenues shown in Figure 5.10, one would naturally wonder how it is possible that Scottish nationalism exploded in the 1970s, when oil was still a prospect, as actual exploitation had not started yet, and remained somnolent a decade later, when billion of pounds were being pumped out of the fields. The answer probably lies in the opportunity structure that electors could take advantage of in the two periods. In the 1970s, the SNP established itself as a reliable actor extremely competent in oil issues, while in the 1980s, it had lost credibility and, plagued by internal factionalism and financial problems, had troubles producing good policy-making.<sup>1178</sup> Furthermore, oil in itself did not rank high in voters priorities in the 1974 elections and some polls suggested that a majority was willing to share its benefits on a UK level.<sup>1179</sup> In this connection, Finlay has interestingly argued that the British identity could not be dismissed so easily 'after all, the British state had provided Scotland with schools, hospitals and jobs, and, although there were difficulties, especially in the seventies, it was a tall order to ask people to turn their back on this. Some evidence for the existence of this attitude can be found in the fact that it was the young who tended to vote nationalist [...] the idea of Britain had a lot of emotional capital in Scotland during the seventies'.<sup>1180</sup> What mattered most was to reverse the pattern of general decline of the Scottish economy and assure employment, something that the major parties had until then failed to do. The nationalists were the first to understand the chronic, and not contingent, nature of the Scottish economic problems and the first to propose radical measures to reverse it. Therefore, the impact of North Sea oil on Scottish politics, in the early 1970s, was first and foremost psychological, as it opened up the possibility of an alternative to the Union.<sup>1181</sup> It put seriously into question the constitutional bond between England and Scotland spurring a long-term process of identity redefinition that was later fuelled by other factors. Hence, it was a necessary, but not sufficient, element for the development and consolidation of a new Scottish identity and a separate public sphere.

It is difficult to evaluate the actual impact of North Sea oil on the Scottish economy. As revenues have been counted separately in government accounts, the benefits of oil are mainly to be evaluated on the basis of the terms agreed with the companies as well as the employment opportunities created. On both, many commentators are critical. According to Peter Payne, of the £13.5 billion of infrastructure needed for exploitation only 22-23% profited Scottish firms. Speed was key as both the corporations and the government wanted to get oil flowing as soon as possible and could not wait for Scottish businesses to develop the skills required to have the lion's share in oil extraction.<sup>1182</sup> The balance of payment crisis stemmed from the 1973 increase in oil prices pushed the government to borrow heavily on the international market – about \$10 billion or 5% of its gross national

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<sup>1177</sup> McCRONE, GAVIN, *op. cit.*, location 170-284.

<sup>1178</sup> HUTCHISON, IAIN G. C., *op. cit.*, pp. 119-126. Other reasons are to be found in Labour's successful efforts to modernise the party and the relatively low popular support for independence, which, at a time when the SNP retreated into a fundamentalist backlash, favoured home rule parties such as Labour and the SDP-Liberal Alliance.

<sup>1179</sup> HARVIE (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 130. ESMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>1180</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 330.

<sup>1181</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (2012) 'Scotland Out of the Union? The Rise and Rise of the Nationalist Agenda', *The Political Quarterly*, 83(1), pp. 69-76.

<sup>1182</sup> PAYNE, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-33.

product – and used future oil revenues as a collateral, which it did again in 1976 when it asked for a loan from the International Monetary Fund.<sup>1183</sup> Speed affected negotiations with the corporations, in which, as Harvie suggested, the UK government was extremely generous in imposing low royalties and taxation levels as well as in granting licences.<sup>1184</sup> Harvie further argues that oil was not such a godsend for the Scottish economy, as it absorbed 25% of national investment which could have been directed to other sectors, and that the dominance of foreign companies, especially American ones, was felt almost as a ‘colonial imposition’.<sup>1185</sup>

Overall, oil created about 90,000 new jobs in Scotland, but their distribution was not even. More than half of them were concentrated in the east, especially in Grampian, which has since become the second richest region in the entire UK behind Inner London.<sup>1186</sup> In this connection, it is relevant to notice that the SNP drew most of its electoral support from the north-east of Scotland – Grampian, Tayside and Central.<sup>1187</sup> In 1974, 71% and 64% of seats won in the two elections were in these three regions, 42% and 27% in Grampian alone. The trend is confirmed when looking at the number of votes obtained.<sup>1188</sup> As Iain Hutchison suggested, the impact of oil on job creation in Eastern Scotland probably played a role in attracting these voters to the SNP. But, also, the SNP had trouble breaking traditional voting allegiance, especially among Labour voters in Western Scotland and the Central Belt. Hence, the party electorate was mainly made up of young socially mobile workers either in the oil-regenerated North East or in the new towns built up under regional policy programmes of new industry formation.<sup>1189</sup> Even today, despite being quite evenly represented across Scotland, the party is overrepresented in the North East.<sup>1190</sup>

Structural change eventually came in full swing throughout the 1980s and mainly depended on the rise of services that, in the early 1990s, absorbed the surplus in manufacturing. The financial sector did especially well and by 1995 Edinburgh became the fourth most important stock exchange in Europe.<sup>1191</sup> While England fell into recession, Scotland almost totally closed the gap with the UK average GDP per head and unemployment. It is in this context that the subsidy-surplus debate was revived by the

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<sup>1183</sup> ESMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 36; FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>1184</sup> HARVIE (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 264. And yet, as recently argued by Bernard Mommer, such a reading only looks at the cash revenue side of the possible economic benefits of oil. On the contrary, the UK has adopted a strategy that attracts companies and focuses on taxation at the gasoline pump, thus enabling the formation of a strong indigenous oil services industry, especially in finance, and, at the same time, maximising state revenues from consumers. MOMMER, BERNARD (2002) *Global Oil and the Nation State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>1185</sup> HARVIE (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 142. On this specific issue, Harvie seems to indulge in the internal colonialism thinking that was widespread in the 1970s and probably reflects part of the then Scottish public opinion, as witnessed by literary events such as the drama *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*, that centred around the theme of big American firms’ exploitation of North Sea oil and was extremely popular.

<sup>1186</sup> LEE (1995) *op. cit.*, pp. 55 and 103-104. McCURONE, GAVIN, *op. cit.*, location 159.

<sup>1187</sup> But also in the Highlands and Galloway and the Borders.

<sup>1188</sup> AGNEW, JOHN (1984) ‘Place and Political Behaviour: the Geography of Scottish Nationalism’, *Political Geography Quarterly*, 3(3), pp. 191-206.

<sup>1189</sup> HUTCHISON, *op. cit.*, p. 123. Thus, paradoxically the UK regional policy partly set the ground for the rise of the SNP in the 1970s.

<sup>1190</sup> MITCHELL, JAMES, BENNIE, LYNN AND JOHNS, ROB (2011) *The Scottish National Party: Transition to Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) table 4.11, p. 67.

<sup>1191</sup> PAYNE, *op. cit.*



Tories. In 1987, after a terrible electoral performance in Scotland, but a victory in the UK as a whole, the Conservative Chancellor, Nigel Lawson, criticised the Scots for being characterised by a ‘subsidy culture’. Similar accusations were later repeated in the press.<sup>1192</sup> The answer coincidentally came some years later in the form of two papers published by the Scottish Centre for Economic and Social Research, founded the same year as Lawson’s statement, which strongly rejected the Conservative argument.<sup>1193</sup> James Mitchell’s *The Myth of Dependency* and George Rosie’s *Scotching the Myth*.<sup>1194</sup> Since 1992, the government began regularly publishing, through the Scottish Office, a yearly account of expenditures and revenues in Scotland which consistently showed Scotland to be in a worse fiscal position than the whole of the UK.<sup>1195</sup> This offered Salmond the opportunity to present the SNP’s own calculations in the series of papers published in 1995 seen in section 5.2.2. Since then, such discussion has remained a central item of the independence debate. Its persistence is certainly due to the lack of precise statistics – mainly because of the unallocated quota of spending mentioned above – and to the virtual impossibility to correctly predict the economic consequences of independence, as evidenced by the fact that, during the 2014 referendum campaign, although the Scottish population was pretty satisfied with the work the parties had done to make their cases, still 70% of residents in the region argued that ‘neither campaign can accurately estimate the consequences of independence’.<sup>1196</sup>

Margaret Thatcher was right when she argued that, looking at the data, Scotland was the richest region in the UK except for the over-crowded South East. When looking at per capita statistics, the argument that Scotland has not grown at the same pace as the rest of the country does not find evidence, at least not in the years 1970-1996. During this period, Scotland’s per capita GDP grew on average 2.47% per year in real terms, second only to Northern Ireland at 2.59% and, in any case, more than the UK average (2.19%) and that of the South East of England (2.28%). Breaking down the results by decade, the region ranked second in the 1970s, penultimate, but still above average in the 1980s, and first between 1990 and 1996 (Table 5.1). The situation has not substantially changed in the last two decades, with Scotland’s gross value added (GVA) per capita expanding at exactly the same pace of the UK average (1.4%) and gross disposable household income (GDHI) per capita increasing slightly more than the UK average, at 1.5%. Yet, in absolute terms, up to the 1990s, Scottish GDP did lag behind relatively to the rest of the UK and this was visible in the steady flow of people leaving the region to look for employment opportunities in the South or overseas.<sup>1197</sup> Similarly, apart from some years in the 1970s, the unemployment rate remained consistently higher than the UK as a whole and increased dramatically in the 1980s, going from the 6.4% of the 1973-1979 period to 11.6% in 1979-88, with a peak at 14% in 1986, while the British average was equal to 4.7% in the 1970s and 9.9% in the

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<sup>1192</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 369.

<sup>1193</sup> See section 5.2.2 for further information.

<sup>1194</sup> MITCHELL, JAMES (1990) *The Myth of Dependency*, SCESR Forward series, paper n. 3; ROSIE, GEORGE (1992) *Scotching the Myth: An Investigation*, SCESR Calton series, paper n. 4.

<sup>1195</sup> The Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland series is available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Economy/GERS/Publications> (accessed on November 27, 2014).

<sup>1196</sup> HENDERSON, AILSA, DELANEY, LIAM and LINEIRA, ROBERT (2014) *Risk and Attitudes to Constitutional Change* (Edinburgh: Scottish Centre on Constitutional Change) p. 8.

<sup>1197</sup> PEDEN, GEORGE (1993) ‘An Agenda for the Economic History of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland’, *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 13(1), pp. 5-26.

1980s.<sup>1198</sup> Hence, although the 1980s were years of successful structural adjustment and economic convergence, the process had a huge price: 30% of graduates had to leave the country in order to find employment, about one million and a half Scots lived on the minimum salary and people worked longer hours. As Richard Finlay pointed out, ‘whatever the success of government policy in restructuring the Scottish economy, and no matter how successful it was in the long term, the fact remains that it was not done without pains’.<sup>1199</sup>

**Table 5.1 – Real GDP Growth per Capita, selected UK regions, 1970-1996 (average by decade)**

Period	England	South East of England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales	UK as a whole
1970-1979	2.16%	2.47%	3.23%	2.74%	2.25%	2.56%
1980-1989	2.43%	2.57%	2.14%	2.30%	2.62	2.22%
1990-1996	1.46%	1.61%	2.31%	2.32%	0.64%	1.62%
1970-1996	2.08%	2.28%	2.59%	2.47%	2.05%	2.19%

Source: Our calculations on UK Office of National Statistics, regional accounts data. The base year used for real figures is 2012.

In this connection, it is interesting to note that, between 2000 and 2013, an average 31.3% of Scots reckoned that England was benefiting more from the Union against 21.8% thinking that Scotland did (Table 5.2), which would show that the SNP’s arguments had made inroads into a sizable part of the Scottish population. Furthermore, Bennie et al. found that, already in the early 1990s, a majority of Scots agreed with this claim.<sup>1200</sup> What is surprising, however, especially in light of recent events, is that the two groups have been converging rather than diverging. Scotland’s economic performance in the last decade can help understand this, as real GVA and GDHI per head grew steadily and in line with each other and the UK average. The financial and debt crisis hit badly the economy in 2009-2010, but GDHI did not decrease (Figure 5.11) and unemployment remained low, by European standards (from 4.7% in 2008 to 7.3% in 2013),<sup>1201</sup> and in line with average UK figures, which certainly contributed to avoiding a scenario such as the one realised in Catalonia.

<sup>1198</sup> LEE, *op. cit.*, p. 67; McCrone, GAVIN, *op. cit.*, location 142; Office of National Statistics figures for UK as a whole data.

<sup>1199</sup> FINLAY, RICHARD J. (2008) ‘Thatcherism and the Union’, in THOMAS MARTIN, DEVINE, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>1200</sup> BENNIE et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 102-124. In the early 1990s, Brand, Mitchell and SurrIDGE also showed that a feeling of collective relative deprivation (i.e. the impression that Scotland was deprived relatively to other comparable areas of the UK and that such deprivation was unnecessary and due to government action), linked to independence as the solution to such deprivation, was the variable that best explained SNP’s vote as compared to Labour’s vote. BRAND, JACK, MITCHELL, JAMES and SURRIDGE, PAULA (1994) ‘Social Constituency and Ideological Profile: Scottish Nationalism in the 1990s’, *Political Studies*, 42(4), p. 627.

<sup>1201</sup> UK Office of National Statistics figures.

**Table 5.2 – Who Benefits More from the Union?, 2000-2013 (percentage of regional population)**

	2000	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Av.
<b>England</b>	42	38	30	36	27	28	23	29	28	32	31
<b>Scotland</b>	16	18	24	21	25	24	26	22	22	20	22
<b>Equal</b>	36	39	40	34	39	40	45	44	45	41	40
<b>Neither</b>	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<b>D/K</b>	4	4	6	8	8	6	5	5	5	6	6

Source: Scottish Social Attitude Survey consulted at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/> (accessed on February 12, 2014).

**Figure 5.11 – Scotland’s GVA and GDHI per Capita Real Growth, 1998-2011**



Source: Our calculations on UK Office of National Statistics, regional accounts data. The base year used for real figures is 2012.

### 5.3.2 Political Marginalisation

Why nationalism did not explode in a region with one of the longest sovereign traditions in Europe at a time, the nineteenth century, when this ideology was sweeping the continent has been a recurrent question among scholars.<sup>1202</sup> It is tempting to conclude that, for much of its history, Scotland was a nation without nationalism, but this would be a wrong assertion. Scotland’s nationalism was unionist-nationalism and the Scots’ self-understanding was grounded in the parallel recognition of their distinctiveness as Scots

<sup>1202</sup> See for instance NAIRN (1997) *op. cit.*; NAIRN (2003) *op. cit.*; HARVIE (1998) *op. cit.*; KIDD, COLIN (1993) *Subverting Scotland’s Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); ASH, MARINELL (1980) *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head).

and their participation in the union state of Great Britain.<sup>1203</sup> The true novelty of the SNP's nationalism lay in its anti-unionist character: it was not the awakening of a dormant identity, but the re-interpretation and questioning of part of it, i.e., its Britishness. As argued by Linda Colley, the British identity was forged out of the Union between England and Scotland – in which also Wales and, later, Ireland participated – and was based on the pillars of Protestantism, the rivalry with France, and the Empire. The last element was especially important to the Scots, not only for its obvious economic advantages, but also because it was one of the few realms in which they could truly feel to be partners on a par with the English. If, on a slip of the tongue, people often mistook Great Britain for England, nobody ever 'referred to an *English* empire'.<sup>1204</sup> Since the last quarter of the eighteenth century the barriers to the advancement of Scots within the British institutions were progressively removed. Apart from the commercial advantages brought about by the Union, the Scots did profit from career avenues in British politics and in public employment, at home and abroad, in the army and the civil service. Despite Scotland representing about 10-13% of the British population, between 1850 and 1939, a third of governors-general in the Empire came from the region.<sup>1205</sup> By the early twentieth century, English political propaganda could even satirically decry the Celtic 'take over' of British institutions, with the Scots playing a leading role.<sup>1206</sup> The concentration of people of Scottish origins in the army and in imperial positions abroad was certainly influenced by the preference of the more affluent English elites to take employment at home, but it undeniably provided a source of material prosperity and, individual and collective, self-esteem unprecedented before.<sup>1207</sup>

Nevertheless, the British self-understanding never replaced the identities that pre-existed it and related to the constituent units of the United Kingdom. With regard to Scotland, Colin Kidd argued that, at the time of the Acts of Union, the population of Scotland had already achieved a fully-formed national consciousness – arguably going back to the fourteenth century Wars of Independence and the Declaration of Arbroath –<sup>1208</sup>

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<sup>1203</sup> McCrone, DAVID (2012), *op. cit.*,

<sup>1204</sup> COLLEY, LINDA (1992) *Britons, Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press), p. 130.

<sup>1205</sup> FINLAY (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>1206</sup> See the pamphlet, *The Oppressed English* quoted in COLLEY (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>1207</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 128-129.

<sup>1208</sup> The Declaration of Arbroath has been defined by Ranald Nicholson as the 'most impressive manifesto of nationalism that medieval Europe produced'. NICHOLSON, RANALD (1974) *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh: Oliver&Boyd). The Declaration certainly is one of the most interesting texts of medieval Western Europe. It consisted in a letter probably written by King Robert I and his council – and sealed by about 40 nobles, barons and freeholders – to the Pope John XXII, in 1320, in order to ask him to take their side against the pretensions of Edward II, King of England, over their realm after the dynastic competition triggered by the death of Alexander III in 1286. The document, written in Latin and meant as a petition, was later turned into a piece of national mythology from the seventeenth century onwards and came to be known as the Declaration in the early twentieth century. The echoes of modern nationality and ethnicity that we would easily recognise in the text today refers to a rather different conception of nation and people. As pointed out by Dauit Broun, 'the doctrine here was that sovereign kingdoms constituted peoples, not that ethnic communities should be politically independent; nations were communities of submission, not people bound together equally by a common culture'. BROUN, DAUIT (2003) 'The Declaration of Arbroath: pedigree of a nation?' in GEOFFREY, BARROW (ed.) *The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Settings* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland) p. 11. See also: COWAN, EDWARD (2003) *'For Freedom Alone': the Declaration of Arbroath* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press). Interestingly, with regard to the issue of the early formation of the Scottish nation, Kidd clearly distinguished between the medieval aristocratic national community that had in effect arisen in Scotland and the modern 'popular form of

mainly based on ideas of contractualism between the King and the ‘community of the realm’ and a specific Scottish Whig tradition distinct from the English one.<sup>1209</sup> Yet, during the crucial decades of the Scottish Enlightenment, the ideas of freedom and nationhood that had gone hand in hand in the Scottish Whig tradition came to be dissociated. Liberty was now identified with the advantages offered by the Union and entailed a rejection of Scottish feudal institutions, seen as backward and uncivilised, and the historical tradition attached to them. The Scottish whigs moved from a conception of liberty as aristocratic resistance against the tyranny of the King, to the English ideal of ‘the liberty of all men to enjoy security in their property and persons on a level footing under the rule of law’.<sup>1210</sup> In these conditions, the Scottish past could not sustain a solid ideology of nationhood. Yet, at the same time, the Scottish and English whigs failed to forge a genuine British identity and rather ended up creating Anglo-Britishness, as a compromise between the two communities’ historical traditions. As Kidd concluded, ‘the ideological consequences of the processes described in this study are therefore the triumph of Anglo-Britishness; the dismal failure to construct a wholeheartedly “national” British identity different from loyalty to Crown or to Empire; and a continuing Scottish national identity weakened by a loss of ideological coherence’.<sup>1211</sup>

This ‘unaccomplished work’ was reflected in Britain’s institutional architecture, as the Kingdom became a union, but not a unitary state.<sup>1212</sup> Its constituent parts enjoyed considerable autonomy and policies of complete homogenisation were never pursued. On the contrary, while the old landed Scottish aristocracy affected English manners and obtained its education in English institutions, despite being strongly unionist, the commercial bourgeoisie that arose from the buoyant exploitation of imperial markets was also proudly Scottish: ‘not only did it speak with a Scottish accent, it immersed itself in the folklore and literature of its native land’ and, even more importantly, ‘it celebrated its distinctive values of thrift, hard work and personal achievement’.<sup>1213</sup> Largely diffused by the popular literary tradition of the Kailyard which arose at the end of the nineteenth century, the myth of the ‘lad o’ pairts’, a poor but talented individual, was a widespread stereotype of Scottish society, which was deemed naturally more egalitarian than the

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nationhood’ that failed to fully blossom in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. KIDD, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-279.

<sup>1209</sup> KIDD, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>1210</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 272.

<sup>1211</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>1212</sup> Quoting Stein Rokkan, Mitchell defines a union state as ‘not the result of straightforward dynastic conquest. Incorporation of at least parts of its territory has been achieved through personal dynastic union, for example by treaty, marriage or inheritance. Integration is less than perfect. While administrative standardization prevails over most of the territory, the consequences of personal union entail the survival in some areas of pre-union rights and institutional infrastructure which preserve some degree of regional autonomy and serve as agencies of indigenous elite recruitment’. MITCHELL (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 38. David McCrone still defined it as a unitary state, but in which Scotland remained different and then quoted David Marquand arguing that ‘the UK is not a state in a continental sense. It is a bundle of islands (including such exotica as the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man which are not even represented at Westminster), acquired at different times by the English (sic) crown, and governed in different ways [...] its inhabitants are not citizens of a state, with defined rights of citizenship. They are subjects of a monarch, enjoying “liberties” which their ancestors won from previous monarchs’. McCRONE, DAVID (2003) ‘Redesigning the UK: the politics of devolution’, in GAGNON, ALAIN G., GUIBERNAU, MONTSERRAT and ROCHER, FRANÇOIS, *The Conditions of Diversity in Multinational Democracies* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy) p. 141-142.

<sup>1213</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 182.

English one.<sup>1214</sup> On the institutional level, Scotland could retain its own legal and education systems, while the Church of Scotland maintained its autonomy. Furthermore, until the interwar years, daily affairs were governed by a powerful system of local boards, whereby the Scottish middle classes already possessed ‘liberty, economic prosperity and cultural integrity, the very advantages for which European nationalism had yearned for so long’ and thus had ‘no reason to seek parliamentary independence or to adopt a nationalism which was hostile to the British state’.<sup>1215</sup>

Mainly as a consequence of the war effort, the interwar years brought about a much stronger centralisation continued in the immediate post-Second World War period through the expansion of state spending. Along with the demise of empire, such a shift of powers to London did bring about a feeling of marginalisation among the Scottish population.<sup>1216</sup> Yet, the SNP had to wait about 30 years to have a decisive impact on British politics. Among the reasons for this, the creation of a new British consensus based on the welfare state probably explains best the continuous strength of the unionist parties until the late 1960s, not least because, as seen above, it offered the Scots an unprecedented level of wellbeing. The welfare provisions also brought the state into the ordinary life of the Scots as never before, with the Scottish Office acquiring much more competences.<sup>1217</sup> Some authors, however, argue that this took on a specifically Scottish character and the ‘welfare years’ were characterised by a truly Scottish welfare. Planning and delivery of social services brought about a form of administrative devolution that reinforced the idea of Scotland as a territorial and administrative unit of development with its own peculiar interests and agenda separate from the rest of the United Kingdom.<sup>1218</sup> As Lindsay Paterson asserted, Scotland’s administration became a Scottish technocracy, whereby bureaucrats maintained great autonomy in a wide range of matters – housing and education above all, but also economic policy – by means of interpretation and implementation of laws. This institutional architecture also granted privileged contact with the centre, which was considered more valuable than political autonomy because it secured access to the wider pool of British resources. All occurred in a context where the Scottish identity was taken

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<sup>1214</sup> As we have seen in section 5.2.4, this image of the hard-working and talented Scottish population as one of Scotland’s major assets has resorted widely in the SNP’s propaganda.

<sup>1215</sup> DEVINE (2008) ‘Three’ *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14. Regarding the ‘lightness’ of the British identity, Linda Colley pointed to the fact that the teaching of British history was dramatically neglected. This is all the more relevant as Scotland has recently seen a flourishing of research and teaching of Scottish history. The BBC probably was the most important institution shaping a sense of Britishness, but this changed with the creation of regional channels. COLLEY, LINDA (2009) ‘Does Britishness still Matter in the Twenty-First Century – and How Much and How Well Do the Politicians Care?’, in ANDREW, GAMBLE and TONY, WRIGHT (eds.) *Britishness, Perspectives on the British Question* (Chichester, UK/Malden, MA: Wiley & Sons) pp. 21-29. For an appraisal of recent trends in history writing on Scotland see FINLAY, RICHARD J. (2001) ‘New Britain, New Scotland, New History? The Impact of Devolution on the development of Scottish historiography’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 36(2), pp. 383-393.

<sup>1216</sup> ESMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>1217</sup> FINLAY, RICHARD J. (1997) *A Partnership for Good? Scottish Politics and the Union since 1880* (Edinburgh: John Donald), pp. 134-144.

<sup>1218</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 114-118. This seems to be confirmed also by KEATING (2001) *Nations, op. cit.*, p. 199-262 and NAIRN (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 187, when they define Scotland as a ‘managing society’.

for granted and strengthened the perception of a specific Scottish interest that had to be pursued through collaboration with London.<sup>1219</sup>

Consciously or not, such a ‘Scottish dimension’ was actively exploited by both Labour and the Conservative Party during the 1950s and early 1960s. Winston Churchill, for instance, played the Scottish card against socialism and centralisation. Attacking Labour’s socialism at a meeting in Edinburgh held before the 1950 general election, he argued that ‘the principle of centralisation of government in Whitehall and Westminster is emphasised in a manner not hitherto experienced or contemplated in the (1707) Act of Union’ and, suggesting that it raised questions concerning the relationship between Scotland and England, he concluded that ‘I would never adopt the view that Scotland should be forced into the serfdom of socialism as a result of a vote in the House of Commons’.<sup>1220</sup> This does not mean that he was ready to concede anything more than administrative devolution through the Scottish Office, but the point is that he deliberately played on a conception of Scotland as a distinct political unit with its own specific interests. So did Labour in the early 1960s. The party’s main propaganda document produced in this period – *Signposts for the Sixties* – displayed arguments surprisingly close to those that the SNP would make some years later. It declared for instance that: ‘from 1951-61 the number of males in employment in Scotland has decreased by 16,000 while increasing by 839,000 in Great Britain [...] the truth is that the prosperity so often claimed for Britain has been more or less confined to the range of new and expanding industries that have settled overwhelmingly in the area running from Birmingham to London. The economic experts call this *the coffin* because of the shape it makes if drawn on a map. It is a suitably sombre title, for the hopes of Scottish prosperity have been buried in this area during the years of Toryism’.<sup>1221</sup>

We should refrain from purely instrumentalist understandings of the welfare consensus. As seen in the previous section, the idea of a British identity had strong emotional currency in the 1970s – and still does today, although certainly to a lower extent. For instance, as McEwen has argued criticising Paterson, it is questionable whether the ‘national’ in the National Health Service (NHS) referred to Scotland rather than Britain.<sup>1222</sup> At the same time, it is clear that the system could enjoy a solid legitimacy provided that welfare institutions delivered the goods. Indeed, the technocratic character of government in Scotland stemmed from a fundamental tenet of the social agreement at the basis of post-World War II Britain. This was rooted in the 1930s ‘middle opinion’, that is, the paternalist idea, shared by both Tories and Labour, that democracy was not so much about participation, as about improving people’s material conditions in order to deliver real freedom. Hence, efficiency warranted large powers being devolved to unaccountable specialised bureaucracies. This in part confirms the SNP’s claim that Scotland had been

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<sup>1219</sup> PATERSON, LINDSAY (1994) *The Autonomy of Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) pp. 130-131; McEWEN, NICOLA (2002) ‘State Welfare Nationalism: The Territorial Impact of Welfare State Development in Scotland’, *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12(1), p. 73.

<sup>1220</sup> Quoted in MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>1221</sup> Quoted in *idem*, p. 35.

<sup>1222</sup> McEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 71. Here McEwen criticises PATERSON (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 103, who argued that the welfare state in Scotland in the 1950s and 1960s took on a distinctively Scottish character thanks to administrative autonomy.

ruled by a gigantic administrative structure<sup>1223</sup> and, as suggested by Mitchell, it also was the legacy of a state architecture devised before the age of modern mass democracy, whereby it guaranteed pluralism but not democracy.<sup>1224</sup> Finlay dubbed it ‘benevolent authoritarianism’ and eloquently caught its essence when he wrote that ‘the “experts” knew what was best, and the public was expected to accept it with gratitude’.<sup>1225</sup> As we have seen in section 5.3.1, from the 1960s on the technocrats had troubles living up to their promises; hence, people looked for other ways of organising the state.<sup>1226</sup> The SNP, with its radical claims of self-determination, was one such way, although helped by fortune as the discovery of North Sea oil came at a time when it could make a formidable difference in the party’s arsenal.<sup>1227</sup>

**Figure 5.12 – Conservative Seats in Scotland, 1945-1997**



Source: HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

The first signs of the end of the British consensus coincided with the beginning of the divergence between Scottish and English political behaviours that lies at the roots of the SNP’s denunciation of a ‘democratic deficit’. Although the fall of the Conservatives in Scotland was evident in the late 1980s, some authors argue that the process began much earlier. Iain Hutchison identifies 1959 as the turning point, with Tories recording a favourable swing of 1.4% in England against pretty much the same for Labour in Scotland. From that election on the Conservatives never performed as well in Scotland as in England

<sup>1223</sup> In 1970, there were 8,300 civil servants in the Scottish administration. By the early 1990s, the Scottish Office alone employed about 12,000 people, more than the European Commission of the time. HARVIE (1998), *op. cit.*, p. 119. MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, 46.

<sup>1224</sup> MITCHELL (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>1225</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>1226</sup> PATERSON (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 163-182. The point is confirmed also by Mitchell when he says that ‘the case for a Scottish Parliament is based on appreciation that the modern democratic age requires a democratic component to be added to the national distinctiveness which has been the hallmark of British pluralism’. MITCHELL (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 285.

<sup>1227</sup> FINLAY (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 158.



and the number of MPs started a long-lasting downward cycle (Figure 5.12).<sup>1228</sup> Others, however, are more prudent. Finlay and Miller, for instance, argued that, considering Scotland's large industrial basis, the Conservative dominance in the 1950s was extraordinary.<sup>1229</sup> Likewise, in the 1970s and 1980s their decline was exaggerated by the distortions of the first-past-the-post system that served them so well in England.<sup>1230</sup> Yet, the decline of two-party politics, which was much more marked than south of the border, and the rise of the SNP do suggest a change in the British consensus.<sup>1231</sup>

Margaret Thatcher dealt the mortal blow to the Conservative Party in Scotland, although this process should not retrospectively be extended to the entire 1980s, but rather set in from the second half of the decade. In a way, the SNP's argument that Thatcher was utterly against the values of the Scots makes sense, as she set out to destroy the bond on which the Union had lain since the interwar years.<sup>1232</sup> Thatcher crafted a discourse of 'two nations', pitting "hard-working" citizens against an underclass of sub-citizens parasitic upon the state for their livelihood',<sup>1233</sup> thus shattering the previous, more inclusive, national narrative of the protective nanny state. Although the impact of her policy was more rhetorical than effective, it nonetheless had real consequences for the self-understanding of the Scottish population: 'National identity, social democracy and the demand for constitutional change represented mutually reinforcing factors that combined to emphasize a sense that "Scotland is different"'.<sup>1234</sup> Thus, Scottish nationalism took the form of a defence of the welfare core of that consensus. Class and national identity came to be conflated to a large extent: while, in 1979, 43% of people identifying with the working class declared themselves to feel more solidary with English individuals of the same class than with Scotsmen of another class (22%), in 1997 the proportion had been reversed to 29% and 47% respectively.<sup>1235</sup> But the process went beyond that. On the one hand, Thatcher openly identified the Scottish autonomous institutions as a cause of British decline and, thus, as an obstacle on her revolutionary march.<sup>1236</sup> Although she did not do anything strictly speaking undemocratic, in her approach to the constituent nations of the Kingdom, she, the self-proclaimed ultimate unionist, showed a poor understanding of

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<sup>1228</sup> HUTCHISON, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>1229</sup> FINLAY (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 138-140; MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-30. In 1955 they managed to win an absolute majority (the only time in the entire century) and between 1950 and 1966 they obtained 46% of votes on average against 47% for Labour.

<sup>1230</sup> FINLAY (2008), *op. cit.*

<sup>1231</sup> The combined vote of Labour and the Conservatives in Scotland remained above 90% from 1945 to 1964, when it decreased slightly to 89.3%. It then decreased steadily to 87.6% in 1966, 82.5% in 1970, 69.5% in February 1974 and 61% in October. It resurged a little in 1979, at 73%, but later stabilised around 60% throughout the 1980s. By contrast, in England, it remained around 90% from 1945 up to 1970 and, apart from the two 1974 elections when it went down to 66% and 62%, it remained around 75% until very recently. HUTCHISON, *op. cit.*, p. 156; HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY (2008) *Election Statistics: UK, 1918-2007*, Research Paper 08/12, 1 February, <http://www.keele.ac.uk/depts/por/ukbase.htm#elections> (accessed on December 7, 2012).

<sup>1232</sup> MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>1233</sup> JESSOP, BOB, BONNET, KEVIN, BROMLEY, SIMON and LING, TOM (1988) *Thatcherism: a Tale of Two Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press) pp. 87-88.

<sup>1234</sup> McEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>1235</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80.

<sup>1236</sup> MITCHELL, JAMES and CONVERY, ALAN (2012) 'Conservative Unionism: Prisoned in Marble', in TORRANCE, *op. cit.*, pp. 178-179.

unionism and tended to conflate it with unitarianism.<sup>1237</sup> On the other, Thatcherism provided Scottish anti-Unionists with material to craft the narrative of victimisation that had been lacking, or weak, until then, a narrative that enabled the ‘nation’ to clearly identify a force responsible for all that was wrong with it. As Gerry Hassan has concisely pointed out: ‘what did happen was the delegitimation of the Conservatives which allowed Scottish politics to feel good about itself, and to wrap itself in a warm, comforting, suffocating blanket’.<sup>1238</sup>

The Scottish defence of welfare largely stemmed from the higher dependency on it of the Scottish middle-class as both providers and users. This mainly derived from Scotland’s bigger share of civil servants and social housing.<sup>1239</sup> The ‘experience of the state’, that is the taken-for-granted role of the state in assuming responsibility for the national economy, and the social change that it unleashed have probably been the single most important difference between the Scots and the English.<sup>1240</sup> The technocratic elite that – we have seen above – developed during the welfare years also played a role by setting a much more corporatist than market-driven agenda for addressing the need of economic adjustment.<sup>1241</sup> As a result, Scotland would show slightly more left-wing attitudes. This was probably much more the case in the 1970s than today. Reporting figures from the British Social Attitude Survey of 1974, Miller showed that there were some clear national divergences between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom (UK), although some could be linked to more general North-South (involving also the northern English region) and centre-periphery (with London in the middle between the North and the South of the UK) patterns. True national differences were to be found in religion, with Anglicanism predictably stronger in England; housing, as already seen above; and social class subjective identification, since the Scottish population was much more likely to define itself as belonging to the working-class. The Scots also used different media, especially newspapers written in Scotland rather than those coming from south of the border.<sup>1242</sup>

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<sup>1237</sup> FINLAY, RICHARD J. (2012) ‘Thatcherism, Unionism and Nationalism: a Comparative Study of Scotland and Wales’, in BEN, JACKSON and ROBERT, SAUNDERS (eds.) *Making Thatcher’s Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 168.

<sup>1238</sup> HASSAN, GERRY (2012) ‘“It’s only a Northern Song”: The Constant Smirr of Anti-Thatcherism and Anti-Toryism’, in TORRANCE, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>1239</sup> Local government employment for instance increased by 47.5% between 1960 and 1975, while it did only by 32.2% in England. The 79 Group asserted that, in 1977, public sector employment in Scotland was about 4% higher than in England as a share of the total workforce. Public-owned houses amounted to 54% of the total stock in Scotland against 29% in England. HUTCHISON, IAIN G., *op. cit.*, p. 114-117; 79 GROUP (1980), *op. cit.*, p. 11. Although he did not provide clear figures, Buxton revealed that Scotland was the fourth UK region for share of public sector employment on the total one, behind Northern Ireland, Wales and the North of England. BUXTON, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>1240</sup> KENDRICK, STEVE (1989) ‘Scotland, Social Change and Politics’, in DAVID, McCRONE, STEVE, KENDRICK and PAT, STRAW (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 76. Kendrick also adds two other fundamental factors explaining the political divergence between Scotland and England: the growth of privatisation, i.e., the diffusion of less communal and more individual behaviours which created an identity vacuum filled by the SNP; and the role of regional TV newscast that contributed to ingraining in people’s mind the existence of two separated unit of analysis: Scotland and Britain. Yet, these two by themselves may well have led to an alignment on Thatcher’s neo-liberal ideology, rather than opposition to it.

<sup>1241</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (1992) *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>1242</sup> The relative ‘insularity’ of the Scottish press is something that is often overlooked because of the lack of a linguistic barrier and, yet, has been pointed out by authors such as Miller and Finlay. Also the media scene became more distinctive from the end of the 1970s. By 1977, London current affairs programmes were suppressed to make room for Scottish ones and political parties began broadcasting different spots in the

With regard to social and political attitudes, people in Scotland were much more critical towards the government's performance, with about 10% fewer people judging it positive than in England; more opposed to cuts in social spending (66% vs. 61% in England) and supported the redistribution of wealth to a larger extent (64% vs. 55%) although the difference with the North of England was much smaller. They were also more in favour of comprehensive education (68% vs. 59%), while European integration and the repatriation of migrants were much less popular (50 vs. 59% and 29% vs. 39% respectively in favour).<sup>1243</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, Bennie, Brand and Mitchel obtained similar results. On average, more Scots than English perceived themselves as working-class (74% vs. 57%), held the government accountable for the state of the economy (68% vs. 53%) and believed in redistribution (60% vs. 45%).<sup>1244</sup> Over time, however, while political divergence has increased, social differences have shrunk, although some of them persist. In 2006, a higher number of Scots still identified themselves as working class (64.7% against 58.2% in England) and support for redistribution has, on average, been higher than in England (42% against 38% from 2001 to 2008), although in both cases to a lower extent than before.<sup>1245</sup> On the other hand, people with a predominantly Scottish identity are more likely to identify as left-wing than those with a predominantly British self-understanding. In 2002, for instance, 59% of those who felt mostly Scottish supported higher taxes and public spending, while the same figure for British identifiers was 46% and such difference is even stronger with regard to questions on inequality. Hence, as Lindsay Paterson, pointed out, 'in Scotland, there is an erosion of the common British meaning of politics. Appealing to left-wing sympathies in Scotland implies appealing to Scottish sympathies, and right-wing programmes similarly map onto British identity'.<sup>1246</sup>

But why is that? Michael Keating has pointed to two major factors. First, there would be an issue of policy framing. The refashioning of Scottish identity during the 1980s and 1990s was largely influenced by the opposition to Conservative England, with the consequence that public policy has become less a matter of 'precise views' than a "moral economy" [...] summed up in the critique of neo-liberal excess'.<sup>1247</sup> Invoking the examples of not charging up-front university tuition fees and giving free personal care to the elderly – two policies recently introduced in Scotland but opposed in England – he argued that

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North and the South, as they had done since the 1950s with political manifestos. MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 81; FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 377-378.

<sup>1243</sup> MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-89.

<sup>1244</sup> BENNIE, BRAND and MITCHELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-124.

<sup>1245</sup> Data coming from British Social Attitude Survey consulted at the <http://www.britsocat.com> (accessed on February 12, 2014). Redistribution has been measured through the question 'How much do you agree or disagree that government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off?' and collapsing together the 'strongly agree' and 'agree' answers. The average concerns data from 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006 and 2008. Figures for 2004, 2005 and 2007 have not been taken into account because there was no significant statistical difference between the categories selected at the 5% confidence interval. In 2011, John Curtice and Rachel Ormston have suggested that differences have consistently shrunk since devolution. CURTICE, JOHN and ORMSTON, RACHEL (2011) *Is Scotland More Left-Wing than England?*, Scotcen Brief, 42(5), December, <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/scotcen-ssa-report.pdf> (accessed on February 12, 2014).

<sup>1246</sup> PATERSON, LINDSAY (2002) 'Is Britain Disintegrating? Changing Views of "Britain" after Devolution', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12(1), p. 33. See also: BROWN, ALICE, McCRONE, DAVID, PATERSON, LINDSAY and STURRIDGE, PAOLA (1999) *The Scottish Electorate. The 1997 General Election and Beyond* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) pp. 100-105.

<sup>1247</sup> KEATING, MICHEAL (2005) 'Policy Convergence and Divergence in Scotland under Devolution', *Regional Studies*, 39(4), p. 458.

they could both be interpreted as being either left-wing, because inspired by the principle of universal provision, or right-wing, as, in practice, they benefit the better off most. What in fact matters is that both ‘tap a sense of shared responsibility and community ethos that challenges the neo-liberal market-driven assumptions of much policy under successive British governments’.<sup>1248</sup> Second, party competition is markedly different in Scotland as, to the left-wing divide, one must add the nationalist one. This is relevant because the Conservatives, despite enjoying a virtual monopoly on the right of the political spectrum, failed to expand their social basis in the region<sup>1249</sup> and this outcome mainly stems from their close connection with the main relevant other of the reinforced Scottish identity arisen in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1250</sup> Since the end of the Conservative dominance in Britain and the establishment of the Holyrood Parliament, the party has not been able to free itself of the accusation of being an English party that cannot be trusted to defend Scotland’s interest and that is not committed to devolution.<sup>1251</sup>

The SNP has not only claimed that Thatcher was totally against Scottish values, but also that she failed in her attempt to convert the Scots to her neoliberal creed. While some evidence to support such assertion might be found in the data shown above, other authors are more sceptical. Pointing to those parents who took advantage of legislation allowing them to put their children in the schools of their choice, as well as those families that bought their council houses (public ownership shrank from 54% to 38.8% in about a decade), Andrew Marr argued that, at least in part, the Scots embraced some of the reforms introduced by the Iron Lady.<sup>1252</sup> Similarly, the much-hated poll tax was devised at the University of St. Andrews, at the time a neoliberal bastion, and enacted a year earlier than in England upon the pressing requests of the Scottish Conservative MPs who, fearing that the rates’ revaluation would oust them out of their seats, were eager to see them replaced by a flat charge.<sup>1253</sup> But, at a deeper level, despite all their criticism for Thatcher’s economic recipes, both Labour and the SNP – as seen in section 5.2 – have taken up at least part of the Iron Lady’s ideological heritage.<sup>1254</sup> Salmond once unwillingly acknowledged this when, on a slip of the tongue, he asserted that: ‘the SNP has a strong, beating social conscience, which is very Scottish in itself. One of the reasons Scotland didn’t take to Lady Thatcher was because of that. **It didn’t mind the economic side so much.** But we didn’t like the social side at all’ (our emphasis).<sup>1255</sup>

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<sup>1248</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>1249</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 459.

<sup>1250</sup> PATERSON, LINDSAY (2006) ‘Sources of Support for the SNP’, in CATHERINE, BROMLEY et al. (eds.) *Has Devolution Delivered?* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press) pp. 63-64. The party’s deliberate strategy of clinging to its small but loyal core support in Scotland has played a role as well.

<sup>1251</sup> CURTICE (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 119-123.

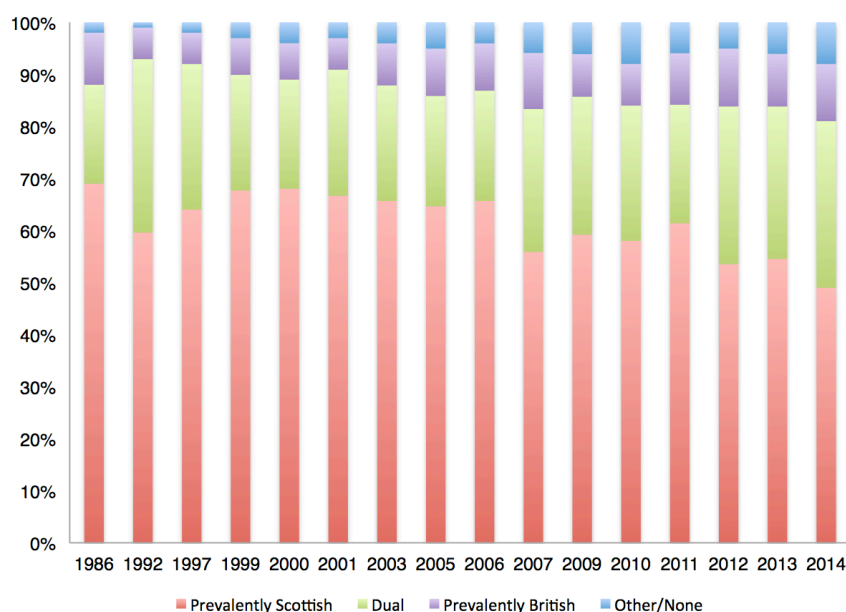
<sup>1252</sup> In this respect, however, Midwinter, Keating and Mitchell pointed out that buying one’s house is not necessarily the essence of Thatcherism. MIDWINTER, KEATING and MITCHELL, *op. cit.*, pp. 210-211.

<sup>1253</sup> MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, pp. 172-178. The first point is made also by FINLAY (2008), *op. cit.*

<sup>1254</sup> TORRANCE (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>1255</sup> Quoted in HASSAN (2012) *op. cit.*, p. 87.

**Figure 5.13 – Subjective National Identity in Scotland, 1986-2014 (percentage of regional population)**



Sources: MORENO, LUIS (2006) ‘Scotland, Catalonia, Europeanization and the “Moreno Question”’, *Scottish Affairs*, 54, pp. 1-21 for 1986 data; BOND and ROSIE, *op. cit.*, p. 37 for 1992-1997; Scottish Social Attitude Survey consulted at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/> (accessed on February 12, 2014) for 1999-2014.

All this points to the existence of societal differences, but not so big as to justify the political divergence between Scotland and England.<sup>1256</sup> The Thatcher years left an indelible scar on Scotland, as the simple fact that, in 1989, 77% of Scots felt treated as second-class citizens by Thatcher bears witness, an experience that was later crystallised in the kind of ‘national mythology’ mentioned above.<sup>1257</sup> This was coupled with an extraordinary Scottish cultural revival, which produced the grassroots support for constitutional change that had lacked in 1979.<sup>1258</sup> Along with voting for the Liberal-Democrats – which in the 1980s recorded electoral results similar to those of the SNP in the 1970s – this cultural activism channeled the rising popular discontent that had been captured by the SNP a decade before.<sup>1259</sup> After the 1987 election and, even more so, the introduction of the poll tax a year later, such movement contributed to refashioning Scotland’s identity as a true democratic place opposed to the oligarchic nature of Conservative England and,<sup>1260</sup> in the form of the Scottish Constitutional Convention,<sup>1261</sup> it put pressure on Labour to commit to

<sup>1256</sup> Likewise, Harvie, quoting a survey by Bill Miller, argues that Scottish attitudes differed only by 10% from the English ones on average, while McCrone and Hassan concludes that the value differences between English and Scots are often exaggerated. HARVIE (1998), *op. cit.* p. 213; MCCRONE, DAVID (2012), *op. cit.*; HASSAN, GERRY and WARHURST, CHRIS (2002) ‘New Scotland? Policy, Parties and Institution’, *The Political Quarterly*, 72(2), pp. 213-226.

<sup>1257</sup> BENNIE, BRAND and MITCHELL, *op. cit.*, p. 146. The figure went down to 41% under John Major.

<sup>1258</sup> That devolution in the 1970s was a top-down process is suggested by both Wilson and Marr. See WILSON (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 200 and MARR (1992) *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>1259</sup> This, at least, is Finlay’s interpretation. He explains it with the disillusion with politics following the 1979 referendum. FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 377-378.

<sup>1260</sup> PATERSON (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 163-182.

<sup>1261</sup> For more information on the Scottish Constitutional Convention see note 979.

the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. Although there was no strong evidence of higher civil activism in Scotland, the idea of Scottish civil society fighting for ‘popular sovereignty’ against the British concept of ‘parliamentary sovereignty’, and Thatcher’s authoritarian style, managed to rally discontent behind a half-way house between the status quo and the independence advocated by the SNP. It further contributed to the conflation of class and national struggle, by putting together anti-Toryism and constitutional reform. It also represented a way for the institutions of the old corporatist state weakened by Thatcher – the trade unions, local government and the Church – to find new legitimacy.<sup>1262</sup> Surprisingly, the SNP did not play a leading role in the mythologisation of the Thatcher years from the late 1980s on, but rather profited from wider trends in Scottish society.

The Scottish Parliament was established precisely with the intent of providing an answer to the feeling of political marginalisation that had haunted Scotland in the previous decades. Hence, as in the preceding case studies, it was conceived of as a nation-building effort aimed at assuaging conflict and reinforcing the cohesion of the British polity by showing understanding for the demands of its constituent units. This has had a clear impact on subjective national identification. While only 51% the Scotland’s residents declared themselves to be Scottish in 1979, they were 72% in 1992,<sup>1263</sup> yet, since the establishment of the Parliament, such growth seems to have stopped with dual and prevalently British identities in fact catching up against a reduction in prevalently, and especially uniquely, Scottish identity (Figure 5.13). Hence, in this respect, the Parliament seems to have worked as a means to revive the bonds tying Scotland with the rest of the UK, which had been seriously questioned during the 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, the Parliament was soon perceived as an inchoate step that needed to be reinforced. Already in 2001, the percentage of those who wanted its powers to be widened had gone from 56% to 66% from the previous year,<sup>1264</sup> thus suggesting that the process of devolution was still unstable. Even more significantly, while, in 1999, just before the Parliament was established, 41% of Scots thought it would be the most influential institution over the way Scotland would be run – against 39% who attributed this role to Westminster – in 2000, asked about what institution *had been* the most influential, only 13% chose the Scottish Parliament.<sup>1265</sup> The gap between expectations and outcomes was large. But more fundamentally, as we will see more in detail in the next section, Holyrood provided a completely new, and decidedly more favourable, opportunity structure to the SNP. The mixed electoral system, for instance, has assured a fairer representation. At Holyrood, the SNP can have an impact and the Scots have clearly realised it.<sup>1266</sup>

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<sup>1262</sup> FINLAY (2012) *op. cit.*, p. 176-177.

<sup>1263</sup> BENNIE, BRAND and MITCHELL, *op. cit.*, p. 132. See also, KIELY, RICHARD, MCCRONE, DAVID and BECHHOFFER, FRANCK (2005) ‘Whither Britishness? English and Scottish People in Scotland’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 11(1), pp. 65-82.

<sup>1264</sup> PATERSON, LINDSAY (2001) ‘Does Consultation Work? The Scottish Parliament’s First Two Years’, in JOHN, MACINNES and DAVID, McCRONE (eds.) *Stateless Nations in the 21st Century, Scotland, Catalonia and Quebec*, Scottish Affairs, Special Issue, p. 89.

<sup>1265</sup> BOND, ROSS and ROSIE, MICHAEL (2002) ‘National Identities in Post-Devolution Scotland’, *Scottish Affairs*, 40, p. 46.

<sup>1266</sup> Different voting behaviours at the Scottish and UK General Elections, whereby the SNP over-performs at the former and Labour at the latter, until the 2015 British election, also reflected this awareness on the part of the Scottish population. John Curtice pointed out that Scottish voters who supported the SNP at the Scottish Parliament elections were less likely to do so at the Westminster ones because, when voting for the general elections they were concerned with UK problems and viceversa at the Scottish ones. CURTICE

Furthermore, different political systems shape the political debate in different ways and this has inevitably emphasised the divergence between Scottish and English politics.<sup>1267</sup> Therefore, those differences that we have just mentioned and that are not fundamental *per se* are amplified by the existence of two different political arenas.

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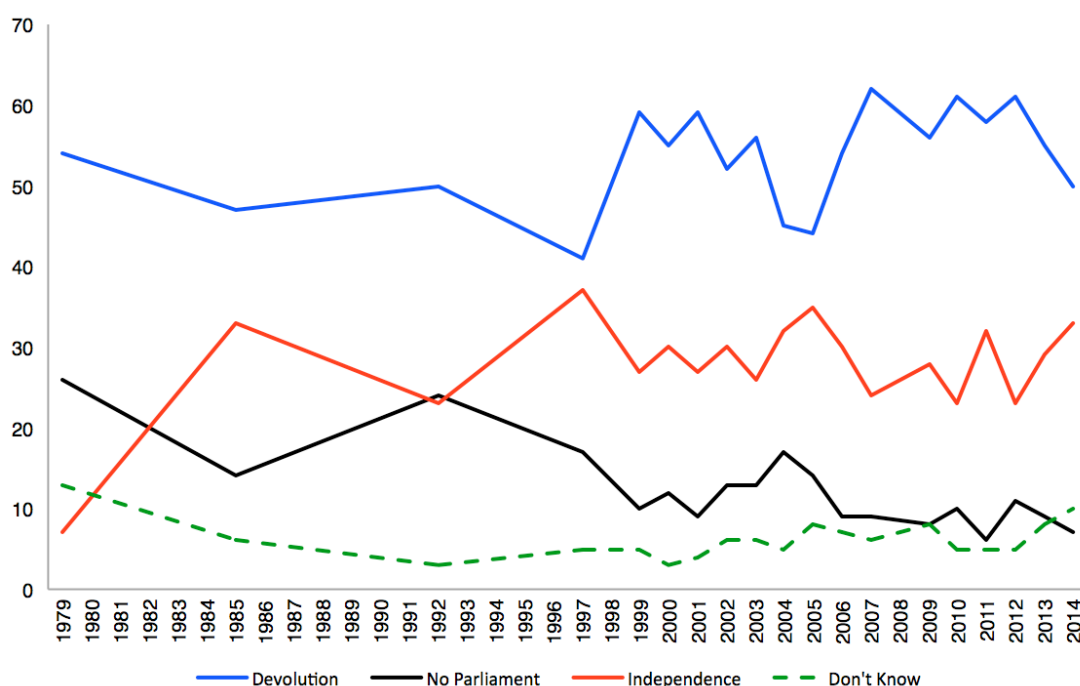
(2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 63-65. Therefore, the SNP has been able to present itself as a reliable candidate for defending the Scottish interest in the Scottish arena, as other parties in this study have done. This is much more difficult at the general election because the Labour party can clearly claim greater political clout in London thanks to its state-wide character.

<sup>1267</sup> McCRONE, DAVID (2012), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

## 5.4 Support for Independence and Electoral Results

As Figure 5.14, suggests the true increase in Scottish support for independence seems to have happened during the 1980s – although the data are not as abundant and consistent as from the mid-1990s.<sup>1268</sup> Between 1992 and 2013, despite constant fluctuations, the Scottish population seems to have remained pretty steadily divided between 30% supporting independence, 55% for devolution and 10% against autonomy. At the same time, from the late 1980s, the SNP has known a steady increase in its share of votes – provided one takes into account regional elections from 1999 on (Figure 5.1). Furthermore, the last two regional electoral victories, in 2007 and 2011, did not coincide, especially in the first case, with any major radicalisations of demands for independence.

**Figure 5.14 – Support for Constitutional Change in Scotland, 1979-2014 (percentage of regional population)\***



\* The differences in the ‘smoothness’ of the lines between the left and right ends of the figure are due to the fact that, regarding the first part, we only have data for the years 1979, 1985, 1992 and 1997, while from 1999 on we have data for each year, except for 2008. The figure therefore interpolates data up to 1999.

Sources: McEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 78, for 1979, 1992 and 1997 data; MIDWINTER, ARTHUR, KEATING, MICHAEL and MITCHELL, JAMES, *op. cit.*, p. 215, for 1985; Scottish Social Attitude Survey data for 1999-2014, available at: [whatscotlandthinks.org](http://whatscotlandthinks.org) (accessed on November 30, 2014).

<sup>1268</sup> While the 1979 data mentioned by McCrone and Paterson comes from the 1979 Scottish election survey and is used also by McEwen, figures from the Kilbrandon Commission and other opinion polls conducted in the first half of the 1970s, would suggest a higher support for independence. On the basis of a 5-option question with status quo at one extreme and ‘full responsibility for running things in Scotland’ at the other, these polls found support for the latter scenario at 23-18% of the Scottish electorate between 1970 and 1974. The question did not mention independence clearly, so this might have influenced the higher number of people choosing it in 1970-1974, but these figures are still useful to put the 1979 result in a wider perspective.



What is probably most puzzling about the SNP is that, despite all its claims, it won a majority in Scotland only in 2007, i.e. about a decade after the end of Conservative domination, when the economic adjustment had been completed, the gap with the British average per capita income had been closed, social differences were converging, and popular support for independence was not on the rise. One explanation is provided by the relationship between support for independence, national identity and electoral behaviour. One would indeed expect pro-independence Scots and people with a stronger Scottish identity to be more likely to identify with the SNP. While this is true, the extent of this connection is weaker than expected, especially when the SNP is compared to Labour. At the beginning of the 1990s there were no major differences between SNP's and Labour identifiers in terms of subjective national identification.<sup>1269</sup> In the last decade the gap has grown wider, without however becoming dramatic – the SNP has attracted on average 23% more 'predominantly Scottish' voters than Labour.<sup>1270</sup> Furthermore, during the 1990s, 'only' between 50% and 75% of SNP identifiers supported independence. Even more surprisingly, during the same period, only around 50% of overall pro-independence Scots identified with the SNP, while between 38% and 50% identified with Labour.<sup>1271</sup> This trend has remained pretty stable in the 1999-2014 period, with 40% of independence supporters identifying with the SNP on average and 28% with Labour, although the latter attracted more separatist voters, and even overtook the SNP, in the 2001-2006 years.<sup>1272</sup> Furthermore, comparing data from four surveys between 1997 and 2000, Paterson and McCrone found that while 45% of the interviewees supported independence at least in one of them, only 7% did it in all four occasions. They thus concluded that the Scots had proven remarkably open to experiment with different constitutional options and have not perceived a stark divide between independence and devolution. In other words, 'the fact that there is no stable core of supporters for independence implies not that this is a fragile option, but that many more people are prepared to countenance independence if they were persuaded that it would generate more responsive government, and would be likely to produce the kind of society they aspire to'.<sup>1273</sup>

In this connection, the establishment of the Scottish Parliament has shifted the terms of the debate from the question whether Scotland should enjoy self-government at all, to its extent, with independence among the possible options. The data obtained by McCrone and Paterson also suggests that the Scottish population has been much more 'conditional' in its support for the Union or independence. This is confirmed by figures concerning the 2014 independence referendum. As we have seen, the literature on electoral behaviour in Quebec pointed to national identity as one of the main variables influencing support for sovereignty-association. This is to be found in Scotland as well, but to a somewhat lower extent than in Catalonia, for instance. While there, in late 2013, 94.4% of those feeling exclusively Catalan declared they would vote for independence in an hypothetical referendum (see section 3.4), in summer 2014, only about 60% of those indentifying as 'Scots not British' said they would vote 'Yes'. Post-referendum results revealed that, by

<sup>1269</sup> BRAND, MITCHELL and SURRIDGE, *op. cit.*, pp. 623-626.

<sup>1270</sup> 'Predominantly Scottish' refers to the sum of people who defined themselves either as 'Scottish not British' or 'more Scottish than British'.

<sup>1271</sup> McCRONE, DAVID and PATERSON, LINDSAY (2002) 'The Conundrum of Scottish Independence', *Scottish Affairs*, 40, pp. 66-67.

<sup>1272</sup> Data from the Scottish Social Attitude Survey (1999-2014), available at: <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/> (accessed on November 30, 2014).

<sup>1273</sup> McCRONE and PATERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

mid-September, the figure increased to 88%. Yet, this 28% hike in the last weeks would still suggest that commitment to independence was not solely based on national identity, or not even strongly influenced by it. At least, it indicates that people made up their mind late in the process, which clashes with the idea of ‘unconditional’ independence supporters.<sup>1274</sup> At the same time, the perception of the probable economic consequences of independence has been the most important variable driving the outcome of the referendum. Already in 2012, 73% of those who believed that the economy would become ‘a lot better’ after independence intended to vote Yes, along with 45% who thought it would become ‘a little better’. In 2014, the shares hit 88% and 81% respectively.<sup>1275</sup> This means that the SNP was right in basing its campaign on an economic case for independence, although it has not managed to win the argument.<sup>1276</sup> The Scots’ favourite constitutional scenario has long been a Scottish Parliament with more devolved powers. Although it is not easy to understand what is the precise extent of autonomy that would be desirable for the majority of Scotland’s population,<sup>1277</sup> during the 1990s, 41% wanted a ‘strong domestic parliament’<sup>1278</sup> and, from 1999 onwards, 65% on average agreed that Scotland should be given more powers.<sup>1279</sup> Improved devolution has also been one of the main promises of the unionist parties during the campaign ahead of the independence referendum.<sup>1280</sup>

In the late 1960s and during the 1970s, the electoral breakthrough of the SNP went along with the demand for devolution – rather than independence – and was largely driven by considerations pertaining to the restructuring of the Scottish industrial system, the Labour and Conservative party’s failure to meet the expectations that they helped create in the first place, and the discovery of North Sea oil in conjunction with the crisis of the British economy. In those years, the SNP mainly attracted the vote of upwardly mobile youngsters living in areas of no Labour domination, such as the new cities arisen as a

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<sup>1274</sup> CURTICE, JOHN (2014) *Has the Campaign Made a Difference?* (Edinburgh: ScotCen) p. 16. For post-referendum data, see: CURTICE, JOHN (2014) ‘So Who Voted Yes and Who Voted No?’, available at <http://blog.whatscotlandthinks.org/2014/09/voted-yes-voted/> (accessed on December 5, 2014).

<sup>1275</sup> CURTICE, JOHN (2013) *Who Supports and Opposes Independence – and why?* (Edinburgh: ScotCen); CURTICE (2014) *Has, op. cit.*

<sup>1276</sup> Unfortunately, the relationship between considerations of the economic consequences of independence and dual identity have not been explored to the same extent as in Catalonia. Eichhorn and Paterson found that those who would have opted for more devolution, if that possibility had been given in the referendum, were more likely to be undecided, while Eichhorn showed that those with dual identities were more likely to be undecided than those with more exclusive ones. Yet, the extent of this connection was not very strong and its relationship with perceptions of the economic consequences of independence was not analysed. See: EICHHORN, JAN and PATERSON, LINDSAY (2014) *Who is Still Wavering? Turnout and the Undecided* (Edinburgh: ScotCen); EICHHORN, JAN (2014) *The Undecideds: Don’t Care or Deeply Conflicted?* (Edinburgh: ScotCen).

<sup>1277</sup> The debate has recently concerned two main options, respectively called devo-plus and devo-max. The former would entail that all powers, except for defence, foreign affairs, the overall level of taxation and monetary policy, and social security would lie with the Scottish Parliament, which would also be given sufficient fiscal responsibility to cater for the new competences. The latter would stand out for the break-up of the social pact between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Therefore, only defence, foreign policy and, arguably, monetary policy would be maintained by the UK government. It is not clear though whether devo-max would imply a division of oil-revenues, although it seems unlikely. For a discussion of these options see McCRONE, GAVIN (2013) *op. cit.*, chapter 2.

<sup>1278</sup> McCRONE and PATERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>1279</sup> Our calculations on data from the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey consulted at <http://whatscotlandthinks.org/> (accessed on February 12, 2014).

<sup>1280</sup> However, it is interesting to note that, in the early 2000s, about 50% of the Scots believed that the country would be independent in 20 years. LYNCH, PETER (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 246.

result of the regional policy enacted in the 1960s, and therefore not constrained by previous voting allegiances,<sup>1281</sup> or in the North-Eastern provinces of Grampian and Tayside, where the direct effect of the oil economy were most visible. From the late 1980s, the party profited substantially from the policies and style of the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher, and the narrative of the ‘democratic deficit’ arising therefrom. Yet, as Mitchell has pointed out, until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP maintained features of an extra-parliamentary organisation, as in fact it did not have either governing or ‘blackmail’ potential against Labour and the Tories. It is the establishment of the Parliament that has eventually enabled the party to become a mainstream political organisation and this in four major ways. First, as seen above, the more proportional electoral formula put an end to the chronic electoral inefficiency of the party, whereby it rarely managed to concentrate enough votes to maximise its number of seats. Second, and along with the first, it killed the argument that the SNP could not have an impact on policy making because it was overwhelmed by state-wide parties. Third, it provided the SNP with invaluable staffing resources in the form of administrative support as the main opposition party in Parliament.<sup>1282</sup> Fourth, since it created a dedicated Scottish political arena, ‘parties needed to be seen to act in Scotland’s interests [...] as never before’.<sup>1283</sup> This has clearly advantaged a party that claims a monopoly of representation over the Scottish polity.

This still leaves us with the question how did Scotland get to the verge of separation from the UK without any significant change in the constitutional preferences of the Scottish population? The easy answer relates to the mechanics of the 2011 election and the victory of the SNP. The outcome has as much to do with the party’s good performance during its time in government, between 2007 and 2011, as with Labour’s disastrous electoral campaign and the diverging skills of their respective leaders – Alex Salmond and Iain Gray. Having won the elections with an absolute majority, the SNP kept its promise to organise a referendum and started negotiations with the British government. A more complicated answer would take into account the travails of Labour to reinvent itself in Scotland after having lost most of its traditional constituency,<sup>1284</sup> but also to craft a positive discourse about the union.<sup>1285</sup> Such a difficulty has been patent during the referendum campaign, when the party was helplessly weak in the face of the SNP’s accusation of building up a ‘Project Fear’ in order to convince the Scots to reject independence. Hence, the emotional link to the UK that still existed in the 1970s seems to have progressively given way to a more conditional allegiance. The gradualist approach of the SNP, its instrumental argument for external self-determination and its positive message have clearly played on the pragmatism showed by the Scottish population, while its commitment to bringing about independence as the result of a democratic process in which the people will have the last word ensures that voters can elect it *despite* its separatist nature.

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<sup>1281</sup> HUTCHISON, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>1282</sup> HASSAN (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>1283</sup> MITCHELL (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>1284</sup> This was mainly based on council houses, trade unions and local government, which have been considerably weakened in the last 20 years. In addition, the SNP has certainly profited from a shift from ideological to valence voting, whereby electors change their allegiances on the basis of what party seems the best fit for pursuing their objectives. Hence, the SNP has recently been perceived as the best party to defend Scotland’s interests. HASSAN (2011) *op. cit.*; LYNCH (2009), *op. cit.*

<sup>1285</sup> HASSAN (2007) *op. cit.*

## 5.5 Conclusion

As in the previous chapters the examination carried out in this case study has focused on the three levels of discourse, the historical context and the process of formation of its version of the nationalism of the rich, and the relationship between support for independence and the party's electoral results.

The SNP is a deviant case in our study because, despite certainly being a prosperous region by global standards, Scotland has consistently been outperformed by the South East of England. Also, although when including oil revenues its per capita GDP is second only to the Inner London area, this still remains unrealised potential wealth. As a consequence, the rhetoric of economic victimisation at the core of the SNP's version of the nationalism of the rich has not been overwhelmingly geared around fiscal transfers from north to south, but rather on the better prospects for economic policy of an independent and resource-rich Scotland. Although the emphasis on oil initially used in the 'It's Scotland's Oil' campaign, has later been toned down to the advantage of a representation of the region as rich in other resources as well, oil has played a central role in allowing the SNP to support its long-standing claim that Scotland was not subsidised by England, but, on the contrary, it was being held back by a declining centralising power whose policy was tailored to the needs of the South East. Therefore, Scotland would be a richer country if independent, capable of using oil revenues and fiscal policy to improve welfare services and boost employment. Although the economic case for independence was there since, at least, the mid-1970s – and was substantially promoted by Willy Wolfe – Alex Salmond put it at the centre of SNP's discourse and improved the quality and thoroughness of the economic analysis provided by the party. More specifically, he focused less on oil and more on the obnoxious consequences of the concentration of economic activity in the South East, which, especially in the context of a global economy, did not provide a level playing field for Scottish business. By resorting to the rhetoric of small, dynamic and cohesive nations, he stressed the several comparative advantages of Scotland – oil being only one among many – and promoted a positive case for independence based on the bright future prospects of the country, rather than on any accusations of deliberate harm on the part of London.<sup>1286</sup>

While the colonial metaphor was used sometimes in the 1970s, it was more often replaced by a claim of 'provincialisation', or marginalisation, whereby, although formally being an equal partner in the Union, Scotland was not treated on a par with England. This narrative was potently transformed, during the late 1980s, into that of the 'democratic deficit'. The SNP argued that the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher had no legitimacy in Scotland, which had consistently voted against it, and nonetheless it imposed on the region its extreme neoliberal policies. The introduction of the poll tax a year before than in England was portrayed as the ultimate proof that Thatcher was treating the Scots as second-class citizens. Since those years, the SNP has consistently described Scotland as being a more 'caring' and 'compassionate' society, which, despite being competitive and highly skilled, refused the sheer individualism and monetarism of the Thatcher revolution. In this connection, the party clearly conveyed an idea of Scotland as a more advanced

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<sup>1286</sup> More than harm, the SNP's rhetoric has progressively moved to an accusation of indifference to the specific needs of Scotland and incompetence in managing the economy. However, it is surprising to find among some of the members interviewed the assertion that Scotland would have been deliberately exploited economically. See interviews with Bill Kidd and Linda Fabiani in Annex 2.

society than Tory England in the sense that, not only would it be a prosperous society, but also a fairer and more progressive one.

By the mid-1990s, the SNP also eagerly embraced devolution and was ready to play a constructive part in the Scottish Parliament – although fundamentalist challenges came again between 2000 and 2004. Since the establishment of the Parliament in 1999, the party has managed to make coexist the commitments to defend the interest of Scotland at Holyrood – and at Westminster – while at the same time working for constitutional reform. The acceptance of devo-max as a middle-ground between independence and the status quo well illustrates the gradualist consensus found within the party. Also, since the late 1980s, the SNP unambiguously declared its social-democratic outlook. This helped the formulation of the economic case for independence, as it enabled the party to portray a clearer scenario for a future independent Scotland in socio-economic terms. At a closer look, however, around the turn of the century, its social-democratic rhetoric came to be influenced by neoliberal arguments concerning the need to create a business friendly climate and improving efficiency in the public administration, that have led some commentators to define the party's economic thinking as neoliberalism with a heart.<sup>1287</sup> The party has however consistently made an instrumental case for independence, focusing on the socio-economic advantages that this would bring to the population of Scotland rather than on principled considerations relating to the right of self-determination or the need for recognition of the Scottish nation. Although the cultural dimension has not been one of the SNP's major items of discussion, the party has projected a specific Scottish self-understanding. More recently, this has coincided with the image of a more solidary and egalitarian society, firmly believing in popular rather than parliamentary sovereignty. The party has also revived the idea of the Scots as skilled and talented people – the myth of the lad 'o pairts – who can thrive in the global economy thanks to their ingenuity. In historical perspective, the main red thread has been the willingness to boost the confidence of the Scots, which since the 1990s – and more decisively so since the turn of the century – has given way to the 'positive message' in favour of independence. Since the end of the 1980s, the SNP has also assumed a europhile profile, although clearly indicating a preference for a confederal Europe. Gordon Wilson and Jim Sillars saw in the EU a tool to counter the association of independence with isolation. At the same time, the association between Scotland and the continental social-democratic tradition entailed a reinterpretation of the nation as culturally and ideologically closer to the continent than the rest of the UK. This was instrumental to stress the region's distinctiveness and to underline the more progressive outlook mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph. Hence, as in the other cases, since the end of the 1980s, Europe has been used as a positive other to counter the negative other represented by Tory England.

The immediate context of the SNP's formulation of the nationalism of the rich is to be found in the beginning of the process of structural change experienced in the region between the late 1950s and the mid-1960s. The 1950s were years of unprecedented well-being: unemployment was at a historic low, the economy grew at a good rate, the establishment of the welfare state expanded the middle class and mass consumption reached the region. This and the promises of both the Conservative and Labour party – based on the belief that central economic management could ensure sustained growth and full employment – nourished expectations that, when not met by facts, jeopardised the

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<sup>1287</sup> This however is a phenomenon that has touched also the Labour party, as well as other major European centre-left parties.

legitimacy of traditional parties. From the late 1950s to the mid-1960s, the Scottish growth rate slowed down and unemployment edged up, while emigration had never really stopped. The traditional parties devised huge investment plans under regional policy, which certainly helped soothe economic distress, but did not stop structural change. Wilson's government in particular had promised to put an end to deflation and unemployment, while, at the same time, avoiding devaluation. The July measures of 1966 and the devaluation of 1967 broke the spell and certainly favoured the SNP's victory at Hamilton. It is in this context, that the accusation of economic victimisation, present in the party's rhetoric since the early 1960s, could reach a wider audience. While it is not clear where the claim that Scotland was subsidising England came from, the argument was readily dismissed by government data. Yet, a few years later, oil rescued the nationalists, making their version of the nationalism of the rich credible and appealing. The threat of Scottish independence became real because oil had opened up the possibility of an alternative at a time when the British economy was suffering more than the Scottish one and seemed in a terminal phase of utter decline. For a time, prospects in Scotland were better than in England and the idea that the Union was holding Scotland back made sense. Yet, Scotland's population did not call for independence but rather for a bigger say on its own affairs within the British framework. The emotional commitment to the Union seems to have held up well at the time, while the risk of an 'unintended independence scenario' discouraged many voters from supporting the establishment of a Scottish assembly.<sup>1288</sup>

The reason why the SNP did not profit from the situation of the 1980s, when oil production was in full swing and Scotland politically marginalised by the Tories has probably to do with the problems that the party was going through. The 1980s, however, did provide the party with the ingredients necessary to craft a convincing rhetoric of political marginalisation. Pre-World War I Scotland had indeed tremendously profited from Empire and the wider British market, while at the same time keeping autonomous religious, educational and legal institutions. While a fully blossomed Scottish national identity did not develop, the British one did not replace it either, but identity rather remained stuck in a kind of Anglo-Britishness, as a halfway house between Englishness and Scottishness. This did not prevent the Scottish bourgeoisie from cultivating its own sense of being different, at the same time, maintaining allegiance to Britain as a whole. From the Great War centralisation increased at the expense of local autonomy and especially so after World War II. Yet, this coincided with the institution of the welfare state, which not only was wholeheartedly embraced by Scotland's population, but also favoured the rise of a specifically Scottish technocracy and the identification of a specific Scottish interest. In such conditions, administrative autonomy and privileged access to the wider pool of British resources were considered as more valuable than political autonomy. Margaret Thatcher hit the welfare consensus at its core and interpreted Great Britain as a unitary rather than a union state. In this way, she seriously jeopardised the Union in Scotland. Her discourse portrayed the Scottish autonomous institutions as a vested interest in the way of reform, which it was necessary to overthrow in order to invert British decline. The Scottish defence of welfare mainly depended on Scotland's higher dependency on the state. It then evolved into a pattern of political divergence between Scotland and England that is not explained by existing – but shrinking – differences in social structure and attitudes, but rather by the fact that the anti-Thatcher narrative arising out of the 1980s

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<sup>1288</sup> On this see: DARDANELLI, PAOLO (2005) 'Democratic Deficit or the Europeanisation of Secession? Explaining the devolution referendums in Scotland', *Political Studies*, 53(2), pp. 326-328.

favoured the conflation of class and national identity to the extent that left-wing tendencies are frequently identified with pro-Scottish leanings, while right-wing policies map onto British self-understandings.<sup>1289</sup> The SNP contributed to, but was not the main actor shaping the narrative of the ‘democratic deficit’ that have certainly reinforced the appeal of its nationalism of the rich. Such formulation was mainly carried out in the cultural and civil society spheres that were very active in the 1980s in bringing about a cultural revival as well as in building up a successful campaign for a new referendum on devolution.<sup>1290</sup>

Whether Scotland would have been better off as an independent country is a moot point. It largely depends on the criteria used and the period chosen. There is little doubt that Scotland would be a successful state, but whether it would profit or suffer from full sovereignty, it is probably impossible to say with enough certainty. In per capita terms, after a first period of convergence between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, mainly due to the good results of regional policy and the crisis of the English economy, Scotland caught up with the UK average only in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, it was a painful process that put under further stress the legitimacy of the Union. Scotland consistently enjoyed higher public spending per capita, at about 20% of the UK average, decreasing to 15-10% in later years. Although this would probably be offset by oil revenues – bearing in mind that revenues are highly volatile – and the data can vary widely according to the criteria chosen for the distribution of general expenses, it has been a major weapon in the rhetorical arsenal of the British government in countering the solidity of the SNP’s economic estimates concerning an independent Scotland, as evidenced by the debate of the 2014 referendum. In this connection, it is easy to figure out what would be the appeal of the SNP’s claims in the absence of oil revenues.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament has offered the SNP a totally different opportunity structure in which it can decisively have an impact. In this way, it can be considered as one of the major factors for the recent move of the party from marginality to mainstream and from opposition to power. It is also central to understand how the SNP could win elections, *despite* its flag policy of independence. As we have seen in section 5.4, there is neither a strong unconditional commitment to independence in Scotland nor a taboo about it. The population has consistently appeared open to experimentation and to vote for independence if convinced that it would bring substantial advantages. The reason why people vote for the SNP even if they do not support independence has to do with its capability to present itself as the best actor defending Scottish rights, its gradualist strategy and clear ideological profile, its commitment to leave the last word on independence to the Scottish population, as well as to its effectiveness in government and Labour’s mistakes during the 2011 electoral campaign. Furthermore, at a deeper level, the 2014 referendum has clearly shown the difficulty experienced by the unionist parties in making a positive case for the Union to counter to the SNP’s one. At the same time, the Nationalists have failed to win the economic case for independence on which most of their campaign had been based. Although in the last 15 years a higher percentage of the Scottish population has believed that England profits more from the Union than Scotland, this figure has been largely overwhelmed by the number of those who think that both benefit equally.

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<sup>1289</sup> Such divergence is also due to the failure of the Conservative party in Scotland to recast its image as a party that can be trusted to defend the Scottish interest.

<sup>1290</sup> With regard to the positive result of the 1997 referendum, it should be noted that the appearance of the ‘Independence in Europe’ scenario was fundamental in assuaging people’s anxiety concerning the independence scenario, which had strongly influenced the outcome of the 1979 referendum.

Furthermore, the referendum debate has demonstrated that independence is a risky option and that its consequences in terms of well-being are hardly predictable. This has clearly discouraged the Scots to opt for leaving the Union, although it equally clearly showed that they are not content with the Union. When offered the possibility to choose more devolution Scotland's population has consistently preferred this option. However, what the SNP has certainly achieved by successfully questioning the Union since the late 1960s is a 'thickening' of the Scottish political dimension and a weakening of the British one. Scottish nationalism has become more explicit and 'banal' at the same time, while independence is only one of the possible ways to realise Scotland's self-determination.





## 6 The Lega Nord

### 6.1 Origins and Evolution of the LN

When compared to the case-study parties analysed in the previous chapters, the feature of the *Lega Nord* (LN – Northern League) that immediately stands out is its complete novelty in the Italian political arena. The SNP and ERC, for instance, were founded in the interwar years, while the VB and the N-VA, despite being quite recent formations, originated in a party, the *Volkusnie*, founded in the 1950s and harking back to the older tradition of Flemish nationalism. The LN, on the contrary, arose at the turn of the 1990s from the merger of a series of autonomist movements that appeared across the North of Italy only a decade earlier and with no connection to previous political movements or traditions. Among them, the *Liga Veneta* (Venetian League) and the *Lega Lombarda* (Lombard League) played a major role.

In 1978, a young politician from the Aosta Valley<sup>1291</sup>, Bruno Salvadori, leader of the autonomist movement *Union Valdôtaine*, was seeking allies for the upcoming European elections. His effort was enthusiastically met by a group of people centred around the Venetian Philological Society, an association founded in February 1977 in Venice and fighting to ‘re-affirm the right of the Venetian nation to conserve and develop its own culture, its own language, its own roots and its own identity’.<sup>1292</sup> Until then the Philological Society had organised cultural events and covered the region of Veneto in posters and leaflets calling for a revival of the Venetian culture, but some of its members wanted to translate this endeavour into political action. Salvadori’s proposal offered the chance they were looking for. Thus, the *Liga Veneta* joined the coalition *Union Valdôtaine – Federalismo Europa Autonomie* and obtained 8,000 votes. The movement was officially constituted as a party in January 1980.<sup>1293</sup>

In the short run, the movement wanted Veneto to acquire a special statute, which a few other Italian regions like Sicily, Trentino-South Tyrol and Aosta Valley already enjoyed. In the long run, they aimed at reforming Italy in federal terms, whereby regional boundaries would be redrawn according to ethnic criteria.<sup>1294</sup> Despite few economic resources, the Venetian League was able to successfully spread its arguments through party posters, wall writings and public meetings. Not having its own media<sup>1295</sup>, it took advantage of the lively debate that originated as a reaction to its political activity in local newspapers. As a consequence, at the 1983 general elections it won 125,347 votes (4.3% of the Venetian regional vote), with results in double digits in some electoral districts.<sup>1296</sup> Traditional

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<sup>1291</sup> Aosta Valley lies in northwestern Italy, at the border with France and Switzerland, and contains a francophone minority.

<sup>1292</sup> JORI, FRANCESCO (2009) *Dalla Liga alla Lega. Storia, movimenti, protagonisti*, (Venezia: Marsilio) p. 36.

<sup>1293</sup> CAVALLIN GIANFRANCO (2010) *La vera storia della Liga Veneta*, (Vigorevea: Zephyrus Edizioni) pp. 20-65.

<sup>1294</sup> AMANTIA, AGOSTINO (1994) *Note sulla penetrazione della Liga Veneta in provincia di Belluno (Distretto dell’Alta Piave), 1979-1993*, in AGOSTINO, AMANTIA and FERRUCCIO, VENDRAMINI (eds.) *Lega e localismi in montagna. Il caso Belluno* (Belluno: Istituto Storico della Resistenza e dell’Età Contemporanea) pp. 15-17.

<sup>1295</sup> In 1986, the party founded its own paper, *Mondo Veneto* (Venetian World).

<sup>1296</sup> JORI, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

parties were stunned. What had been considered a ‘folkloric’ party had become a relevant force in one of Italy’s most populous and richest regions, with representatives in both Chambers in Rome. The Venetian League, however, was later plagued by internal conflicts and schisms that would weaken it until its merger with its Lombard counterpart in the Northern League, in 1989-1991. While at the 1985 regional elections it still did well, with 3.7% of regional votes and 7 regional councillors, at the 1987 general elections it lost its seats in Parliament.<sup>1297</sup>

In February 1979, Salvadori made another seminal encounter. At the University of Pavia he came across an electronics technician who was struggling to complete his degree in medicine, Umberto Bossi.<sup>1298</sup> In 1980, Bossi and Salvadori founded a magazine, *Nord-Ovest* (North-West), which was soon closed because of Salvadori’s sudden death in a car crash. Bossi held on and in 1982 founded a new periodical, *Lombardia Autonomista* (Autonomist Lombardy)<sup>1299</sup>, which called for the formation of a Lombard Autonomist League, eventually established in 1984. Similarly to his Venetian colleagues, from the columns of *Lombardia Autonomista*, Bossi demanded a special statute for Lombardy.<sup>1300</sup>

The *Lega Lombarda* was not the first, but it became by far the most popular and best organised of the autonomist movements that proliferated in Northern Italy during those years. Endowed with a solid structure from the start, it was able to avoid the deadly schisms that plagued the other leagues.<sup>1301</sup> It also realised that to provide its political claims with teeth it needed to go beyond the narrow regional borders and unify the other movements in a single federal body. The party made its first appearance at the 1984 European elections, in a coalition with other autonomist leagues, but did not win any seats. Its first success came in 1985, when Giuseppe Leoni became councillor in the province of Varese. Then, in 1987, it replaced the Venetian League in Parliament – Bossi obtained a seat in the Senate and Leoni in the Lower Chamber – as well as at the head of the northern autonomist movements. Its progression peaked at the 1989 European elections, when it polled 8.1% regionally and sent two MEPs to Brussels.<sup>1302</sup> On this occasion the Lombard League had promoted the ‘Northern Alliance’, a wide coalition of regionalist leagues across the North, a first step towards the formation of the *Lega Nord* (Northern League – LN), whose statute was officially signed in Bergamo, on December 4, 1989. The process of formation of the LN ended in February 1991, with the first Federal Congress, where the idea of a division of Italy into three macro-regions (North, Centre and South) was approved.<sup>1303</sup>

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<sup>1297</sup> Ibidem, pp. 53-71.

<sup>1298</sup> VIMERCATI, DANIELE (1991) *I Lombardi alla nuova crociata* (Milano: Mursia), pp. 3-4. Salvadori was able to mobilise people also in Piedmont, where Roberto Gremmo founded *Arnassita Piemontesa* (Piedmontese Renaissance), in 1980, later replaced by Gipo Farrasino’s *Piemont Autonomista* (Autonomist Piedmont).

<sup>1299</sup> At the beginning, the newspaper had a circulation of 13,000 copies. See PARENZO, DAVID and ROMANO, DAVIDE (2008) *Romanzo Padano. Da Bossi a Bossi, storia della Lega* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfer).

<sup>1300</sup> In these early programmes of both the Venetian and the Lombard leagues one can see Salvadori’s influence, since they asked for autonomy modelled after the example of traditional special statute regions such as the Aosta Valley. See, BIORCIO, ROBERTO (1997) *La Padania Promessa*, (Milano: Il Saggiatore) pp. 39-54.

<sup>1301</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO and VIMERCATI, DANIELE (1991) *Vento dal Nord* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfer).

<sup>1302</sup> MOIOLI, VITTORIO (1990) *I nuovi razzismi: miserie e fortune della Lega Lombarda* (Roma: Edizioni Associate) pp. 18-19.

<sup>1303</sup> SIGNORE, ADALBERTO and TROCINO, ALESSANDRO (2008) *Razza Padana* (Milano: BUR) p. 60.

The movement's positive progression did not stop and at the 1992 general elections the new-born LN scored an impressive 8.6% nationally, winning more than 3 million votes and obtaining 80 seats in Parliament.<sup>1304</sup> The enthusiasm was so high that Bossi predicted the *Lega's* political take-over of Northern Italy by 1995.<sup>1305</sup> The League played a major role in bringing about the fall of the First Republic and its traditional parties. Its success paved the way for state prosecutors who tore apart the system of corruption and clientelism endemic to the Italian political system.<sup>1306</sup> The investigations, called 'Bribesville' (*Tangentopoli*), began in 1992 and soon led to the demise of the Christian Democratic (DC) and the Socialist parties – both dissolved in 1994. It also brought new rivals, though, above all *Forza Italia* (Go Italy – FI), a party built up in some months by the media-mogul Silvio Berlusconi, that appealed to the entrepreneurial liberal northern constituencies until then attracted by the League.

In 1994, the LN entered government in a coalition with Berlusconi named the *Polo della Libertà* (Pole of Freedom), but called it off eight months later on account of the partner's purported violation of the electoral agreement that provided for an immediate federal reform of the state.<sup>1307</sup> The League thus went back to its protest origins, denouncing the absence of any will to reform the state on the part of the other political forces,<sup>1308</sup> in June 1995, it founded a Northern Parliament in Mantua and launched a secessionist project aiming at the independence of Padania – such was the name chosen for the northern Italian macro-region and nation. At the following general election, in April 1996, it recorded its best performance – 10.1% nationally, about 20% in the north and more than 4 million votes – and on September 15, 1996, after a three-day procession along the river Po concluded in Venice, it declared the independence of Padania.<sup>1309</sup> The 'march for independence', however, was a lukewarm success. While the LN expected millions of people to join the rallies, no more than 250,000 showed up.<sup>1310</sup> The following year a referendum on Padania's independence was organised, along with elections for the Padanian Parliament,<sup>1311</sup> but at the turn of 1998 the separatist thrust seemed to have come to a halt.

Secession was eventually side-lined at the September 1999 Congress in Acqui Terme. 'Devolution' became the new immediate goal and Scotland the model to imitate. At the same time, the party assumed a tougher stance on issues like immigration and globalisation, but lost half of its support, polling 4.5% nationally at the 1999 European elections.<sup>1312</sup> Considerably weakened, the LN approached Berlusconi again and entered an

<sup>1304</sup> BIORCIO (1997) *op. cit.*, 79-82.

<sup>1305</sup> FERRARI, GIULIO (1992) 'Scontro Frontale. Nel '95 la resa dei conti tra Lega e Dc', *Lombardia Autonomista*, X(8), 14 April 1992, pp. 1-2.

<sup>1306</sup> DIAMANTI, ILVO (1994) *La Lega. Geografia, storia e sociologia di un nuovo soggetto politico* (Roma: Donzelli) p. 88.

<sup>1307</sup> DIAMANTI, ILVO (1996) *Il male del Nord. Lega, localismo, secessione* (Roma: Donzelli).

<sup>1308</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1995) *Tutta la verità* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfer) pp. 132-150.

<sup>1309</sup> CENTO BULL, ANNA and GILBERT, MARC (2001) *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) pp. 106-112.

<sup>1310</sup> DIAMANTI (1996) *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>1311</sup> SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*, 109-112. The Parliament had changed its name that year, from Northern to Padanian Parliament. The League declared that 4,833,863 people voted with 97% of them answering yes to the question whether Padania should be an independent state. However, the referendum was not monitored by any independent body that could confirm or refute these figures.

<sup>1312</sup> BIORCIO, ROBERTO (2010) *La rivincita del Nord. La Lega dalla contestazione al governo* (Bari: Laterza) pp. 28-29.

alliance for the next general election due in 2001. The downward cycle begun in mid-1998 continued and the party obtained only 3.9% of votes.<sup>1313</sup> The alliance, however, triumphed. Despite the prolonged absence of Bossi, hit by a stroke in 2004, the LN was able to draft a constitutional reform introducing some form of federalism based on the transfer of exclusive legislation to the regions in the realms of healthcare, education and police. The bill was rejected by the Italian population in a referendum held in 2006,<sup>1314</sup> although the regions in which the League held its electoral bastions – Lombardy and Veneto – supported the change.

The LN came into office again in 2008, along with Berlusconi's new party, *Il Popolo della Libertà* (the People of Freedom – PdL), a merger of FI and the *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance – AN – post-fascist and heir of the Italian Social Movement). The League's main goal was a reform devolving fiscal powers to regions and municipalities,<sup>1315</sup> but it was not able to obtain its approval before the government's fall in November 2011. In the meantime, the party experienced a remarkable revival, attaining 8.3% nationally at the 2008 general elections and 10.2% at the 2009 European ones.<sup>1316</sup> With the euro crisis raging on the continent and a new government of technicians imposing painful austerity measures, 2012 seemed to re-propose some of the conditions that had made the League's fortune in the first half of the 1990s. Yet, internal contrasts among party factions – concerning the alliance with Berlusconi as well as the succession in the leadership – along with the outbreak of a financial scandal involving the movement's management of public funding jeopardised the party's reputation. At the 2012 administrative elections, the *Lega* lost considerable support, especially in some of its former strongholds. Umberto Bossi was forced to step down, as members of his family were accused of embezzlement of party funds. After some months of caretaking leadership through a triumvirate, Roberto Maroni became party chairman in July 2012 and went a long way to renewing the movement and avoiding further schisms. In February 2013, he was elected President of the Regional Government of Lombardy,<sup>1317</sup> leading a coalition with Berlusconi's *Popolo della Libertà*, although limited to the regional context.<sup>1318</sup> In Rome, the League has been firmly in the opposition since the end of 2011. In December 2013, Maroni was replaced at the head of the party by the *Lega*'s MEP Matteo Salvini, who, aged 40, became one of the youngest party chairmen in Italy.

Salvini further steered the movement towards a populist right-wing position similar to that adopted by the French *Front National* under Marine Le Pen. He thus focused his campaign for the 2014 European elections on a bid to withdraw Italy from the common currency and, once again, on a tougher approach to illegal immigration. Profiting from the collapse of the PdL, the LN bounced back after about two years of steady decline and polled more than 6% nationally.<sup>1319</sup> At the regional elections in Emilia-Romagna in

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<sup>1313</sup> PASSALACQUA, GUIDO (2009) *Il vento della Padania* (Milano: Mondadori) pp. 122-160.

<sup>1314</sup> Ibidem, pp. 213-214. It should be noted, however, that the referendum concerned the modification of 57 articles of the Constitution involving, not only wider competences for the regions, but also stronger powers for the Prime Minister.

<sup>1315</sup> SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*, 170-185.

<sup>1316</sup> BIORCIO (2010), *op. cit.*, p. IX.

<sup>1317</sup> Italian regions are endowed with executive (*giunta regionale*) and legislative organs (*consiglio regionale*). Since 1999, Presidents of the Regional Government have been directly elected by the citizens, while before they were appointed by the Regional Council.

<sup>1318</sup> CREMONESI, MARCO (2013) 'La Lombardia basta a Maroni ma non alla Lega', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 26 February.

<sup>1319</sup> DIAMANTI, ILVO (2014) 'Ora Marine fa scuola anche in Italia', *La Repubblica*, 29 September.

November 2014, it obtained an unprecedented 19.4%, double that of Berlusconi's party.<sup>1320</sup> Salvini has thus tried to enlarge the League's appeal to the entire country, which has inevitably entailed a silencing of its northern ethos. However, this is not the first time that the League strategically side-line the territorial conflict for electoral reasons. It is too early to say whether this change will have a lasting impact on the movement's identity.

**Figure 6.1 – LN's Electoral Results, 1990-2013 (percentage of regional vote)\***



\*We have used data concerning general and regional elections for the following regions: Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna, Trentino-Südtirol (not for regional elections), Friuli-Venezia Giulia (not for regional elections).

Source: MINISTERO DELL'INTERNO, *Archivio storico delle elezioni*, <http://elezionistorico.interno.it/> (accessed on February 28, 2014).

<sup>1320</sup> 'More Over, Silvio', *The Economist*, 25 November 2014.

## 6.2 Discourse and Strategies

As in the other case studies, we analyse here the discourse of the LN from the 1980s until 2012. As a substantial share of the arguments taken up from the *Lega* after 1989 were already formulated in the propaganda material of the Lombard and Venetian leagues we will deal with them in detail.

The part is divided in six sections. The first is a special section concerning the very controversial claims made at the beginning of the 1980s by the Lombard and the Venetian leagues, i.e., that they represented true nations opposed to the artificial Italian state. Such a digression is necessary to understand the unconventional character of the *Lega Nord* and the identity-building efforts described in section 6.2.4. Following the scheme adopted in the previous chapters, section 6.2.2 dwells upon the claims of economic victimisation, while 6.2.3 upon those of political marginalisation. Sections 6.2.5 and 6.2.6, instead, engage with the League's rejection of multicultural society and its attitude towards the process of European integration respectively.

### 6.2.1 The Northern Peoples

On the occasion of the Lombard League's campaign for the 1985 local elections, Guido Passalacqua, editor of *La Repubblica*, one of the most important Italian dailies, had the following reflection: 'the European summit has just ended, people talk about Milan as a European City, but for these guys [the members of the Lombard League EDM] the Lombards are a true people that have unluckily been invaded by the Southern Italians. "Lombardy is a nation, Italy is just a state" asserts the Secretary General of the League [...] But on what bases, on what politics, do Bossi and his friends from Varese think they will be elected?'.<sup>1321</sup> Surprise and ridicule, even loathing, were natural reactions to the Lombard and Venetian leagues' arguments throughout the 1980s. The existence of northern nations distinguished from the Italian one as well as the idea that the vernacular they used to communicate was a proper language, and not a dialect, were radical opinions at the time.

Surprisingly, one of the first political posters designed by the Venetian League, in fact, was in English and read 'when you say ciao you are speaking VENETO the language of five million people' (emphasis in the original).<sup>1322</sup> Using English to claim the existence of a language distinguished from Italian, but endowed with equal dignity, was a rhetorical device aimed at giving value to the claim itself and at establishing a direct connection between the sub-state and the international dimensions. The nation was not directly mentioned, but its existence was implied in the five million people speaking 'VENETO'. After all, the Venetian League had been constituted as a political movement for 'the survival of the Venetian people, of its dignity and of its territory'.<sup>1323</sup> The Lombard League, instead, centred its first electoral poster on a map of Lombardy with a bellicose warrior standing in the middle, his arm holding a sword above his head.<sup>1324</sup> Once again,

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<sup>1321</sup> Guido Passalacqua, quoted in FUSELLA, AMBROGIO (1993) *Arrivano i barbari*, (Milano: Rizzoli), p. 5.

<sup>1322</sup> Quoted in CAVALLIN, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>1323</sup> DAL SASS, G. (1987) 'Autonomia e federalismo', *Mondo Veneto*, IV(2), January-February, p. 3.

<sup>1324</sup> PIAZZO, STEFANIA and MALAGUTI, CRISTINA (1996) *La Lega Nord attraverso i manifesti* (Milano: Editoriale Nord) p. 6.

the people were concealed behind a symbol, the shape of the region. Some years later, the connection was no longer implicit, as shown in Figure 6.2 where the Lombard nation was defined as ‘a good, but invincible people’. The Venetians used language as the main marker of their identity, while the Lombards, instead, preferred a geographical reference.<sup>1325</sup> Other elements were added later, mostly dealing with the industrious, sober and honest mind-set of the two people. The Venetians, for instance, ‘know sacrifice, hard work, the pain that stems from renunciation’ and ‘the limits of human endurance’,<sup>1326</sup> while the Lombards are ‘drawn more to the essential than the glamorous, demanding and of tough, tenacious industriousness’<sup>1327</sup>. They thus shared the values of work, pragmatism and thrift that set the ground for the development of an overarching northern self-understanding.

**Figure 6.2 – ‘The Lombard Nation, a Good, but Invincible People’ (1987)**



Source: PIAZZO and MALAGUTI (1996) *La Lega*, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

According to both Leagues, the identities of their nations were in danger and needed to be re-constructed,<sup>1328</sup> or rather, the people had to be awoken back to them, a typical

<sup>1325</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO and VIMERCATI, DANIELE (1993) *La Rivoluzione* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfer). This is mainly due to the higher linguistic fragmentation of Lombardy, as well as the stronger resilience of Venetian dialects in Veneto. DIAMANTI (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 57. However, at the beginning, language played a major role in the Lombard League’s rhetoric as well. Like the Venetian one, the party organised sections concerning the grammar and vocabulary of Lombard in its journal. Moreover, in 1985, it ordered its newly elected councillors to use local dialects when speaking in municipal assemblies. And yet, the difficulty posed by the Lombard linguistic fragmentation was clearly visible, since in its texts it kept talking about dialects, although it defined them as ‘local variants of the Lombard linguistic national *koine*’. See, the press release published in *Lombardia Autonomista*, III(32), September 1985, p. 3. Later, however, the party made unambiguous reference to the Lombard language. BOSSI, UMBERTO (1986) ‘La lingua lombarda’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(16), September, p. 1.

<sup>1326</sup> LIGA VENETA (1986) ‘Un movimento popolare è un confluire di intenzioni e volontà’, *Mondo Veneto*, IV(1), October-November, p. 1.

<sup>1327</sup> MORI, UMBERTO (1986) ‘A gh’è anca Mantua’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(4), February, p. 1.

<sup>1328</sup> See point one in the Lombard League’s 1985 programme in *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(12), May 1983, p. 2.



nationalist argument.<sup>1329</sup> Hence, history became a contested field of national struggle. According to the Venetian League, the Venetians traced their origins back to the millenarian history of a people with branches scattered around Europe and united in a federal ‘commonwealth’. They lived in harmony with nature, regulating themselves through republican and democratic institutions, untouched and untamed by foreign invaders, and excelling in commercial skills.<sup>1330</sup> The Lombard League’s historical revisionism, in turn, was clear from its very name, which referred to the league formed in the twelfth century by city republics all across Northern Italy to fight against the German Holy Roman Emperor, Fredrick I Barbarossa. The alliance, signed in Pontida in 1167, led to victory at the Battle of Legnano, in 1176. Both the alliance and the battle became ‘symbols of the fight for peoples’ freedom because the clash between the Empire and the Lombard municipalities did not only arise from economic interests, but also involved a different world view: that of the centrality of peoples and then of nations against the centrality of the state’.<sup>1331</sup>

The leagues’ claims also resulted from the acknowledgement of an ‘ethical crisis’ in the Italian society, embodied by the country’s corrupted political class. More specifically, the Lombards asserted that power had become unaccountable and the solution lay in making it coincide with smaller and more homogenous communities<sup>1332</sup> and this for two reasons. First, a smaller community – the party wrote – was more easily manageable. Politics would be closer to the citizen, who could check the conduct of politicians without much effort. Second, the Lombard League believed that the indispensable ingredient for good politics was the ‘highest possible identification of the citizen with the state’,<sup>1333</sup> which occurred only when the state coincided with the national community: ‘popular sovereignty is guaranteed, not only by institutions, but also, and mainly, by the free recognition of the citizens in their common culture and in their common historical origin’.<sup>1334</sup> In other words, what the Lombard League was suggesting is that smaller communities based on national homogeneity were more solidary, affected by a lower incidence of free riding and led by more accountable politicians. Therefore, autonomy, defined as the power to decide on one’s own affairs, was not only a natural right, but also necessary to make democracy work.<sup>1335</sup>

<sup>1329</sup> LIGA VENETA (1987) ‘La Liga (per un’approfondita conoscenza)’, *Mondo Veneto*, IV(2), January-February, p. 1.

<sup>1330</sup> ROCCHETTA, FRANCO (1993) *I veneti: il popolo, la civiltà, l’economia, il diritto, lo Stato* (Verona: Edizioni del Nord).

<sup>1331</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1986) ‘29 maggio di lombardità’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(8), June, p. 1.

<sup>1332</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1982) ‘L’autonomia dei popoli. Il sistema politico dell’uomo’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, I(2), p. 2.

<sup>1333</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1983) ‘Statuto della Lega Autonomista Lombarda’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(14), September, art. 4.

<sup>1334</sup> Idem. The Venetian League shared a similar argument when it posited that its core values were ‘Autonomy, Federalism and Honesty’, and that the last one was anchored in the ‘values of the Venetian tradition’. MARIN, MARILENA (1987) ‘La Liga Veneta alle elezioni di giugno’, *Mondo Veneto*, IV(3), March-April, p. 1.

<sup>1335</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1984) ‘Razzismo veneto o manovra politica?’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(17), January, p. 4; LEONI, GIUSEPPE (1991) ‘Federalismo: il contributo dei cristiani’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(5), 18 February, p. 8. With regard to these ideas, later on, the LN declared having been influenced by federalist thinkers such as Denis de Rougemont, Ferdinand Kinsky and Alexandre Marc. See LN (1993) *Federalismo, scritti di Ferdinand Kinsky, Denis de Rougemont, Alexandre Marc*, (Milan: Editoriale Lombarda). Interestingly, however, the argument would apply to the northerners *a contrario*. As the League claimed that social cohesion was necessary to avoid free-riding and that the northerners were law-abiding

Finally, referring to the medieval alliance forged in Pontida, the Lombard League naturally projected its ideas onto a pan-northern context, thus facilitating the transition from regionalist leagues to the *Lega Nord*. References to the wider universe of the Padian-Alpine peoples were all along present in the Lombards' discourse, while the Venetians were more prone to stress their specificity within the limits of the former-Venetian Republic. Both, however, made a strong and unambiguous statement: the Italian state was not mono-national, but pluri-national and the nations living in it deserved dignity and recognition.<sup>1336</sup> Even more radically, they argued that the Italian state had been imposed by force, and the Italian nation had been artificially constructed after unification. In other words, the small northern motherlands were true nations, Italy was not.

## 6.2.2 Thieving Rome

The protest against the economic exploitation of the North has probably been the most successful argument made by the Lombard and the Venetian leagues. Criticism of the model of development based on internal migration dominated the discourse of the *Lega Lombarda* in the early 1980s, although it later gave way to the fiscal protest.<sup>1337</sup> Thus, initially, the Lombards asked for measures favouring the relocation to the South of those Southerners who had come to work in Lombardy in the previous decades.<sup>1338</sup> More precisely, using an argument surprisingly similar to that exploited by the VB a few years later, although with reference to internal migrants rather than foreign ones, they denounced the arrival of 250,000 Southerners at a time – 1985 – when there were 200,000 unemployed in Lombardy.<sup>1339</sup> On the other hand, in one of its electoral posters released in the early 1980s, the Venetian League already represented the State as a pincer crushing Veneto through 'fiscal robbery'.<sup>1340</sup> Such fiscal protest prevailed in the following years and became one of the mainstays of the *Lega Nord*. The list of outcries has been endless. The dilapidation of resources caused by the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (Special Fund for the South) and other forms of preferential treatment enjoyed by the South,<sup>1341</sup> the unbearable and absurd fiscal imposition,<sup>1342</sup> the frauds involving fake disability<sup>1343</sup> and

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people, while the southerners were opportunists, one should conclude that northerners recognised themselves into the institutions of the Italian state, while southerners did not and for this reason took advantage of it. The League would then embody a further step in the process, whereby a sizable section of the northern population rejected those same institutions and called for the need to set up new ones excluding southerners in order to avoid to be affected by their free-riding behaviours.

<sup>1336</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1984) 'Testo del documento di Verona', *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(17), January, p. 4.

<sup>1337</sup> We will come back on this issue in section 6.3.1. Suffice it to say here that tax pressure began rising from the early-1980s on and that in the same period foreign immigration started replacing the internal one.

<sup>1338</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1984) 'Avvertimento mafioso alla Lega', *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(22), November, p. 2; LEONI, GIUSEPPE (1986) 'Programmazione dei rientri', *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(1), January, pp. 2-4.

<sup>1339</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1985) 'Aderire alla Lega', *Lombardia Autonomista*, III(36), December, p. 1.

<sup>1340</sup> See, CAVALLIN, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>1341</sup> LEONI, GIUSEPPE (1986) 'Programmazione dei rientri', *op. cit.*; BONOMETTI, GIOVANNI (1998) 'Iri 2 la vendetta', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(13), 28 March, pp. 15-19; MONTERO, GIGI (2000) 'L'Italia incompiuta', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, IV(7), 19 February, pp. 22-23; LN (2012) 'Sud, accanimento terapeutico' *la Padania*, 8-9 July 2012, p. 2.

<sup>1342</sup> GREMMO, ROBERTO (1986) 'La tassa sulla salute è una nuova 'tassa sulla mafia'?', *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(20), December, pp. 3-4; DELLA TORRE, CORRADO (1990) 'Marcheno ICIAP alle stelle!', *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(19), 18 June, p. 4; DELFI, STEFANO (1997) 'Spremuta d'IRAP', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, I(9), 10 Novembre, pp. 31-37; SCALA, GIOIA (1998) 'Dieci regole per salvarsi dal fisco', *Il*

agricultural workers<sup>1344</sup> pensions, as well as the skyrocketing budget deficit and public debt<sup>1345</sup> are only a few examples.<sup>1346</sup> The political poster, first introduced by the Lombard League in 1988 and continuously re-proposed in later years, where a northern hen lays eggs for a southern woman (Figure 6.3) – in some cases replaced by leaders of traditional parties – has probably been the best visual representation of this purported economic exploitation.

**Figure 6.3 – ‘Wake up Padanian, with the League against Thieving Rome’ (first published in 1988, but reprinted several times)**



Source: [www.leganord.org](http://www.leganord.org) (accessed on June 25, 2012).

Not only taxes themselves, but also the attitude and mind-set of tax inspectors stirred the League’s anger. As one could read in the early 1990s, ‘the Italian Revenue Service is archaic, muddled, unjust and punitive. It is the degenerated product of a culture, or better a lack of culture, of the State: the culture that urges the administration to behave with citizens as a policeman and not as a representative of popular sovereignty (and thus of

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*Sole delle Alpi*, II(20), 16 May, pp. 9-11; PETRA, GIANNI (2012) ‘L’urlo di Cota: “Per noi solo tasse e bastonate. Taglino le spese di Roma”’, *la Padania*, 13 July, p. 10.

<sup>1343</sup> PIAZZO, STEFANIA (1996) ‘Basta soldi ai falsi invalidi’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(8), 26 February, p. 6; CAFFARATI, ROBERTA (1997) ‘Invalidi per forza’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, I(7), 25 October, pp. 27-31.

<sup>1344</sup> CONCA, GIORGIO (1990) ‘I soldi del Nord truffati al Sud’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(17), 11 June, p. 2.

<sup>1345</sup> PESENTI, FRANCESCO (1990) ‘Dai BOT prima o poi un botto’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(25), p. 5; LN (1994) *Programma elettorale*, general election manifesto, pp. 3-6; LN (2001) *Ragionamenti per la campagna elettorale*, April, pp. 3-4;

<sup>1346</sup> It must be noticed, however, that most of these arguments were toned down during the period 2001-2006 and 2008-2011, when the Northern League was in government, although they reappeared quite strongly from mid-2011, when the majority coalition was showing signs of exhaustion.

citizens themselves)'.<sup>1347</sup> As a consequence, the LN campaigned for fiscal autonomy, regional pension systems and, more generally, at least in its early years, neo-liberal economic policies.<sup>1348</sup> A major point in the *Lega's* programme at the beginning of the 1990s, for instance, was the introduction of a ceiling to the income tax, equal to 30% for individuals and 25% for enterprises.<sup>1349</sup> The movement also launched fiscal boycotts. In 1993, they invited Northerners not to pay the state TV fee and to buy treasuries of other EEC countries, although the proposal arose little popular enthusiasm.<sup>1350</sup>

What is surprising, however, is that, despite all its accusation, the LN has never produced a consistent and detailed analysis of inter-regional fiscal flows between Padania and Southern Italy. In the early 1990s, *Lombardia Autonomista* claimed that Lombardy was transferring about 30,000 billion liras (about 27 billion constant 2011 euros) per year to the South, or about 3.5 million liras (3,250 constant 2011 euros) for each Lombard.<sup>1351</sup> Again, in the 1996 manifesto, the party claimed that 'four regions of the North (Lombardy, Veneto, Piedmont and Emilia-Romagna) alone send to Rome about 50% of the taxes that the State cashes in and they receive in return derisory amounts of the spending managed by the central State'.<sup>1352</sup> In 2011, the party tossed off the figure of 100 billion euros a year, as a rough estimate of what would go from North to South, without, however, providing further details.<sup>1353</sup> A year later, quoting almost *en passant*, data provided by the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce, the party estimated the fiscal deficit in billion euros between the Italian state and the richest northern regions as follows: Piedmont, 1.2;

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<sup>1347</sup> BOSSI and VIMERCATI (1993), *op. cit.*, p. 189. See also, GUSMEROLI, ALBERTO and VALENTE, MARCO (2001) 'Il contribuente è sempre un evasore', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, V(47), 1 December.

<sup>1348</sup> As we will see later, the League's support for neo-liberalism, however, has not been wholehearted throughout its entire history. Until the mid-1990s, the party's economic policy was very liberal. At the turn of the 2000s, the LN assumed a much more sceptical view of economic freedom, as witnessed by its harsh criticism of globalisation and the financial system. For a comparison see for instance: LN (1994) *op. cit.*; and VIELMINI, FABRIZIO (2000) "'Praga 2000" l'Europa aspetta ancora la sua Seattle', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, IV(38-39), 7 October, pp. 4-7. Furthermore, the party cannot be qualified as liberal regarding subject matters such as immigration and ethical issues, although with regard to the latter there has been a clear shift away from some more open positions concerning euthanasia, religious freedom and gender around the late 1990s and early 2000s. Recently, under Salvini's leadership, the party has mixed liberal and more traditionalist claims. It has for instance defended traditional marriage against same-sex marriage, but, at the same time, supported drug and prostitution liberalisation (albeit mainly on economic grounds). Economically, the party has opposed, along with some left-wing trade unions, the lifting up of the retirement age, while, at the same time, supporting a much more neoliberal policy such as the introduction of a flat income tax equal to 20%.

<sup>1349</sup> BONETTI, GIANFRANCO (1992) 'Struttura del salario e costo del lavoro', in LOMBARDIA AUTONOMISTA, *Un sindacato per il federalismo liberista*, (Milan: Editoriale Lombarda), pp. 6-21.

<sup>1350</sup> MIGLIO, GIANFRANCO (1994) *Io, Bossi e la Lega: diario segreto dei miei quattro anni sul Carroccio*, (Milano: Mondadori) pp. 34-36.

<sup>1351</sup> MOLTIFIORI, ALDO (1990) 'Schiavitù lombarda', *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(8), April, p. 5. We have calculated the conversion using the price index' historical series provided by the Italian Institute of Statistics. ISTAT (2011) *Valore della moneta – Coefficienti per tradurre valori monetari tra i periodi sottoindicati*, <http://seriestoriche.istat.it> (accessed on February 20, 2014).

<sup>1352</sup> LN (1996) *Programma elettorale per la Padania, elezioni politiche del 21 aprile 1996*, general election manifesto, p. 3. This claim was made also in two articles of *Lega Nord* published the same year. One provided a regional breakdown of tax income and spending as a percentage of Lombardy's figures. It showed that the state was in deficit towards the region to the tune of 29 trillion liras per year, or 21 billion 2011 constant euros. LN (1996) 'Nord: paga cento, incassa uno', *Lega Nord*, 18 March, p. 3; PIAZZO, STEFANIA and MALAGUTI, CRISTINA (1996) 'Paga solo la Padania!', *Lega Nord*, 20 May, p. 4. We converted the figure into euros using the coefficients provided in ISTAT (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>1353</sup> CASTELLI, ROBERTO (2011) 'Pagano sempre solo i Padani', *La Padania*, 6 December, p. 1.

Lombardy, 42.6; Veneto, 6.8; and Emilia-Romagna, 5.6.<sup>1354</sup> Calculating the aggregate GDP of the four regions for 2011, it would be equal to 7.5% of it.<sup>1355</sup> Finally, in the context of the 2012 proposal by then party leader, Roberto Maroni, to create a northern macro-region that would manage 75% of all taxes raised on its territory, the LN calculated that within this hypothetical institutional entity Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont (the three northern regions ruled by the LN at the time) would manage, altogether, 146.8 billion euros of tax revenue per year, instead of 69.9 billion as they in fact did.<sup>1356</sup> Yet, this is not much in more than 30 years of struggle against ‘fiscal plundering’, especially because none of the documents mentioning these data did so in the framework of a systematic study of fiscal flows. The most likely reason for this absence is that the existence and size of transfers from North to South has been widely accepted by Italian society, thus, the LN need not provide detailed evidence about them. What has become problematic, instead, is their size and legitimacy.

It is little surprise that the *Lega* has been accused of being selfish. Since the 1980s, the party’s answer has centred around the argument that the bulk of money collected in the North has not been used to assure fair wealth redistribution, through services and social allocations, or to finance investments for southern development, but to nourish an elephant-like inefficient state and dishonest parties.<sup>1357</sup> The explanation went further, though, and put into question the very model of Italian economic development. According to the party, Italy became an industrial economy 30-40 years later than the other advanced European countries. Until the end of the 1970s, this happened by means of a quite positive state intervention. Yet, when the growing prosperity started generating conflicts requiring a parallel evolution of the political and social systems, southern-dominated political parties opposed change by resorting to clientelism and welfarism to their and southern advantage. Hence, state-expenses, public debt and inefficiencies soared, while organised crime took over large swathes of the country. Southerners’ employment was boosted by favourable expansion of the public sector<sup>1358</sup> and all this eventually turned against the development of the South itself, which was kept dependent on state allocations and stifled by the mafia.<sup>1359</sup>

Such an account entailed a radical departure from the traditional interpretation of Italian history. Generations of scholars, especially of the *scuola meridionalista* (southern school), had suggested that the socio-economic difference between the North and the South resulted from the pattern of development followed after unification, whereby the North had kept the South backward and dependent for its own advantages.<sup>1360</sup> By contrast, the *Lega* has argued that northern success did not stem from patterns of domination or the unequal distribution of capital, but it rather was culturally-driven, the result of centuries of history segmenting the peninsula into two, or more, different peoples with dissimilar characteristics. As the Lombard League claimed: ‘we have been poor too, here in

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<sup>1354</sup> BALLARIN, ANDREA (2012) ‘“Oberate dalle tasse PMI in pericolo”’, *la Padania*, 3 July, pp. 4-5.

<sup>1355</sup> Our calculations on regional GDP data from ISTAT.

<sup>1356</sup> LN (2012) ‘Così la ricchezza che produciamo potrà restare sul nostro territorio’, *la Padania*, 16-17 September, p. 5.

<sup>1357</sup> SARTORISI, ANNA (1988) ‘L’intervento statale assistenziale nel Sud crea solo sprechi e nuova disoccupazione’, *Mondo Veneto*, V(5), July-August, pp. 1-2.

<sup>1358</sup> VALLANZ, MARCO (1990) ‘Nord: colonizzati in casa’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(4), March, p. 3.

<sup>1359</sup> TOMASSINI, CORRADO (1990) ‘Piccola-media industria, commercio, turismo. Relazione approvata dal 1° Congresso Ordinario 8/9/10 Dicembre 1989’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(20), 22 June, p. 4.

<sup>1360</sup> For more details on this see section 6.3.1.

Lombardy. But in Brianza's wasteland, in the foggy Padanian flatland, in old working-class Milan, in the beautiful and harsh mountains of Lombardy, the Lombard people have made their way without resorting to kidnapping, mafia, 'ndrangheta or camorra,<sup>1361</sup> but working hard, day by day, with honesty and profound dignity'.<sup>1362</sup> In other words, the LN has replaced the 'Southern Question' – the collective moral need to develop the South – with a 'Northern Question', thus turning the North into the victim.<sup>1363</sup>

Claiming that a strong work ethic lies at the core of northern economic success, the party has implied two further conclusions. First, the North's superior wealth was legitimate, because gained through sacrifice and merit, rather than resulting from misappropriation or pre-existing conditions. Second, indiscriminate redistribution was no longer legitimate because: on the one hand, the northern example showed that the South could bridge the gap if it worked hard; on the other, waste and lack of results became problematic, as the money could be used better in the North.

As already mentioned, in its early years the LN supported quite radical neoliberal policies that contemplated slashing state spending and boosting productivity. Yet, since the beginning, the party also carefully qualified its adherence to neo-liberalism. In the early 1990s, Bossi defined 'federal liberalism' as a 'third way' between capitalism and socialism 'reflecting the values of the free market and the needs of a society that respects men and their traditions'.<sup>1364</sup> 'Federal liberalism – he concluded – is indeed the economic model originating in an economy mainly composed of artisans and small and medium sized firms'.<sup>1365</sup> This later claim has been one of the outstanding features of the party's identity. The League presented itself as the representative of 'the small producers' of the so-called Third Italy<sup>1366</sup> against the state-protected big industries that had marked the first period of Italian industrialisation. Consistently with this position, it not only criticised the economic relationship between the North and the South, but also the model of development of the North itself. This was based on the concentration of industrial production in northwestern Italy that caused wild urbanisation, internal migrations, social alienation, ethnic mixing, environmental damages, cultural devastation and an unhealthy mixture of economic and political power. It is interesting to note that in the very first issues of *Lombardia Autonomista*, the condemnation of the damages of modernity was prominent. As Bossi wrote in those years: 'while they try to persuade workers that the improvement of their social condition exclusively hinges on the regular functioning of the economy, suggesting the blind acceptance of bourgeois capitalism and pretending to ignore the tragedy of a society withdrawn into itself and bereft of any spiritual tension,

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<sup>1361</sup> 'ndrangheta is the name commonly used to refer to mafia-style organised crime in the region of Calabria, while camorra refers to similar groups in Campania (the region of Naples).

<sup>1362</sup> CASTELLAZZI, FRANCO (1990) 'L'industria dei sequestri', *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(3), 17 February, p. 3.

<sup>1363</sup> TETI, VITO (2011) 'L'invenzione della questione settentrionale, la cancellazione della questione meridionale e nuove forme di razzismo', in *La razza maledetta. Origini del pregiudizio antimeridionale* (Roma: Manifestolibri) pp. 7-47.

<sup>1364</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1990) 'I limiti dello sviluppo', *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(29), 12 September, p. 7.

<sup>1365</sup> Idem.

<sup>1366</sup> We deal more in detail with the Third Italy in section 6.3.1. In short, the term refers to the areas of latest industrialisation in the North that developed around the model of small and medium sized enterprises organised in industrial districts.

autonomist determinism breaks out'.<sup>1367</sup> The League's discourse, however, was not anti-modern. Although there was a hue of nostalgia for a rural pre-modern past,<sup>1368</sup> what the League blamed on the Italian state – and northern big business – was to have developed the wrong way. Thus, although, on the one hand, it denounced southern and Italy's lack of modernity, on the other, it also criticised the northern mismanaged modernity.<sup>1369</sup> It suggested replacing all this with 'diffused industrialisation' based on districts of SMEs regulated by regional and local institutions, better placed than the central state to do this in harmony with the territory and the population.

In the last decade, such a defence of the productive economy brought the party to question the process of economic globalisation and even to propose the use of tariffs in order to shield local enterprises from unfair, especially Chinese, competition.<sup>1370</sup> Similarly, the recent financial crisis has been explained as the consequence of massive consumerism – 'the most unnatural, vulgar and offensive thing that one can imagine'<sup>1371</sup> – doped through debt and financial speculation. According to the party, countries need to go back to true production, while finance should be more tightly regulated.<sup>1372</sup> More interestingly, the peak of the debt crisis in Italy, around the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012, coincided with a revival of the League's secessionist stand, at least in its internal propaganda. At the beginning of the crisis, the party argued that Italy would be well placed to face this because the country had a strong industrial basis and families were not indebted. It was the state, a debt-addict, that was dragging down the entire country, but this problem could be easily dealt with by means of the federal reform that the party was tried to push through Parliament. From mid-2011 on, however, secessionist tendencies within the movement started brewing again and grew all the year through (Figure 6.4). In August, for instance, an article on *la Padania* compared Italy to a family, which 'has four brothers who work – their names are Piedmont, Emilia Romagna, Veneto and Lombardy – and at least thirteen who live off the others because the cash machine is in common and they are a majority'.<sup>1373</sup> Unilaterally leaving the family – the piece suggested – was the only way for the four to survive. In November the government fell, putting an end to any

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<sup>1367</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1982) 'Il più avanzato modello sociale. Nuovo determinismo', *Lombardia Autonomista*, I, March, p. 3.

<sup>1368</sup> See for instance, BOSSI and VIMERCATI (1991) *op. cit.* Here, we find a clear metaphor of the League's contradictory relationship with modernity. Bossi tells about his youth spent in rural Lombardy and how this suddenly ended because of an accident involving his grandfather's chariot and a motorcycle. The grandfather was riding the chariot in the middle of a rural street because the margins were covered in mud, thus he was held responsible for the crash. The family had to sell its land and move to the city. Hence, Bossi left that unsophisticated, uncultivated world, for a new 'fierce world, where everything was measured in money, where every man only aimed at its personal profit'. Rather than wondering whether Bossi's account is true or not, the relevant thing is that modernity is seen as an inevitable, but not necessarily positive, phenomenon impacting on a pristine, uncorrupted rural world and that this image is a powerful theme in the League's rhetoric.

<sup>1369</sup> REINA, PIETRO (1990) 'Occorre una nuova politica del territorio', *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(18), 15 June, p. 4. See also GOBBO, PAOLO (1988) 'Pan al pan', *Mondo Veneto*, V(5), July-August, p. 4.

<sup>1370</sup> FERRARI, MASSIMILIANO (1999) 'I perché del mondialismo', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, III(15), 10 April, pp. 6-11; GNOCCHI, MASSIMO (1999) 'Tutti contro il WTO', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, III(49), 11 December, pp. 9-11; EISEN, ENRICO (2003) 'Basta con i prodotti del Terzo Mondo. Sono fame e miseria', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, VII(7), 15 February, p. 34-37; DUSSIN, LUCIANO (2008), 'Federalisti e no global: così battiamo la crisi', *La Padania*, 10 December, p. 4.

<sup>1371</sup> POLIEDRI, MASSIMO (2009) 'Nuove regole internazionali per il sistema finanziario', *La Padania*, 5 March, p. 11.

<sup>1372</sup> *Ibidem*; see also the interview with Gianvittore Vaccari in Annex 2.

<sup>1373</sup> DUSSIN, LUCIANO (2011) 'Italia, una "famiglia" da cui bisogna uscire', 23 August, p. 8

imminent dream of federal reform. The League responded by summoning the Padanian Parliament and strongly opposed the ‘technical government’ that followed. The movement seemed willing to embark on a new season of uncompromising secessionism, when a financial scandal broke out jeopardising the party’s and Bossi’s reputation.

**Figure 6.4 – ‘The Exploited North Can No Longer Maintain the Rest of Italy, the Only Way Is the Independence of Padania’ (2011)**



Source: [www.leganord.org](http://www.leganord.org) (accessed on June 25, 2012).

### 6.2.3 The Southern Majority

In 1982, the Lombard League described Lombardy as a lost community: ‘its people are only a mass of individuals, bereft of any political identity, anonymously incorporated in a failing national State that is dragging us down into its bottomless and hopeless crisis. And yet, the Lombards and all the other Padanian and Alpine peoples, as such, would know no crisis and really match European standards’.<sup>1374</sup> The claim was pretty straightforward, Italy, as a state, was failing and the argument would be reiterated at different times.<sup>1375</sup> But why? The reason was to be found in the ‘original sin’ committed at its birth, i.e., the adoption of a centralised institutional system instead of a federal one. This implied the eradication of local cultures and ethnic groups that had been in existence for centuries, an act of folly but ‘necessary to a State imposed from above in need of a nation as alibi’.<sup>1376</sup> The federal state proposed by intellectuals such as Carlo Cattaneo was side-lined in favour of centralist policies suitable to the interests of the Savoy monarchy, the big landowning

<sup>1374</sup> COMITATO PROMOTORE DELLA LEGA LOMBARDA AUTONOMISTA (1982) ‘Lega Autonomista Lombarda. Lombardi!’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, Year I, March, p. 2.

<sup>1375</sup> See for instance: BOSSI, UMBERTO (1985) ‘Immigrazione: l’ultima faccia del colonialismo’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, III(29), April, p. 3; MARIN, MARILENA (1989) ‘Si all’Europa dei popoli. No alla mafia’, *Mondo Veneto*, VI(4), June, p. 2; CORTI, MICHELE (1995) ‘Padania-Italia: quale “questione nazionale”’, *Quaderni Padani*, 1(2), Fall.

<sup>1376</sup> BOSSI (1986) ‘29 maggio di lombardità’, *op. cit.*, p. 1.



aristocracy and the rising industrial bourgeoisie. The northern peoples, that had agreed to take part in the process of unification to get rid of the centralism of the Hapsburgs, found themselves subjected to another, heavier, authoritarian power. The centralism of the monarchy lived on into the fascist era and, then, into the Republican one, where it assumed the form of 'particratic centralism'.<sup>1377</sup> Both the Lombard and the Venetian leagues further argued that, exploiting the advantage of being what they called an 'ethnic' majority, Southerners took over political parties and bureaucracy.<sup>1378</sup>

In the first years, the theme of cultural colonisation ranked quite high in the regionalist leagues' rhetoric. According to the Lombard League, this also explained the Lombards' passive acceptance of their economic exploitation.<sup>1379</sup> Schools, and especially primary schools, where children learned their mother tongue, were considered the main instruments of cultural domination (Figure 6.5). As the LN later argued 'making Italians' had required an homogenous educational system, implying: prohibition to use dialects, a strong administrative centralisation leaving no room for local adaptations and autonomy, and a vulgarisation of history based on the celebration of the Risorgimento.<sup>1380</sup> Furthermore, being advantaged in state competition for tenure, most teachers were Southerners, thus northern pupils learned 'values and languages that are not theirs'.<sup>1381</sup> In this early phase, language played a momentous role. The regionalist leagues argued that 'when using the fundamental system of language (the grammar) one does not use a neutral reproductive tool for communicating ideas, but, on the contrary, one relies on an instrument that ITSELF SHAPES IDEAS, THAT PLANS AND LEADS THE MENTAL ACTIVITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL',<sup>1382</sup> (emphasis in the original). Hence, for instance, the Venetian League urged parents to talk to their children in Venetian.<sup>1383</sup> Furthermore, in Veneto, devaluation of the local language was accompanied by denunciations of cultural denigration: 'we of the League, we have always thought that Venetians, in the Italian state, have ever since been exploited, laughed at, despised, according to the typical colonialist attitude. Good at working, but "morons"'.<sup>1384</sup> Likewise, the Lombard League claimed that the perpetration of a cultural belittling of the northern peoples was cunningly carried on through southern dominance in the media, especially television.<sup>1385</sup> But, by far, the worst tool of northern colonisation certainly was the internment in northern municipalities of

<sup>1377</sup> BOSSI (1982) 'L'autonomia dei popoli. Il più avanzato, *op. cit.*; see also CESTONARO, BRUNA (1987) 'Come hanno tentato di farci diventare italiani', *Mondo Veneto*, VI(2), January-February, p. 4.

<sup>1378</sup> BOSSI (1986) '29 maggio di lombardità', *op. cit.*, p. 1. POLASTRO, M., REBAUDO, G., GHIRARDINI, M.D. and SISTI, T. (1992) *Quello che i partiti non vogliono che si sappia*, Lega Nord-Liga Veneta, p. 2.

<sup>1379</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1985) 'Vittoria lombarda. Il voto di un popolo che rinasce', *Lombardia Autonomista*, III(30), May, p. 1.

<sup>1380</sup> QUAGLIA, FRANCO (1999) *La Scuola Padana* (Milano: Enti Locali Padani Federali), pp. 3-4.

<sup>1381</sup> VALLANZ, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>1382</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1984) 'La scuola delle nazioni senza stato: ikastolak, gli asili infantili in lingua basca', *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(18), March, p. 3.

<sup>1383</sup> See for instance the Venetian League's poster in PIAZZO and MALAGUTI (1996) *La Lega*, *op. cit.*, p. 10. This poster is written in Venetian. Surprisingly, this is not the rule since most are in Italian. The Venetian League attributed this choice to a perverse effect of the Italian colonisation: 'despite talking and thinking with their mind and heart in Venetian, most of us do not know how to read and write in Venetian, for this reason this poster is written in Italian, the only language on which all education has been based'. LIGA VENETA (1986) 'Parlé Veneto anca co i fhiui. El Veneto vostro el xe anca nostro', *Mondo Veneto*, IV(1), October-November, p. 5.

<sup>1384</sup> MARIN, MARILENA (1988) 'La Liga è guida', *Mondo Veneto*, V(1), p. 1.

<sup>1385</sup> VALLANZ, *op. cit.*

southern criminals convicted for mafia-related crimes. This – the leagues argued – not only spread organised crime in the ‘until then virgin’ northern regions, but also showed the arrogance of the state, which did not care about the opposition of the local population.<sup>1386</sup> The North had been transformed into a penal colony.<sup>1387</sup>

**Figure 6.5 – ‘Stop Colonial School’ (1986)**



Source: PIAZZO and MALAGUTI (1996) *La Lega*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

In the following years, however, such claims of cultural colonisation became marginal.<sup>1388</sup> The stress on language clashed against the huge variety of dialects in the North and the impossibility to find another *lingua franca* besides Italian. This absence was supplanted through the use of a specific style of communication, very direct, colloquial, at times even vulgar, that especially characterised the leader, Umberto Bossi, and deliberately marked him off from the verbose and often convoluted language of traditional politicians (*politichese*). In other words, Bossi and the *Lega* claimed to be speaking the language of the people against the language of the parties.<sup>1389</sup>

<sup>1386</sup> POLASTRO et al., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>1387</sup> LIGA VENETA (1988) ‘Rivolta popolare nel Veneto contro la colonizzazione mafiosa’, *Mondo Veneto*, V(2), February, p. 3.

<sup>1388</sup> The party still defended the study of local languages and history in school and tried to set up a system of Padanian schools. But, the subject matter simply did not rank high in the party’s priorities. On the other hand, as we will see in section 6.2.4, the LN did embark on an ambitious nation-building process entailing a huge effort of cultural definition of the Padanian people, especially in the second half of the 1990s.

<sup>1389</sup> On these aspects see DIAMANTI (1994) and (1996), *op. cit.*, BIORCIO (1991), (1997) and (2010), *op. cit.*, CENTO BULL and GILBERT (2001), *op. cit.* In this connection, the LN does not seem to have followed the *Vlaams Belang* in its ‘normalisation’, or at least not completely. Although the latter never used as informal a language as that of the League, it still went through a process in which, not only the extreme nature of its arguments, but also the image of its leaders were somehow made more mainstream. See ERK (2005) ‘From’, *op. cit.*, p. 498. The leadership of Roberto Maroni seemed to foreshadow such a shift, but it

Despite the toning down of the colonial rhetoric, the opposition against the South remained a mainstay of the party's discourse. The relationship between the two halves of the country is at least as complex as it is important. The South is the 'relevant other' enabling the North to define its own identity, but the dichotomy has been nuanced according to the need of the time. In the Lombard League's earliest articles, for instance, Rome was often mentioned as the cause of northern troubles, while the connection between the South and Rome was not clearly defined. It was Rome that, in Lombard League's words, had both promoted the 'immigration of other peoples into our territories and the shrewd allocation of key-positions amongst their hands'.<sup>1390</sup> It was Rome as well that had kept the South dependent on state allocations. The main slogan in the early 1990s was 'thieving Rome, the League doesn't pardon'. At other times, however, Southerners' seizure of parties and institutions was loudly denounced. In 1990, for instance, the LN wrote: 'if in South Africa the white people exercise their political control through weapons, in Italy, the southern ethnic majority need not use physical coercion: its political representatives only need to get most of the votes in the elections to be legitimated "by the people" to exercise political control over minorities'.<sup>1391</sup> Hence, even if in other instances Southerners were not directly mentioned and the blame was put on Rome, the connection was quite clear.

Another consideration made by the League and its predecessors nourished such connection, i.e., Southerners had been acting as a self-conscious and determined ethnic group for the pursuit of their own interests. They had done so when taking over parties and state institutions. They did the same when 'over-profiting' from public services.<sup>1392</sup> In short, 'they belong to an ethnic majority that, as such, can use the state to its advantage and colonise Lombardy'<sup>1393</sup> and indeed 'the Roman government keeps trying to "southernise" the Italian State, by attributing the most important public charges to people mostly coming from the South'.<sup>1394</sup> Hence, according to the LN, the North was politically marginalised by the southern majority.<sup>1395</sup>

In order to end the northern political marginalisation, the LN has envisaged two strategies in the course of its history. Federalism was the *Lega's* original goal. While the regionalist leagues mainly aimed at some form of autonomy, to a large extent similar to that enjoyed by some Italian regions with special statutes such as the Aosta Valley, their federalisation into a single movement favoured the idea of a single overarching structure unifying the entire North. This came to be embodied in the idea of the Northern Republic,

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lasted too short a time and the current secretary, Matteo Salvini, has brought the movement back to the extreme protest attitude of its origins.

<sup>1390</sup> COMITATO PROMOTORE DELLA LEGA LOMBARDA AUTONOMISTA (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>1391</sup> VALLANZ, *op. cit.*

<sup>1392</sup> While the leagues were labelled as racist when they argued that locals should have priority in the delivery of public services and jobs, southerners – they claimed – did the same without being blamed at all, see for instance LIGA VENETA (1989) 'Via da Roma', *Mondo Veneto*, VI(6), September-October, p. 3.

<sup>1393</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1986) 'Lettere al Segretario', *Lombardia Autonomista*, IV(5), March, p. 3.

<sup>1394</sup> COLOMBO, ANDREA (1991) 'Questori di razza', *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(2), 19 January, p. 9.

<sup>1395</sup> ORESTILLI, DANILO (1991) 'Le poltrone del Sud', *Lega Nord Emilia Romagna*, supplement to *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(10), 24 April, p. 1. For previous complaints about this issue see also CESTONARO BRUNA (1987) 'I cannoni di "Lavarone"', *Mondo Veneto*, IV(4), October, p. 3. Similar arguments have been present later as well, although with much less visibility during its times in government. See for instance: LN (1995) 'Tutti dal Sud i prefetti del Nord', *Lega Nord*, XIII(45), 16 December, p. 3; CORNALI, ALESSANDRO (1998) 'La Lega corre da sola', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(41), 24 October, pp. 16-19; MONTERO, *op. cit.*; DUSSIN (2008) *op. cit.*

largely influenced by the thought of the political thinker, and for a while Lega sympathiser, Gianfranco Miglio.<sup>1396</sup> Convinced that the end of the nation-state had already come, fascinated by the idea of a Europe of the peoples, and emboldened by the fast rise of his party, in the first half of the 1990s, Bossi aimed at turning Italy into a confederation of three republics – North, Centre and South.<sup>1397</sup> The reason for such an institutional architecture was twofold. First, as the regionalist leagues merged to enjoy a stronger bargaining power, a new layer of government was needed to overcome the limitations of the traditional regions, too weak to flex their muscles in Rome. At the same time, the republics represented ‘homogenous’ socio-economic communities, whose members had converging interests and a shared, although lightly defined, identity.<sup>1398</sup> Three concrete projects were devised between 1990 and 1994. Two, despite differing in the precise geographical definition of the republics, maintained the tripartite division of the peninsula and attributed all powers to the republics – which, in turn, were to be federally organised within themselves – except for foreign policy, defence, monetary policy, the higher courts of justice (Constitutional Court, Court of Appeal and so on), federal economic aspects and an interregional compensation fund. The third, devised in the context of the First Berlusconi government, presented a more prudent modification that did away with the idea of a confederation and simply reduced the number of existing regions from twenty to nine.<sup>1399</sup>

Despite a growing popular support and its experience in government, the League was not able to turn any of these assets to its advantage. The party had also sought the collaboration of the South by founding the Southern and the Central League, later merged into the League for Federal Italy.<sup>1400</sup> Already in 1990, Bossi came to believe that it was ‘necessary to involve the southern peoples in the project of integral federalism’.<sup>1401</sup> But the South never responded enthusiastically. At the same time, Berlusconi’s entry into politics largely reduced the LN’s chances to become a leading party in the North and be able to impose federalism in the country. The first alliance with *Forza Italia*, in 1994, was based on the promise of such a reform.<sup>1402</sup> Yet, the plan failed and after less than a year the League toppled the government declaring that for Berlusconi ‘pacts, engagements, promises are propaganda and advertising’.<sup>1403</sup> It is in this context that the project of Padania’s independence was begotten. In fact, such an idea had been voiced some years before within the movement. In 1991, Bossi recognised the existence of militants eager to

<sup>1396</sup> Miglio never formally joined the movement and in fact ran as an independent candidate at the 1992 elections, but undoubtedly assumed the position of party ideologue until he quit in 1994.

<sup>1397</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1991) ‘Lega Nord per la libertà’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(5), 18 February, p. 4. It is remarkable that Central Italy, as yet neglected by the leagues’ rhetoric, had all of a sudden arisen to the dignity of a ‘homogenous socio-economic community’ distinguished from the South.

<sup>1398</sup> SPERONI, FRANCESCO ENRICO (1991) ‘Una confederazione contro il centralismo’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(5), 18 February, p. 6. Of course, the Northern Republic also answered the need to give administrative unity to the north, a necessary preliminary step on the way to full self-determination.

<sup>1399</sup> ONETO, GILBERTO (1999) ‘L’evoluzione dei progetti costituzionali padani’, *Quaderni Padani*, V(25/26), September-December, pp. 2-8.

<sup>1400</sup> FAVERIO, SIMONETTA (1993) ‘Lega Nord! Lega Nord!’, *Lega Nord*, XI(30), 28 May, p. 1. Despite being practically dead from 1993/1994, the Southern League remained officially in place until 2001. See interview with Oreste Rossi, in Annex 2. The project has been revived by Salvini, which is one of the reasons why it would be wrong to consider the current move as a novelty.

<sup>1401</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1990) ‘Trionfa la Lega Lombarda’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(2), 10 February, p. 6.

<sup>1402</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1994) ‘Via libera al Popolo della Libertà’, *Lega Nord*, XII(4), 9 February, p. 2.

<sup>1403</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1995) ‘In trincea per la libertà del Paese’, *Lega Nord*, XIII(1), 10 January, p. 1.

go the secessionist way, even along ethnic divisions separating the different peoples of the North, but concluded that secession was historically obsolete and that the North rather needed to unite around its common economic interests.<sup>1404</sup> Then, at the end of 1993, when the party agreed on the alliance with Berlusconi, Bossi felt the need to make clear that the alternative to the coalition was to run alone, in which case the party should have considered the separatist option and evaluated how strong this tendency was within the party.<sup>1405</sup> In June 1994, Bossi clearly opened up to the separatist current, recognising its existence and the tensions with the other factions, but also recalled the need for unity.<sup>1406</sup> Despite obtaining reassurances from hard-core members that they would not break up the party,<sup>1407</sup> it seemed clear that the federalist project based only on socio-economic similarities, the creation of the League for Federal Italy and the alliance with *Forza Italia* had increasingly disaffected a substantial part of the militants.

In summer 1995, Bossi dissipated all ambiguity about the new party line when, giving a speech in the Italian Parliament, he suggested that ‘it is time to fight for the political independence of the North’.<sup>1408</sup> At that year’s rally in Pontida,<sup>1409</sup> in April, Bossi presented the Declaration of Self-Determination, Sovereignty and Association of the Peoples of the North approved by the Constitutional Assembly of the Northern Parliament.<sup>1410</sup> A month later, the League’s militants elected a Padanian government and Bossi called for the division of the country on the model of Czechoslovakia.<sup>1411</sup> At the beginning of September, the movement organised a three-day march across the Padanian flatland ending up in Venice, where, on September 15, they declared the Independence of Padania, ‘a natural, cultural, socio-economic community grounded on a shared heritage of values, culture, history and homogenous social, moral and economic conditions’.<sup>1412</sup> The party also drafted a transitory constitution, which held that the Padanian government should have opened negotiations for secession with the Italian state. The Padania proposed here was a ‘Greater Padania’ including also the regions of Tuscany, Umbria and the Marches, often identified as part of Central Italy. Citizenship could be acquired by

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<sup>1404</sup> FAVERIO, SIMONETTA (1991) ‘Le differenze diventato un valore’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(44), 4 December, p. 3.

<sup>1405</sup> BOSSI (1994) ‘Via libera al Popolo della Libertà’, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>1406</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1994) ‘Lega di lotta e di governo’, *Lega Nord*, XII(23), 22 June, p. 3.

<sup>1407</sup> PIAZZO, STEFANIA (1994) ‘Boso: gli indipendentisti vigilano sulla Lega’, *Lega Nord*, XII(24), 29 June, p. 3.

<sup>1408</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1995) ‘Al Nord bandiera bianca mai più!’, *Lega Nord*, XIII(38), 31 October, p. 4. According to David Parenzo and Davide Romano, this was the first time in the history of the Italian Parliament that a threat of secession was mentioned in it. PARENZO and ROMANO, *op. cit.*, p. 191. In the first half of 1995, however, Bossi made a last attempt to mobilise people in favour of federalism across the peninsula.

<sup>1409</sup> The Pontida rally is a yearly feast organised by the League on the site where, in 1167, the northern city-states that fought against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, who wanted to bring them back under his control, swore their allegiance to each other and joined in a league called the Lombard League (wherefrom the name of the LN’s predecessor). There the party leadership meets the militants, discusses the year just passed and makes plans for the future.

<sup>1410</sup> LN (1996) ‘Pontida, 24 marzo data storica. Nasce la Nazione Padana’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(12), 25 March, p. 1.

<sup>1411</sup> ‘There are two Italies, two economies...and they shall separate, each with its own treasury, each with a central bank. No armed insurrection. There is only one way: negotiate and say goodbye. As they have done in Czechoslovakia’. POLI, GABRIELLA (1996) ‘Onda d’urto verso la Secessione’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(19), 6 May, p. 2.

<sup>1412</sup> LN (1996) ‘Dichiarazione d’indipendenza’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(34), 16 September, p. 3.

whoever had a European nationality and, at the date of independence, had been living in Padania for at least five years.<sup>1413</sup>

**Figure 6.6 – ‘Free Padania’ (2006)**



Source: [www.leganord.org](http://www.leganord.org) (accessed on June 25, 2012).

Negotiations never started, but in May the League held a referendum on independence where ‘officially’ 97% of the 4.8 million voters<sup>1414</sup> – more likely 1.5 million –<sup>1415</sup> accepted the constitution of the Padanian Republic. In October, the first elections of the Padanian Parliament took place.<sup>1416</sup> The 200 members drafted two Constitutions, a federal and a confederal one, that were presented in July 1998 and were to be voted on by the population at the beginning of 1999.<sup>1417</sup> By that time, however, the party was losing support. Already in 1997 it had lost the municipality of Milan, where the incumbent LN mayor had not gone beyond 15%, and at the May 1998 administrative elections it saw its support shrinking across the North. After the poor results of the 1999 European elections (4.5%, less than half compared to 1996) Bossi announced the move from ‘Padania now’ to ‘Padania always’,<sup>1418</sup> suggesting that independence would remain the main objective of the party, but it would not be possible to realise it in the short run. Secession was eventually abandoned in September 1999, at the Party Congress in Acqui Terme, where Bossi proposed Scottish-style devolution and, threatening to resign, obtained a blank cheque to form new political alliances, thus setting the ground for a renewed collaboration

<sup>1413</sup> LN (1996) ‘La Costituzione transitoria’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(34), 16 September, p. 5.

<sup>1414</sup> SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>1415</sup> PARENZO and ROMANO, *op. cit.*

<sup>1416</sup> Idem. In an attempt to distinguish Padania from the League, the party opened the elections to non-members. Although some participated, this effort did not succeed, not even in the long term. Thus far, the idea of Padania has irremediably remained attached to the League’s identity.

<sup>1417</sup> LN (1998) ‘Due proposte per il futuro’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(29), 25 July, pp. 20-25.

<sup>1418</sup> MAURI, MATTEO (1999) ‘La Padania verrà’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, III(26), June, pp. 4-11.

with FI.<sup>1419</sup> Addressing the disappointed secessionist militants, Bossi reassured them that ‘they should be confident [...] Padania will come. Not anymore through the *Big Bang* of secession, which failed because the lira, thanks to European backing, was replaced by the euro. Padania will come by Darwinian evolution, step by step’.<sup>1420</sup>

Secession was put on the backburner and federalism became, again, the immediate goal of the party. Yet, independence remains the *Lega*’s official goal and a strong commitment among a substantial share of the militants; it is constantly referred to, especially, in its visual propaganda (Figure 6.4; Figure 6.6) and it can rapidly become salient again, as was the case, for instance, in the second half of 2011.

#### 6.2.4 The Invention of Padania

In section 6.2.1, we have introduced the radical claims made by the Lombard and the Venetian Leagues during the 1980s. Here, we will deal instead, with the *Lega*’s attempt to craft an identity for the entire North. Such an effort has been, comparatively, much more important and much less effective than that made by the other parties in our study and this chiefly because of the shaky foundations on which the LN could ground the Padanian identity. Broadly speaking there are two major types of self-understandings that the League has tried to adopt. The first one, mainly coinciding with the political project of federalism and the idea of a Northern Republic – although in principle not incompatible with outright secession – has been based on some socio-economic features shared by the different peoples inhabiting the North. The second one, instead, has shown a much stronger ethnic nature. In both cases, the South played an important role as the relevant other against which to construct these identities.

When looking at any historical map of Northern Italy after the end of the Roman Empire, one feature is immediately noticeable: political fragmentation. The same fragmentation characterised all regionalist leagues, which lost votes and energies because of irreconcilable schisms, all but the Lombard League. By harking back to the medieval coalition of city republics that fought against Barbarossa, Bossi implicitly conveyed an ideal of northern unity suitable to contemporary and historical realities.<sup>1421</sup> The merger of the regionalist leagues into the *Lega Nord* inaugurated the season of ‘ethno-federalism’, that is, the federalisation of the northern peoples in a common struggle for autonomy and state reform. In this process of unification, the rally held in Pontida in May 1990 was a symbolic moment of extreme importance. On the soil where the medieval alliance had been signed, the first pan-northern meeting of autonomist forces took place. Before thousands of militants, all the members of the new-born Northern League elected at the recent round of administrative elections swore allegiance to the cause of autonomy and freedom of the northern peoples.<sup>1422</sup> The event was described in sacred tones: ‘many journalists asked us the meaning of the oath and almost all did not grasp the holiness of the ritual, the intensity of a choral participation’ – wrote the League in the following

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<sup>1419</sup> SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-128.

<sup>1420</sup> Quoted in SAVOINI, GIANLUCA (2000) ‘Un accord per la Padania’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, IV(10), March, pp. 8-9.

<sup>1421</sup> BOSSI (1990) ‘Trionfa’, *op. cit.*

<sup>1422</sup> COLOMBO, MASSIMO (1990) ‘Il nostro ‘Giuramento di Pontida’’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(14), May, p. 3.

days.<sup>1423</sup> Yet, back then, what mainly united the North was the ‘way of life of the northern populations, which, standing on their own legs and having progressively assumed, not of their own will, the function of support and (economic) locomotive of the Italian State, have “proliferated less” than the southern populations’.<sup>1424</sup> This went along with a view of social relationship based on contract theory, whereby the state originated from a covenant among citizens who decided to temporarily delegate their sovereignty to solve specific problems. The covenant, however, was open to renegotiation and could also be terminated.<sup>1425</sup> While Bossi claimed to adhere to the liberal contractual ideas of John Locke, the League’s liberalism was mitigated by its communitarianism and this mainly because – as it argued – the individual needed the people to find his/her full expression.<sup>1426</sup> At any rate, until the mid-1990s, a ‘light’ identity, mainly based on the economic success and work ethic of the northern peoples, prevailed.

The difference between a socio-economic and an ethnic approach was clearly exposed by the *Libera Compagnia Padana* (Free Padanian Company), a cultural association set up in summer 1995 because the rise of the northern autonomist movements ‘had not been matched by an identical diffusion of the autonomist Padanian culture that has ended up being penalised by the greater attention devoted to “national” economic and social issues’.<sup>1427</sup> Its members concluded that ‘the partial abandonment of the cultural and moral force of their origins eventually becomes the major weakness of such movements’<sup>1428</sup> and thus suggested ‘a strong re-definition of the Padanian identity, by re-ordering and re-constructing the organic unity of its culture’.<sup>1429</sup>

The Padanian Papers, edited by the Company, became the main laboratory of the invention of Padania. According to their authors, Padania consisted in that part of the peninsula between the Alps and the Apennine, including ‘the Italian and Romance-speaking cantons of Switzerland, the region of Nice and the Istrian-Dalmatian villages of Venetian culture’.<sup>1430</sup> This area was inhabited by the Padanian peoples divided into those speaking the Padanian language – ‘the Piedmontese, the Lombards, the Ligurians, the Emilians and the Romagnols’<sup>1431</sup> – the Venetians, the Friulans and the Ladins. Although the Company recognised the existence of ‘sub-ethnic groups’, endowed with their own specificities, Padania was an ‘ethnic homogenous entity [...] characterised by common historical traditions, habits, culture [...] language, life models, juridical institutes,

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<sup>1423</sup> Idem. While the description was certainly exaggerated for propaganda purposes, the style reveals a remarkable feature of the LN: the coexistence of pragmatism and spirituality, of dream and efficiency. This was recently effectively expressed by the name of the current founded during the contest for the leadership begun in 2011 by Roberto Maroni, former federal secretary and current President of Lombardy, ‘The Dreaming Barbarians’.

<sup>1424</sup> Idem.

<sup>1425</sup> BOSSI and VIMERCATI (1993) *op. cit.*, pp. 131-133. See also POLASTRO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>1426</sup> LEONI, GIUSEPPE (1991) ‘Federalismo: il contributo dei cristiani’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(5), 18 February, p. 8.

<sup>1427</sup> LIBERA COMPAGNIA PADANA (1995), ‘Un’associazione per la Padania’, *Quaderni Padania*, I(1), Summer, p. 2.

<sup>1428</sup> Idem.

<sup>1429</sup> Idem. Before the Free Padanian Company, Gianfranco Miglio had already reproached Bossi for having based his pan-northern claim exclusively on socio-economic elements. MIGLIO, *op. cit.*

<sup>1430</sup> LIBERA COMPAGNIA PADANA (1995) ‘Statuto dell’associazione’, *Quaderni Padani*, I(1), Summer, p. 34.

<sup>1431</sup> Idem.



geography, economy'.<sup>1432</sup> Culturally speaking such unity derived by the merger of the three peoples originally inhabiting the North: the Ligurians, the Venetians and the Celts, with the last later uniting with the Langobards.<sup>1433</sup> The Celto-Langobard heritage was highly stressed in the Padanian Papers, because – the Company argued – the Celtic cultural tradition survived Roman invasions.<sup>1434</sup> In the sixth century, the Langobards conquered the entire Padania. As the name suggests, the Lombards would then be the direct descendants of the Langobards and, until Italian unification, the name Lombardy had been used to identify the North. As Gilberto Oneto, a leading author of the Padanian Papers and Minister for Identity of the Padanian government, suggested: 'the denomination of the Lombard League [the medieval one EDM], which in its various editions has united cities today belonging to Lombardy, Piedmont, Veneto, Emilia and Romagna, is proof of the total identity between Lombardy and Padania'.<sup>1435</sup>

At the beginning of 1996, the Free Padanian Company's arguments broke into the League's mainstream newspaper. The end of ideologies and the advent of mass culture – an editor argued – had triggered a quest for values and spirituality leading to 're-discovery of "Small Motherlands", i.e., of less mass societies, in which the historical and ethno-cultural heritage gives the individual a new feeling of completeness and self-consciousness'.<sup>1436</sup> The re-discovery of the Padanian identity aimed at filling this gap because, as the LN suggested, 'no political action can succeed if it is not supported by an adequate cultural action, aimed at giving value back to the very identity of a people and the territory that it inhabits'.<sup>1437</sup>

The declaration of Padania's independence described in the previous section required a sustained symbolic effort. The party spent about a year and a half trying to promote the Padanian society. Associations, schools, cooperatives, media, a national football team, beauty contests, art companies and events, all this was created,<sup>1438</sup> acting 'as if' the Padanian nation existed. 'An enormous work',<sup>1439</sup> as Bossi defined it, but one that did not

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<sup>1432</sup> VITALE, ALESSANDRO (1996) 'Padania, etnie e federalismo', *Quaderni Padani*, II(3), January-February, p. 1.

<sup>1433</sup> ONETO, GILBERTO (1996) 'I confini della Padania', *Quaderni Padani*, II(3), January-February 1996, pp. 10-18.

<sup>1434</sup> MONTAGNA, MAURIZIO G. (1995) 'La "Terra di Mezzo". Il recupero del celtismo padano', *Quaderni Padani*, I(2), Fall, pp. 4. Although they admitted that the Romans subdued the area, the authors of the Padanian Papers suggested that the Celtic cultural, and also genetic, heritage was preserved by Celtic groups sheltered in the pre-Alpine area. As the Romans never conquered the Alpine region, but only the flatland, branches of the Celtic tribes previously inhabiting the flatland could survive and prosper in the valleys. Experiencing a demographic surplus, these tribes recurrently 'refilled' the Celtic ethnic, cultural and genetic stock in the lowlands. As it was argued in the Papers, 'all this explains "the surprising" Celticness of Lombardy as evidenced by genetic studies supporting the claim that the Italian demographic influence in the Cisalpine area was certainly modest'. Here, Italian, of course, means southern. CORTI, MICHELE (1995), 'Riflessioni sulla matrice alpina dell'identità etnica lombarda', *Quaderni Padani*, I(1), Summer, p. 10. In this connection, the Papers concluded that the Apennines happened to be a better barrier than the Alps, preventing any major contacts between the populations living north and south of them. ONETO, GILBERTO (1996) 'I confini della Padania', *op. cit.*

<sup>1435</sup> ONETO, GILBERTO (1995) 'Come si chiama questa Terra', *Quaderni Padani*, I(2), Fall, pp. 7-8. This tendency to equate Padania with Lombardy has always been resented by the Venetian League and constitutes a permanent tension within the movement.

<sup>1436</sup> CROCI, ALFREDO (1996) 'Dialecto, anima e forza di un Popolo', *Lega Nord*, XIV(9), 4 March, p. 7.

<sup>1437</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>1438</sup> SALVINI, MATTEO (1998) 'Una società in evoluzione', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(11), 14 March, pp. 10-15.

<sup>1439</sup> CORNALI, ALESSANDRO (1998) 'Il Ritorno del Guerriero', *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(31), 8 August, p. 8.

bring immediate electoral results, which urged Bossi to change tactic to the chagrin of the separatists within the party.<sup>1440</sup>

As in the first half of the 1990s, the socio-economic homogeneity of the northern regions became more prominent. However, although it is true that the more ethnic definition of the Padanian identity was sidelined along with the goal of independence, the identification of the North with the name Padania – which was quite recent<sup>1441</sup> – remained everyday practice within the movement. Also, an ethnic conception of the national community can be seen lurking behind the party's rejection of multicultural society, as we will see more in detail in the next section. Finally, the party has continued to show indifference, if not to openly boycott Italian national holidays, as happened at the celebrations for the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Italian unification, on March 17, 2011. On that day, for instance, the League's councillors of Lombardy deliberately deserted the commencement of the Regional Council's meeting, when the national anthem was played. They were found at a nearby bar, having breakfast together.

### 6.2.5 Against Multicultural Society

Corollary of the *Lega's* stress on the need to preserve the ethnic bond between the individual and the local community has been its rejection of multicultural society (Figure 6.7). In 1984, the Lombard League recognised the 'ever growing need' of the Lombards 'to rediscover that self-consciousness which had been sacrificed to make room for one million immigrants'.<sup>1442</sup> Those migrants were southern Italians, but they were defined as alien to the North. Later, from the end of the 1980s on, when talking about immigration, the League mainly meant Third World migrants, but there was an element of continuity between the two categories: both were conceived as weakening local identity, causing social alienation and favouring authoritarian turns. As Bossi wrote in 1990, 'by destroying the process of ethnic identity, multi-racial society provokes the decline of morality and, hence, of solidarity'.<sup>1443</sup> Societies – the party thought – could integrate alien bodies, but not beyond a certain threshold, otherwise they would develop 'social pathologies' (sic) like homosexuality, youth deviation, drug addiction and even sterility. If immigration from Southern Italy was to be discouraged, the LN however allowed for the integration of those already in the North. But Third World migrants could hardly assimilate at all, even after generations. Their integration would mean the immediate demise of the national community.<sup>1444</sup> In the party's mind-set, migrations were supported by the left, the Church and big capitalism for purely instrumental reasons: the first wanted their votes, the second their despair, the third their cheap labour. Moreover, by competing with local workers, immigrants made up a new proletariat setting the ground for social conflicts that

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<sup>1440</sup> BRENNI (1998) 'Padania é solo l'inizio. Riflessioni sul momento politico della Lega e del Movimento indipendentista', *Quaderni Padani*, IV(17), May-June, pp.1-6.

<sup>1441</sup> There are very few instances of its use before 1995.

<sup>1442</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1984) 'Non illudersi', *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(21), October, p. 2.

<sup>1443</sup> BOSSI (1990) 'Trionfa', *op. cit.*, p. 8. For similar ideas earlier on see LEGA LOMBARDA (1983) 'Statuto', *op. cit.*, art. 4, p. 2.

<sup>1444</sup> BOSSI (1990) 'Trionfa', *op. cit.*, p. 8. Third World immigration somehow re-approached the *Lega* and the south, as some of the League's arguments on the issue could be shared by part of the southern Italian population.

traditional parties could seize to justify an authoritarian *coup*. Immigration was thus seen as a threat to democracy.<sup>1445</sup>

**Figure 6.7 – ‘The Tricolour That We Do Not Want! Multiracial in Order to Make Us Accept an Authoritarian State’ (1990)**



Source: PIAZZO and MALAGUTI (1996) *La Lega*, *op. cit.*

Yet, when looking in detail at the party’s internal propaganda, in the first half of the 1990s, immigration was mainly rejected on account of technical and efficiency reasons, such as its effects on unemployment, social and healthcare spending, and criminality. The *Lega* expressed serious concerns about the demographic surplus and the poor political conditions of Northern African countries, which would push ever more migrants onto the Italian coasts,<sup>1446</sup> and firmly refused to accept the legitimacy of ‘economic immigration’. Commenting on the wave of Albanian citizens leaving their country after the Albanian government’s bankruptcy, for instance, Roberto Ronchi, head of the Lombard League in Milan, argued that ‘the cause [of their migration EDM] does not lie in persecutions carried out by the government of Tirana, but in a situation of economic distress and in a generic and illusory wish to improve one’s standard of living, which cannot bind Italy either politically, or morally, or according to international obligations’.<sup>1447</sup> Furthermore, already the Lombard League had shown a Malthusian conception of economics, whereby unlimited development was impossible and, therefore, the indigenous community should

<sup>1445</sup> Idem.

<sup>1446</sup> LN (1992) ‘Immigrazione un problema complesso’, *La Vus da Galarà*, supplement to *Lombardia Autonomista* X(1), January, p. 4.

<sup>1447</sup> RONCHI, ROBERTO (1991) ‘Gli albanesi non sono rifugiati’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(7), 12 March, p. 2.

have economic priority in the distribution of resources. As a consequence, industrial development had to be 'proportional to the offer of the local workforce'<sup>1448</sup> and immigration had to be discouraged by paying better those manual jobs that were held in low esteem in advanced societies.<sup>1449</sup> In short, the party thought that capital and goods should freely move, while people should not. It also argued that Padania needed more effective development cooperation, bringing the means of production to Third World peoples rather than the opposite.

The LN, however, adopted a tougher stand on immigration in the second half of the 1990s. In 1999, the leading editorialist of the Padanian Papers, nicknamed Brenno, wrote an article entitled 'Against the three worst plagues of history'. As the title suggests, the piece was not exactly moderate: 'the history of the Western world has known three big curses invented by man: Rome, Islam and communism'.<sup>1450</sup> Islam meant 'the invasion of masses of purportedly dispossessed people that, behind the mask of exiles and victims, hide the usual arrogance and overbearingness, the inclination to violence and prevarication, to religious intolerance and to the worst anti-democratic absolutism'.<sup>1451</sup> Padania was depicted as having always fought against Muslim expansionism and the text advocated the continuation of this resistance.

As we have already noticed, the Padanian Papers have not been an official party publication, but in the second half of the 1990s many of the arguments published there made their way into the party's official propaganda. This is the case with one of the best-known official publications of the LN, 'Padania, identity and multiracial society'. In this booklet, the emphasis was more on Third World migrants in general, rather than on Islam, but concrete references were made to the demographic surplus produced in the Maghreb area that risked upsetting the balance of power in Europe. Immigration was regarded as the wedge used by global, especially American, big business to divide European societies and turn citizens into alienated 'global consumers'. There, Padania represented one of those small peoples that rose against this trend in order to assert the right to be 'masters in our land'. Later in the text, however, the party tried to moderate its stand asserting a 'differentialist' view of the world, similar to the ethnopluralism of the *Vlaams Belang*. The members of the Padanian nation, therefore, were described as 'proud of their ethnic community without for this reason considering it superior to others, they accept differences, they prefer in principle their neighbours to the members of other ethnic groups, without however rejecting cooperation'.<sup>1452</sup> The LN argued that those who supported multiculturalism were the true racists, because they aimed at erasing cultures. Hence, it concluded, immigration was a weapon used by Third World countries as a tool of 'demographic imperialism that tends to demographically, culturally and politically reduce our nations to an appendix of countries that do not belong to the European continent'.<sup>1453</sup>

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<sup>1448</sup> LEGA LOMBARDA (1983) 'Programma', *Lombardia Autonomista*, II(13), June, pp. 3.

<sup>1449</sup> BOSSI(1990) 'I limiti dello sviluppo', *op. cit.* To be more precise, the argument was that, by preventing immigration, salaries in low skilled profession would naturally rise because of the absence of migrants' competition and locals would thus be eager to do them.

<sup>1450</sup> BRENNNO (1999) 'Contro i tre peggiori morbi della storia', *Quaderni Padani*, V(22-23), March-June, p. 3.

<sup>1451</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 4.

<sup>1452</sup> MUSSA, GIORGIO, CORTI, CARLO and RONCHI, ROBERTO (1999) *Padania, identità e società multirazziale* (Milano: Enti Locali Padani Federali) p. 12.

<sup>1453</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18. This statement was of course, at least partially, in contradiction with the one above, as immigration was represented as a weapon deliberately used, at the same time, by both big business and Third World countries to weaken Europe.

The *Lega* further suggested that, since men were ‘dots’ in the history written by succeeding generations, they should at least be conscious of their responsibility, before their ancestors and descendants, to preserve their identity. Defending one’s identity was a morally correct and legitimate choice because ‘when people feel uncertain about themselves and look for justifications, the enemy does not hesitate to strike’.<sup>1454</sup> This ‘shame’ of one’s own identity was the biggest strength of the enemies of the European culture and the solution lay in limiting immigration to the capacity of absorption of the local society, favouring the relocation of immigrants in their countries of origin through economic incentives, improving development cooperation, adopting *ius sanguinis* rules for citizenship, defending local culture and giving priority to Padanians, and Europeans, in access to public services.<sup>1455</sup>

Unsurprisingly, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the LN’s rhetoric especially focused on Muslim migrants. Some party members called on the Muslims living in Italy to openly take their distance from fundamentalism, arguing that their attitude towards Islamic extremism was ambiguous and nourished suspicions that such a thing as a ‘moderate Islam’ did not exist. Discussing CIA’s claims that the Islamic centre of Milan hosted a cell of Al Qaeda led by the local imam, an editor of *Il Sole delle Alpi* (Sun of the Alps) concluded that ‘to Muslims, who have destroyed our [sic] Towers, we have in fact granted too much, without getting anything back. Their “holy war” made through hijacking and, now, with anthrax envelopes, is disgusting, as disgusting as the cover offered to terrorists’.<sup>1456</sup> The emphasis on fundamentalist Islam stressed the security side of immigration policy, an element that had already existed in the League’s rhetoric but ranked considerably higher among the party’s priorities from 2001 on. Besides arguments concerning the threat of terrorism, the LN has suggested a causal link between immigration, especially clandestine immigration, and security, as, not having an income, migrants would be ‘forced to break the law’.<sup>1457</sup> It also claimed to be the only party listening to people’s worries about rising crime. Hence, during its time in government, it promised to put an end to all this, to compel judges to apply more rigorously the existing laws on immigration and to introduce the crime of clandestinity, which it did in 2009.<sup>1458</sup> The *Lega* also actively supported and, through the action of the Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni technically implemented, push-back operations of migrants’ boats on the high sea off North Africa, arguing that they were necessary to stop the ‘invasion’ of the Italian coasts.<sup>1459</sup>

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<sup>1454</sup> Ibidem, p. 11.

<sup>1455</sup> A list of concrete legislative proposals was attached at the end of the publication. While we need not go into details, it is interesting to remark that among these the League advocated draconian measures concerning clandestine migrants: these should be sentenced to 3-5 years of detention, while, if refusing to declare their identity, or, if providing a fake one, the sentence should be raised to 5-8 years. Likewise, all those who facilitated the stay of clandestine non-EU migrants should be punished with 1 to 3 years of detention. At the same time, the party never elaborated detailed extreme plans of migrants’ relocation in the countries of origin as the *Vlaams Belang* did in the mid-1990s.

<sup>1456</sup> BALLARIN, ALBERTO (2001) ‘Una lealtà tutta da dimostrare’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, V(42), 27 October, pp. 10-11. Note how the editor, here, is talking from a supposedly Western perspective, whereby the Twin Towers are ‘our’ towers. Although he did not clearly state it, it is obvious that he was taking the ‘clash of civilisation’ theory for granted, in which Islam was fighting against Western Christianity.

<sup>1457</sup> STUCCHI, GIACOMO (2008) ‘Nessun razzismo, solo paura’, *la Padania*, 29 May, p. 3.

<sup>1458</sup> This has been removed in January 2014 by the government led by Enrico Letta. The *Lega* strongly opposed the move.

<sup>1459</sup> BRICOLO, FEDERICO (2009) ‘Aiutiamo prima i nostri, adesso é ufficiale’, *La Padania*, 3 July, p. 2.

From the late 1990s, the *Lega* also clarified its Christian identity and this not only with reference to the fight against Islam. Rejecting the ‘relativism in which we live’, Alessandro Cè, head of the League’s MPs in the Lower Chamber, argued that ‘we cannot abstract from the fact that the Church is fundamental for the renaissance of the European civilisation...its values are those of us all. Those that have shaped our culture through centuries’.<sup>1460</sup> Despite being a lay movement, the League clearly stood for the defence of Christian values and was also accused by some of sympathising with conservative catholic currents close to Marcel Lefebvre, leader of the Traditionalist Catholic Society of Saint Pius X and excommunicated in 1988 by the Pope for his ideas opposing the Second Vatican Council.<sup>1461</sup>

### 6.2.6 Europe

The construction of a ‘Europe of the peoples’ figured in the early programmes of both the Venetian and Lombard Leagues. In effect, the 1979 European elections were the ‘incubator’ of their future political action, as their common mentor, Bruno Salvadori, had met the representatives of both while attempting to build up an alliance precisely for those elections. When in the 1980s, with the *relance européenne*, the prospects of true integration started taking more concrete substance, the Venetian League openly declared that ‘we think that just the realisation of a federal Europe, where all the peoples have their rights recognised, may change even the Italian State, where “the hegemony of the South” affects the development of the other peoples’.<sup>1462</sup>

Thus, in this early phase, European integration was regarded as a quite positive development by the various autonomist movements that arose across the North. It was not just a matter of hope that Europe would make Italy a more democratic state. As in the other case studies, Europe was also seen as a positive other, as a civilizational standard to aim at (Figure 6.8). The Leagues felt that the North was a natural member of the club of the northern European advanced nations, while Italy was not because of southern backwardness and state corruption. Being part of the Italian state thus tarnished the image of the North: ‘we go abroad – we Northern Italians – believing we share the same mind-set the French, the English, the Germans, the Swiss, the Austrians have, in many things: in values, in our life models, in our habits. And yet, the other Europeans, used to the “Italians”, force upon us what we are not, the image that the Mediterranean Italians have given: dirty, mafious, lazy and corrupted’.<sup>1463</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, the criteria for monetary integration were set. Candidate countries had to limit their budget deficits to no more than 3% of GDP and public debt to no more than 60%. At the time, Italy’s deficit was around 10% and public debt hit 120%. In order to avoid being excluded, which would have been a tragedy for northern enterprises, the League called for bold domestic reform entailing the division of the

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<sup>1460</sup> Alessandro Cè, quoted in CORNALI, ALESSANDRO (2002) ‘I valori cristiani alla base della società’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, VI(38), 28 September, pp. 24-26.

<sup>1461</sup> See SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*, p. 218-220; and PARISI, MAX (2003) ‘Tradizione e fede opposte alla caduta del nostro sistema occidentale’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, VII(11), 15 March, pp. 24-27. Although in the late 2000s, the party took distance from the Lefebvrians. See STEFANI, STEFANO (2009) ‘I Lefebvriani non c’entrano con la Lega’, *La Padania*, 31 January, p. 8.

<sup>1462</sup> MARIN, MARILENA (1989) ‘Scelta Europea. Alleanza Nord’, *Mondo Veneto* VI(4), June, pp. 1-2.

<sup>1463</sup> ARCUCCI, FRANCESCO (1992) ‘I valori della nostra cultura’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, X(10), 8 May, p. 5.

country into three federal republics, each responsible for its fiscal policy.<sup>1464</sup> Then, in the mid-1990s, the LN suggested that it was too late to change the country, and that, even if it had entered the monetary union, Italy's structural inefficiencies would have stifled northern firms, killed by the competition of companies located in the more advanced states of Northern and Central Europe. They offered two possible solutions: first, the adoption of two different currencies, one for the North and the other for the South, which eventually meant the division of Italy into two separate economic systems;<sup>1465</sup> second, the independence of Padania.<sup>1466</sup> Yet, the dichotomy was only apparent, because, it was implied, monetary separation would naturally lead to political separation.<sup>1467</sup>

**Figure 6.8 – ‘Nothern Alliance, Farther Away from Rome, Closer to Europe’ (1989)**



Source: PIAZZO and MALAGUTI (1996) *La Lega, op. cit.*, p. 22.

As this strategy failed, the party grew progressively more critical of the process of European integration. Previous criticism had focused on the Common Agricultural Policy, that unfairly penalised Northern Italian producers, especially in the dairy sector, as well as on the need to give a stronger role to regions in the EU.<sup>1468</sup> In 1997, the party began

<sup>1464</sup> BOSSI, UMBERTO (1991) ‘L’Italia fuori dall’Europa’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, IX(26), 5 August, p. 4. See also, STAGLIENO, MARCELLO (1994) ‘L’Italia nel nuovo contesto internazionale’, *Lega Nord*, XII(12), 20 April, p. 2.

<sup>1465</sup> MALAGUTI, CRISTINA (1996) ‘Una moneta forte per il Nord’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(23), 3 June, p. 11; BOSSI, UMBERTO (1996) ‘Nord-Sud: due economie, due monete’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(23) 3 June, p. 4; LN (1996) ‘Quattro opzioni’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(29), 15 July, p. 5.

<sup>1466</sup> PAINI, PAOLO (1996) ‘Un referendum per la Padania’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(3), 22 January, p. 3; BOSSI, UMBERTO (1996) ‘Padania sovrana’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(31), 29 July, p. 2.

<sup>1467</sup> AGEPADANIA (1996) ‘Padania: la sua moneta per andare in Europa’, *Lega Nord*, XIV(33), 9 September, p. 2.

<sup>1468</sup> CORTI, MICHELE (1990) ‘No alle “quote latte” CEE’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, VIII(3), 17 February, p. 8; MORETTI, LUIGI (1992) ‘L’Europa può essere solo federale’, *Repubblica del Nord*, X(38), 21 October, p. 14; MONTI, CHRISTIAN (1992) ‘Mercato comune sì, unione politica no’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, X(17), 19 June, p. 4; PIAZZO, STEFANIA (1994) ‘Più forza all’agricoltura del Nord’, *Lega Nord*, XII(18), 25 May, p. 6. The overall judgement however was positive and, indeed, the *Lega* eagerly

voicing Eurosceptic arguments more vocally, arguing that the introduction of the euro risked reproducing an Italian scenario on a continental scale, whereby the strongest economies (Germany, France and Padania) would pay for the weakest ones (Greece, Spain and Southern Italy).<sup>1469</sup> A year later, it clearly denounced the degeneration of the European project into a bureaucratic and centralising entity dominated by state governments, inefficient, undemocratic and totally indifferent to the pleas of the European peoples,<sup>1470</sup> a criticism that became the standard line of attack in the following years.<sup>1471</sup> This coupled with accusations that the common currency had furthered inflation and that the enlargement to former communist countries would threaten the European economy and identity.<sup>1472</sup> Concerning the latter, Bossi suggested that a Europe enlarged to its Eastern part ‘would only be an immense global market dominated by high finance and multinationals: there would no longer be peoples, traditions, the Christian religion... in one word, there would be no autonomy and freedom’.<sup>1473</sup> Not surprisingly, the negotiations for Turkey’s EU candidate status added new fuel to *Lega*’s Eurosceptic positions as its accession would bring within the Union ‘about 200 million people (sic) who with Europe and its values have nothing to do, but who in Europe will have an enormous political weight’.<sup>1474</sup>

The League’s anti-EU propaganda has been stepped up in the context of the recent euro crisis. Paradoxically, the situation realised in the Euro area since 2010 strikingly reflected the debate about the productive North and the parasitic South that the League had so eagerly contributed to set up in Italy. One could then expect the party to agree with the austerity imposed by the stronger European governments – Germany above all – and the European Commission on the weakest ones – Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and, eventually, Italy. On the contrary, starting from 2011, the *Lega* has gone from a lukewarm

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claimed Padania’s right to join the strongest European countries leaving the South behind. See: FORMENTINI, MARCO (1992) ‘Maastricht apre al federalismo’, *Lombardia Autonomista*, X(32), 4 September, p. 2; MALAGUTI, CRISTINA (1992) ‘Europa, il Nord è pronto’, *Repubblica del Nord*, X(37), 21 October, p. 11; POLI, GABRIELLA (1993) ‘Pronti ad entrare in Europa’, *Lega Nord*, XI(34), 16 July, p. 4; AGEPADANIA (1996) *op. cit.* The change of party’s rhetoric concerning the EU in the late 1990s is confirmed by Biorcio. BIORCIO, ROBERTO (1998) ‘L’Unione in Italia: chi ha paura dell’Euro?’, *Il Mulino*, 3, May-June, pp. 535-545.

<sup>1469</sup> BONOMETTI, GIOVANNI (1997) ‘Euro fregatura’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, I(8), 1 November, pp. 54-59.

<sup>1470</sup> BONOMETTI, GIOVANNI (1998) ‘Eurominaccia’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, II(16), 18 April, pp. 14-19. Here, however, the LN was careful to take distance from other Eurosceptic parties, such as the *Front national* and the *Vlaams Blok*, that it considered as fascist.

<sup>1471</sup> GNOCCHI, MASSIMO (2000) ‘L’Unione che non ci piace’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, IV(48), 9 December, pp. 4-7; REINA, PIETRO (2001) ‘Una follia il superstato europeo’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, V(24), 16 June, p. 1; STUCCHI, GIACOMO (2008) ‘Trattato europeo, con il referendum sarebbe stato tutto diverso’, *La Padania*, 31 July, p. 5. In the context of growing competition from China and other developing countries, in the second half of the 2000s, the party also accused the EU of not providing enough protection against unfair competition. See, STEFANI, STEFANO (2008) ‘L’Europa non tutela le imprese padane’, *La Padania*, 2 October, p. 7.

<sup>1472</sup> QUIRICONI, ALESSIA (2002) ‘Euro...ma quanto mi costi?’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, VI(28), 13 July, pp. 8-13.

<sup>1473</sup> BONTEMPI, ARCHIMEDE (2001) ‘La posta in gioco’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, V(18), 5 May, p. 1.

<sup>1474</sup> FERRARI, MASSIMILIANO (2002) ‘Turchia nella UE? No, grazie’, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, VI(36), 14 September, p. 15. The author refers not only to the 70 million people living in Turkey, but also to the Turkish communities already living in the EU. In any case, two hundred million clearly is an exaggerated figure.



sympathy with the EU's rigour concerning the need to put state accounts in order<sup>1475</sup> to a strong opposition to the Commission's requirements, accusations of German imperialism aimed at killing Northern Italian competition,<sup>1476</sup> and calls for a referendum on the euro,<sup>1477</sup> until the decision, since January 2014, to openly call for Italy's exit from the common currency.<sup>1478</sup> This is a major u-turn in the party's rhetoric. Although critical of the euro since the late 1990s, the League had never before called for a return to the lira. It had instead consistently proposed the revision of the euro in order to include only homogenous (i.e. strong) economies such as Germany, the Netherlands, France, the Scandinavian countries. This would have entailed the separation of the North from the South, with the former joining the club of virtuous economies. To understand the watershed represented by this change, suffice it to consider that the proposal to exit the euro has mainly been based on the idea that the euro penalises Northern Italy because it is a strong currency moulded around the strong German economy. Calling for the re-establishment of the lira implies that Northern Italy has become a weak economy.

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<sup>1475</sup> DUSSIN, LUCIANO (2011) 'Zavorra Sud, zavorra Italia', *la Padania*, 13 September, p. 8; CIAMBETTI, ROBERTO (2012) 'Euro, Monti pretende da Merkel ciò che nega alle regioni virtuose', *la Padania*, 24-25 giugno, p. 4.

<sup>1476</sup> REGUZZONI, GIUSEPPE (2012) 'Ma Monti & C. sognano un Superstato centrale', *la Padania*, 28 June, p. 7; BASSI, PAOLO GUIDO (2012) 'Sovranità addio. In Europa c'è chi vuole uno "Zar" dei conti', *la Padania*, 29 June, p. 4.

<sup>1477</sup> LN (2012) 'Referendum, il quesito', *la Padania*, 7 September, p. 1. The referendum, however, did not call for abandoning the common currency, but rather to redraw its membership, allowing only those 'territories' (and not states) that showed a balanced budget to take part in it. In other words, the question would be whether Padania would like to join a new euro made up of only fiscally healthy areas.

<sup>1478</sup> See BORGHI AQUILINI, CLAUDIO (2014) *Basta Euro* (Milano: Boniardi). For more on this see, HUYSSSEUNE, MICHEL and DALLE MULLE, EMMANUEL, 'Crisi economica ed "evoluzione del regionalismo dei ricchi": la *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, la Lega Nord e la retorica europea dell'austerità', *Polis*, forthcoming in autumn 2015.

## 6.3 Examining the LN's Discourse and Strategy

As in the other case studies, in this part we examine the socio-economic context that favoured the formation of the nationalism of the rich as formulated by the League and its ensuing evolution. The first section deals with the arguments of economic victimisation, while the second focuses on the claims of political marginalisation. In these two sections we try to explain why the nationalism of the rich arose in the first half of the 1980s among the regionalist leagues that preceded the LN and why it became popular between the later part of that decade and the early 1990s, when it was further refined by the Northern League.

### 6.3.1 Economic Victimisation

The claim of northern fiscal exploitation has certainly been the main contribution of the *Lega Nord* to the Italian political debate, urging, since the beginning of the 1990s, all other parties to embrace, at least formally, the goal of a federal reform of the state. The party's claim has clearly been linked to the existence of a cultural fracture between the North and the South, but it has also been openly associated with the interests of a specific constituency within the North, that of the areas of late industrialisation centred around the small and medium-sized firm.

In this section, therefore, we first look at the rise and characteristics of the so-called 'Third Italy'; we then discuss the main academic works that have attempted an evaluation of the nature and size of the fiscal flows from North to South; next, we analyse the economic context of the 1980s and early 1990s with special reference to the dire, and worsening, situation of the Italian state finances throughout the period; and we finally evaluate more recent economic trends in order to account for the persistence of the League's arguments.

Arnaldo Bagnasco has been the first scholar to analyse the development of an area characterised by SMEs in the country. In *Tre Italie* (Three Italies), he read the evolution of the Italian economy as the interrelation of three different socio-economic systems endowed with a specific function and a precise territorial delimitation: the South, as an underdeveloped area dependent on the industrialisation of the North West; the North West – especially the metropolitan areas of Turin, Milan and Genoa – as the site of big industry and the chosen recipient of state investments towards technological excellence; and the Centre-North East, as the region of late industrialisation where SMEs proliferated.<sup>1479</sup> The Third Italy was basically made up of the regions of Veneto, Tuscany and Emilia Romagna. In 1971, SMEs accounted for more than 75% of total manufacturing firms in each of these three regions. Yet, SMEs represented an important part of the northwestern economic fabric as well. In Piedmont, in the first half of the 1970s, about 50% of the car industry production was in fact carried out in SMEs and then assembled in the factories of FIAT (the leading Italian car maker). Similarly, Lombardy showed a lower percentage of SMEs in the total number of firms than Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, but in absolute terms these employed more than 1 million people, equal to those of Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and

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<sup>1479</sup> BAGNASCO, ARNALDO (1977) *Tre Italie. La problematica territoriale dello sviluppo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino), pp. 153-212. Bagnasco referred to SMEs as firms with fewer than 250 employees. Today, however, the majority of manufacturing SMEs employ fewer than 10 employees.

Tuscany altogether.<sup>1480</sup> Hence, as Bagnasco concluded, the North West was an area of SMEs as well.<sup>1481</sup>

SMEs were territorially diffused, often organised in industrial districts, highly specialised in traditional labour-intensive sectors – such as furniture, footwear and leather, textiles and garments – and mainly employing cheap labour on flexible temporary contracts.<sup>1482</sup> The small size stemmed from both practical reasons (international competition demanding higher flexibility, advantages of decentralised production) and distortions induced by state and domestic inefficiencies (a sluggish state bureaucracy, high labour costs, contract rigidity increasing with firms' size, a backward financial sector, insufficient research institutions). Thus, the Third Italy represented a section of the Italian economy that filled specific niches in traditional sectors, often coinciding with previously existing craft traditions, and targeted either the supply of semi-processed products to domestic big firms or international markets – exports made up 20% of total production.<sup>1483</sup> It also constituted an answer to the problems experienced by the model of big – and often state-aided – industrialisation characterising the triangle between Milan, Turin and Genoa, which in the 1970s struggled to compete internationally. These smaller units often provided lower costs and higher flexibility, although later many of them also developed technological excellences and became world leaders in specific productions. Such a process was hardly the result of a conscious government choice, since, even if SMEs certainly profited from the devaluation of the lira of the 1970s, they equally suffered from the anti-inflationary measures adopted in the following decade and were not the main target of state subsidies, which rather concentrated on tottering big firms and on promoting industrialisation in the South.<sup>1484</sup>

As Figure 6.9 shows, between 1951 and 1991, the Centre-North East, along with some rural provinces of the North West such as Cuneo, Alessandria, Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona, Mantua, experienced a general convergence towards the living standards of the industrial areas of the Milan-Turin-Genoa triangle. The region of Veneto is an exemplary case in this respect. While in 1951 its per capita value added was equal only to 81% of the national average, by 1981 it hit 109%, displaying the quickest growth rate among northern regions.<sup>1485</sup>

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<sup>1480</sup> They were 375,000 in Veneto, 370,000 in Emilia-Romagna and 341,000 in Tuscany for a total of 1,086,000. Also in Piedmont their absolute number was sizable, 377,000.

<sup>1481</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 219.

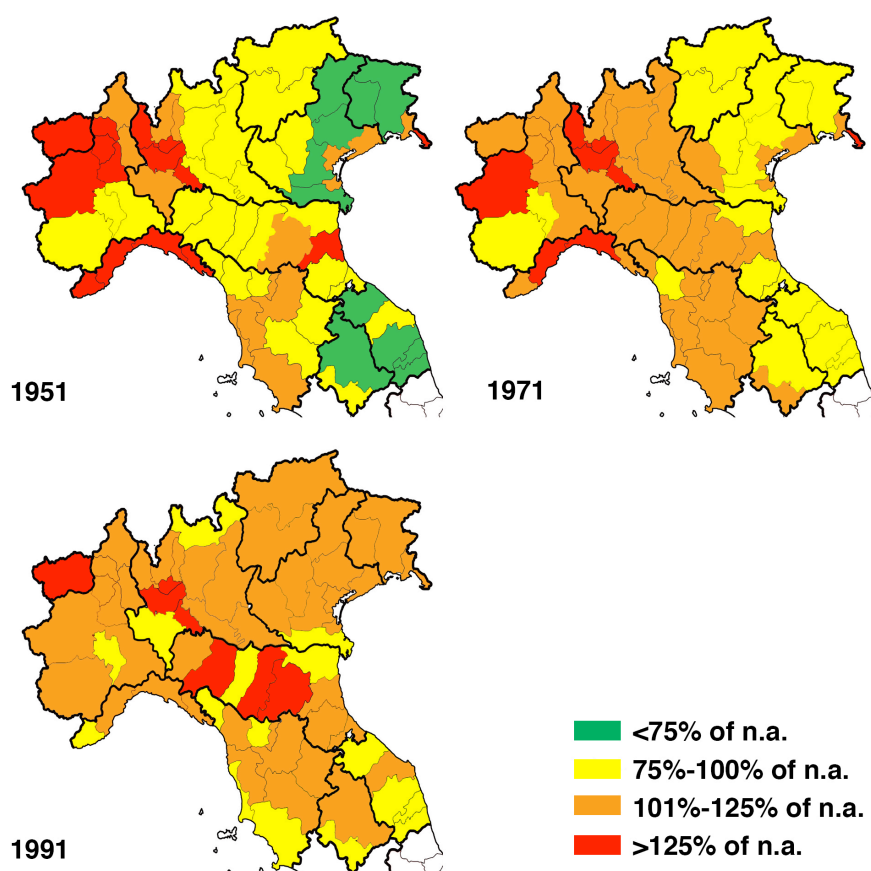
<sup>1482</sup> Work at home and black market jobs were also widespread.

<sup>1483</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>1484</sup> BAGNASCO, ARNALDO and TRIGILIA, CARLO (1993) *La construction sociale du marché. Le défi de la Troisième Italie* (Cachan: Edition Cachan) pp. 39-49.

<sup>1485</sup> Our calculations on data from ISTITUTO G. TAGLIACARNE, *op. cit.*

**Figure 6.9 – Value Added per Capita by Province, 1951-1991 (percentage of national average)**



n.a. = national average.

Source: our elaboration on data from ISTITUTO G. TAGLIACARNE (2011) *Reddito e Occupazione nelle province italiane dal 1861 ad oggi*.

Electoral studies have shown a striking correlation between support for the LN and employment in areas of SMEs industrialisation, at least for the early 1990s. Analysing the Lombard League, Vittorio Moioli stressed that among its voters there was a high proportion of private sector workers and self-employed living in small centres with higher than average employment but lower than average levels of education, salaries and ratios of civil servants to the total population.<sup>1486</sup> Some years later, Diamanti confirmed a similar profile for the electors of the new Northern League at large. According to his findings, most lived in small centres of diffused industrialisation enjoying lower than average levels of state transfers.<sup>1487</sup> The correlation between SMEs and the electoral success of the League, however, does not hold for Emilia Romagna. The explanation is probably to be found in the communist sub-culture that dominated the region since the post-War period – and arguably even before – which was ideologically too dissimilar to undergo a quick transition. Furthermore, also because it was less touched by the corruption scandals of the

<sup>1486</sup> MOIOLI, *op. cit.*

<sup>1487</sup> DIAMANTI (1994), *op. cit.* The coincidence of the League's strongholds with the areas of diffused industrialisation is also confirmed by BONOMI, ALDO (1997) *Il capitalismo molecolare. La società al lavoro nel Nord Italia* (Torino: Einaudi).

early 1990s, the *Partito comunista italiano* (Italian Communist Party, PCI) did not melt away as did the *Democrazia Cristiana* (Christian Democracy, DC) and the *Partito socialista italiano* (Italian Socialist Party, PSI), but rather reformed itself into a social democratic movement, the *Partito democratico della Sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left, PDS) which could therefore keep its territorial hold on the area and prevent an expansion of the League. Finally, municipalities in this area tended to spend substantially more than those led by the DC, which were mainly located in the northern regions where the League prospered, thus probably imposing constraints on the success of arguments of fiscal victimisation.<sup>1488</sup>

In its attempt to represent the constituency of the ‘small producers’, the LN introduced a completely new issue in Italian politics, which has often been referred to as ‘the Northern Question’. Historically speaking, the economic development of the South had always been considered, at least rhetorically, as a necessary requirement to make Italy a modern country. In some versions, especially the view of the ‘meridionalist school’, the area was also seen as the victim of national unification and, more specifically, of a pact between northern industrialists and southern big landowners, the so-called *Blocco Storico* (the historic social bloc) that would have kept the South unindustrialised and dependent on the North to the advantage of both dominant classes.<sup>1489</sup> After the Second World War, and especially since 1957, such a view informed an interventionist and paternalist strategy of state investment in welfare and development policies aimed at industrialising the South and guaranteeing convergence in standards of living with the North, which however led to controversial results. By the early 1990s, the South's GDP was 60% of that of the North, about the same as in 1945.<sup>1490</sup> Considering that in the meantime northern regions had made an impressive leap forward, this was a positive result. Both the North and the South increased their product fourfold in the post-war period. Yet, this evolution was problematic for two reasons. First, southern development resulted more from public employment and top-down industrialisation than from the creation of endogenous factors of growth. The South relied considerably more on public sector jobs (50% of its GDP) than the North (30%).<sup>1491</sup> Second, despite having remained almost unchanged in relative terms, the income gap between the North and the South was much less visible in 1990 than it was in 1945. As argued by Gianfranco Viesti, it was much easier to argue in favour of redistribution to the South when ‘many Southerners lived in houses without restrooms, or they were illiterate’.<sup>1492</sup> In 1990, living standards and levels of consumption were much more homogenous and, thus, solidarity could much more easily be put into question.

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<sup>1488</sup> LEVY, CARL (1996) 'Introduction: Italian Regionalism in Context', in CARL, LEVY (ed.) *Italian Regionalism: History, Identity, Politics* (Oxford: Berg) pp. 1-30; HINE, DAVID (1996) 'Federalism, Regionalism and the Unitary State: Contemporary Regional Pressures in Historical Perspective', in LEVY, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-113. Lately, however, the League has consolidated its support in Emilia-Romagna as well, especially playing on its arguments against multicultural society in an area of recent immigration. ANDERLINI, FAUSTO (2009) 'Il mito dell'espansione leghista', *Il Mulino*, 5, pp. 744-752; PASSARELLI, GIANLUCA and TUORTO, DARIO (2009) 'La Lega Nord oltre il Po', *Il Mulino*, 4, pp. 663-670.

<sup>1489</sup> BAGNASCO (1977) *op. cit.*, pp. 33-45.

<sup>1490</sup> The gap has probably widened since. In 2010, Ricolfi calculated southern GDP as being equal to 53.2% of the northern one. RICOLFI, LUCA (2010) *Il sacco del Nord. Saggio sulla giustizia territoriale* (Milano: Guerini e Associati).

<sup>1491</sup> TRIGILIA, CARLO (1992) *Sviluppo senza autonomia* (Bologna: Il Mulino) pp. 37-73; VIESTI, GIANFRANCO (2003) *Abolire il Mezzogiorno* (Bari: Laterza) pp. 51-53.

<sup>1492</sup> VIESTI (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 7.

**Table 6.1 – Northern Italian Regions’ Fiscal Balances, various estimates (percentage of regional GDP)**

	<b>Ambrosiano et al. (2005, bf)</b>	<b>Arachi et al. (1996-2002, bf)</b>	<b>Brosio et al. (1997, cf)</b>	<b>Staderini et al. (2004-05, bf)</b>
<b>Abruzzo</b>	6.9%	4.2%	-0.6%	5.9%
<b>Aosta Valley*</b>	2.8%	11.7%	10.3%	11.2%
<b>Basilicata</b>	13.7%	19.6%	9.8%	23.1%
<b>Calabria</b>	17.8%	26.9%	7.7%	25.6%
<b>Campania</b>	14.6%	14.3%	2.0%	14.9%
<b>Emilia Romagna</b>	-5.9%	-11.6%	-5.4%	-8.4%
<b>Friuli-VG*</b>	-0.8%	-3.0%	7.2%	-0.4%
<b>Lazio</b>	2.5%	-9.7%	7.4%	-8.5%
<b>Liguria</b>	5.6%	1.0%	-0.1%	3.7%
<b>Lombardy</b>	-11.6%	-17.9%	-6.0%	-14.6%
<b>Marches</b>	0.6%	-2.4%	-4.4%	-1.5%
<b>Molise</b>	14.1%	15.2%	2.8%	20.3%
<b>Piedmont</b>	-1.8%	-8.6%	-4.5%	-5.1%
<b>Puglia</b>	12.9%	12.2%	1.5%	14.3%
<b>Sardinia*</b>	12.4%	16.6%	12.9%	15.4%
<b>Sicily*</b>	16.5%	20.4%	8.8%	18.7%
<b>Trentino-ST*</b>	-1.3%	2.2%	11.0%	4.7%
<b>Tuscany</b>	0.6%	-4.5%	-5.7%	-4.1%
<b>Umbria</b>	7.8%	3.8%	-0.3%	6.6%
<b>Veneto</b>	-6.4%	-11.1%	-9.8%	-7.6%

bf = benefit-flow; cf = cash-flow.

\*Special statute region.

Sources: our calculations on AMBROSIANO et al., *op. cit.*; ARACHI et al., *op. cit.*; STADERINI and VADALÀ, *op. cit.*; BROSIO and REVELLI, *op. cit.*; ISTAT, *Geodemo database*, <http://demo.istat.it/ric/index1.html> (accessed on March 11, 2014) for 1997 population data.

In the early 1990s Carlo Trigilia argued that the South largely profited from redistribution from the North, although this had mainly come from the revenue side rather than the spending one – that is, per capita state expenses have been roughly proportional to the population both in the North and the South, but the latter contributed 50% less than what it received – and mainly from ordinary rather than extraordinary spending, while the latter had instead been the focus of northern criticism.<sup>1493</sup> His data refuted some evaluations carried out at about the same time by Giuseppe de Meo and other researchers

<sup>1493</sup> TRIGILIA, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-73.

who in fact tried to provide evidence that taxation in Italy was regressive and the South was in fact subsidising the North.<sup>1494</sup> Trigilia's results were later confirmed by more recent studies that have also tried to calculate precise estimates of the fiscal transfers. Unfortunately, contrary to the other cases analysed here, rigorous evaluations of interregional fiscal transfers were carried out only in the early 2000s and, because of the poverty of regional data, most of them have focused on single years, rather than providing consistent time series.

In 2003, working on statistics relative to 1997 and using a cash-flow method, Brosio and Revelli calculated the northern fiscal deficit<sup>1495</sup> as being equal to -4.7% of the area's GDP – or -6% excluding the special statute regions – with a peak contribution in Veneto (-9.8% of regional GDP).<sup>1496</sup> Higher figures were obtained in 2006 by Arachi et al. through a benefit-flow analysis covering the 1996-2002 period. The authors concluded that northern regions contributed on average to the central government 11.7% of their GDP, more than what they received back, with Lombardy recording the highest fiscal deficit (-17.4% of its product).<sup>1497</sup> In 2009, calculating the deficit for 2004-2005 through a benefit-flow method and excluding interests on the debt, Staderini and Vadalà found a total deficit of the central administration with the North of -8.6% of northern GDP (-9.6% excluding special statute regions), with a peak again in Lombardy at -14.6%.<sup>1498</sup> Similar conclusions using nearly the same methodology and with reference to 2005, were reached in 2010 by Ambrosiano et al., who found a total transfer of -6.5% of northern GDP – or -7% excluding special statute regions. Lombardy played once more the role of biggest contributor (-11.6% of the region's GDP).<sup>1499</sup> Thus, despite differing somewhat, these studies confirmed the existence of substantial transfers from the North to the South –

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<sup>1494</sup> DE MEO, GIUSEPPE (1992) 'Traslazione territoriale delle risorse in Italia', *Rivista economica del Mezzogiorno*, VI(2), pp. 253-263. De Meo's claims were based on the distinction between 'tax percussion' and 'tax incidence', that is, the difference between the contribution to tax revenue and the real incidence of taxation on people's income, whereby taxes can be passed on to other subjects. In short, De Meo argued that some of the taxes collected in the North were in fact paid by the South through the prices of northern products purchased by southerners. Yet, De Meo did not explain what economic model he used to come to these conclusions, or the elasticity coefficients of the products analysed (as tax incidence hinges heavily on price elasticity). Also, he compared the South to the Centre-North (without clarifying what he meant by either), rather than the South and the North or a set of individual regions.

<sup>1495</sup> Once again, the fiscal balance with the central administration is calculated as the difference between expenses and revenues, thus net contributor regions show a fiscal deficit.

<sup>1496</sup> We have calculated the figures in percentage of GDP from the fiscal deficit and regional GDP data provided by the authors. By North we mean the regions of: Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria, Aosta Valley, Trentino-Sud Tirol and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. BROSIO, GIORGIO and REVELLI, FEDERICO (2003) 'The political economy of regional opting out: distributive implications of a prospective Europe of the Regions', *Economics of Governance*, 4, p. 140. In their calculation of the regional fiscal deficits, the authors also took into account capital spending, interests on the debt and tax shifting effects.

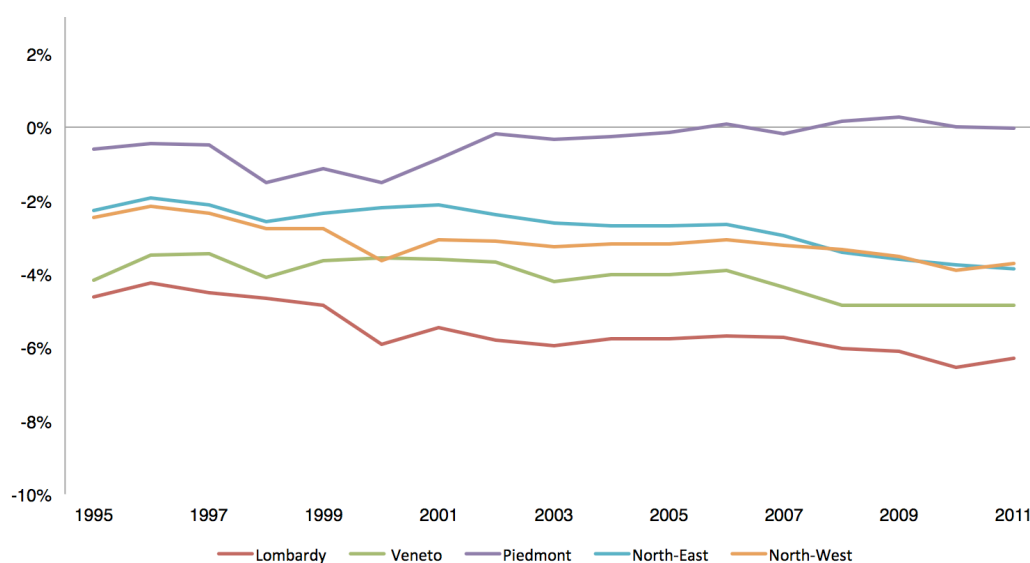
<sup>1497</sup> ARACHI, GIAMPAOLO, FERRARIO, CATERINA and ZANARDI, ALBERTO (2006) 'Redistribuzione e ripartizione del rischio tra territori regionali in Italia: il ruolo dei diversi livelli di governo', in FABRIZIO, BARCA, FRANCESCA, CAPIELLO, LETIZIA, RAVONI and VOLPE, MARIELLA (eds.) *Federalismo, equità, sviluppo. I risultati delle politiche pubbliche analizzati e misurati dai Conti Pubblici Territoriali* (Bologna: Il Mulino) pp. 93-123.

<sup>1498</sup> STADERINI, ALESSANDRA and VADALÀ, EMILIO (2009) 'Bilancio pubblico e flussi redistributivi interregionali: ricostruzione e analisi dei flussi fiscali nelle regioni italiane', in BANCA D'ITALIA, *Mezzogiorno e politiche regionali, seminari e convegni* (Roma: Banca d'Italia) p. 602.

<sup>1499</sup> AMBROSIANO, MARIA FLAVIA, BORDIGNON, MASSIMO and CERNIGLIA FLORIANA (2010) 'Constitutional reforms, fiscal decentralization and regional fiscal flows in Italy', in BOSCH et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 96. We have calculated the figures in percentage of GDP from the fiscal deficit, regional GDP and regional population data provided by the authors.

generally higher than those reviewed in the previous chapters – with the main contributors embodied by the regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna. They showed that all southern regions were net recipients, but such were also the northern special statute ones, which is a staggering conclusion since they enjoy very high levels of income per capita, especially Aosta Valley and Trentino-Süd Tirol.<sup>1500</sup> Commenting on the results, Staderini and Vadalà argued that the flows were quite proportional to the distribution of income across the peninsula and largely justified on account of inter-personal re-distribution, only magnified by the big gap between northern and southern regions. Likewise, Ambrosiano et al. found tax revenue to be substantially proportional to income and only slightly larger in richer Lombardy (24%) compared to poorer Calabria (22.4%). However, both pointed to some problems as well. Staderini and Vadalà made room for the possibility that part of the transfers was generated by lower efficiency in the public sector in southern regions, while Ambrosiano et al. focused on the lack of convergence between the South and the rest of the country and wondered whether, in the context of the recent financial crisis, such generous flows could still be sustainable (for a synthetic view of the data discussed in this paragraph see Table 6.1).<sup>1501</sup>

**Figure 6.10 – Redistributive Effort per Capita, selected Italian regions, 1995-2011 (percentage of standardised primary income)\***



\* Our measure of the regions' redistributive effort is based on a formula proposed by Lago-Penas et al. as a modification of the approach first suggested by Bayoumi and Masson. Accordingly, the redistributive effort of a specific region is calculated as follows:  $Effort = ((D_i/D_n) - (P_i/P_n))/(P_i/P_n)$ , where  $D_i$  is the region's disposable income per capita,  $D_n$  the country's disposable income per capita, while  $P_i$  and  $P_n$  are the regional and national primary incomes per capita respectively. In other words, a region's redistributive effort is equal to the difference between the region's per capita disposable and primary incomes both standardised by the corresponding national average. The difference is then expressed as a percentage of the region's per capita standardised primary income. See LAGO-PENAS et al., *op. cit.*, p. 13; BAYOUMI and MASSON, *op. cit.*

Source: our calculations on ISTAT (n.d.) *Formazione del reddito delle famiglie negli anni 1995-2011*.

<sup>1500</sup> The GDP per capita in these regions was equal to 131% and 125% of the Italian average respectively for the years taken into account in the study.

<sup>1501</sup> STADERINI and VADALÀ, *op. cit.*, p. 613. AMBROSIANO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 95-102.



Unfortunately, no study provides an analysis of the evolution of the transfers through a substantial number of years.<sup>1502</sup> We can partially overcome this shortcoming by looking at the evolution of the relationship between primary and disposable income per capita in the three northern regions where the League has been most successful – Lombardy, Veneto and Piedmont – as well as on the North West and North East regional aggregates provided by ISTAT. As shown by Figure 6.10, obtained building on the revised formula provided by Lago-Penas et al. that we have used in chapters 3 and 4,<sup>1503</sup> the redistributive effort of Lombardy and Veneto has remained quite stable in the period 1995-2011, although it has slightly worsened, while Piedmont's almost completely reversed. As a result, Lombard residents have contributed between 4.6% and 6.3% of their standardised primary income to the system of central redistribution, while those of Veneto between 4.2% and 4.9%.

Although very recent, and thus not relevant to the context of the late 1970s and 1980s, when the nationalism of the rich arose in the area, these data still suggest that, while there has been a slight increase of the redistributive effort of Veneto and Lombardy, their contribution, at least as directly experienced by the region's residents relatively to the rest of the country, has remained quite stable and cannot therefore account for variations in the salience of the transfers. As in the other cases, however, such stability has been clearly used by the parties to denounce the substantial lack of change in the fiscal exploitation of the North and can therefore account for the persistence of the Northern Question. In order to explain variability one has to look at other – economic and non-economic factors. Among the former, considerations of convergence, overcompensation effects, efficiency in the public administration and in patterns of public spending, as well as growth trends must be taken into account.

According to data provided by Padovano, from the 1970s on, the Italian government began to redistribute mainly through cash transfers instead of capital expenditure, thus propping up consumption rather than production. This advantaged firms in the North that could sell their products to a wider market in the South without being threatened by southern enterprises.<sup>1504</sup> Yet, income redistribution reversed, instead of favouring, economic convergence. Using an index of geographical redistribution, which – Padovano claimed – would capture market driven flows generated by public policy choices, and analysing convergence from the 1950s up to the 2000s, he concluded that, when redistribution was geographically regressive – i.e. the average tax rate decreased as income increased – southern economies converged towards the northern ones, while when it was progressive the gap widened. He thus concluded that this finding would 'run counter to the notion that government policy in favor of *Mezzogiorno* was...in favor of *Mezzogiorno*'.<sup>1505</sup> Such a claim has been confirmed by Alesina et al. in an influential paper published in the late 1990s. There they showed that public employment had been used, mainly in southern Italy, as a form of income redistribution – akin to a permanent

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<sup>1502</sup> Arachi et al. do look at the 1996-2002 period, but provide only a synthetic measure of their results.

<sup>1503</sup> LAGO PENAS et al., *op. cit.* see chapter 3 for more details.

<sup>1504</sup> PADOVANO, FABIO (2007) *The Politics and Economics of Regional Transfers. Decentralization, Interregional Redistribution and Income Divergence* (Cheltenham/Northampton: Edward Elgar) p. 12.

<sup>1505</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90. Suggesting that the redistribution policy mainly enacted between the late 1970s and the early 1990s prevented factor relocation and, thus, the reduction of the income gap through market forces, Padovano seems to implicitly confirm the LN's argument about state policy keeping the South dependent for electoral reasons. It is interesting to note that one of the assumptions made in Padovano's model is that 'decision-makers devise redistributive measures to maximize their political support, rather than social welfare'. *Ibidem*, p. 1.

unemployment benefit – which, when compared with a baseline established on the basis of various characteristics of northern regions, they estimated as being equal to an excess of between 32% and 37% of total southern public sector employment, or, in monetary terms, of about 43-53% of the total southern public sector wage bill.<sup>1506</sup> But the worst consequence, in the authors' opinion, was that a higher availability of better paid and more secure jobs in the state administration would have discouraged private employment pushing the region into a vicious circle of ever enlarging public sector opportunities and ever declining private ones, which might explain the end of convergence since the mid-1970s.<sup>1507</sup>

More recently Ricolfi integrated estimates of efficiency in the public sector and fiscal evasion into calculations of interregional fiscal transfers. His results did not substantially differ from those seen above. According to his calculations, four regions (Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Piedmont) subsidised all others – to the tune of 7-11.5% of their aggregate GDP – with all southern regions as net recipients but also some northern ones among them. It thus concluded that any just federal reform 'should, with time, move many resources from the South to the North, but it could not ignore that there are also regions of the North that receive too much and regions of the South that receive too little'.<sup>1508</sup> In this way, he denied the LN's depiction of the North and the South as two undifferentiated entities. Yet, looking at patterns of discretionary spending he pointed to clear overcompensation effects, whereby northern residents not only paid more on average, but also received less in both relative and absolute terms, with those in the South obtaining about 500 euros more per capita. But Ricolfi also made another important point. He argued that in the last 30 years transfers were accompanied by a substantial rise in tax pressure – from 31.3% of GDP in 1980 to 42.7% in 2008 – and suggested that it would be such an increase, not followed by a proportional improvement in services, that put the legitimacy of the transfers into question.<sup>1509</sup>

Any historical analysis of patterns of public spending and taxation in Italy clearly shows that between 1970 and 1990 spending rose dramatically. At first, this happened without a substantial increase in taxes, as budget deficits were mainly financed through debt and inflation. Yet, by the early 1980s this strategy became unsustainable.<sup>1510</sup> A sudden tax hike occurred between 1981 and 1983. Tax revenue as a percentage of GDP then slightly decreased in the two following years, but edged up steadily from 1985 to 1993, when it reached 42.9% of the country's GDP. Spending was very much affected by

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<sup>1506</sup> The reason why the percentage of excess public sector employment and that of excess public sector wage bill do not coincide is that a qualitative factor is added to the latter, whereby prices are lower in the South than in the North, while public sector wages are the same. Hence, public sector wages in the South are higher, in real terms, than in the North.

<sup>1507</sup> ALESINA, ALBERTO, DANNINGER, STEPHAN and ROSTAGNO, MASSIMO (1999) *Redistribution through Public Employment: the Case of Italy*, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 7387. They also argued that public employment was an ineffective form of income redistribution – in terms of social welfare concerns – because non-universal.

<sup>1508</sup> Ricolfi's analysis takes into account not only GDP, tax revenues and state expenses, but also real prices and tax evasion for each region. Moreover, he decomposes and re-aggregates the traditional dimensions of GDP according to so-called 'liberal accounting rules', which correct the public sector's product by a coefficient of efficiency. In this way, he has also challenged Trigilia's argument that per capita spending would be equal in the North and the South. According to his calculations it would be 15% higher in the latter in real terms. RICOLFI (2010) *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>1509</sup> RICOLFI (2010) *op. cit.*, pp. 82-112.

<sup>1510</sup> VIESTI (2003), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-51.

the stock of debt accumulated and the interests paid on it. In the early 1990s, public expenditure net of payments of the interest on the debt was equal to 39.2% of GDP, slightly lower than the EEC average. Yet, the draconian interest rates (at around 10-12% a year) and the massive debt faced by the country pushed spending up to 53.2% of GDP, more than most other advanced economies.<sup>1511</sup> This was the result of the irresponsible policies adopted throughout the 1980s, when the country recorded the second-highest rate of increase in public spending among OECD economies behind Spain.<sup>1512</sup> Accordingly, public debt increased from 60.4% of GDP in 1975 to a 121.8% in 1994. All this was made worse by an inefficient administration and by one of the most unbalanced welfare states among advanced economies. Although it is hard to comparatively gauge the former, there is a general consensus in the literature that the standards of the Italian bureaucratic service – although with geographic variations – have not been up to those of other countries with similar, or even lower, levels of spending.<sup>1513</sup> To make a quick example, in 1987, a letter posted in Milan took an average of 8 days to be delivered anywhere in Italy. In the United Kingdom and Germany, three-quarters of all letters were delivered in only one day.<sup>1514</sup> Similarly, Italian welfare was among the most distorted in Europe to the advantage of employees and, especially, pensioners. The progressive extension of the redundancy fund (*cassa integrazione*) was consistently preferred over the establishment of a universal unemployment benefit scheme, with the former mainly targeting employees in big industrial plants to the disadvantage of workers in SMEs.<sup>1515</sup>

In the early 1990s, the dire situation of Italian public finances cast a long shadow over the chances that the country would be able to respect the criteria for membership of the coming European monetary integration and the media seriously debated the possibility of the country's exclusion. Concerns for the state of national accounts turned into a true emergency in 1992. At the end of the summer, a speculative attack on the lira pushed its value down by 15%, forcing it out of the European Monetary System.<sup>1516</sup> The government led by Giuliano Amato answered with a bill that cut the budget deficit by 90 thousand billion liras in just one year (about 74 billion constant 2011 euros).<sup>1517</sup> Before such numbers, the idea that the country had been brought on the verge of collapse by a corrupt and incompetent political class struck a cord.<sup>1518</sup> SMEs were deeply affected by rising

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<sup>1511</sup> PADOA SCHIOPPA KOSTORIS, FIORELLA (1996) 'Excesses and Limits of the Public Sector in the Italian Economy. The Ongoing Reform', in GUNDLE, STEPHEN and PARKER, SIMON (eds.) *The New Italian Republic. From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to Berlusconi* (London: Routledge) pp. 273-276.

<sup>1512</sup> Our calculations on TANZI and SCHUKNECHT, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>1513</sup> CASSESE, SABINO (1998) *Lo Stato Introvabile. Modernità e arretratezza delle istituzioni italiane* (Roma: Donzelli) pp. 60-76; GINSBORG, PAUL (1996) 'Explaining Italy's Crisis', in GUNDLE and PARKER, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>1514</sup> PADOA SCHIOPPA KOSTORIS, *op. cit.*, p. 283.

<sup>1515</sup> FERRERA, MAURIZIO, FARGION, VALERIA and JESSOLA, MATTEO (2012) *Alle radici del welfare all'italiana* (Padova: Marsilio) pp. 330-331.

<sup>1516</sup> GUNDLE, STEPHAN and PARKER, SIMON (1996) 'Introduction: the new Italian Republic', in GUNDLE and PARKER, *op. cit.*, p. 1-15.

<sup>1517</sup> We converted the figure from liras to euros using the coefficients provided in ISTAT (2011) *op. cit.*

<sup>1518</sup> In retrospect, however, it is surprising that the LN did not resort to the kind of stigmatisation of the financial economy that it has used in the context of the euro crisis. This could be explained by a number of reasons: first, the crisis of the 1990s was a domestic and not a continental one. Second, the League was not in government, as it was during most of the financial crisis, and could thus attack the executive. Third, back then, it aimed at destroying the political system of the First Republic and bring about change, while in the late 2000s, the party in fact was the oldest existing party in Italian politics. Fourth, at the time, debt was

taxes – themselves a consequence of worsening national accounts – which added to already high labour costs. In light of the opportunities and threats posed by the European Single Market that was looming on the horizon, a substantial part of northern Italian society started realising that the costs of clientelism ‘had become increasingly uneconomic and were placing burdens on local business’, as evidenced by the weakening hold of traditional parties in the area.<sup>1519</sup> Costs were high for workers as well. Out-sourcing of production had already begun in the late 1980s causing unemployment and workers’ anxiety. Furthermore, enterprises began to need more resources in terms of information and marketing and realised that local, and especially regional, institutions could play a critical role in providing firms with such services. For these reasons industrial districts started asking for liberal policies, local autonomy and a bigger say in state politics, all demands that were captured by the League.<sup>1520</sup> Although these problems appeared already in the early 1980s, the economic prosperity of those years – one largely inflated by debt and deficit – delayed until the later part of the decade the explosion of tensions that had boiled below the surface for about a decade.

In the second half of the 1990s, and especially after 1996, the picture considerably changed. It is true that in 1997 there was another strong fiscal squeeze, with tax revenue as a percentage of GDP hitting an all time high at 43.7%, as a consequence of the government’s further efforts to bring the deficit below 3% of GDP in line with the Maastricht criteria (Figure 6.11). Yet, soon after, reforms began delivering results and the country managed to enter the emergent monetary union. While today, in the midst of the euro crisis, it seems as if it had been better that the country not make it, at the time few dared voice such wishes. Also the prospect of a common currency and of European-imposed tighter fiscal discipline, dramatically reducing the interest rates paid by the government which, as we have seen above, weighed heavily on total public spending during the early 1990s, was very attractive.

Yet, as shown in Figure 6.12, the 2000s were years of decreasing GDP and gross disposable household income (GDHI) growth. Under many respects, during this period Italy lost the opportunity to use the resources freed by the reduced interest on the debt – that shrank from 12.6% in 1993 to less than 5% a decade later – to invest in innovation, improve services and reduce the inefficiencies in the public administration that hampered the development of the country as compared to its direct foreign competitors. The northern areas of the Third Italy, especially in the North East, have been proportionally more affected by this stagnation than other regions. Although it is true that the North West and the North East have evolved towards a progressive homogenisation around the middle-sized firm driven by the restructuring of big businesses in the former and the consolidation of SMEs in the latter,<sup>1521</sup> overall, firms remained undersized compared to those in other

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largely held by Italians, especially northern ones, whose large savings made the accumulation of debt easier to the state.

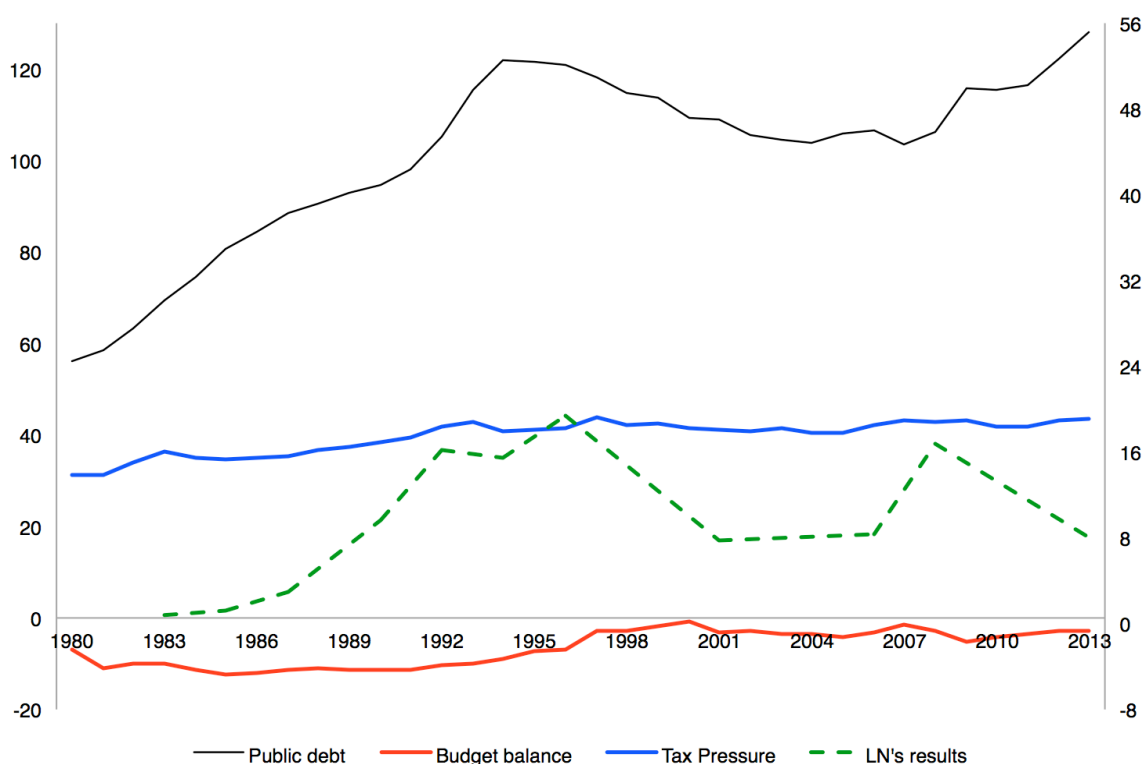
<sup>1519</sup> CENTO BULL, ANNA and GILBERT, MARK (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 82. On trends in voting for traditional parties in the North see the next section.

<sup>1520</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 79-98.

<sup>1521</sup> See PICCHIERI, ANGELO and PERULLI, PAOLO (2010) ‘La crisi Italiana e il Nord’, in ANGELO, PICCHIERI and PAOLO, PERULLI (eds.) *La crisi italiana nel mondo globale. Economia e società nel Nord* (Torino: Einaudi) pp. 3-35; and GRANDINETTI, ROBERTO (2010) ‘I territori delle imprese nell’economia globale’, in PICCHIERI and PERULLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-113. While Bagnasco analysed firms with fewer than 250 employees, Picchieri and Perulli look at enterprises in the 50-499 workers range and realising a turnover between 13 and 290 million euros. Therefore, they, in fact, look at a small sample of firms (about 4,000 out of 4 millions). It should also be noted that the process of homogenisation around the

advanced European regions, with detrimental effects on their capacity to invest in R&D. Northeastern firms have often remained stuck in traditional sectors characterised by low growth and low technological value-added. Also, the proportion of family-owned firms has remained substantially higher than in other European regions. Not a shortcoming *per se*, this has however gone along with a higher than average age of managers, which has probably contributed to slowing down innovation. Between 2000 and 2007, Northeastern enterprises have been very good at internationalising their production, but the main driver of this process has been cost-reduction rather than the improvement of their position along the technological frontier. All this has led to a reduction of the regions' share of global exports and a notable absence from high-tech sectors. Employment rates have remained among the highest in Europe, but have also been characterised by a lower average level of education, thus suggesting that firms have mainly attracted low-skilled workers.<sup>1522</sup>

**Figure 6.11 – Public Debt, Fiscal Balance and Tax Pressure (left y-axis) vs. LN's Electoral Results at General and Regional Elections, 1980-2013 (percentage of GDP and percentage of regional vote)**



middle-sized firm mainly concerns the creation of networks of enterprises centred around the middle-sized ones, which play a leading role in opening up foreign markets and coordinating production and marketing among a wealth of minuscule firms. In sheer arithmetical terms, in fact, manufacturing SMEs still account for 99.7% of the total number of manufacturing firms and 65.4% of value added in the sector – 63.55% of them being in the North. At a narrower level of analysis, manufacturing enterprises with fewer than 10 employees account for about 82.5% of manufacturing firms and 11.7% of the value added produced by the sector. Our calculations on ISTAT, *I.Stat database, Struttura delle imprese*, <http://dati.istat.it/> (accessed on March 14, 2014).

<sup>1522</sup> CANNARI, LUIGI and FRANCO, DANIELE (2012) ‘La trasformazione economica del Nord Est’, *L’Industria*, 33(1), pp. 103-127.

Source: ISTAT (2009) *Rapporti caratteristici del conto economico consolidato delle Pubbliche amministrazioni - Anni 1980-2009*, <http://seriestoriche.istat.it/> (accessed on June 25, 2012); Public debt data for 1980-1983 have been drawn from IMF-FAD, *op. cit.*; MINISTERO DELL'INTERNO, *Archivio storico*, *op. cit.*

**Figure 6.12 – Northern Italy’s GDP and GDHI per Capita Real Growth, 1996-2010**



Source: Our calculations on ISTAT (n.d.) *Formazione del reddito op. cit.*; ISTAT, *I.Stat database, Conti e aggregati economici territoriali*, <http://dati.istat.it/#> (accessed on March 4, 2015); ISTAT, *I.Stat database, NIC - Indice dei prezzi al consumo per l'intera collettività*, <http://dati.istat.it/#> (accessed on March 4, 2015).

Since the mid-2000s, the concentration on traditional sectors of the northern economy and the wider access of Chinese products to the European market brought northern export-oriented firms into increasingly higher competition with their counterparts from the Far East. Not only did the North lose considerable market share to Chinese firms, but entrepreneurs were also complaining that these were illegally imitating Italian brands with poor-quality goods, which tarnished the reputation of the ‘made in Italy’ brand.<sup>1523</sup> While in the late 1990s and early 2000s the League’s rhetoric was often at odds with SMEs’ interests, especially on the matters of immigration, from 2004 on the party seized the occasion to regain support from industrial areas by focusing on economic arguments against Chinese imports and the EU’s ineffectiveness in protecting northern products. This contributed to the new wave of electoral success experienced in the 2008-2011 period,<sup>1524</sup> which however also benefited from the financial and debt crisis. While in the early 1990s, the risk of collapse of state finances was accompanied by enviable growth rates and levels

<sup>1523</sup> FORTIS, MARCO and QUADRO CURZIO, ALBERTO (2003) ‘Alle prese con la concorrenza asiatica’, *Il Mulino*, 6, pp. 1103-1113.

<sup>1524</sup> FELTRIN, PAOLO (2011) ‘La politica e gli interessi’, in PICCHIERI and PERULLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-173.

of industrialisation in the North – which clearly favoured the LN’s rhetoric of a virtuous North held back by Rome’s mismanagement – the recent economic crisis has hit the northern economy much more harshly. Real GDP decreased by 5.3% between 2009 and 2010, and again by 1.4% between 2011 and 2012.<sup>1525</sup> Although it did not reach Catalan proportions, unemployment increased as well, from 3.9% in 2008 to 8.6% in 2014. But the highest price was paid by industrial production that in 2014 was 76% of its 2007 level, or about the same as in 1986-87.<sup>1526</sup>

### 6.3.2 Political Marginalisation

Arguing that Southerners had taken over political parties and state institutions, the *Lega* was only in part making a revolutionary claim. The most controversial issue, of course, concerned the assertion of the multi-national character of the state. However, despite being much more problematic than in the other case studies, the claims about the northern peoples, first, and the Padanian nation, later, could profit from a long-standing belief in the cultural segmentation of the peninsula between the South and the rest of the country. Furthermore, the idea that the northern and southern elites had somehow followed complementary paths of specialisation, the former taking care of the economy and the latter focusing on the management of the state, had roots reaching back to the interwar years and even further.<sup>1527</sup>

In this section, we first provide an historical inquiry into the North-South fracture in order to show that the perception of a segmentation existed throughout the history of the country. This is a necessary premise of the identity-building effort of the LN, which, in turn, is fundamental in order to understand the claim of southernisation of the administration of the political parties analysed in the second part of the section. We also focus on the supposed weakness of the Italian national identity and on the impact on the formation of a distinct northern identity. We then conclude by reviewing the process of devolution of powers to the regions and at the development of some signs of divergent political behaviour between the north and the south.

Writing in the late 1970s, the British historian Hugh Seton-Watson noted that ‘at the beginning of the last quarter of the twentieth century, the fabric of Italian society and political life was still fragile. The division between North and South had not been eliminated [...] The great cities of Turin and Milan, and smaller industrial centres in the north, had attracted hundreds of thousands of Southerners, whose behaviour and mentality seemed strange and barbarous to the Northerners’.<sup>1528</sup> Similarly, in the 1970s, the Turin-

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<sup>1525</sup> ISTAT, *I.Stat database, Conti e aggregati*, *op. cit.* Data for 2011-2012 are in nominal terms. Overall, between 2008 and 2012, nominal Northern GDP shrank by 2.3%.

<sup>1526</sup> ISTAT, *I.Stat database, Tasso di disoccupazione, livello regionale*, <http://dati.istat.it/#> (accessed on March 4, 2015); OECD, *Industry and Services, Production and Sales (MEI)*, <http://stats.oecd.org/> (accessed on March 4, 2015).

<sup>1527</sup> See for instance the political debates quoted in CASSESE, SABINO (1977) *Questione amministrativa e questione meridionale: dimensioni e reclutamento della burocrazia dall'unità ad oggi* (Milano: Giuffrè) pp. 87-106.

<sup>1528</sup> SETON-WATSON, *op. cit.*, p. 109. We are not concerned here with discussing the reality of southern backwardness. We rather aim at showing that there was such a stereotypical perception – often fuelled by the social sciences – and that the League exploited it. For a wider discussion of representations of southern backwardness in the social science and the League’s rhetoric see HUYSSSEUNE, MICHEL (2006)

based newspaper *La Stampa* asked southern migrants coming to the city to work in the FIAT factories to fully adapt ‘to the rules of life in the metropolis’.<sup>1529</sup> The North-South fracture has always been a central theme of Italian politics, but never a threat to Italian unity. On the contrary, it was seen as a goal of the polity to overcome this duality on the path towards development and modernisation. Before unification the major concern of those Italian intellectuals who engaged with the subject of national unity regarded the need to regenerate the Italian people in order to bring them up to the standard of the other great European nations. In this context, idiosyncratic flaws such as *ozio* (idleness) were attributed to the inhabitants of the entire country. Yet, in the first post-unification years, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, mainly as a consequence of the war against *brigantaggio*,<sup>1530</sup> the South came to embody the defects formerly attributed to the entire nation. The South thus became the internal ‘other’ representing all what was not modern about Italy.<sup>1531</sup> Later on, two main interpretations of southern backwardness dominated the political debate. On the one hand, the positivist school, led by Cesare Lombroso and, afterwards, Alfredo Niceforo,<sup>1532</sup> believed in the racial inferiority of Southerners based on the influence of African and Oriental genetic heritages. On the other, the so called ‘meridionalist school’ read the ‘Southern Question’ as the consequence of the Piedmontese ‘invasion’ that imposed northern economic dominance over the South through a pact between southern big landowners and the northern rising industrial bourgeoisie – the thesis of the *Blocco storico* mentioned in the previous section. Both schools underlined the existence of ‘two Italies’, although none put into question Italian unity and the existence of an Italian nation.<sup>1533</sup>

From unification on, the stress was put on the need for ‘making Italians’.<sup>1534</sup> Already in the first years after independence, politicians and intellectuals complained that the country suffered from the original sin of not having come about as the result of a revolutionary process. Despite being limited to 6% of the population – extended to about 20% in 1882 – elections showed a remarkably low turnout suggesting that ‘the liberal and moderate elites that were in power ruled, but were not hegemonic: their values were dominant in the state apparatus, but did not permeate society and seemed alien to the majority of the

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*Modernity and Secession: the Social Sciences and the Political Discourse of the Lega Nord in Italy* (New York: Berghahn Books).

<sup>1529</sup> LUPO, SALVATORE (1996) ‘The Changing Mezzogiorno’, in GUNDLE and PARKER, *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>1530</sup> The term usually refers to the illegal activities of bands of brigands in the South in the first years of existence of the new Kingdom. While having existed before, they assumed the connotation of revolts against the state – bands were made up, among others, of desperate indebted peasants, former Bourbon army officers who had been dismissed, and members of religious orders that had been dissolved. The threat was deemed so serious that an army of 120,000 soldiers was sent from Piedmont to the South in mid-1861 to secure the newly unified (or acquired, depending on the perspective) territories.

<sup>1531</sup> PATRIARCA, SILVANA (2011) *Italianità. La costruzione del carattere nazionale* (Bari: Laterza) pp. 74-108.

<sup>1532</sup> It is worth noting that Niceforo was Sicilian. These ideas had been shared by the most important Italian anthropologist of the nineteenth century, Giuseppe Sergi.

<sup>1533</sup> TETI, *op. cit.*

<sup>1534</sup> The famous quote of Massimo D’Azeglio has often been misunderstood. Being a father of the Risorgimento, he did not put into question the existence of the Italian people, but rather referred to the need to turn them into good citizens, improving their moral qualities. PATRIARCA (2011) *op. cit.*, pp. 49-42. However, the sentence, that, by the way, was attributed to him by later commentators but is nowhere to be found in his documents, clearly betrays the awareness that Italian unification stirred little people’s enthusiasm.



population'.<sup>1535</sup> Italy was undeniably divided among dozens of languages,<sup>1536</sup> identities and local cultures that seriously threatened the unity, and legitimacy, of the state. Fearing for the survival of the Kingdom, the Piedmontese extended their legislation to the entire country, with such a level of uniformity that some English observers analysing it at the beginning of the twentieth century concluded that it led to 'an irritating and harassing system of bureaucratic obstacles'.<sup>1537</sup> Regional elites did complain about excessive centralisation and the adoption of Savoy legislation, yet they never dared openly challenge state authority, nor developed any forms of political regionalism. As argued by Lyttelton, this 'reflected the interests and anxieties of a new political class which had won power, but still felt it to be precarious'<sup>1538</sup> and thus accepted state protection trying to maximise the benefits deriving from its position of intermediary between the state and civil society. Hence, state legitimacy came to be based not on a substantial social bloc capable of assuring the smooth integration of the different components of the new state, but on the mediation of the political class.<sup>1539</sup> Such weak legitimacy of the state institutions coupled with a centralised architecture and their dependence on local political elites hampered the definition of a general interest and was the main cause of the development of a peculiarly Italian feature, *trasformismo* (transformism), i.e. a 'form of political action that is designed to cater to multiple interests and that, instead of achieving a general synthesis, seeks short-term and partial syntheses'.<sup>1540</sup> Deeply engrained clientelism would be the father of transformism and, although today discredited, in the early phases of consolidation of the new Italian state, it served the need to weave together the very different societies making up the country.<sup>1541</sup>

The First World War and the ensuing fascist age tried to provide founding myths and a 'grand design' for the nation. Yet, the tragedy of the Second World War constituted a fundamental rupture. As Gian Enrico Rusconi pointed out at the beginning of the 1990s, 'in Italy the theme of the nation has never conceptually gotten rid of, nor emotionally recovered from, the treatment undergone by historical nationalism, especially the fascist one'<sup>1542</sup> and thus suggested that most Italians were still convinced that the principle of nationality could not be a conceptual resource bolstering solidarity, and other civic virtues, because its historical application had led the country to moral and physical disaster. The situation was made more complex by two further issues. First, the Resistance had become the most immediate myth of national unity on which to re-found the country, despite having in fact been a civil war between anti-fascists and collaborationists that even stretched into the first years of the Republic (1945-1948). Second, as Norberto Bobbio

<sup>1535</sup> Ibidem, p. 41.

<sup>1536</sup> One often reads about dialects, instead of languages, when referring to Italy's regional differences. Yet, in the nineteenth century, these were true sister languages, since they did not derive from Italian, but rather Italian derived from one of them, Tuscan. LEPSCHY, ANNA LAURA, LESPSCHY GIULIO, AND VOGHERA, MIRIAM (1996) 'Linguistic Variety in Italy', in LEVY, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-80.

<sup>1537</sup> VANDELLI, LUCIANO (2011) 'L'unificazione italiana e il rapporto centro-periferia', *Il Mulino*, 3, p. 421.

<sup>1538</sup> LYTTELTON, ADRIAN (1996) 'Shifting Identities: Nation, Region and City', in LEVY, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>1539</sup> CAMMARANO, FULVIO (2011) 'Un ibrido fra stato e nazione', *Il Mulino*, 1, pp. 72-78. A similar position is held by Sabino Cassese, who has argued that the centralist and, administratively speaking, authoritarian character of the Italian state stemmed from the need to compensate its low substantial legitimacy. CASSESE (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>1540</sup> GRAZIANO, MANLIO (2010) *The Failure of Italian Nationhood. The Geopolitics of a Troubled Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) p. 5.

<sup>1541</sup> LYTTELTON, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>1542</sup> RUSCONI, GIAN ENRICO (1993) *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione* (Bologna: Il Mulino) p. 13.

argued, ‘the War of Liberation had mainly been fought by the Communists, but the elections had been won by the Christian-Democrats’.<sup>1543</sup> While the contribution of other partisan groups, especially Catholics, has been largely re-considered in the literature, Bobbio’s reasoning is compelling when he stresses that, overnight, the leitmotif of national unity moved from anti-fascism, in which the communists had been a fundamental component, to anti-communism, therefore laying the foundation of the post-war national identity on even more shifting sands. Furthermore, when, with the end of the Cold War, even anti-communism had gone, nothing was there to replace it, leaving the polity without any strong historical legitimation. Paradoxically, the rise of the LN at the beginning of the 1990s unleashed a renewed debate about Italian national identity. Historians, political scientists and journalists began arguing about its strength and taking sides in favour of a more vigorous Italian self-understanding, newspapers and publishing houses released contributions on Italy’s past, while the government stressed the role of history teaching for the defence of national unity. All this sudden interest came ‘after a period – in fact almost the whole duration of the Cold War – when the language of national identity and nationalism in Italy were more or less the discursive monopoly of the extreme right’.<sup>1544</sup> Hence, not only did the *Lega* disclose once again the problematic features of the Italian national identity, but it also resumed a conversation that had been silent for about half a century, thus inevitably contributing to strengthening the national dimension in Italian politics.<sup>1545</sup>

Opinion polls generally confirm the weakness of the Italian identity, although an important nuance should be stressed. Studies carried out in the 1980s and 1990s showed that 80% of Italians declared themselves proud of their national identity, a percentage in line with that of other European countries. Nevertheless, Italians stood out by virtue of a substantially lower attachment to political institutions and a pronounced attachment to their culture. Thus, it would be the Italian political identity that has been weak, while cultural identity has been as strong as in most other European countries.<sup>1546</sup> Unfortunately, this is not necessarily an element of political cohesion. Features of the ‘glorious’ Italian culture can indeed be appropriated by alternative national narratives, especially in such a fluid context as that of a transition from an all-Italian to a northern Italian, or a regional, identity. This is the case, for instance, of the Oath of Pontida (1167) and the battle of Legnano (1176), which before being used by the League had been a prominent myth of the rhetoric of Risorgimento.<sup>1547</sup>

As we have already mentioned in section 6.2, the idea of the existence of northern nations, first, and of Padania later, did not have any real historical precedent. It certainly played on the existing cultural fracture between the North and the South, but while the South could boast several centuries of unity within the same political entity, although

<sup>1543</sup> BOBBIO, NORBERTO and RUSCONI, GIAN ENRICO (1992) ‘Lettere sull’azionismo’, *Il Mulino*, 6, pp. 1023.

<sup>1544</sup> PATRIARCA, SILVANA (2001) ‘Italian neopatriotism: Debating national identity in the 1990s’, *Modern Italy*, 6(1), pp. 21-22.

<sup>1545</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

<sup>1546</sup> SEGATTI, PAOLO (1999) ‘Perché é debole la coscienza degli italiani’, *Il Mulino*, 1, pp. 15-23. See also, HUYSSSEUNE, MICHEL (2002) ‘Imagined geographies: Political and Scientific Discourses on Italy’s North-South Divide’, in BRUNO, COPPIETERS and MICHEL, HUYSSSEUNE (eds.) *Secession, History and the Social Sciences* (Brussels: VUB) p. 220.

<sup>1547</sup> See CAVAZZA, STEFANO (1995) ‘L’invenzione della tradizione e la Lega Lombarda’, in ALDO, BONOMI and PIERPAOLO, POGGIO (eds.) *Ethnos e Demos, dal leghismo al neopopulismo*, (Milano: Mimesis) pp. 195-215.

under different foreign rulers and, at any rate, in a pre-nationalist context, the North could not point to any such precedent, apart from the loose Lombard League of 1167, which gave the name to the movement.<sup>1548</sup> This lies at the core of three major features of the *Lega's* identity-building effort: its indeterminacy, its chiefly negative construction and its lightness. The difficulty to point to clear historical precedents of northern unity, wherefrom to derive positive characters of the northern identity, has led the party to mainly build it up by opposition to the well-defined – because available in the rich literature on the ‘Italian national character’ and the Southern Question – profile of Southerners. Despite the attempt to ‘homogenise’ the Padanian self-understanding around a precise ethnic definition, pre-existing cultural differences between Venetians, Lombards and other northern groups have prevailed, making the Padanian identity a sort of light overarching feature of the fragmented northern community. Yet, the League's nation-building effort has not been totally unsuccessful. According to figures reported by Biorcio, in 1996, only 5.3% of northern Italians declared belonging to Northern Italy as their primary territorial identity. In 2000 the figure reached 9.3%, then 13.8% in 2005, 18.1% in 2006 and eventually 22.7% in 2008.<sup>1549</sup> Unfortunately, more recent data are not available. Yet, these figures suggest a strengthening of the perception of the existence and salience of an overarching northern identity, which is quite remarkable when considering its virtual absence at the end of the 1980s.

Especially in its early years the League denounced the cultural colonisation of the North. The formation of the Italian state did bring about a process of homogenisation that erased previously existing languages and cultures, although at the time these were not perceived as being alternative national traditions. The merit of such a process can of course be discussed, yet, for good or for worse, it has not substantially diverged from the dynamics of national unification realised in the rest of Europe and has affected the entire peninsula, not just the North. If anything, one could not help but stress its ineffective implementation up to, at least, World War I. At the time of unification, Italian was spoken only by 2.5% of the population and often as a dead written language similar to what Hebrew would be initially for the state of Israel. Despite being in principle obligatory, school attendance in Palermo in 1864 did not go further than 30% for boys and 18% for girls. In 1910, about 50 years after unification, the Ministry of Education complained that two-thirds of school classes were of inadequate quality. In many places, illiterate teachers were hired because of lack of literate ones and even those who spoke Italian often had to use dialects to be understood by pupils. In Tuscany, where local dialects were closest to Italian, only 20% of those who received some schooling could actually read. The first real wave of linguistic nationalisation came with the military conscription enacted during World War I, although army chaplains often had to act as interpreters.<sup>1550</sup>

The accusation of cultural colonisation was also linked to the huge internal migration from the South to the North that followed the Second World War. Between 1955 and 1974,

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<sup>1548</sup> The Napoleonic Cisalpine Republic (1797-1802) could be another precedent, but not a very suitable one because, apart from its ephemeral nature and Jacobin character, most of the former Venetian Republic was not included in it.

<sup>1549</sup> BIORCIO (2010), *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41. Similar data are provided by Diamanti who, however, found a slightly higher figure for 2008 (25%). See, DIAMANTI, ILVO (2008) ‘Così sta nascendo l’identità nordista’, *La Repubblica.it*, 15 June, <http://www.repubblica.it/2008/06/sezioni/politica/diamanti-identita-nordista/diamanti-identita-nordista/diamanti-identita-nordista.html> (accessed on June 10, 2012).

<sup>1550</sup> GRAZIANO, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-64.

more than 3.7 million people moved northwards<sup>1551</sup> with a peak in 1963, when 287,000 people left the South. The annual figure did not dip below 100,000 until 1974.<sup>1552</sup> As Enrico Allasino suggested, these migrations had a lasting impact on both new comers and local populations: ‘at times, cleavages relating to class and regional origin overlapped, setting the ground for an almost ethnic conflict’.<sup>1553</sup> When the leagues arose, however, in the early 1980s, southern immigration had long abated and most migrants had successfully integrated into northern communities. Anti-southernism still existed but was probably in decline, as hinted by opinion polls showing that it was stronger among older generations, but generally ignored by youth.<sup>1554</sup> What is most striking from a cultural perspective is that the attribution of a clear political dimension to the North-South fracture came precisely after the country had gone through the most intense phase of homogenisation experienced in its history, i.e., that obtained since 1945 with the expansion of schooling, the increase of well-being and, above all, the spread of radio and television which brought standard Italian to virtually all households in the country.<sup>1555</sup>

The main argument of political marginalisation however concerned Southerners’ domination of state bureaucracy and political parties. With regard to the former, there is evidence of a process of ‘southernisation’ at least up to the early 1960s. Unsurprisingly, right after unification, Piedmontese bureaucrats made up the bulk of the administration. This body later went through different phases, seeing first a considerable increase of Tuscans and then Romans, according to the movement of the capital from Turin, to Florence and, eventually, Rome. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century on, however, there was a steady flow of officials from southern regions. By 1954, bureaucrats from the South were overwhelmingly represented among the higher ranks of the administration (56% against 13% from the North). The trend had probably intensified during fascism – although detailed data are not available – and continued after 1945 involving the lower ranks as well. In terms of number of civil servants for 100,000 inhabitants coming from the respective circumscriptions, in 1961, these were 15.4 in the North West, 48.4 in the North East and the Centre, 102.9 in the South and 127.5 in the Islands (Sicily and Sardinia).<sup>1556</sup> This would be the result of a set of historical reasons, whereby public employment became the best chance of social mobility for the southern middle class and this condition was deliberately tolerated, even encouraged, by successive governments for reasons of consensus and political stability.<sup>1557</sup>

With regard to political parties, Carlo Trigilia argued that, since in the South the political class lacked sufficient legitimacy, its members had to base their relations with the electorate on clientelism and control of public resources to be distributed as rewards within their networks. This favoured political, instead of market, acquisitive behaviours and discouraged entrepreneurship. Resource distribution fed the system generating the

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<sup>1551</sup> ALLASINO, ENRICO (2011) ‘Le radici sociali dell’emigrazione’, in PICCHIERI and PERULLI, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-339.

<sup>1552</sup> TAMBINI, DAMIAN (2001) *Nationalism in Italian Politics: the Stories of the Northern League, 1980-2000* (London: Routledge) pp. 27-29.

<sup>1553</sup> ALLASINO (2011) *op. cit.*, p. 307-308. See also Seton-Watson’s quote at the beginning of the section.

<sup>1554</sup> BIORCIO (1997) *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>1555</sup> LUPO, *op. cit.*, p. 258; LYTTTELTON, *op. cit.*, p. 49. And yet recent data still show the persisting strength of dialects. In 1991, 36% of Italians declared to use dialect with all members of the family, while 34% used Italian to the same extent. LEPSCHY et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>1556</sup> CASSESE (1977) *op. cit.*, pp. 70-117.

<sup>1557</sup> *Idem.*

perverse effect of further reducing competition skills and increasing dependence on funds obtained through political bargaining.<sup>1558</sup> All this, however suited well the North that remained the overriding target of investments for the development of big industries since the late nineteenth century, at least until the rise of SMEs in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, as seen above, other authors have nuanced this interpretation, arguing that clientelism would be a feature characterising the entire country and only reaching its most acute manifestations in some southern areas.<sup>1559</sup> After all, although the League portrayed corruption as something inherent to the ‘southernised traditional parties’ and the state administration, and thus alien to the culture of the North, the centre of ‘Bribesville’, the judicial scandal that put an end to the First Republic and disclosed the endemic corruption and clientelism achieved in those years, was Milan.

In a longer historical perspective, Silvio Lanaro has argued that the rise of the League in the 1980s echoed debates regarding the direct participation of northern elites in the management of the Italian state that have been around since 1861, although he did recognise the fundamental novelty of the political dimension attributed to such discussions by the *Lega*. Thus, for instance, for the first 30 years after unification, the Milanese elite looked at Rome with scorn and lived its participation in the new state as a kind of relegation to a hypothetical lower league of modern countries. Yet, it did not engage in any serious political battle, but remained content with its economic prosperity and rather indifferent to national politics, sending few representatives to participate in central governments. This condition changed a little after the disaster of Adua, but the higher activism against Francesco Crispi’s colonial and spending policy simply marked a move from ‘indifference to opposition’.<sup>1560</sup> When considering that Milan, the most advanced, rich and dynamic city of the country, had its first Prime Minister only in 1983, when Bettino Craxi entered in office, this seems to have remained a consistent pattern throughout Italy’s history.<sup>1561</sup> Yet, with regard to the North East, and other non-metropolitan northern areas, the late 1980s brought about a perception of marginalisation, rather than of conscious indifference to national politics. Such feeling was openly expressed at the end of the 1980s by the Venetian Senator of the Christian Democracy, Antonio Bisaglia who, interviewed by Ilvo Diamanti, stated that ‘the state has very often considered my region as an isolated area, alien to the strategic choices of the country. It has focused its attention on the big metropolitan areas, that fortunately we do not have, or on the South. Hence, the area in between, that has neither Naples, nor Turin, nor Milan,

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<sup>1558</sup> TRIGILIA, *op. cit.* This was suggested by Alesina et al. as well, but Trigilia pointed to a much longer historical process harking back to the specific conditions of national unification and integration of the South into the Kingdom, while Alesina et al. only focused on the expansion of public employment from the mid-1970s. Cassese, on the other hand, suggested that the overrepresentation of the South in the ranks of the administration somehow mirrored a similar situation within the most important political parties, but provided no conclusive data about it. CASSESE (1977) *op. cit.*, pp. 70-117.

<sup>1559</sup> LANARO, SILVIO (1988) *L'Italia nuova. Identità e sviluppo 1861-1988* (Torino: Einaudi); GRAZIANO, *op. cit.*; VIESTI (2003) *op. cit.*; LYTTTELTON, *op. cit.* A quite radical portrayal of Italy as divided for centuries between a clientelistic and uncivic South and a more equalitarian and civic North has been provided by Putnam, who contrary to Trigilia attributed the strength of clientelism not to the low legitimacy of the political class, but rather on the excessive power of the landed aristocracy (which mainly filled the ranks of political parties, at least in the first years of the Kingdom). PUTNAM, ROBERT (1993) *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

<sup>1560</sup> LANARO, SILVIO (1993) 'Le élites settentrionali e la storia italiana', *Meridiana*, 16, pp. 31-32.

<sup>1561</sup> LANARO (1988) *op. cit.*, p. 81.

has been sacrificed'.<sup>1562</sup> Non-academic accounts provided some statistical evidence, although the calculation was limited to the North East and to a very short time-span. Gian Antonio Stella, editor of *Il Corriere della Sera*, showed indeed that at the beginning of the 1990s the area accounted for 14% of the national wealth and 20% of exports, but only 3 out of 78 members of the government at the time (taking into account also ministerial undersecretaries) belonged to it, that is, less than 4%.<sup>1563</sup> By contrast, successive governments throughout the 1970s and 1980s, along with much of the southern political class, widely publicised the extraordinary intervention in the South in order to ensure consensus in the area. They thus unwillingly contributed to sow the seeds of the League's fiscal protest.<sup>1564</sup>

The first decade of the 2000s has been characterised by a striking paradox: although the LN was in power for most of it (from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 to 2011), the enlargement of the autonomy of the northern regions has been patchy.<sup>1565</sup> While the establishment of regions was inscribed in the 1948 Constitution, only the special statute ones of Sicily, Sardinia, Trentino-Süd Tirol and Aosta Valley were immediately implemented.<sup>1566</sup> All the others had to wait until 1970. Their institutionalisation, mainly assigning them competences concerning the provision of healthcare services, however, went along with a tight centralisation of fiscal spending impacting all sub-national jurisdictions.<sup>1567</sup> The corruption scandals that broke out at the beginning of the 1990s, along with the dire conditions of state accounts, clearly exposed the inefficiency of the centralist Italian political system. Also thanks to the rise of the LN, a consensus arose around the idea that decentralisation could bring about more accountability and efficiency in public spending.<sup>1568</sup> Hence, throughout the 1990s, regions were progressively endowed with more fiscal autonomy – the ratio of own taxes on regional spending increased from 15% in 1992 to over 50% by 2000.<sup>1569</sup>

The most important modifications came in 1999 and 2001. The former established the direct elections of regional presidents and gave them extensive powers to lead the government coalition and dissolve regional assemblies, thus increasing stability and enhancing the profile and legitimacy of regional leaders.<sup>1570</sup> The latter, adopted by the Left in an attempt to stem an electoral swing in favour of the centre-right coalition at the 2000 regional elections and approved in 2001 by the population in the first constitutional referendum of the Italian Republican period, introduced far reaching, although contradictory, innovations. A list of competences reserved to the state was provided,

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<sup>1562</sup> Antonio Bisaglia interviewed in DIAMANTI, ILVO (1988) 'Il politico come imprenditore, il territorio come impresa', *Strumenti*, 2, pp. 71-80.

<sup>1563</sup> STELLA, GIAN ANTONIO (2000) *Schei. Dal boom alla rivolta, il mitico nordest* (Milano: Mondadori).

<sup>1564</sup> VIESTI (2003) *op. cit.*, p. 51. As already argued most redistribution has in fact occurred through ordinary expenditure rather than the extraordinary one. The latter indeed rarely went beyond 1% of the country's GDP.

<sup>1565</sup> RICOLFI, LUCA (2011) *La repubblica delle tasse* (Milano: Rizzoli) pp. 105-112.

<sup>1566</sup> Friuli Venezia Giulia was added in 1963.

<sup>1567</sup> Special statute regions, instead, have enjoyed wide financial autonomy since the very beginning. Sicily has managed 100% of its own taxes, Aosta Valley and Trentino-Süd Tirol 90%, Sardinia 70% and Friuli Venezia Giulia 50%.

<sup>1568</sup> FABBRINI, SERGIO and BRUNAZZO, MARCO (2008) 'Federalizing Italy: The Convergent Effects of Europeanization and Domestic Mobilization', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 13(1), p. 105 and 112.

<sup>1569</sup> AMBROSIANO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>1570</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL and WILSON, ALEX (2010) *Federalism and Decentralisation in Italy*, PSA Conference, Edinburgh, March-April, p. 8-9.

leaving all the residual ones to the regions, with the exception of some concurrent legislation – in which regions still hold legislative powers but within the limits set by the national parliament. An article of the constitutional reform also allowed regions, at least in principle, to claim more competences than those initially attributed to them, thus opening up the possibility of asymmetric federalism as in the Spanish model.<sup>1571</sup> Nevertheless, this specific article has never been implemented.

Similarly, article 119 of the Constitution was changed so as to provide that regions be totally financed by their own revenues and tax shares, thus ruling out earmarked central transfers as standard practice. Furthermore, a new inter-regional equalisation fund was created, aimed at reducing differences in fiscal capacity, but with no consideration of regional needs or historical expenditure – although the extent of equalisation, whether full or partial, has never been defined. The potential of this article has not been translated into ordinary legislation, though, as is the case for much of the overall constitutional reform.<sup>1572</sup> Despite its formal opposition to the bill, the centre-right government that followed, between 2001 and 2006, did pass some of the required ordinary laws, but the task of clarifying the attribution of competences and their implementation, especially in the case of concurrent legislation, was mainly left to the Constitutional Court – appeals rose from 25 in 2000 to 98 in 2003.<sup>1573</sup> Under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, Minister for Reforms and Devolution, the government embarked on a new Constitutional bill granting exclusive legislative rights on healthcare, education and police to the regions, a degree of fiscal federalism and the transformation of the Senate into a federal chamber,<sup>1574</sup> although it had to accept the right of the central government to veto regional legislation and accept the amendment of the article allowing the regions to expand their competences.<sup>1575</sup> The reform also included reinforced powers for the Prime Minister and a new electoral law wanted by the *Lega*'s allies. In the ensuing referendum, held in June 2006, the bill was rejected by 61.7% of voters – turnout was equal to 53.7%, much higher than in 2001, when only 38.3% of the population had voted. At a closer level, however, Lombardy and Veneto, as well as five out of eight provinces in Piedmont and two out of four in Friuli supported the bill.<sup>1576</sup> As pointed out by Keating and Wilson, 'the *Lega* had won in its electoral constituencies in northern Italy, while resistance had come from statewide parties in Rome and their southern supporters, so defeat in the Constitutional referendum did not imply a broader political failure'.<sup>1577</sup>

Overall, thus, the Italian process of federalisation has been limited and contradictory.<sup>1578</sup> From data concerning fiscal autonomy, one could be led to conclude that Italian regions have greatly improved their powers. Yet, specific provisions in the 2001

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<sup>1571</sup> GIARDA, PIERO (2004) *Decentralization and intergovernmental fiscal relations in Italy: a review of past and recent trends*, Paper presented at the Special Session on 'Reforming the Italian public sector: Outcomes, Lessons, Perspectives', 60th Congress of the International Institute of Public Finance, Università Bocconi, Milano, August 23-26, pp. 1-15.

<sup>1572</sup> AMBROSIANO et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>1573</sup> ROUX, CHRISTOPHE (2008) 'Italy's Path to Federalism. Origins and Paradoxes', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 13(3), p. 334.

<sup>1574</sup> Yet, senators were still to be elected instead of being appointed by the regional councils.

<sup>1575</sup> BULL, MARTIN and PASQUINO, GIANFRANCO (2007) 'A Long Quest in Vain: Institutional Reforms in Italy', *West European Politics*, 30(4), pp. 684-685.

<sup>1576</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 687.

<sup>1577</sup> KEATING and WILSON (2010) *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>1578</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 16; FABBRINI and BRUNAZZO, *op. cit.*, p. 117; ROUX, *op. cit.*, p. 334; BULL and PASQUINO, *op. cit.*, pp. 671-672.

constitutional reform constrained the scope for differentiation. Some clauses in the modified versions of articles 117 and 119 have ensured the primacy of uniformity over autonomy, both in the levels of spending and the quality of services.<sup>1579</sup> In addition, many of the modifications have not been implemented, leaving their autonomist potential largely unexploited. As in all the other case studies, the process has lacked vision and has mainly been guided by short-term political compromises. This has been made worse by a superficial adherence to federalism on the part of most Italian politicians.<sup>1580</sup> Finally, the regions have not been singled out as a ‘privileged’ layer of government that has some measure of control over the lower levels (provinces and municipalities), as it happens in the German *Länder*, the Spanish Autonomous Communities or the UK devolved Parliaments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Hence, in this respect, they resemble much more the French administrative regions.<sup>1581</sup>

The role played by regional institutions in the previous case studies suggest that the fragmentation of the northern constituencies targeted by the *Lega* into different regions has certainly represented a disadvantage for the party, although such fragmentation reflects the indeterminacy and weakness of the overarching northern identity. However, some elements of change can be underlined. The 1999 reform allowing the direct election of the presidents of the regions has created a new cleavage in Italian politics between local and central politicians.<sup>1582</sup> Emboldened by the strong electoral support that national party leaders have often lacked because of their usually appointed nature, regional presidents have become more vocal in defending the interests of their constituencies.<sup>1583</sup> Yet regions have not uniformly taken advantage of such powers. While the northern ones have wholeheartedly embraced the new presidential model, marking a strong break with the previous consociational system, most southern ones have tended to maintain elements of the collegiality typical of the previous period.<sup>1584</sup> This is not the only political difference that recently divided Italian regions. Since the end of the First Republic and the transition towards a bi-polar party competition, the centre-left has won only two elections out of the 14 that were held between 1995 and 2014 in the three key northern regions of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto (where the League has collected most of its support). All the others have been won by centre-right candidates, mostly resulting from alliances between the LN and FI (PdL from 2008 to 2013).<sup>1585</sup> This does not mean that Italy is divided across the North-South divide in the sense that the League electorally dominates the North, as FI has, in fact, often recorded higher results, or that there is a clear domination of the Right in the North and of the Left in the South, since some southern regions have consistently voted for FI – Sicily for instance – and the Left has been successful in other northern regions, notably Emilia Romagna. Yet, the centre-right domination of these three regions has upheld the idea of a more entrepreneurial North out of tune with the rest of the country, which largely reflects the LN’s propaganda. Such a concern has also been openly expressed by some northern leaders of the Centre-Left. This is the case with Massimo Cacciari, Sergio Cofferati, Riccardo Illy and Piero Fassino. While Cacciari called for the

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<sup>1579</sup> GIARDA, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>1580</sup> FABBRINI and BRUNAZZO, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>1581</sup> KEATING and WILSON (2010) *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>1582</sup> This would concern also mayors, who have been directly elected since the early 1990s.

<sup>1583</sup> FABBRINI and BRUNAZZO, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>1584</sup> MUSELLA, FORTUNATO (2011) *Governi monocratici. La svolta presidenziale nelle regioni italiane* (Bologna: Il Mulino) kindle edition, locations 6201-6410.

<sup>1585</sup> The League ran alone only in 1995.



creation of a Northern Democratic Party, closer to the specific needs of the area, Illy and Cofferati made unequivocal statements in favour of public policies more suitable to northern necessities and did not refrain from using the term ‘Padania’.<sup>1586</sup> After the elections in 2000, Fassino publicly argued that the defeat ‘expressed the difficulty in the relationship between the Centre-Left and the northern society. Where society is more dynamic – he continued – the Centre-Left has a greater difficulty to understand and represent this reality’.<sup>1587</sup>

Although Northern Italy has not developed a political divergence from the rest of the country as marked as in the other case studies, apart from the recent trends mentioned above and the idiosyncratic rise of the League, a mild but increasing differentiation between some northern and southern regions could be spotted from the late 1970s on. Since the end of that decade, traditional parties – the DC, the PSI and the PCI – began a long-lasting downturn, opening up a window of opportunity later exploited by the League. Yet, their decline was more pronounced in the North than in the South, especially with regard to the DC, a trend often explained with reference to stronger clientelist dynamics in the South. The percentage of southern votes for the Christian-Democrats on the national total steadily increased by about 10% between 1972 and 1992 (from 32% to 42%), while the Socialist Party (PSI) improved its relative performance in the area by about 12%. This was not the case for the PCI, though, whose share of southern votes remained constant throughout the period. An important consequence of these developments was that ‘the political class of the DC and the PSI elected at the national level inevitably became more southernised’.<sup>1588</sup>

Did this degree of political divergence coincide with different individual attitudes and values of the northern and southern societies? This is an important element of analysis because it is the claim that the populations of the North and the South have markedly different orientations, and thus ask for different policies, that makes the argument of political marginalisation relevant and justifies calls for more autonomy and even secession. Unfortunately, few studies on this specific subject are available. However, data provided by Biorcio with regard to the second half of the 2000s showed that, on average, people in the North were more likely to be concerned with security issues (72.1% vs. 63.7% in the South) and were more conformist (53.3% vs. 47.1%). More of them supported neoliberal policies (33.3% vs. 28.4%), as well as the extension of individual rights (65.3% vs. 52.5%), and trusted other people (20.3% vs. 13.8%).<sup>1589</sup> Albeit present, such differences were not dramatic. What instead has often been highlighted as a feature markedly distinguishing the North from the South is the level of ‘civic virtue’, especially after the publication of the works of Robert Putnam. Putnam defined ‘civic virtue’ as ‘a steady recognition and pursuit of the public good at the expense of all purely individual and private ends’<sup>1590</sup> and suggested that it could be measured through a series of indicators pertaining to: the existence of horizontal social structures of association as varied as cooperatives, sport clubs and ‘bird-watching groups’; newspaper readership; the expression of a preference vote in open lists at general elections; and turnout at referenda. He found that all four indicators markedly discriminated between centre-northern and

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<sup>1586</sup> See SIGNORE and TROCINO, *op. cit.*

<sup>1587</sup> ROUX, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

<sup>1588</sup> TRIGILIA, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>1589</sup> BIORCIO (2010) *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>1590</sup> PUTNAM, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

southern regions – with the former achieving the best scores – and that these results strikingly correlated with the performance of regional institutions, generally better in the Centre-North. The northern higher ‘civicness’, which according to the author would hark back to the medieval communal past of the area, fostered trust and civic engagement, facilitating collective action and promoting socio-economic development. It would thus explain, at least in part, the socio-economic gap between the two areas.<sup>1591</sup> Putnam’s work has been correctly criticised on a number of accounts,<sup>1592</sup> yet two features of his analysis are of momentous importance for the League’s arguments. First, he has provided clear evidence of the better institutional performance of centre-northern regions over the southern ones, thus fuelling the LN’s accusation that the money transferred to southern regions was being wasted rather than used to provide better services. Second, by introducing a cultural-institutionalist explanation of the northern socio-economic success and southern ‘failure’, he has indirectly confirmed the League’s interpretation of the underlying reasons of North-South dualism, thus lending legitimacy to the party’s arguments.<sup>1593</sup>

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<sup>1591</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 83-120.

<sup>1592</sup> The most important being that: the indicators used to operationalise civicness were highly debatable; he showed correlations rather than causation; his historical analysis was quite skinny and selective, while he relies too much on unsubstantiated path-dependent mechanisms; and last, but not least, his findings seem, at least in part, to be contradicted by the extent to which northern regions were involved into the ‘Bribesville’ scandal.

<sup>1593</sup> HINE, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

## 6.4 Support for Independence and Electoral Results

Unfortunately, figures concerning support for the independence of Padania, or Northern Italy, are fragmentary, as interest in the subject has ebbed and flowed with the strength of the LN. In 1996, Diamanti revealed that 52.4% of Northern Italians thought of independence as advantageous, but 29.2% also said it was ‘inacceptable’,<sup>1594</sup> with the adjective pointing to an opposition based on moral, rather than feasibility considerations. Quoting data from a poll conducted in the same year, Beirich and Woods reported that 19% of Northerners supported independence.<sup>1595</sup> In June 2010, a survey by the firm SWG found that 35% of Italians – not Northern Italians – supported northern independence, with this last figure as high as 61% among Northerners.<sup>1596</sup> In 2011, however, a study of the University of Siena revealed that only 18% of Northerners’ would be in favour of separating the North from the South.<sup>1597</sup> Although these data would suggest levels of support for independence higher than in Flanders and close to pre-crisis Catalan data, they are too fragmentary to draw meaningful conclusions.

More recently, a movement for the independence of Veneto distinct from the LN managed to organise an online referendum in which, supposedly, 2.1 million people took part and 89.9% voted Yes to the question ‘would you like Veneto to become a federal Republic independent and sovereign?’. Although the reliability of the results were immediately contested by journalistic inquiries showing that only several hundred thousands people would have participated in the poll, following scientific surveys did provide evidence of a demand for sovereignty and autonomy in the region. According to figures released by the Demos firm, 55% of the region’s population supported the independence of Veneto, while only 40% clearly opposed it. This does not necessarily mean that they wanted the region to secede from Italy, as only 30% identified full independence as the best way to defend Veneto’s interests, but it certainly signalled a demand for a substantial increase of the region’s powers.<sup>1598</sup> In this connection, there is clear evidence of a higher demand for autonomy in the North as a whole, especially on the fiscal side. According to an electoral study conducted by ITANES in 2001, 71% of inhabitants of the North thought that regions should administer all taxes and 86% wanted these to be given more autonomy, against 58% and 71% respectively in the South.<sup>1599</sup> Concerning the subject of a federal reform of the country, while, in 2011, 52.3% of people

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<sup>1594</sup> DIAMANTI (1996), *op. cit.*

<sup>1595</sup> BEIRICH, HEIDI and WOODS, DWAYNE (2000) ‘Globalisation, workers and the northern league’, *West European Politics*, 23(1), pp. 138.

<sup>1596</sup> ‘Sondaggio SWG: La Padania è un’invenzione per il 55% degli italiani’, *Clandestinoweb*, 25 June 2010, <http://www.clandestinoweb.com/home-archiviazione/italia/15720-sondaggio-swg-la-padania-e-uninvenzione-per-il-55-degli-italiani/> (accessed on June 11, 2012). Surprisingly, the results of this poll were ignored by mainstream Italian newspapers that did not cover it at all (either to comment or criticise them). Only two newspapers, ‘Il Clandestino’ and ‘Affariitaliani’ (which commissioned the poll), published the results.

<sup>1597</sup> Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali, Università di Siena, 2011. See also, D’ALIMONTE, ROBERTO (2011) ‘Sì all’unità, divisi sul federalismo’, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, February 20, <http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2011-02-20/unita-divisi-federalismo-081506.shtml?uuid=Aa7s9x9C> (accessed on 13 March 2014). Surprisingly, 15% of people from Southern Italy were in favour of the separation from the North as well.

<sup>1598</sup> DIAMANTI, ILVO (2014) ‘L’indipendenza del Veneto non è uno scherzo. Bocciato lo stato centrale, no alla politica locale’, *la Repubblica*, 24 March.

<sup>1599</sup> ITANES (2001) *Inchiesta campionaria sulle elezioni politiche del 2001*.

in the North were in favour, the same figure was only 32.2% in the South.<sup>1600</sup> Furthermore, the study of the University of Siena mentioned above found that 39% of Northerners deemed the South to be a drag on the development of the country and while 60% agreed that richer regions should help poorer ones, when the question was asked in the specific context of North-South relations the percentage fell to 38%, and this quite irrespectively of political orientations.<sup>1601</sup> Although it was rejected in the North as well, territorial differences were also quite marked with regard to the results of the 2006 referendum on the constitutional reform proposed by the Centre-Right. On the macro-regional level, 52.6% of people in the North voted 'No' compared to 74.8% in the South and 70.6% in Sicily and Sardinia.<sup>1602</sup>

As shown in the rest of this chapter, the Northern League has consistently tried to give voice to such demands. Yet, this is not the only reason for its success. In a way similar to the *Vlaams Belang*, immigration has been one of the main items in the party's rhetoric and has increasingly become an important explanatory factor of its electoral fortune, along with its stress on the need for tougher security policies and its anti-system character (when in the opposition). The first electoral success of the League, in the early 1990s up to 1997-98, was primarily due to its monopoly over the 'Northern Question', which is directly linked to the conditions favouring the rise of the arguments of fiscal victimisation and political marginalisations that we have explained in the previous sections. In these years the League also profited from the crisis of legitimacy of traditional parties. In fact, their declining trend began more than a decade before the formation of the LN and was partly linked to a general crisis of representative democracy in all Europe, which opened the way to populist parties.<sup>1603</sup> In Italy this process commenced in the late 1970s and touched both the PCI and the DC. The former certainly suffered from the changing features of Italian society that made the class vote ever weaker.<sup>1604</sup> Similarly, the DC was affected by the mounting secularization of society, especially marked in the North East.<sup>1605</sup> In such a context, the reference ideologies of the DC and the PCI held increasingly less sway and the two parties progressively turned into power brokers, distributing public funds to client networks and receiving back electoral support.<sup>1606</sup> As in Belgium and, although to a lesser extent, Spain, clientelism and corruption paved the way to the LN's protest against dishonest traditional parties. The *Lega* promised to restore democracy and improve governance by making institutions coincide with pre-existing national boundaries, thus coupling anti-system and territorial struggle. Although the 'Bribesville' scandal was more

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<sup>1600</sup> Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali, Università di Siena, 2011.

<sup>1601</sup> Ibidem. The figure is even lower for southerners, as only 33.6% think that the North should help the South and 48% that the South should live on its own resources. Yet, about three times as many southerners did not provide a clear answer to the question.

<sup>1602</sup> ROUX, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

<sup>1603</sup> IGNAZI, PIERO (2005) 'L'evoluzione dei partiti contemporanei fra delegittimazione e centralità', *Polis*, XIX(2), pp. 265-278.

<sup>1604</sup> The party also uneasily managed its relationship with extra-parliamentary and terrorist groups, especially after the assassination of former Prime Minister and senior DC member Aldo Moro. See DE LUNA, GIOVANNI (1994) 'Dalla spontaneità all'organizzazione: la resistibile ascesa della Lega di Bossi', in GIOVANNI, DE LUNA (ed.), *Figli di un benessere minore. La Lega 1979-1993*, (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia).

<sup>1605</sup> DIAMANTI (1994), *op. cit.*

<sup>1606</sup> The decline of the ideology of socialism and the lower appeal of Catholicism also weakened the centrality of the concept of solidarity, favouring the rise of more individualistic conceptions of life.

of a consequence than a cause of the rise of the League,<sup>1607</sup> the party cunningly exploited it by depicting itself as an innovative force representing the people against a caste of ‘Roman’ – and thus southern – politicians that had brought the country to the verge of fiscal and moral disaster. The extent of the crisis, unprecedented in Western Europe since it led to the radical restructuring of the Italian institutional system, with the sudden disappearance of two of the parties that had dominated Italian politics since 1945 (the DC and the PSI) and a substantial redefinition of the third one (the PCI), opened up a momentous window of opportunity for new actors, among whom the League played a leading role.

As suggested by party member Giuseppe Leoni, the launching of a secessionist strategy in 1995-1996 was done calculating – or rather hoping – that the country would not be able to respect the Maastricht criteria, thus delaying it access to the single market that was of vital interest to northern enterprises.<sup>1608</sup> Yet, despite being rewarding in electoral terms at the 1996 elections, such strategy overestimated popular support for the independence option. It also relied too much on pessimistic scenarios concerning Italy’s ability to join the euro. The ensuing success of the left-wing government to improve state accounts and respect, at least in part, the criteria for accession to the common currency somehow pulled the rug from under the League’s feet. Although partial and contradictory, the following reform of the constitution did increase the powers of the regions to an extent unprecedented before thus mitigating, at least temporarily, demands for autonomy and perceptions of political marginalisation.

It is in this period that the League emphasised its right-wing profile giving more prominence to the anti-immigration arguments already existing in its programme. This was also due to the need to differentiate the movement from its partner and direct competitor on the right of the political spectrum, Berlusconi’s FI. In the first half of the 2000s, such a choice generated a clash with its traditional SMEs constituency, as SMEs often needed cheap unskilled labour mainly coming from non-EU migrants.<sup>1609</sup> As a consequence, the electorate of the party has slightly changed over time. While artisans, shopkeepers, self-employed and small entrepreneurs were the main supporters at the beginning, the party has progressively attracted more blue and white collar workers, who more often compete with migrants for welfare resources and do not draw direct advantages from their presence. Yet, in recent years the share of artisans and small entrepreneurs has arisen again, probably in connection with the League’s rhetoric on globalisation and the financial crisis. Furthermore, small entrepreneurs, the self-employed and professionals have remained overrepresented among party officials and militants.<sup>1610</sup> Such a change in its electorate, along with the merger of FI and *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) in the *Partito della Libertà* (Pdl) that moved disaffected members of the two parties towards the *Leg*

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<sup>1607</sup> Diamanti has argued that the League’s victory at the 1992 elections played a major role in delegitimising the power of the Christian Democracy and the other mainstream parties. Hence, to some extent, its breakthrough created a more favourable environment for the legal action of the attorneys general working on the inquiry. Chronologically, the scandal began in February 1992, but it intensified dramatically after the election in April of the same year. See DIAMANTI (1994) *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>1608</sup> We have already discussed the reasons for the ensuing u-turn of the party on the issue of European integration. See CENTO BULL and GILBERT, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>1609</sup> GUOLO, RENZO (2002) ‘Immigrazione, etnicismo, crescita zero. La Lega e il Nord Est’, *Il Mulino*, 5, pp. 886-892.

<sup>1610</sup> BIORCIO (1997) and (2010), *op. cit.*, ANDERLINI (2009), *op. cit.*, PASSARELLI, GIANLUCA and TUORTO, DARIO (2012) *Lega & Padania. Storie e luoghi delle camicie verdi* (Bologna: Il Mulino) electronic edition, locations 538-539 and 601-602.

would be one of the major reasons of the success of the League's anti-immigration rhetoric between 2008 and 2011. This was also greatly favoured by the migratory dynamics impacting the country. On the one hand, the foreign population resident in northern Italy increased from 3.2% of the total population of the North in 2001 to 9.4% in 2009, a staggering figures also considering that immigration in Italy is a quite recent phenomenon dating back to the late 1980s.<sup>1611</sup> On the other, the progressive augmentation in the number of migrants reaching Sicily and other southern islands by boat in the second half of the 2000s, with a peak in 2011 – a phenomenon that received very high media attention despite its low impact on the total number of illegal migrants in the country – contributed to lending legitimacy to the League's denunciation of an 'invasion' of the country.<sup>1612</sup> Overall then, especially from the late 1990s, the LN can also be seen as a product of the rapid transformation of the country, and especially the North, into a multicultural society. In this respect, it has capitalised on a sense of general insecurity that it has certainly contributed to emphasise with its own rhetoric.<sup>1613</sup> Curiously, the League has not consistently practiced what it has preached, at least at the local level. While often making loud xenophobic arguments and proposing extreme measures to tackle immigration and criminality, the party has also favoured pragmatic choices and promoted the integration of foreigners. Most towns, provinces and regions administered by the LN are among the best performing in the country according to several indicators of migrants' integration.<sup>1614</sup>

Despite the growing importance of the right-wing profile of the party, especially its anti-immigration and security elements along with the recently toughened anti-euro attitude, in explaining its recent electoral success, it would be a mistake to discount the relevance of its territorial nature. Its northern identity has consistently represented the glue that has kept together the hard core of its voters and its militant structure. In this connection, compared to the other case-study parties, the League is the one that shows the biggest variation between the language used in its internal and external propaganda. This is due to the deliberate use of a double language: an external one, more open and compromising – although capable of unpredictable turns to a more radical stand – and a more extreme internal one, with frequent references to the commitment to pursuing the independence of Padania. The slogan *Lega di lotta e di governo* (fighting and government League) clearly conveys the movement's ambivalent character and – although they do not perfectly square – the protest/compromise divide within the movement largely overlaps the separatist/federalist one. In this connection, the wide arrays of cultural associations created after the launch of the Padanian project to further the identity-building effort have allowed the party to maintain a niche of activists, along with a more professionalised management, despite its alliances with other parties and its role in government. In other words, while in other contexts – Flanders and Catalonia are a case in point – one finds more extreme separatist forces distinguished from more moderate regionalist ones, the LN

<sup>1611</sup> ISTAT (2009) *Stranieri residenti in Italia per sesso e regione ai censimenti 1981, 1991, 2001 e anni 2002-2009*, [www.seriistoriche.istat.it](http://www.seriistoriche.istat.it) (accessed on March 10, 2015).

<sup>1612</sup> For data on the number of migrants reaching Italian coasts see ISMU (2014) *Sbarchi e richieste d'asilo. Serie storica anni 1997-2014*, <http://www.ismu.org/irregolari-presenze/> (accessed on March 7, 2015). All this was topped by an increase in total crimes during the period 2006-07, this as well widely reported by the media. On the role of media attention in this period see BIORCIO (2010) *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>1613</sup> For a description of the rise of the feeling of insecurity from 1998 on and some tentative – although we think problematic – explanations see DIAMANTI, ILVO and BORDIGNON, FABIO (2001) 'Sicurezza e opinione pubblica in Italia', *Rassegna italiana di sociologia*, XLII(1), pp. 115-135.

<sup>1614</sup> DIAMANTI (2010) 'Lega di protesta e di governo', *op. cit.* See also ALLASINO, *op. cit.*

has managed to embody both at the same time.<sup>1615</sup> Despite having been able to avoid fatal schisms, the *Lega* has often suffered from waves of rapidly vanishing support due to such an internal contradiction, which would show a specular division between a niche of committed supporters and a wider pool of more volatile voters.<sup>1616</sup> In this connection, when compared to other cases, the party has, until very recently, failed to focus its government involvement on the regional level, which would, arguably, help shield it from accusation of compromise with the corrupted ‘Roman’ parties, even more so in light of its patent lack of results in terms of providing the North with more powers.<sup>1617</sup> As pointed out in section 6.3.2, the institutional fragmentation of Northern Italy certainly contributed to making the *Lega*’s task much more difficult.

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<sup>1615</sup> AVANZA, MARTINA (2009) ‘The Northern League, a Party of Activists in the Midst of a Partisan Militancy Crisis’, in HUYSEUNE *op. cit.*, pp. 219-234.

<sup>1616</sup> PASSARELLI and TUORTO (2012) *op. cit.*, locations 583-647.

<sup>1617</sup> It goes without saying that the recent corruption scandals, both at the national and regional level, have disproportionately contributed to ruin the party’s image as well as to propel renovation within its ranks.

## 6.5 Conclusion

From a protest party to a governing party, from pro-European to Eurosceptic, from liberal to conservative, from separatism to compromise with Rome, quite a few times the League has changed its discourse and strategy. Many have thus concluded that it is an opportunist, chameleon-like movement, extremely cunning in adapting its programme and keeping it purposefully vague in order to catch votes in the widest possible constituency. By contrast, we agree with Anna Cento Bull and Roberto Biorcio<sup>1618</sup> that amidst many twists the LN has maintained a consistent goal: the defence of the interests of the North. Although based on a less well-defined identity than that upon which other case-study parties could build, this territorial dimension has endowed it with a core of committed militants and voters that has enabled it to live beyond cycles of protest voting and to become, currently, the oldest party of the Second Italian Republic.

As in the other case studies, the analysis carried out here has concerned three levels: the party's discourse; the critical examination of the conditions that favoured the formation of such discourse; and the evolution of support for independence and the electoral success of the party.

The 'Northern Question' has been the most important novelty introduced by the League in Italian politics. This has consisted in a reversal of traditional interpretations of Italian economic development according to which it was necessary to modernise the South in order to make Italy modern. In this framework redistribution was often justified on the grounds that state policies had favoured industrialisation in the North keeping the South agricultural and backward. With its arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation the League suggested that the money transferred from the North to the South had instead been wasted and used to finance clientelism and corruption. The party rarely provided detailed accounts of the transfers and mainly relied on anecdotal evidence coming from corruption scandals and from practices of positive discrimination favouring the South. The party also promoted neoliberal policies mainly consisting of improving efficiency in public administration and reducing taxes, although these policies were moderated by the assertion of the need to cater to members of the national community and the claim to represent a constituency of small producers. Later on, as it progressively put higher emphasis on its right-wing profile, the party assumed an even more sceptical position towards liberal policies of trade openness linked to the process of globalisation. What is most important, however, is that the party made a culturally determinist argument about the economic success of the North, as being based on the hard-work ethic and entrepreneurial capacities of its population. This had two fundamental advantages for the party: on the one hand, it provided an identity unifying the different northern regions; on the other, it allowed the movement to reject accusations of selfishness, since the transfers had not fuelled solidarity but rather clientelism and dependence, as evidenced by the lack of convergence between the North and the South. If the South wanted to become richer – the League argued – it just had to follow the northern example and work harder. At the same time, the party also claim to represent a specific constituency within the North, that of the areas of diffused industrialisation which had arisen during the 1960s and 1970s. Especially in its early years, this led the party to criticise the growth model based on state-aided big-firms that had developed earlier on in the North West and, therefore, the traditional northern economic elites as well.

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<sup>1618</sup> CENTO BULL and GILBERT, *op. cit.* p. 61; BIORCIO (1997), *op. cit.*, p. 10-20.



The argument of political marginalisation was initially formulated by the regionalist leagues in colonial terms. They claimed that instead of adopting a federal structure, the artificial Italian state assumed an extreme centralist architecture which brought about the colonial imposition of the Italian language, culture and administration, wiping out existing regional cultures. This would also have entailed the imposition of southern values and cultural features over the northern population, through their dominance of schooling, the media and culture. Yet, colonial arguments were later dropped and gave way to the claim of southern domination of the state administration and the political parties, which were reputed to have caused the ‘minoritisation’ of the North. The *Lega* has often changed tone, at times emphasising the responsibility of Rome in making the South dependent, at others, depicting Southerners as a cohesive ethnic group deliberately plotting against Northerners. In this connection, the LN suggested that the corruption and clientelism endemic to the country showed that democratic institutions could not work in the absence of a strong national identity because without such a felt bond of solidarity people will freeride on each other. Therefore, the solution it proposed lay in making the political and national community coincide in order to make government more responsible and effective, a claim in line with liberal-communitarian political theories (as seen in previous case studies). In order to achieve this, the party has offered two major solutions throughout its history: a federal reform of the country; and the secession of Padania. The former first entailed the division of the country into three Republics – North, Centre and South – being part of a kind of Italian confederation, but later evolved into a less ambitious devolution of powers to the existing regions or, alternatively, to their rationalisation. The latter, launched betting on Italy’s failure to join the monetary union, enjoyed little grassroots success outside the party’s most committed voters and militants, but has remained the *Lega*’s official goal and an important reference in its internal propaganda, despite having been side-lined for all practical purposes since the late 1990s. In this connection, similarly to other case-study parties, recognising the low popularity of the secessionist option amidst the northern population, the LN has adopted a gradualist strategy positing independence as its long-distant objective and focusing on the extension of powers on the regional, or macro-regional level, in the short-term.

In coincidence with the launch of the separatist project, the League also invested in an identity-construction effort that, compared to the other case-study parties, has been much heavier and less effective. This was due to the shaky ground on which the movement had to build its own representation of the nation. Two main identities have been devised. The former, based on the socio-economic peculiarities of the northern population, mainly the hard-working ethos and entrepreneurship that have supposedly made its economic fortune, has been prevalent. It has thus provided a very light overarching self-understanding that has often gone along with the political project of a federal Northern Republic or macro-region in a confederal Italy. The latter identity concept consists in a more ethnic project that became prominent immediately after the idea of the secession of Padania was launched. It remained prevalent within the party only for some years, although its inheritance can still be seen in some of the party’s positions over immigration. This has taken the form of a firm rejection of multi-cultural society. Already between the late 1980s and early 1990s, the party replaced Southerners with people coming from the Third World as the main target of its anti-immigration rhetoric. The Lombard League had argued that the ‘disorientation’ brought about by migrations could lead to all kinds of ‘social pathologies’ and create conflicts between natives and newcomers; it could also threaten democracy, setting the ground for authoritarian coups. Yet, throughout the 1990s, the LN

more consistently argued against immigration on account of its supposed economic costs. It thus forcefully demanded priority for locals in the attribution of jobs and public services. The approach became much tougher from the late 1990s and especially so after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks. The party adopted a differentialist view similar to the ‘ethnopluralism’ of the *Vlaams Belang*, in which the world is divided into ethnic groups that are equal, but different and should remain such. It focused especially on Muslim immigration often adopting a stereotyped ‘clash of civilisation’ approach, whereby Western Christianity would be in a war with Islam. This also strengthened the security side of immigration policy.

Finally, like other parties in this study, the League has devoted quite an important space in its propaganda to the European dimension. Generally speaking, Europe, and especially Northern Europe, has been used as an external positive Other to oppose as a civilisational standard to the negative Other represented by the South and the Italian state. Although having always been sceptical of the technocratic character of the EU, until the late 1990s, this went along with an overall positive evaluation of the process of European integration as an opportunity to redraw state borders along ethnic criteria, as well as offering the lure of a considerably larger economic market indispensable for northern enterprises. In this connection, in the mid-1990s the party proposed to adopt two currencies, one for the North, which would have been able to respect the Maastricht criteria if free from the drag of the South, and the other one for the South. The idea of having two monetary systems in the country later evolved into the project of the independence of Padania.<sup>1619</sup>

After Italy’s accession to the monetary union, the *Lega* reinforced its Euroscepticism, emphasising the centralistic and undemocratic drift of the project of European integration, as well as its seemingly unlimited expansion. In the context of the recent euro crisis, the party has finally made a major u-turn by calling for Italy’s withdrawal from the euro and a return to the use of a national currency. Although having been critical of the monetary union, the LN had never in fact advocated its end, but rather called for a redefinition of its membership so that only countries with truly healthy state finances and strong economies would have participated, which entailed the separation of the North from the South and the former’s participation in the new euro. Now, calling for a return to the lira implies that the North has become a weak economy as well.

In historical perspective, the nationalism of the rich in northern Italy did not arise in those areas that had enjoyed unchallenged primacy in the national economy since the beginning of the century, that is, the metropolitan areas included in the northwestern triangle between Turin, Genoa and Milan, which had been the main target of state-led industrialisation. It rather originated in semi-rural areas, especially of Veneto and Lombardy, that experienced the spread of industrial districts of SMEs combining high flexibility and specialisation and, between the 1960s and 1990s, brought about what has often been mentioned as the ‘second Italian economic miracle’. In this connection, although having been richer than most of the South since the end of the Second World War, many of these provinces went from enjoying a GDP per capita closer to that of the South than that of the richest industrial areas of the North, to joining the group of the most prosperous regions in the entire country. They thus experienced a situation of economic

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<sup>1619</sup> While before the League had sometimes hinted at the possibility of northern independence, and despite the presence of a separatist faction within it long before, it is only at this time that the party became openly separatist.

reversal similar – although not exactly coinciding – to that realised in Flanders and, if one counts the potential wealth deriving from oil, Scotland.

As compared to other case-studies, rigorous assessments of the transfers between the North and the South came much later, well after the LN had pushed the issue to the centre of national politics. The reason might deal with the initial scepticism, and often scorn, with which the League was hailed in mainstream Italian politics, which might have discouraged scholars from engaging on the terrain traced by the party at an early stage. Another reason might have to do with the absence of detailed regionalised data on spending until the late 1990s, when the government began seriously considering devolving substantial powers to the regions. However, despite varying widely, the available estimates show sizable transfers between the North and the South, although especially coming from the regions of Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, and usually of greater magnitude than those registered in other case-studies (8-15% of regional GDP). From a short analysis of the relationship between primary and disposable income in the main contributory regions from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s, the relative amount of the transfers seem to have remained quite constant, which on the one hand would not explain variation in the saliency of the issue, but on the other would explain its persistency. The studies have generally confirmed the proportionality of fiscal deficit to regional income, thus suggesting that their magnitude mainly depends on the wide gap between northern and southern regions, yet some authors also suggested problems linked to lack of convergence and the effect of lower administrative efficiency in the South. With regard to the former, Padovano argued that convergence stopped around the mid-1970s mainly as a consequence of a change in policy towards the South – from an emphasis on capital expenditure to cash transfers. Concerning the latter, Alesina et al. provided evidence of a deliberate inflation of the public sector for welfare concerns – they argued it was aimed at providing a kind of permanent unemployment benefit – which made public expenditure in the South higher, but not necessarily more efficient, and also discouraged private sector employment. Finally, Ricolfi pointed out that redistribution would in fact trigger overcompensation effects, both in relative and absolute terms, whereby residents of recipient regions would enjoy 500 euros more of public spending, on average, than those in contributor ones.

Yet, probably the most important variable explaining the questioning of solidarity since the late 1980s has been the progressive worsening of state finances with the parallel increase of deficit, debt and taxation throughout the decade and the first half of the 1990s. Spending increased dramatically already in the 1970s, but taxation remained stable since deficits were paid through debt and inflation. From the early 1980s, however, successive governments were forced to increase taxes and cut expenses in order to contain the rising debt, which went from 60.4% of GDP in 1975 to more than 120% in 1994. The irresponsible policies of the 1980s also put into jeopardy the country's possibility to take part in the monetary union, which at the time was seen as a necessary condition for the further prosperity of northern enterprises. It is in those years that the nationalism of the rich became a powerful force in Italian politics and brought with it the Northern Question to the centre of the political stage. Then, Italy's admission into the euro and the successful reforms enacted in the mid-1990s brought state expenses under control, thus depriving the LN of two of the most important conditions that had determined its success.

Both the argument of economic victimisation and political marginalisation requires a claim of difference based on the belief in the existence of a distinct political community.

Although new and surprising, the claim of existence of a northern identity could rely upon a long existing cleavage in Italy's history centred around the 'Southern Question' and the perception of a cultural difference between the North and the South. Soon after independence, the South became the relevant other in the construction of the Italian national identity with which most of what was not modern about Italy was identified. At the same time, the formation of the Italian state was quite problematic. The fact that Italy had not come about as the result of a true grassroots process meant that the new-born Kingdom enjoyed little legitimacy and had to rely on local notables as intermediaries with the very diverse regional constituencies that it had integrated. Yet, instead of adopting a decentralised structure recognising such differences, for fear of unleashing uncontrollable centrifugal forces, the monarchy imposed a strongly centralised administrative system that, at the same time, had few resources to bring about a thorough nation-building process, as, for instance, France had managed to do. In this connection, the LN's accusations of cultural colonisation would mainly be strategic overstatement, since the regional cultures that were erased by the process of national homogenisation were not considered as alternative national cultures at the time, and because the process was highly ineffective until at least the Fascist era. Paradoxically, the rise of the regionalist leagues in the 1980s, came after the first true process of cultural homogenisation had come about, after the spread of cinema, radio and TV in the post-Second World War period.

But the most important argument of political marginalisation has concerned the 'southernisation' of the administration and the political parties. The former has been a reality at least up to the early 1960s, as shown by the data provided by Sabino Cassese. Figures regarding political parties are more fragmentary, but there would be some evidence, especially of a process of increase of southern votes for the DC and the PSI throughout the 1980s that would have augmented the percentage of Southerners among its elected members. All this contributed to the perception of a political marginalisation in the non-metropolitan areas of diffused industrialisation that, as seen above, between 1950 and 1980 had become among the richest in the country and therefore began claiming a representation more in line with their new economic status. Such a perception was greatly enhanced by the judicial revelations of an endemic system of corruption linked to the parties that had dominated the First Republic – the DC, the PSI and to a lower extent the PCI – which, although involving a number of representatives of the northern political and economic elites was depicted by the League as belonging to a mainly southernised partitocratic system.

Despite having been in power for most of the 2000s, the LN has not been capable of solving the Northern Question. Devolution of powers to the regions has been carried out at the end of the 1990s under a left-wing government that brought about a far-reaching modification of the Constitution. This, however, remained largely unimplemented. The LN did not do much to turn the most far-reaching aspects of the reform into reality and instead pushed through a new federal reform that was rejected by most of the population both in the North and the South, although it was approved in the party's regional bastions, Lombardy and Veneto. A new reform was devised during the new government coalition in which the party participated between 2008 and 2011, but the government fell before it could be passed. Overall, then the process of devolution of powers has remained patchy and contradictory, without dispalying any clear consensus among the political parties on the final institutional configuration of the country. As in the other case-studies, the process has been substantially influenced by short-term political considerations leaving most of the reasons that brought the debate about largely unresolved. Compared to the other case-

studies, the League has suffered from the undeniable disadvantage of representing a community divided into a number of regional units. It has therefore consistently tried to participate in national governments in Rome in order to modify the institutional architecture of the country to the advantage of northern regions. Only recently has it tried to focus its activity more consistently on the regional level of government. This might also be due to the relatively recent reinforcement of the regions.

Data on support for independence in Italy have remained quite fragmentary and this because the saliency of the issue has come and gone with the waves of electoral success of the LN. The available polls would however show a percentage between 18-20% of the northern population in favour of northern independence. Some polls would also question the meaning of 'independence', as shown by surveys on a recent hike in sympathy with the idea of Veneto's independence. Consistently with the situation detected in the previous chapters, the northern Italian population seems to have rather been in favour of increasing the powers of the regions, especially in financial terms, without reaching the point of full separation.

In historical perspective, the electoral success of the League is in large part to be attributed to its monopoly of the Northern Question and, therefore, to the socio-economic conditions that favoured its formulation. This was especially the case in the early 1990s, when the party also profited from its innovative nature and populist outlook that enabled it to capture protest voters at a time of critical delegitimation of traditional parties. The following wave of success of the League in the late 2000s, however, had more to do with the party's monopoly over the anti-immigration discourse after a decade of unabated growth in the immigrant population of the North, although the onset of the economic crisis in the country, in 2009-2010, revived demands for more powers and even separation. In this connection, it is interesting to note how the context of the recent debt crisis, with the state on the edge of financial bankruptcy, rising taxes and austerity and the League in the opposition since the end of 2011, seemed to bode well for a renewed season of Padanian separatism. The financial scandal that hit the party, along with the harsh downturn that affected the northern industrial sector – while on the contrary in the 1990s it kept buoyant throughout the crisis of state finances – led the party to re-direct its criticism against the EU and the euro rather than against Rome and the South. Yet, it is still too early to say whether the muting of the northern dimension that this choice has entailed will be a lasting feature. It certainly signals the hardship that the northern industrial districts have recently experienced and their reduced status in the world economy.



## **7 Comparing the Nationalisms of the Rich**

In this chapter we draw together the findings of the case studies analysed in the previous pages and systematically compare them with a focus on three levels of analysis:

- the discursive strategies utilised by the parties, especially with regard to the construction of the arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation;
- the social conditions and the historical processes that favoured the formation of their discourse;
- the electoral evolution of the parties studied, trends in support for independence in the regions where they have acted and how these two are related to the conditions that favoured the formation of the nationalism of the rich and/or to other factors.

Furthermore, we expand on some general phenomena that have not been treated adequately in the case studies and require further attention, notably the role of international processes such as globalisation and European integration. We also introduce a wider comparative dimension on some of the factors that have been taken into account in the previous chapters.

### **7.1 Discourse and Strategy**

In chapter one, we introduced our definition of the nationalism of the rich as a type of nationalist discourse that aims to put an end to the economic exploitation suffered by a group of people represented as a wealthy nation and supposedly carried out by the populations of poorer regions and/or by inefficient state administrations. The core elements of this ideology are a claim of economic victimisation, according to which a backward core area holds back a more advanced periphery, and a denunciation of political marginalisation that takes different forms in each case, but that can generally be defined as a more subtle, and more subjective, kind of victimisation than open discrimination or deliberate exploitation. The previous chapters have further inquired into this proposition giving substance to our general definition, but also pointing out differences in the ways in which the parties have constructed their own arguments. Here we build on the dimensions used for the analysis of the case studies, that is: the economic and political relationship with the parent state, the idea of the nation conveyed by the party and its ideological profile, the approach to immigration and European integration. We thus aim at stressing commonalities and differences as well as at creating subgroups, when possible. Table 7.1 summarises, albeit approximatively, the main characteristics of each party for the dimensions mentioned above.

**Table 7.1 – Party Discourses Compared**

<b>Dimensions/Arguments</b>	<b>ERC</b>	<b>LN</b>	<b>N-VA</b>	<b>SNP</b>	<b>VB</b>
<b>Economic relationship</b>					
Fiscal transfers	C	C	C	S	C
The nation will be better off if independent	C	C	C	C	C
Need for tailored economic policy	C	C	C	C	C
Cultural-determinist explanation of economic success	S	C	C	S	C
<b>Political relationship</b>					
Lack of recognition	C	S	S	S	C/I
Cultural oppression	C	T	S	T	C
Critique of consociationalism	N/R	C	C	N/R	C
Critique of majoritarianism	S	N/R	N/R	C	N/R
Mismatch between economic and political power	C	C	C	C	C
<b>Definition of the nation</b>					
Predominantly ethnic discourse	N/R	I	N/R	N/R	C
Predominantly civic discourse	C	I	S	C	N/R
Strong work ethic	C	C	C	C	C
Linguistic nationalism	C	T	S	N/R	C
<b>Ideological profile</b>					
Openly left-wing	C	N/R	N/R	C/I	N/R
Openly right-wing	N/R	S/I	S	N/R	C
Openly centrist	N/R	S/I	N/R	S/I	N/R
Instrumental case for independence	C/I	I	C	C/I	N/R
Gradualist	C/I	C/I	C	C/I	N/R
<b>Immigration</b>					
Multiculturalist	S/I	N/R	N/R	N/R	N/R
Integrationist	S/I	N/R	S	S	N/R
Assimilationist	N/R	C/I	N/R	N/R	N/R
Ethnopluralist	N/R	C/I	N/R	N/R	C
<b>Europe</b>					
Eurosceptical	N/R	C/I	N/R	N/R	S
Europhile	S	S/I	S/I	S	N/R
Eurorealist	N/R	N/R	S/I	N/R	N/R
Euroinstrumentalist	C	C	C	C	C
Europe as a positive other	C	C	C	C	C
Europe as Christianity	N/R	S/I	N/R	N/R	C

C = core argument; T = temporary argument; S = secondary argument; I = inconsistent, either argumentatively or across time; N/R = not relevant.



### 7.1.1 Economic Relationship with the Parent State

This is arguably the most important dimension as it pertains to the claim of economic victimisation that we have pointed out at the outset. In this connection, the SNP must be clearly treated as a deviant case. Let us therefore focus first on the other four.

ERC, the LN, the N-VA and the VB have used different words – *geldstroom*, *expoli fiscal*, *rapina fiscale* – but they have all denounced the fiscal transfers between the region where their national constituency live and the rest of the country. This is the argument concerning which their rhetoric resembles each other most. The resemblance is indeed quite striking and their reasoning can be broken down in the following logical steps:

1. there is uncontroversial evidence of sizable transfers between our nation and the rest of the country;
2. these transfers are excessive and unjust;
3. they are excessive because higher than in any other country – they usually do not provide clear comparative data, but often mention the reunification of Germany, arguing that the West paid less to finance the reconstruction of the East than what they have paid to their parent state – and because they overcompensate the difference between donor and recipient, leaving the former worse off;
4. they are unjust because they are (a) obligatory, (b) non-transparent, (c) ineffective;
  - a. the donor constituency cannot decide to stop donating at its will; while this is often coached as a democratic argument – i.e. ‘the people should decide about the use of their own resources’ – it in fact stems from the nationalist argument that a nation constitutes a political community endowed with a right to self-determination and should thus always be free to decide how its money is spent, otherwise a democratic argument would theoretically allow, for instance, the rich neighbourhood of *Les Tres Torres* in Barcelona (whose income per head is equal to 222% of the city’s average) not to share its solidarity with that of *El Besòs i el Meresme* (average income 50%);
  - b. the transfers are deliberately non-transparent because in this way the centralist parties can use them to finance clientelist networks in other regions of the state, especially the poorer ones, by promoting subsidies, unemployment benefits, and oversized employment in the public sector;
  - c. this solidarity promotes dependency rather than endogenous growth: on the one hand, this would be clearly showed by the lack of convergence since the beginning of the transfers; on the other, it is logically in the interest of the parties to keep the poorer regions dependent as, in this way, their role as mediators remains indispensable;
5. this solidarity is therefore a waste and it is a drag on the competitiveness of the donor nation; the money would be used much better if kept in the areas where the members of the nation live and work, allowing them to enjoy better services and be more competitive, or if solidarity was managed directly by the members of the relevant nation rather than by the central state.

Party estimates have varied through time, but when looking at the more recent data, they have been quite similar at about 7-8% of regional GDP in all four cases.<sup>1620</sup> Surprisingly, only the VB – in its thematic brochures the *Kostprijs van Belgie* – has provided detailed analysis of the transfers, while the other parties have tended to rely on studies carried out by external actors, often in academia or regional governments. This might probably be due to the fact that there has been abundant evidence of the existence of sizable transfers, therefore, these parties do not really need to provide it.

In the Scottish case, however, the more ‘ambiguous’ position of Scotland within the UK economy, whereby its status as a donor or a recipient region has been unclear, did spur the SNP to provide detailed evidence of its net contribution to the rest of the country, at least from the late 1980s onwards when the party began achieving the internal cohesion and capacity to carry out such an exercise. The ‘ambiguity’ underlying the Scottish fiscal position is the main reason for treating the SNP as a deviant case. As seen in chapter 5, Scotland has only recently closed the gap with the British average income, which clearly fits uneasily with claims purporting the region as being wealthier and subsidising the Union. The potential wealth provided by oil revenues would have clearly boosted Scotland’s economic prospects, although it is impossible to precisely say whether the region would have been better off as an independent state. The SNP has decided to fight the battle on economic grounds and rightly so, as electoral data suggest that this is the best way to convince the Scots to support constitutional change. The indeterminacy of the issue has allowed the debate to be dragged on almost indefinitely without any clear answers coming up. Yet, it has also led the Scottish economic case to rely a lot more than the others on alternative considerations. These mainly boil down to the accusation of too much centralisation and mismanagement of the Scottish economy on the part of successive London governments. More specifically, from the post-Second World War period, Scotland would have suffered because it was imposed policies tailored to the needs of the South East of England, which were at odds with its own ones. In the 1970s and 1980s the language of the party played on a double register, accusing London of deliberately sacrificing Scotland to the advantages of the South East – sometimes even indulging in colonial metaphors – while pointing more to accusations of neglect, or to the structural consequence of being the junior partner in the Union, at other times. This latter approach has consistently prevailed from the 1990s onwards, in line with Salmond’s idea of conveying a positive message about independence. Hence, the need for statehood has been predicated on the necessity to counter the gravitational attraction exercised by London on economic activity through the creation of a new centre of power in Edinburgh endowed with the fiscal competences required to set up a business-friendly environment in a globalised economy.

This argument concerning the need to devolve powers in order to set up policies more suitable to the local context reconciles the SNP with the other cases, as they all share a claim that the policies enacted by the centre have been detrimental to their own interests. In all cases, there is a claim that the political and the economic centres of the country do not coincide. In other words, the most productive areas, or some of them, would not have adequate representation within state institutions, whereby the need to break away. Such reasoning relates to the accusations of political marginalisation that we will examine below. What is important to note here is that, again, this argument is less persuasive in the case of the SNP than in all other cases. And, yet, the party and especially Alex Salmond,

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<sup>1620</sup> We look at these more in detail in the next section.

have consistently accused the southeastern economy of being driven by the concentration of public employment, defence spending and mortgage tax relief to the disadvantage of the rest of the UK, and Scotland in particular. Unlike the other cases, however, the SNP has not been able to convincingly portray the rest of the country as a ‘cost’ for Scotland.

There are two other important elements that are shared – to a varying extent – by all parties in the sample and that lie at the core of the nationalism of the rich. The former is a belief in the special talent and work ethic of the members of the nation. In the cases of the LN, the N-VA and the VB, this leads to an unambiguous cultural-determinist explanation of the nation’s economic success. Such cultural determinism is very important because, on the one hand, it dignifies the nation’s prosperity and turns it into a major marker of its members’ identity; on the other, it allows them to reject solidarity on account of the consideration that the areas they represent used to be less developed than the national average but were capable, through their hard work, to build up their own current prosperity without state subsidies. Hence, what the other regions of the state that ‘live off the transfers’ should do is simply to follow their example. Although they might tactically divert their attacks to the state administration and the central or local political elite, this culturalist interpretation has led them to attribute opportunistic and parasitic behaviours to the populations of Southern Italy and Wallonia. With regard to the LN, such representation has also been the most important element in the construction of the northern Italian identity.<sup>1621</sup> In the case of ERC, we find such an argument but without denigration, and virtually no mention of the poorer regions of the country. While the Catalans are depicted as hard-working people who have made their way with no external support, and it is often implied that culture does play a role in influencing patterns of economic development more in general, this does not involve any disparaging stereotyping of the regions of Spain that profit from the fiscal transfers flowing from Catalonia. The main targets of the party’s rhetoric have been the Spanish state administration and the Spanish political elite. If there is any reference to less prosperous regions such as Extremadura and Andalusia, it is limited to the local political ‘barons’, who are accused of using redistribution for their clientist purposes. This reconciles the implicit cultural determinism of the nationalism of the rich with the left-wing ideology of the party, since the intervention of the centralising and authoritarian Spanish state is identified as the main cause of the backwardness of the poorer Spanish regions. It also makes such a critique consistent with the older Catalan nationalist tradition and allows the party to formulate arguments similar to those of the LN, the N-VA and the VB concerning pride in the nation’s prosperity and the rejection of solidarity.

In all these four cases, the culturalist interpretation of their economic development goes along with a claim to represent the local constituency of SMEs, which would be living proof of the validity of the cultural-determinist argument. According to Jérôme Jamin this focus on the ‘producing people’ repropose, in a European context, the ‘producerist narrative’ used by populist parties in the United States, which suggests ‘the existence of a noble and hardworking middle class that is constantly in conflict with malicious parasites which (sic) are lazy and guilty, and found at both the top and bottom of the social order’.<sup>1622</sup> Such narrative has the undeniable advantage of explaining complex processes

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<sup>1621</sup> This has arguably been the case in Flanders as well, but here language and the opposition to the Francophones-dominated state in the first century of Belgian history has played a much more important role.

<sup>1622</sup> JAMIN, JÉRÔME (2011) ‘The Producerist Narrative in Right-Wing Flanders’, in DE WEVER (ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 27.

such as uneven development, lack of regional convergence, the persistence of the transfers and patterns of political divergence between regions with a simple compelling explanation. It also has the advantage of appealing to a wide section of the population – the working people – against enemies from above and below and of being justified by the widely shared values of merit, entrepreneurship, skilfulness and responsibility. Jamin further argues that such rhetoric is typical of right-wing parties. This might be true with regard to its complete form – which in the cases of the VB and the LN also includes foreign migrants – where the producing people are squeezed from above and below, yet, as we have seen in the case of ERC, a left-wing version carefully limiting its attacks to unaccountable state bureaucrats and to those political elites that nourish dependence in other Spanish regions for their clientelist advantages (the enemies from above) is also possible.

The SNP is, once again, a deviant case. Especially in recent years, the party has shared with the other cases a representation of the Scottish people as a talented, ingenious and hard-working lot – building on the much longer tradition of the ‘lad o’ pairts’ and on Scotland’s contribution to the industrial revolution – yet, the party has had a hard-time referring to any SME constituencies because of their weakness in the region. On the contrary, it has consistently preached the need to reverse Scotland’s low rates of business start-ups as compared to England and to steer the economy from one mainly based on big industry, first endogenous and later of multinational provenance, to one with a higher number of SMEs.<sup>1623</sup>

What is certainly common to all parties, however, and which arguably is the main strength of the nationalism of the rich, is that the transfers and, in the case of Scotland oil revenues, have been used as a ‘trump card’ to project the appealing and credible image of a more prosperous society combining competitiveness and welfare protection in a context of high international competition due to processes of globalisation and European integration. In this connection, it is interesting to note that even the right-wing parties in the sample do not advocate radical welfare cuts to their own community. Some of them – the VB and the LN at some point in their history – have even presented themselves as the true defenders of the working-class and have effectively expanded their electoral grip within this constituency. Their models have been the small, dynamic and cohesive countries of Northern Europe, especially the Scandinavian ones, seen precisely as examples of competitiveness and welfare, rather than states epitomising a more individualistic ethos and that have experienced attempts at radical neoliberal reforms such as the United States and Great Britain.<sup>1624</sup> Hence, along the lines of what has been suggested by Michael Keating, the nationalism of the rich can be seen, at least rhetorically, as a tool ‘for reconciling economic competitiveness and social solidarity in the face of the international market’,<sup>1625</sup> although the parties analysed have clearly indicated different ways, some more exclusive than others, to reach this goal.

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<sup>1623</sup> Another reason why the cultural-determinist argument has been less prominent in the rhetoric of the SNP is because ‘Scotland’s wealth surplus’ has mainly to do with natural, rather than cultural factors. Yet, Alex Salmond did strive to downplay the importance of oil and to emphasise Scotland’s high potential deriving from its ‘first class’ human resources.

<sup>1624</sup> The LN has been the exception in this connection, as it has not made consistent reference to the rhetoric of small, dynamic and cohesive states, and this simply because an independent Padania would have around 20 million inhabitants (depending on its specific geographical configuration) which would not really make it a ‘small country’. However, the League clearly embraced the communitarian ethos described above.

<sup>1625</sup> KEATING (2001) *Nations, op. cit.*, p. 1.

The nationalism of the rich also contains an important element of liberal communitarianism pointed out by Michael Waltzer, i.e. ‘the dream of a perfect free-riderlessness’,<sup>1626</sup> and it echoes David Miller’s argument whereby a strong national identity is a pre-requisite for efficient solidarity.<sup>1627</sup> In other words, what these parties have argued is that, in order to work, solidarity needs commitment and consensus on the basic norms and values shared by the society in which it is discharged, otherwise it leads to inefficiencies, free-riding, higher costs and lower quality. Since the economic success of the nations represented in this sample is portrayed as descending from the shared norms and values of its members, it follows that where economic development has not materialised to the same extent other norms prevail. Hence welfare and redistribution will be inefficient. In this framework, changing the boundaries of the political community is the only possible solution because cultural change is deemed to be very difficult to bring about and, in any case, the rest of the population of the parent state has not showed any willingness to effect it. In the cases of the VB and the LN, similar arguments are also directed at foreigners, while they are not in the other cases.

This dimension might be less obvious concerning the SNP. The SNP’s nationalism of the rich does not reflect the idea of Scotland being robbed by lazy parasites in England and/or corrupted bureaucrats – although it is worth stressing again that Salmond did accuse the South East of being made up of subsidy junkies living off state spending – but rather the image of Scotland as a different society, with a stronger social-democratic ethos, which should be free to use its ‘extra-ordinary’ human and natural resources to achieve its goals. Yet, one example of the anti-free-riding ethos mentioned above would be provided by the arguments formulated in the 1970s about the use of oil revenues by the bankrupted British state, pawning away Scotland’s wealth to cover its balance of trade deficit. It can be seen again in the recent decision of the SNP-led Scottish Government to charge pupils from the rest of the UK studying at Scottish universities tuition fees. Although certainly required by the inefficiencies of its funding system, this policy was to remain in place even after independence.

### 7.1.2 Political Relationship with the Parent State

The economic victimisation denounced by the case-study parties is directly linked to a perception of political marginalisation. Such a concept is arguably more vague than the economic argument seen in the previous section, but it can be summed up as a subtler, and arguably more subjective, form of victimisation than deliberate oppression or discrimination. In their analysis of secession in the twentieth century, Alexander Pavkovic and Peter Radan have identified three types of grievances that always appear in the propaganda of separatist movements: the unequal distribution of resources (economic and/or of status), harm and alien rule, with the last one being the most important and common element. While grievances about resources do not require deliberate action on the part of the state or other groups within the country – and against whom separatist claims are directed – but can simply stem from neglect, harm is always deliberate.<sup>1628</sup> Contrary to

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<sup>1626</sup> WALZER, MICHAEL (1990) ‘The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism’, *Political Theory*, 18(1), p. 16.

<sup>1627</sup> MILLER, DAVID, *op. cit.*

<sup>1628</sup> PAVKOVIC, ALEKSANDAR and RADAN, PETER (2007) *Creating New States: Theory and Practice of Secession* (Aldershot: Ashgate) pp. 47-50.

Pavkovic and Radan's description of separatist claims, when looking at the propaganda of the parties analysed, we find plenty of arguments about the unequal distribution of economic and power resources, but few overt statements about harm and alien rule, which would, at least in part, confirm their peculiar character when compared to 'more traditional' separatist movements.

This assertion of course requires a number of qualifications, as the degree of its validity varies from one case to the other and, also, within each case over time. First, we can distinguish between parties such as the SNP, the N-VA and, in part, ERC that have clearly tended to shift from a message centred around blaming central institutions towards one aimed at showing the positive prospects of independence and reassuring the population about the maintenance of good neighbourhood relationship with the rest of the parent state after independence. Thus, the SNP has gone from using colonial metaphors in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to accusing the British government of 'mismanagement' and 'undelivered results', rather than deliberate harm, and to stressing that independence would only mean the end of the British political union, while the social and cultural union would go on and would even be strengthened. The very same expression of *democratic deficit*, arisen during the Thatcher years, points to a problem with British democracy, not its absence. Similarly, the N-VA has certainly been tough with the Walloon Socialist Party and sometimes – especially through personal declarations of some of its members rather than through the official propaganda – delivered almost insulting statements with regard to the Francophones, but more consistently it has referred to the flaws of the Belgian consociational democracy as the main reason to 'divorce' the two halves of the country, suggesting that this would be in the interest of both Flanders and Wallonia. ERC clearly shows a more problematic outlook, especially in light of the constitutional crisis begun in 2010, which has rallied all nationalist parties behind the idea that self-determination is fundamentally about democracy and the Spanish state's opposition to an independence referendum displays its authoritarian character. Yet, between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, especially under the leadership of Josep-Lluís Carod Rovira, the party clearly underwent a transition similar to that experienced by the SNP under Alex Salmond and mainly aimed at spreading a positive message fundamentally based on the socio-economic advantages of independence.

In the three cases, this approach has also entailed the adoption of gradualist strategies based on a conception of independence as a process, rather than only as an event, that can certainly be achieved through a referendum or obtaining an absolute majority in an election, but also by means of further rounds of devolution of powers. Hence, the SNP has accepted the idea of 'devo-max' as an intermediate step to full independence; the N-VA is committed to negotiating the transformation of Belgium into a confederation before getting to its total 'evaporation'; and until about 2010 ERC was proposing to the Spanish state a federal reform based on the equal recognition of Catalonia as a nation and a fiscal deal along the lines of that enjoyed by the Basque Country. Although they have all striven for the long-term goal of radical constitutional change, they have also accepted to work within the existing devolved institutions in order to cater for the present needs of the local population – which, as we will see later, has gone along with a necessary clarification of their ideological profile. The fact of combining a radical long term-goal (full independence) with such gradualist strategies, as well as of taking part in government at the regional level without having to compromise with state-wide parties at the central in order to have political impact, has had the valuable advantage of enabling these parties to hold executive power and to enlarge their pool of voters, while, at the same time,

neutralising, to some extent, accusations by their respective radical wings of compromising independence to seek office or, worse, to collaborate with state-wide parties.<sup>1629</sup>

The VB and LN are rather different in this respect, as they have generally showed a much stronger confrontational posture. Both parties have made reference to colonial metaphors in the 1980s and early 1990s and, in the case of the VB, accusations of francophone ‘arrogance’ have been recently voiced with reference to the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde arrondissement and the linguistic facilities in the periphery of the capital-region. Yet, in a fashion similar to the N-VA, since the second half of the 1990s, the party has more frequently underlined the flaws of Belgium’s consociational democracy and the ensuing ‘minoritisation’ of the Flemish majority. Similarly, the League progressively abandoned the denunciation of southern immigration to the North – also because this was replaced by Third World immigration – and of the eradication of local cultures. Apart from their emphasis on immigration, especially in the 1990s, they both emphasised the corruption scandals that hit Belgium and Italy, portraying themselves as the only clean parties and the representatives of the working people against the ‘corrupted political mafia’.<sup>1630</sup> They thus identified not only an ‘external enemy’ (the state, the Francophones and the Southerners), but also an internal one: the traditional parties in the respective regions. However, the VB never really campaigned to be truly in office, but rather openly accepted the role of ‘whip party’, which thanks to the *cordon sanitaire* raised around it and the absence of a substantial right-wing and nationalist alternative until the arrival of the N-VA, enabled it to maintain a much more confrontational stand. On the contrary, the League joined three government coalitions at the central level – in 1994, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011 – and thus had to continuously play on a double register of protest and collaboration, evidenced by the slogan ‘fighting and government League’. It, arguably, had to play both the role of anti-system party, as the VB has done, and of tough but more moderate alternative, along the lines of the N-VA’s approach. This has been shown by the differences between its internal and external propaganda. Unlike all other parties, in which such differences are marginal and mostly concern the tone used and the priority with which arguments are presented, the League has consistently drafted very dry and technical party programmes for various elections, leaving practically all ideological flavour to its thematic brochures and papers. As we will see more in detail in section 7.3, the party has also often paid dearly, in electoral terms, for its collaboration in government at the central level.

More in general, however, all the case-study parties have confronted two main constraints with regard to the articulation of their grievances. The first has to do with the threat of violence and ‘Balkanisation’ that is often associated with nationalism and

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<sup>1629</sup> The N-VA has supported a federal coalition in 2008, without holding ministerial positions though, but this adventure lasted only some months and the party caused the fall of the government on account of a lack of progress on the reform agenda. This has changed after the 2014 federal elections, when the party became the largest in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. As a consequence it took part in a government coalition from October 2014. The new strategy followed by the N-VA is not clear yet. Initially, De Wever aimed at obtaining so large a majority as to be able to impose to the other parties a move to confederalism. As, despite its exceptional success, this did not occur, mainly because of the specific results of the elections that opened up to the possibility of alternative coalitions, the N-VA seems to be willing to make a muscular use of the Flemish majority in the federal institutions in order to push through some of the wished socio-economic reforms. Yet, there are early signs that this is penalising it electorally.

<sup>1630</sup> ERC played such a role as well in Catalonia in the first half of the 1990s.

separatism – and that was arguably more salient in the first half of the 1990s, when the dissolution of Yugoslavia recalled the dangers of civil war. As seen in the previous chapters, even if independence would be probably advantageous in economic terms, the populations of the regions analysed have shown reluctance to massively support it. In such a context, when willing to expand their appeal to a wider constituency than a small clique of committed voters, the parties have made an effort to reassure the population that separation would be a smooth event. Expressions like ‘orderly split’, ‘evaporation of the state’, ‘consensual separation’, ‘divorce’, ‘confederation’ have thus been widely used along with examples of peaceful dissolutions such as those of the United Kingdom of Sweden and Norway (1905) and of the Czechoslovak Federative Republic (1993). All this points to the tight rope that these parties have to walk if they want to successfully voice grievances without sounding too aggressive or threatening.

This leads us to the second constraint, which relates to the specific context where the parties have operated and, therefore, to the socio-economic and cultural material available to construct a credible narrative and make sense of reality. As shown in the previous chapters, although in some cases there are historical experiences of harsh conflict and persecution – Franco’s dictatorship probably being the clearest example – in their most recent history these parties have lived in quite stable and successful democratic regimes. Certainly, most of them have been plagued by corruption and have displayed flaws in their democratic systems, but one could hardly conclude that they would not qualify as democratic regimes. Furthermore, all of them have also moved to a more decentralised architecture allowing for more or less wide forms of recognition of diversity and institutional autonomy. Therefore, in the longer term, exaggerated accusations of domination, oppression and authoritarianism could risk backfiring, all the more so because all these parties have accepted to bring about constitutional change from within those very same institutions, thus implicitly accepting their legitimacy.<sup>1631</sup> This is why we suggest using the label ‘political marginalisation’ to refer to the varied set of grievances concerning the political relationship with the parent state voiced by these parties. In this way, we do not want to downplay the importance of such grievances. On the contrary, it is precisely by putting them in a wider context of separatist claims and grievances that one realises how much the standard to judge political legitimacy is always relative and subjective, hence the need to take nationalist discourse seriously and evaluate it through contextual analysis.

That said, let us review in a more systematic fashion the core claims of political marginalisation denounced by each party. In a longer historical perspective, the SNP’s main argument has concerned the centralisation of power in the London area. According

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<sup>1631</sup> In this connection, it is interesting to note that almost all parties indulged in colonial-like rhetoric in the first years of their existence, but later dropped it. This is probably due to a number of reasons. First, decolonisation, as the main instance of major constitutional change before the early 1990s, as well as the limitation to the colonial context of the validity of the right of self-determination in international law, influenced this attitude. With regard to left-wing parties such as ERC, and less explicitly the SNP, one should also remember that, outside the context of decolonization, nationalism was a discredited ideology, therefore association with decolonization could provide legitimacy. Internal colonialism models such as Hechter’s did precisely that and were quite popular in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Second, the use of a purposefully exaggerated rhetoric might have been useful in the ‘formative’ years to rally a core of committed supporters, but had to be abandoned in order to make the party appealing to a wider constituency. In this connection, the sense of backwardness implicitly associated with the image of a colony was certainly at odds with the representation of the relevant nation as the most advanced part of the country, which was being held back by a more backward centre.



to this narrative, while the Union was, in principle, a partnership among equals, the strength of the South East sidelined Scotland. During the Thatcher years such a situation evolved into a fundamental questioning of the nature of the Kingdom. The Iron Lady did not do anything undemocratic, strictly speaking, what she did was to treat Britain as a unitarian instead of a union state, thus jeopardising Scotland's position as a constituent nation of the UK. Although Scotland was later recognised its autonomous character and, more recently, its right to self-determination, the narrative arising out of those years has had, and will still have for some time at least, a long-term impact. ERC's main political grievance has similarly, although much more critically than in the Scottish case, had to do with its recognition as a nation. In an effort to reconcile opposing views about the nature of the country, the 1978 Constitution allowed for some flexibility and constructive ambiguity. It defined Spain as a nation, but it also differentiated between regions and historical nationalities, satisfying, to some extent, Catalonia's demand for a special status, while, at the same time, not specifying its real consequences. After having worked for about 30 years, this constructive ambiguity was shattered by the 2010 ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal, precipitating the region into a major constitutional crisis.<sup>1632</sup> The LN on the contrary has not so much complained about the recognition of Padania as a nation, for the simple reason that this was far from being an uncontroversial concept in the North in the first place. What the League has rather consistently focused upon has been the underrepresentation of some northern constituencies – portrayed as representative of the entire North, of course – within the purportedly southern-dominated state institutions and parties. During the 2000s, however, as the party was for most of the decade in power with Berlusconi's FI and PdL, it became harder to hold such an argument. This in part explains why the party gave more emphasis to the immigration issue and strengthened its Eurosceptic position. Yet, the LN has kept demanding more powers for the northern regions – and recently again the constitution of a northern macro-region – in order for it to rule its own affairs without being continuously bogged down by the Roman parties and administration. Finally, the VB and the N-VA probably are the most interesting cases of rhetoric of political marginalisation because they claim to speak on behalf of a demographic and political majority. As we have seen in chapter four, this has to do with some of the 'perverse effects' of the Belgian consociational democracy, whereby each of the two linguistic groups recognised in the federal Parliament has a *de facto* veto power over the other with regard to a whole range of matters. Hence, despite representing a minority, the francophone parties can block major constitutional revisions, frustrating the demands for change of their Flemish counterparts and entailing – according to these parties – a clear violation of the principle of 'one man, one vote'.

Therefore, what is clearly at stake in the discourse of these parties is the type of democracy, rather than democracy itself. Issues of recognition have been prominent only in the case of ERC – and even there, since the mid-1990s, they had begun to peter out until the recent crisis brought them back to the core of the party's rhetoric – and, in part, of the VB. Yet, a general sense of neglect, the idea of being different and having diverging

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<sup>1632</sup> Yet, once again, one cannot really argue that the Spanish government and Constitutional Tribunal acted undemocratically. Although the appeal presented by the PP against the Catalan Statute was a clear sign of 'constitutional dogmatism' and has probably harmed the party's interests, it was totally legitimate and the Court ruling arguably 'light-handed', since it dealt with only 14 articles out of more than 100 directly challenged by the PP's appeal. This, however, has not prevented major constitutional conflict from arising, as the fundamental clash is not about democracy itself, but about the definition of the political unit to which democratic rules apply.

interests from the rest of the country, especially the centre, has been enough to provide these parties with substantial support – although wider success is also explained by other factors, as we will see more in detail in section 7.3.

What is important to underline is that the claims of economic victimisation and political marginalisation that lie at the core of the nationalism of the rich must always be considered in conjunction: on the one hand, economic victimisation directly stems from the nation's political marginalisation; on the other, the nation's political marginalisation is more salient because of its exceptional economic power and unrealised potential, which would warrant not only equal but even special representation within the parent state.

### 7.1.3 Ideological Profile and the Idea of the Nation

As argued by Montserrat Guibernau, nationalism is neither right nor left, but an empty shell, that can be filled with whatever political ideology.<sup>1633</sup> This is consistent with the view set out at the outset of this research, whereby nationalism is a general phenomenon with many particular declinations, whose specific ideological content depends on the set of ideas that lie at its core. Hence, it is not at all contradictory that the parties in this sample have all developed the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich while belonging to different ideological traditions. This depends on a number of often contingent factors, among which the most important are pre-existing nationalist traditions, structural socio-economic conditions, the political opportunity structure in which the party operates at any given time, and the characteristics of the negative other(s) that has/have had an impact on the process of formation or re-definition of the national identity. The considerations made in this and the next section (7.4) therefore are important to provide a thorough discussion of the party's discourse and to understand their overall profile, but they are not fundamental with regard to the central arguments of the nationalism of the rich. What is interesting, however, is to observe the ways in which these parties have reconciled the claims of economic victimisation and political marginalisation seen above with different ideological profiles without sacrificing too much of their consistency.<sup>1634</sup>

Although being a stereotypical and incomplete classification – where for instance should one put classical liberalism grounded on social and market freedom? – it is quite common to evaluate parties' political ideology by locating them on a left-right spectrum in which the former extreme is usually associated with support for redistributive policies and social rights, while the latter with free-market economic and conservative social policies.

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<sup>1633</sup> GUIBERNAU, MONTSERRAT (1997) 'Images of Catalonia', *Nations and Nationalism*, 3(1), pp. 89-111.

<sup>1634</sup> The link between left-right and centre-periphery ideological consistency in the ideological profile of a wide sample of regionalist parties has been analysed by De Winter and Massetti. The former argued that regionalist parties on the left tended to be more likely separatist than those on the right, while the latter nuanced this hypothesis by suggesting that the true criterion was the degree of radicalism of the parties analysed with those on the radical left or right more likely to be separatist than those converging towards the centre. This is only partially confirmed by the parties in this sample as the only truly radical party (apart from ERC in its first years) is the VB – the LN indeed is less of a radical party along both the left-right and centre-periphery dimension. Massetti's conclusions, however, are partly confirmed by the move to gradualism that has been pointed out in the previous section. See: DE WINTER, LIEVEN (1998) *A Comparative Analysis of Electoral, Office and Policy Success of Ethnoregionalist Parties*, in DE WINTER and TÜRSAN, *op. cit.*; MASSETTI, EMANUELE (2009) 'Explaining Regionalist Party Positioning in a Multi-Dimensional Ideological Space: A Framework for Analysis', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 19(4-5), pp. 501-531.

It is quite easy to locate the five parties in the study on such a continuum. While ERC and the SNP confidently define themselves as centre-left parties, with ERC being arguably a little more on the left than the SNP, the N-VA is a conservative but moderate party (centre-right), the Northern League is a right-wing but not clearly an extreme-right party, and the VB is certainly on the extreme right, despite the toning down of some of its most radical policies from the early 2000s.<sup>1635</sup>

Their variability notwithstanding, two processes seem to be common to most of the parties: a move from a catch-all strategy to a clear ideological profile with the aim to conflate national identity and ideological struggle; the comparatively low importance given to cultural matters – in the stricter sense of high-culture rather than the wider one of a system of significance – and identity as compared to socio-economic issues.

With regard to the former, some of these parties directly arose from such an ideological conflict within pre-existing wider nationalist movements. This is certainly the case of the VB, whose foundation represented the result of the increasing disaffection of the right-wing of the *Volkswunie*. Overall, despite the renovation of the mid-1980s and the slight moderation of the first half of the 2000s, the VB has maintained a high level of ideological coherence. ERC can also be considered such a case, as, to some extent, the takeover of the separatists in the late 1980s also represented a reaction of the left wing of the Catalan nationalist movement against the centrist drift of *Esquerra*. Although this already clearly established the party on the left of the Catalan political spectrum, the passage of the leadership from Angel Colom to Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira further contributed to strengthening its left-wing credentials as well as the coincidence, in the party's message, of social and national struggle. The SNP, on the contrary, did not openly become a social-democratic party until the late 1980s, although a change in this direction was already clear from the end of the 1960s, especially from 1969, when Billy Wolfe became party chairman. Yet, the presence of a shrinking but lastingly influential group of members hostile to any move to the left,<sup>1636</sup> made this open clarification impossible until the late 1980s, when it was also facilitated by the opposition to the Tory government of Margaret Thatcher. Peter Lynch has recently suggested a move back to a catch-all strategy,<sup>1637</sup> while others have pointed out the party's more or less surreptitious adoption of some of Thatcher's ideological legacy.<sup>1638</sup> Yet, this is a phenomenon shared also by the Labour Party and common to social-democracy all over Europe. Hence, although there might clearly be inconsistencies in the party's ideology, as well as in its implementation, this does not seem to fundamentally contradict its claim to belong to the social-democratic tradition.<sup>1639</sup> The N-VA was not necessarily born as a centre-right party, but it clearly became such when compared to its immediate predecessor (the VU),<sup>1640</sup> with the decision in 2014 to join the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European

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<sup>1635</sup> For a classification of the VB as an extreme-right party see MUDDE, *op. cit.* Mudde also agrees on the ambiguous status of the Northern League. This issue is further discussed by BIORCIO (1997) and (2010) *op. cit.* On the ideological position of the N-VA and its electors see SWYNGEDOUW and ABTS, *op. cit.* On the SNP see MAXWELL (2009) *op. cit.* and LYNCH (2009) *op. cit.*, on ERC see CULLA (2013) *op. cit.* and ARGELAGUET (2004) *op. cit.*

<sup>1636</sup> On this see BRAND, JACK (1990) *Defeat and Renewal: the Scottish National Party in the Eighties*, Working Paper n. 23, Institut de ciències polítiques i socials, Barcelona.

<sup>1637</sup> LYNCH (2009) *op. cit.*

<sup>1638</sup> CUTHBERT and CUTHBERT, *op. cit.*

<sup>1639</sup> MAXWELL (2009) *op. cit.*; TORRANCE (2009) *op. cit.*; HASSAN (2009) *op. cit.*; MITCHELL, BENNIE and JOHNS, *op. cit.*

<sup>1640</sup> BEYENS et al., *op. cit.*

Parliament confirming such an evolution. Finally, the LN also experienced such a transition, from a more liberal and centrist position in the first half of the 1990s – the party declared itself to be beyond the left-right divide in this period – to a clearer right-wing position. Contrary to other parties in the sample, though, it has never openly claimed such an identity and consistently purported to defend the interests of the people against those of the elites and foreign migrants.<sup>1641</sup>

As we will see more in detail in section 7.3, this direct link to a clearer ideological profile has allowed the parties to expand their electorate by attracting voters sharing a similar ideological profile but who, despite, arguably, not being hostile to the nationalist dimension, would hardly vote for a party platform solely based on nationalism. This ideological clarification is also linked to two other processes seen above. On the one hand, the acceptance of the policy of bringing about independence from within the democratic institutions of the state and in stages has forced the parties to make concrete proposals for the ‘present’ rather than only for future constitutional change. Paradoxically, this has been valid for an opposition party such as the VB as well, because its main role as a whip has been to force other parties to take up some of its core issues, notably a tougher approach on immigration and law and order. A clear focus on this and other non-directly nationalist issues in its programme has thus helped the party find a wider niche in the Belgian political arena. On the other, the idea at the core of the nationalism of the rich, whereby the nation would be better off once independent, could be greatly enhanced by explaining how this would come about and what kind of policies could be enacted in an independent state.

Cultural nationalism has been an under-exploited dimension in the propaganda of the movements analysed. ERC is probably the case in which the cultural dimension has been most important because, contrary to all other parties, literary men and intellectuals were well represented within it from 1987 on, and especially so in the early years after the separatists’ takeover. The importance of the Catalan language as the main marker of the Catalan identity during the harsh repression of Franco’s regime increased its relevance in the post-dictatorship period. Yet, despite such a strong role, its presence is surprisingly not overwhelming in the party’s propaganda and has probably decreased as the autonomous institutions have obtained more powers over education and culture<sup>1642</sup> – although controversies have arisen with regard to specific regional policies and, ultimately, to the lack of recognition of Catalan as an official language on a par with Spanish at the state level. The issue of language was also important in the VB’s discourse, but more in relation to francophone infringement over the linguistic territoriality of Flanders than to any developed cultural policy. The populist and anti-intellectual character adopted by the party in the second half of the 1980s constrained any focus on the cultural dimension. Similarly, the SNP and the N-VA have paid lip service to the development of the national culture, clearly favouring a socio-economic and instrumental approach to national identity. Paradoxically, the party that most than any other invested resources and energy in the cultural dimension has been the Northern League. This apparent contradiction is quickly explained: while all other parties could rely on an already existing and consolidated national identity, which had already gone through a necessary phase of cultural

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<sup>1641</sup> BIORCIO (2009) *op. cit.*, pp. 120-135.

<sup>1642</sup> This is probably due to the fact that nationalist civil society organisations close to the party but separate from it, such as *Omnium Cultural*, have focused on the Catalan cultural dimension, thus leaving it free to take care of other subjects.

nationalism earlier in the twentieth and even the nineteenth century and had already led to the development of a wide array of civil society and government institutions in charge of cultural matters,<sup>1643</sup> the Padanian or Northern Italian national identity had to be invented from scratch, building upon the entrenched but vague perception of a cultural distinction between a ‘poor South’ and a ‘rich North’.

What in all cases has been most important, therefore – in the case of the LN because of the failure of a cultural or ethnic definition of Padania while in the others because of the relatively unproblematic character of national identity – is the attempt to portray the national fracture as bearing on socio-economic attitudes. This has already been explained in part in section 7.1, when we have argued that the parties have made a cultural-determinist argument about economic success, whereby culture was mainly associated with the outstanding work ethic, skilfulness and creativity of the national population. The process is similar with regard to the ideological profile of the party. This has hinged on the formulation or redefinition of the relevant national identity and, especially, on the actor that has played the role of negative other in such a process. Hence, as the Flemish national identity was mainly formed in the social and linguistic struggle against a state dominated by francophone elites commonly identified with stereotypical images of ‘socialist Wallonia’, or ‘liberal Brussels’, it has in part conflated with Catholic and more conservative positions.<sup>1644</sup> Similarly, in Scotland during the 1980s, the Scottish identity was redefined against the background of Margaret Thatcher’s neoliberal revolution. Although Scotland’s population already was slightly on the left compared to the rest of the UK because of structural factors – and it kept being only a little more left-wing even later – the narrative that arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s portrayed the region as deeply anti-Tory, less individualist and more ‘compassionate’ than England. As shown by several studies, to be Scottish has come to be increasingly associated with left-wing positions, although individual attitudes did not diverge radically north and south of the border.<sup>1645</sup>

The issue is more nuanced and, arguably of less direct import in political debates in Catalonia and Northern Italy. ERC did not make a direct claim that Catalonia is more left-wing than the rest of Spain.<sup>1646</sup> Yet, it did argue that Catalonia was more modern, democratic and progressive than Spain and this naturally played on the association between Spanish nationalism, centralism and authoritarianism with the Right descending

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<sup>1643</sup> The necessity of an initial cultural phase in the development of nationalist movements has been theorised and empirically confirmed by Mirsolav Hroch, see: HROCH, MIROSLAV (2000) *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of Patriotic Groups Among the Smaller European Nations* (New York: Columbia University Press) first published in 1985.

<sup>1644</sup> On this points see: BEYEN, *op. cit.*; DE SMAELE, *op. cit.*; VAN GOETHEM, *op. cit.* However, this also depended on the failure of the francophone socialists to see the potential links between their social struggle and the linguistic demands of the Flemish movement. The *Parti ouvrier belge* simply focused on the material improvement of the working class, largely neglecting the linguistic cleavage. As made clear by Nadim Farhat, ‘l’emploi du néerlandais était également faible, voire absent, au sein des instances nationales du Parti ouvrier belge (POB), comme en témoignent ses publications exclusivement en français. Le public ouvrier flamand était donc moins exposé au discours socialiste pour des raisons d’ordre linguistique’. FARHAT, NADIM (2012) ‘Le conflit communautaire belge entre identité et histoire’, *Revue française de science politique*, 62(2), pp. 231-254. See also: ERK (2005) ‘Sub-state’, *op. cit.*

<sup>1645</sup> PATERSON (2002) *op. cit.*; BROWN et al. *op. cit.*, pp.

<sup>1646</sup> This aspect was however hinted at, or even emphasised, by some ERC’s members interviewed for this research project. Cesc Iglésies stressed indeed the existence of a slightly more leftist public opinion in Catalonia than in the rest of Spain. Alba Verges somewhat contradictorily argued that there were no major differences between the attitudes of the Catalans and the Spaniards, but also that all major progressive fights won in Spain originated in Catalonia. See the interviews with Cesc Iglésies and Alba Verges in Annex 2.

from the dictatorship period. As suggested by Balfour and Quiroga with regard to the democratic transition, ‘the fight against Francoism would bring together, once again, the Spanish left and Catalan nationalism in their demands for a democratic and decentralized state’.<sup>1647</sup> This would be confirmed by CiU’s reluctance to unambiguously present itself as a conservative party occupying the centre-right of the Catalan political spectrum – although this is, in fact, where it belonged. Pujol rather profiled the party as a centrist force, even a social-democratic one in the first years of the 1980s.<sup>1648</sup> The reason why ERC did not play harder on this dichotomy between right-wing Spain and left-wing Catalonia depends on the internal competition against CiU, which *Esquerra* often accused of being right-wing and conservative. If the party had emphasised the identification between the Right and Spain, while at the same time portraying CiU as right-wing, it would have probably disaffected a substantial part of the nationalist electorate. Doing so without representing CiU as right-wing would have deprived the party of a fundamental political weapon in the Catalan arena. Furthermore, the PSOE dominated Spanish politics between 1982 and 1996 and has continuously been the first party in other important Spanish Autonomous Communities such as Andalusia, over an even longer period (1982-2012), thus preventing any clear association between the Right and the rest of Spain. In this context, playing on the more general distinction between a modern and progressive Catalonia and a backward and authoritarian Spanish state proved much more suitable.

In Northern Italy the issue is similarly more ambiguous. The values of entrepreneurship, thrift and work ethic that the League put at the core of the representation of Padania have been mostly associated with the Right. This would be in part reflected by regional electoral results, whereby between 1995 and 2014 the Centre-Left won only two out of 14 regional elections in the key regions of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto. This is also partly reflected in recent trends in the evolution of party support by social category. While in the 1980s, centre-right parties gathered a substantial part of their votes in the public sector (which is usually considered at odds with the values highlighted above), such proportion considerably decreased to the advantage of the centre-left, while the latter almost halved its popularity among blue-collar workers (to some extent to the advantage of the League).<sup>1649</sup> As seen in chapter six, this growing ‘gulf’ between the North and the Centre-Left was directly voiced even by some leaders of the left-wing Democratic Party. Yet, apart from the LN, the other parties of the Right and Centre-Right (FI, AN and more recently the PdL) have been voted on across the entire peninsula – for example they have continuously governed the region of Sicily between 1996 and 2012 – thus preventing the rise of any unambiguous dichotomy between a right-wing North and a left-wing South.

A final element, that has already been implicitly mentioned above, must be stressed: most of these parties, although to a different extent at different moments of their history, have made an instrumental rather than a principled argument about independence, that is, they have portrayed independence as a means to achieve better standards of living and better democracy for their electoral constituency, rather than an end in itself. This is clearly the case with the SNP and the N-VA, as shown in the relevant chapters, as well as with ERC until the recent constitutional crisis, which has brought back the issue of the recognition of the Catalan nation to the centre of the political stage. The LN, as well, is an

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<sup>1647</sup> BALFOUR and QUIROGA, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>1648</sup> DOWLING, *op. cit.*; DEL CLOT i TRIAS, DAMIA (2013) *L’espai nacionalista a Catalunya (1999-2006): Cronica d’un Enfrontament* (Barcelona: La Busca) pp. 45-93.

<sup>1649</sup> FELTRIN, *op. cit.*

ambiguous case in this respect: while the more ethnic definition of the Padanian nation has clearly gone along with a more principled rhetoric, especially in the publications of the Free Padanian Company, the socio-economic one has identified the North mainly as a community of interests and advocated the Northern Republic mostly on instrumental grounds. The VB is certainly an exception in this respect, as it has consistently shown a highly principled rhetoric that has arguably been further underpinned by its role as a ‘whip’, and thus uncompromising, party. Yet, its tough stand against immigration has often incorporated important elements of the instrumental case in the form of the socio-economic advantages that a restrictive immigration policy would bring to the local population.

#### **7.1.4 Immigration and Europe**

The ideological classification of the case-study parties devised above is broadly speaking relevant with regard to the external factors analysed in this section, i.e., immigration and the relation with Europe. If, for the time being, we consider the latter as limited to the EU and the process of European integration, at a first look, we have two Euroenthusiastic parties – the SNP and ERC – and two eurosceptical ones – the VB and the LN – with the N-VA lying somewhere in between, although certainly leaning towards the pro-EU pole. Furthermore, ERC and the SNP have provided civic definitions of the relevant national identity and shown a positive attitude towards immigration. On the contrary, the VB and the LN have clearly displayed a xenophobic profile and formulated ethnic definitions of the relevant nation. Despite carefully referring to culture, rather than race, as the criterion to value difference among human groups, they have also adopted an essentialist concept of culture whereby the integration of non-European migrants, especially Muslims, has been deemed near to impossible. Again, the N-VA lies somewhere in between, with a clear assertion that ‘multiculturalism’ has failed, an open acknowledgment of the inherent cultural basis of national identity – although not spelled out in practice – a support for programmes of active integration based on the acceptance on the part of foreign migrants of a minimum set of liberal principles and learning of Dutch, and a clear rejection of illegal immigration, albeit accompanied by a commitment – at least in principle – to set up legal migratory channels instead of upholding the Belgian ban implemented in the 1970s.

As in the case of the previous section, however, this categorisation needs some clarifications. To begin with the parties’ posture concerning the EU, the SNP was very critical of the process of integration up to the mid-1980s, as it believed that this would further marginalise Scotland and that, in any case, participation in it through the mediation of the British government would be detrimental to the region. The change in the late 1980s occurred because the party realised that the EU could, at least psychologically, reduce the perceived costs of independence and thus favour its popular appeal. The party has remained committedly pro-EU since then, although it has been critical of some aspects of European integration and has notably defended a confederal model in which member states would remain the main gatekeepers. ERC has also been consistently committed to the project of European integration, although it has voiced reservations concerning its technocratic character, its focus on economic and monetary aspects and the neglecting of issues concerning national diversity within state boundaries. Most notably, ERC’s discourse on the EU has diverged from the SNP’s for a higher emphasis on the model of the Europe of the Regions and by advocating a European intervention in the domestic

struggle for recognition against Spain. Such difference certainly descends from the more overt opposition of the Spanish state to Catalan self-determination – obvious during the current constitutional crisis – and the higher rigidity of the Spanish constitution, as compared to the position of Scotland within the British system. As a consequence, Catalonia would need the strong support of the international community in order to achieve its independence.<sup>1650</sup> The N-VA has exploited the process of European integration within the framework of the metaphor of the evaporation of the Belgian state, torn between the opposing pulls of devolution of powers above (to the EU) and below (to the regions and communities), in order to depict a smooth independence scenario and to convey the inevitability of its realisation. Contrary to the other two cases above, however, the N-VA has also been one of the main supporters of the EU's austerity policies, using the moral distinction between thrifty northern economies and profligate southern ones contained in the EU and German rhetoric about the crisis<sup>1651</sup> to further legitimise its calls for constitutional reform. Only very recently – more precisely during the campaign for the 2014 European elections – the party adopted a slightly more critical stand against the EU, moving from 'Euroenthusiasm' to 'Eurorealism', without, however, putting into question its commitment to the common European project.<sup>1652</sup>

The LN has not been consistently against the process of European integration. On the contrary, up to about 1997-1998, it was in favour of more integration, especially its monetary aspect, although on a Northern Italian basis. In that period, the party believed that Italy's appalling fiscal position would prevent the country from joining the euro to the disadvantage of northern business. Thinking that northern firms could not afford exclusion, the League launched the separatist project hoping that monetary integration would rally the economic elite behind it. As Italy did manage to join the euro, the party turned ever more Eurosceptic.<sup>1653</sup> Such Euroscepticism has arguably been underpinned by two further factors: the competition of the largely pro-EU *Forza Italia* on the right of the Italian political spectrum that pushed the League to more extreme positions on the matter;<sup>1654</sup> and the fact that before 1998 support for the EU was not unconditional, therefore, existing criticism allowed for a smoother ideological transition to a more radical Euroscepticism.<sup>1655</sup> Such scepticism has been consistently voiced by the VB, which since the Maastricht Treaty has objected to the 'economicist' and centralised character of the project of European integration and proposed an alternative confederal model of the 'Europe of the Peoples' with only a few competences, mainly in the realm of defence and

<sup>1650</sup> Our conclusions on the SNP and ERC contrast with some of Massetti's, who carried out a study of a much larger sample of parties and mainly focused on support for constitutional treaties. We argue that beyond the position on single issues, the parties have stressed a general pro-EU position and mainly for instrumental reasons concerning the overriding goal of independence. See MASSETTI, *op. cit.*, pp. 519-524.

<sup>1651</sup> For more on this see HUYSSSEUNE and DALLE MULLE, *op. cit.*. On the rhetoric of austerity more in general see: BLYTH, MARK (2013) *Austerity: the history of a dangerous idea* (Oxford, Oxford University Press); JABKO, NICOLAS (2013) 'The Political Appeal of Austerity', *Comparative European Politics*, 11(6), pp. 705-712. SCHMIDT, VIVIEN A. (2014) 'Speaking to the Markets or to the People? A Discursive Institutional Analysis of the EU's Sovereign Debt Crisis', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, n. 16, pp. 188-209.

<sup>1652</sup> LERUTH, *op. cit.*

<sup>1653</sup> Grievances were voiced already before, but as for ERC and the SNP, the general ethos of the party on the issue was quite positive because it suited its objectives in terms of constitutional reform.

<sup>1654</sup> CONTI, NICOLO (2003) *Party Attitudes to European Integration. A Longitudinal Analysis of the Italian Case*, Working Paper n. 70, Sussex European Institute.

<sup>1655</sup> HUYSSSEUNE, MICHEL (2010) 'A Eurosceptic Vision in a Europhile Country: The Case of the Lega Nord', *Modern Italy*, 15(1), p. 69.



foreign policy, devolved to the European level. The party has also voiced concerns about the impact on the socio-economic and cultural fabric of Flanders of having Brussels as the main capital of Europe. Yet, the *Blokkers* have also followed a pragmatic strategy, whereby they have not called for the dismantling of the EU, until very recently, but rather its reform. Similarly, until mid-2013, the VB adopted an ambiguous stand on the euro, suggesting the redrawing of its membership rather than its utter dissolution.

Despite these different positions, two aspects seem common to all of the parties in the sample: a distinction between Europe and the EU, with the former consistently used as a ‘positive other’ to counter the domestic negative other (i.e. the central state and/or other regions within the state); a mainly instrumental use of the approach to the EU and the process of European integration. The former position consists of the claim that the relevant nation belongs to the group of more advanced European nations, especially the Northern European economies seen as a successful combination of economic growth and welfare protection, while the rest of the country does not. The economic dimension of this claimed membership in a more advanced Europe is present across the board. As far as its social or cultural aspects are concerned, the sample split unevenly: on the one hand, the SNP has underlined the more social-democratic ethos of continental Europe in line with its own ideological label and at odds with the more individualist and conservative profile of Tory England; on the other, the VB and the LN have mostly highlighted Europe’s Christian origins and values, especially with regard to the arguments against Muslim immigration.<sup>1656</sup> ERC and the N-VA have sat somewhere in between, especially emphasising Europe’s modernity against Spanish/Belgian (Wallonian) backwardness, although ERC has certainly stressed more the social aspects of the European social-democratic tradition, while the N-VA has played on the rhetoric of austerity and the ethic of responsibility – especially in budget terms – of the northern economies.

This distinction between Europe and the EU has been useful to uphold an instrumental approach to the European dimension without sacrificing too much of the parties’ ideological consistency. In this connection, we do not claim a rigid instrumental practice. The parties do show consistency across extended periods of time and have struggled to reconcile major policy turns with their overall ideological profile. What we rather mean is that, although important, the European dimension is not among the core values of the parties, hence in the struggle for strategic effectiveness and ideological consistency it will always be subservient to the overall goal of major constitutional reform.<sup>1657</sup>

This is less the case with the stand on immigration, which relates to the definition of the relevant nation, as predominantly civic or ethnic, at a deeper level than the European dimension and does not offer the possibility to distinguish so neatly between its institutional and ideational aspects. This does not mean that practical concerns have not been taken into account. Although having implicitly avoided any ethnic connotation since at least the 1950s, the SNP, for instance, did not clarify its position on the matter until the mid-1990s, when it started disseminating the image of the ‘New Scots’, and this mainly because Scotland had until then been a country of emigration rather than immigration. Similarly, when it came into government in the mid-2000s, ERC clearly switched to a

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<sup>1656</sup> It must be recalled however that, despite proclaiming the defence of Christian values, these parties are sceptical of organised Christianity in general. Furthermore, the League openly adopted a defence of Christian values only from the late 1990s on.

<sup>1657</sup> This is in line with the findings of ELIAS, ANWEN (2009) *Minority Nationalist Parties and European Integration: a Comparative Study* (London: Routledge) p. 39.

more pragmatic position consistent with the need to regulate immigration in an orderly fashion. Yet, despite these nuances, ERC and the SNP have struggled to defend a civic definition of the relevant nation, open to difference and the incoming of foreigners. In line with major European trends since the second half of the 1990s,<sup>1658</sup> this has fallen short of a defence of multiculturalism and rather promoted programmes of ‘civic integration’, based on the teaching of language and the basic liberal norms and principles of the host society in order to avoid ‘ghettoization’ and promote the development of a sense of belonging to their new environment among migrants. This has also been defended by the N-VA, which, in contrast, has openly recognised the cultural basis of national identity, although it has not specified what that would entail in terms of integration policy beyond the learning of the local language. In this way, the N-VA has carefully distanced itself from the VB, which has instead supported a non-assimilationist policy grounded on the belief that this would be detrimental to both the local and the immigrant communities. The logical consequence has been the proposal to repatriate all non-European immigrants, later toned down because of the legal charges faced by the party. The LN has never formulated such extreme plans for repatriation and in its official policy proposals it has rather limited itself to putting forward tough laws against illegal immigration. At the wider level of discourse, however, it has clearly displayed negative attitudes towards migrants, clearly relying on a ‘clash of civilisations’ approach with regard to Muslims ones. The connection with the ideas of the northern or Padanian nation formulated by the party is also ambiguous as these have not been univocal. The ethnic Padanian definition formulated from the late 1990s on clearly went along with xenophobic positions strongly opposed to immigration from the Third World. Based on the economic success of the northern regions and the strong work ethic of their populations, the socio-economic definition seemed more akin to a civic ideal of integration of different peoples into a confederal structure. Although it is true that this project was limited to the Padanian and Alpine peoples and in part relied on previous ethnic definitions of regional identities – the term ‘ethnofederalism’ was also used at the time – in practice it went along, especially in the first half of the 1990s, with a more tolerant and pragmatic position.

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<sup>1658</sup> JOPPKE, CHRISTIAN (2004) ‘The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State: Theory and Policy’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 55(2), pp. 237-257.

## 7.2 Formation

In this second section, we deal with the socio-economic conditions that facilitated the formation of the nationalism of the rich. We first examine economic factors, then identity and institutional ones, and, finally, we focus on some important international processes that we could not treat adequately in the case studies.

### 7.2.1 Transfers and Economic Performance

The discourse of the nationalism of the rich implies the existence of some form of economic drain on the part of central institutions, although this can also be potential and contested rather than actual and proven, as the case of Scotland shows. The first questions that we have to answer thus are: whether there are similarities and differences in the extent and nature of fiscal transfers between the regions analysed; what has been the connection, in practice, between the origin of the transfers and the origin of the discourse about them; and whether other European regions have experienced similar fiscal imbalances, whether they have seen the rise of similar movements, and, if not, why.

As in the Scottish case the fiscal transfer denounced by the SNP has a peculiar nature, we will leave it aside for the time being and focus first on the economic situations in Catalonia, Flanders and Northern Italy. The several studies reviewed in the previous chapters have shown great variance concerning the availability and quality of data, the methods used for the calculations and, as a consequence, the results obtained. This preliminary observation emphasises the fact that the contested nature of the transfers – notably regarding the methods for their estimation and the reasons why they arose and persist – has allowed the parties to selectively use the data that best suit their arguments in order to provide evidence of their claims of economic victimisation. At the same time, the existence and permanence over time of sizable transfers is undeniable. Table 7.2 provides a summary of the figures reviewed in each case study. Depending on the method used – monetary or benefit flow – Catalonia has recorded fiscal deficits around -7/-9% and -3/-6% of its GDP respectively since at least the second half of the 1970s. From the same period on, Flanders has shown stable fiscal deficits of around -4% of its GDP.<sup>1659</sup> Unfortunately, with the exception of Forte's study for the EEC Commission in 1977 and a few partial works in the early 1990s, no detailed analysis of regional fiscal balances in Italy was carried out until the early 2000s. The picture is further complicated by the absence of a single administrative unit encompassing the entire North. Yet, when taking the three core regions – both economically and in terms of electoral support for the LN – of Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto, the most recent examinations clearly display sizable fiscal imbalances of the order of -6/-17.6%, -1.8/-8.6%% and -6.4/-11.1% of their respective GDPs. Although distortions have been pointed out – and we will come back to them below – most studies emphasise the generally high correlation of regional fiscal deficits and GDP per capita, suggesting that most of them are driven by implicit forms of interpersonal redistribution rather than by discretionary spending.<sup>1660</sup>

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<sup>1659</sup> Studies of the fiscal transfers in Flanders have mainly used a benefit approach.

<sup>1660</sup> See URIEL and BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 411-428; DE LA FUENTE (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 24; DE BOECK and VAN GOMPEL (1998) and (2002) *op. cit.*; DURY et al.; STADERINI and VADALÀ, *op. cit.*

**Table 7.2 – Summary of Fiscal Deficits, Catalonia, Flanders and Selected Northern Italian Regions, selected studies (percentage of regional GDP)**

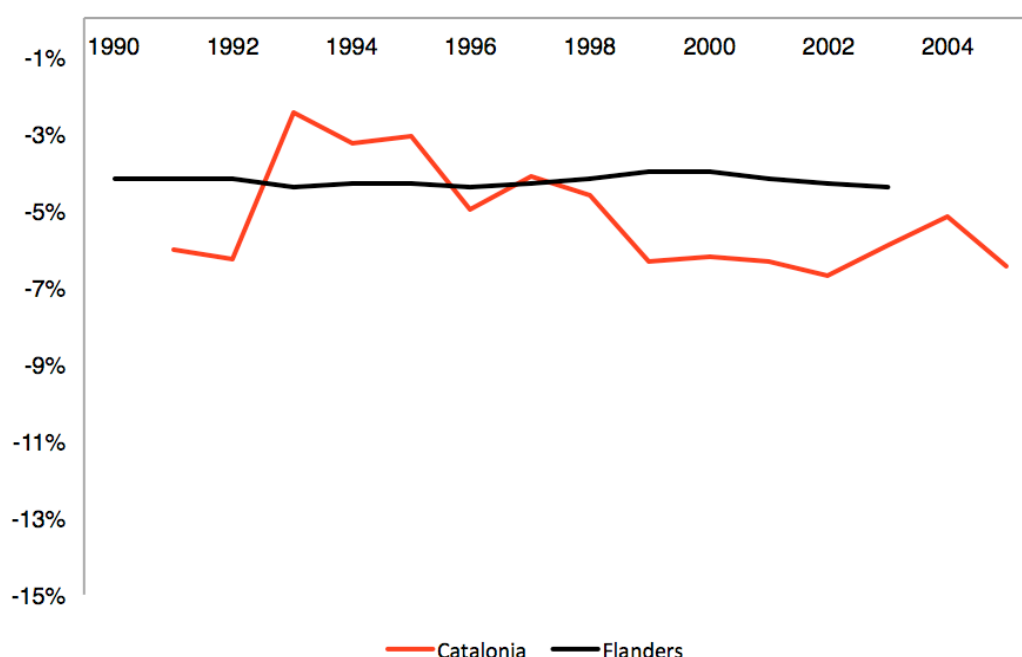
Region	Monetary Flow	Benefit Flow
Catalonia	-7.5% (1985-2000) -8.6% (2001-09)	-2.75% (1980-85) -5.2% (1991-2005) -6.2% (2001-09)
Flanders		-4.6% (1975-85) <sup>1</sup> -4.2% (1990-2003) <sup>1</sup>
Lombardy	-6% (1997)	-17.6% (1996-2002) -14.6% (2004-05) -11.6% (2005)
Piedmont	-4.5 (1997)	-8.6% (1996-2002) -5.1% (2004-05) -1.8% (2005)
Veneto	-9.8% (1997)	-11.1% (1996-2002) -7.6% (2004-05) -6.4% (2005)

<sup>1</sup> Mix of benefit and monetary flow methods.

Sources: see Table 3.1; Table 6.1; VAN ROMPUY and BILSEN, *op. cit.*; VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*

Regarding Catalonia and Flanders, the availability of figures in time series format covering an extended period of time allows an evaluation of their evolution in a consistent methodological framework, although only for very recent years. The figures shown in the relevant chapters have been reported in Figure 7.1. While Flanders' flat curve clearly conveys the constancy of the transfers over time, the Catalan one would suggest more variability. Yet, much of the difference has to do with the way in which the transfers have been calculated. Contrary to the authors of the ABAFIM study, Uriel and Barberan's did not neutralise the Spanish budget deficit in their estimates, but rather distributed it to each region proportionally to GDP. Accordingly, as Spain's deficit in the 1993-1997 period worsened considerably, the deficit of all net contributory regions shrank in the authors' calculations, leaving their position relative to the rest of the country practically unchanged. When excluding those years, the Catalan deficit remains circumscribed within the 5.19-6.72% range. This would suggest a quite stable level of interregional redistribution and, if anything, a reduction of Catalonia's burden. Uriel and Barberan's data might indeed hide an improvement, as the Catalan deficit remains approximately the same in the years 1991-1992, when Spain's central deficit was equal to -4/-5% of GDP, and in the early 2000s, when it edged up to parity.

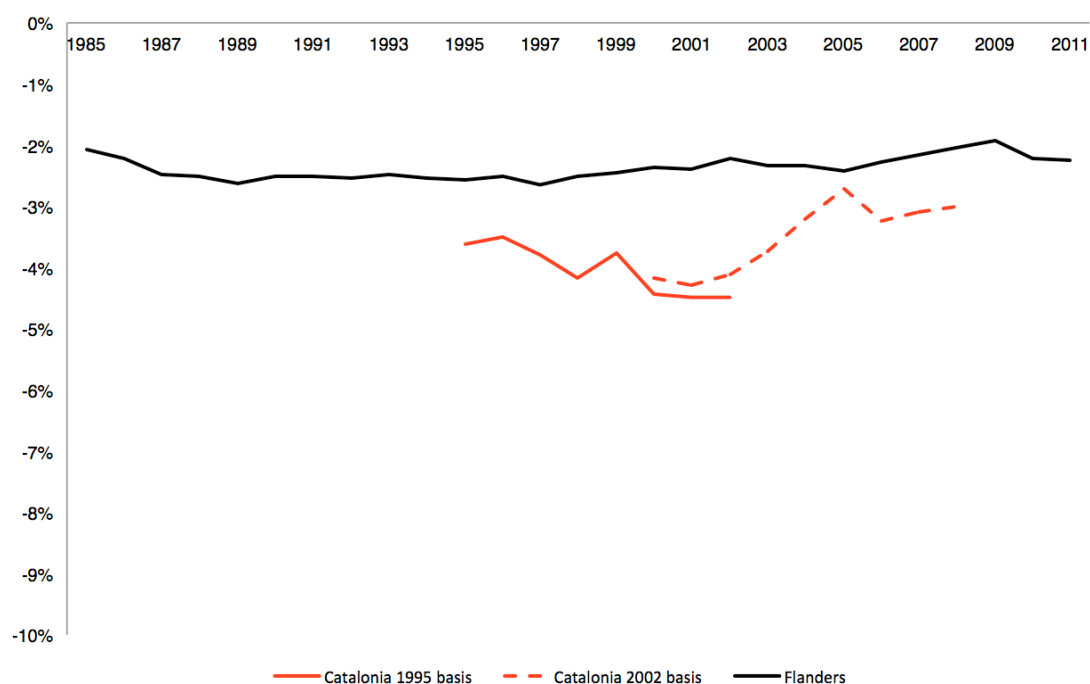
**Figure 7.1 – Evolution of Fiscal Deficits in Catalonia and Flanders, 1990-2005 (percentage of regional GDP)**



Sources: URIEL and BARBERAN, *op. cit.*, p. 303; VAN ROMPUY, PAUL, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

Such a conclusion is confirmed by an analysis of the relationship between primary and disposable income in the regions analysed. The estimates of the region's redistributive effort calculated according to the formula suggested by Lago-Penas et al. are shown in Figure 7.2 and Figure 7.3. Between 1995 and 2008, the standardised redistributive effort of Catalan households, as a percentage of their standardised primary income, varied little around the 4% level and, if anything improved slightly. The relative data for Flanders go further back in time and are even more stable, with a redistributive effort that remained constant at around 2% of the region's standardised primary income. A slight increase can instead be spotted in the redistributive effort of Northern Italy between 1995 and 2011, with clear differences among regions though: while Lombardy and Veneto have seen the gulf between disposable and primary income increase relatively to the national average, Piedmont has in fact experienced its total closure. Yet, the slopes of the curves suggest no radical change, while the League's performance has often recorded very marked ups and downs. All this has two implications. On the one hand, we cannot argue that variability in the success of the parties in recent years is linked to any clear worsening of the regions' fiscal balances with the central administration. On the other, the constancy of the transfers is a powerful rhetorical weapon, since it can be used to underpin the claim that, despite the generous resources transferred and the institutional reforms enacted, the fundamental imbalances have remained unresolved over time.

**Figure 7.2 – Redistributive Effort per Capita, Flanders and Catalonia, 1985-2011\* (percentage of standardised primary income)\*\***

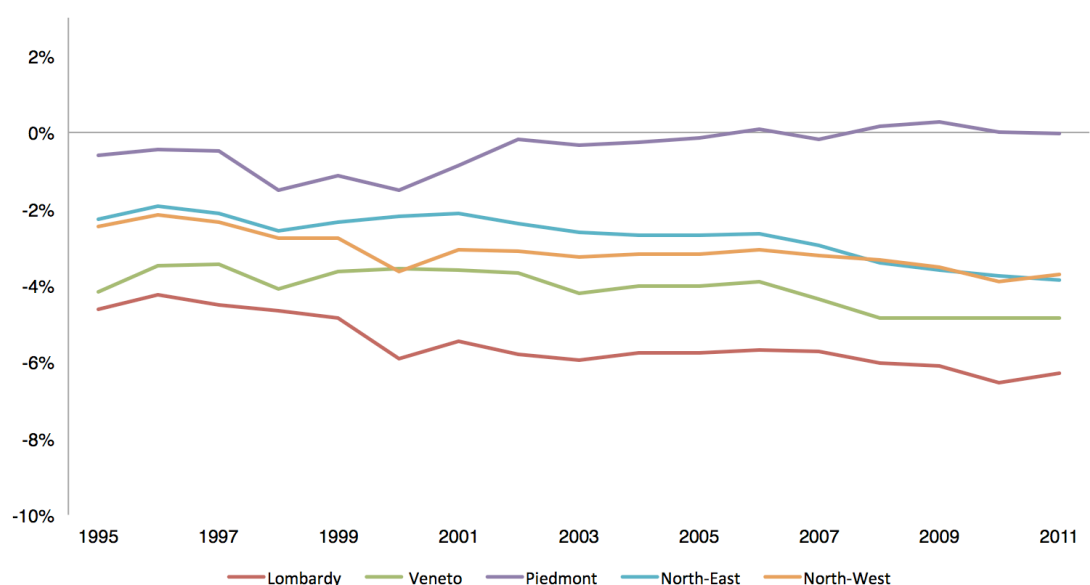


\* See Figure 3.7 for details concerning the use of two statistical series (with 1995 and 2002 as base years) with regard to Catalonia.

\*\* See Figure 3.7 and Figure 4.14 for more details on the formula used to calculate the regions' redistributive effort.

Sources: our calculations on FLEMISH GOVERNMENT, *HERMREG Databank*; and data from the INSTITUTO NACIONAL DE ESTADISTICA, *Renda familiar disponible bruta*.

**Figure 7.3 – Redistributive Effort per Capita, selected Italian regions, 1995-2011 (percentage of standardised primary income)\***



\* See Figure 6.10 for more details on the formula used to calculate the regions' redistributive effort.

Source: our calculations on data from ISTAT (n.d.) *op. cit.*

Unfortunately, most of the data presented in Figures 7.1 to 7.3 do not account for the formative years of the nationalism of the rich in the 1970s and 1980s. During those years Flanders and, to a lower extent, Northern Italy substantially improved their relative economic position vis-à-vis the rest of the country, setting the ground for the formation of the transfers.<sup>1661</sup> Flanders overtook Wallonia in the mid-1960s with corresponding effects on the size and direction of interregional transfers. Already the study of Van Rompuy and Bilsen showed a lower fiscal deficit for the region in the mid-1970s as compared to the second half of that decade,<sup>1662</sup> thus suggesting that this was growing out of the widening gulf in revenues between the North and the South. The extended analysis covering the 1955-1975 period carried out by Gerd Dottermans for the Belgian Minister of Finance in 1997 confirmed this intuition, showing that Flanders received transfers, although mainly from Brussels, up to 1963 and the more recent research of Meunier et al. even argued that Flanders was a net recipient until 1968.<sup>1663</sup>

The situation is slightly more complicated with regard to Northern Italy, as the North has been richer than the South since national unification. Yet, studies conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s by Moiola and Diamanti emphasised how the constituencies of highest support for the northern regionalist leagues coincided with non-metropolitan areas of late industrialisation in the regions of Veneto, Lombardy and Piedmont of the type described by Arnaldo Bagnasco in his study on the Third Italy.<sup>1664</sup> Half of the provinces of strongest support for these regionalist leagues at the 1987 general elections ranked among the ten northern provinces that had grown most relatively to the national average between 1971 and 1981 and 7 out of the 15 that had grown most since 1951.<sup>1665</sup> As found by Diamanti, this coincided with a higher than average revenue from industrial activities and lower than average public transfers per capita.<sup>1666</sup> The region of Veneto is an emblematic example of this process. Between 1951 and 1981, it saw its per capita value-added going from 81% to 109% of the national average, recording the strongest improvement among all northern regions and the fourth strongest in the entire country. As seen in the relevant chapter, this mainly happened through the development of a strong array of SMEs and therefore, contrary to other regions growing at a similar or even faster pace, its development did not primarily rely on public employment. A symmetric evolution of the region's contribution to interregional redistribution is suggested by a comparison of the data provided by Forte in 1977 and the most recent analyses. Using a monetary flow method, Forte calculated Veneto's fiscal deficit at -2% of its primary income – against Lombardy's -12% and Piedmont's -8%.<sup>1667</sup> On the contrary, as seen in Table 7.2, all recent studies estimate the region's contribution in the range of -6.4/-11.1% of its GDP.

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<sup>1661</sup> A similar dynamic was realised in Scotland with the discovery of oil in the early 1970s. We will come back to this point when we will deal more in detail with this region later in the section.

<sup>1662</sup> VAN ROMPUY and BILSEN, *op. cit.*

<sup>1663</sup> DOTTERMANS, *op. cit.*, p. 145; MEUNIER et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

<sup>1664</sup> MOIOLI, *op. cit.*; DIAMANTI (1994) *op. cit.*

<sup>1665</sup> The first group was composed of the provinces of Vicenza, Bergamo, Asti, Verona and Treviso, while the second of Vicenza, Bergamo, Asti, Verona, Treviso, Belluno and Sondrio. Our calculations on ISTITUTO G. TAGLIACARNE, *op. cit.* The list of provinces of highest support for the leagues at the 1987 election has been taken from DIAMANTI (1994) *op. cit.* 39-41. Rankings were calculated for the provinces of the northern regions of Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

<sup>1666</sup> DIAMANTI (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 39-41. Diamanti's analysis spanned the 1987-1992 period, however, the data concerning public transfers per capita referred only to 1992.

<sup>1667</sup> FORTE, FRANCESCO (1977) 'Italy', in COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *Report of the Study Group on the Role of Public Finance in European Integration*, Vol. 2, p. 110.

Therefore, in both Flanders and Northern Italy during the 30 years following the end of World War II, specific dynamics reviewed more in detail in the relevant chapters brought about a substantial change in the economic position of these areas relative to the rest of the parent state, with an ensuing modification of their fiscal effort which set the ground for the exploitation of the issue by nationalist parties.

The Catalan case does not show a similar reversal of the economic conditions of the region or of some areas within it. Catalonia has consistently been one of the most prosperous Spanish regions since at least 1860 and, if anything, between the 1970s and 1990s, it saw its hegemonic position threatened by the Community of Madrid and the Balearic Islands. Accordingly, as we already made clear in chapter two, Catalan nationalism in the early part of the twentieth century already developed some of the economic arguments that later flowed into the nationalism of the rich in the late 1980s. Prominent among them was the idea that Catalonia was being economically exploited by Castile after having recovered from the centuries of stagnation that had followed its decline in the fifteenth century, which provided a template for later elaborations on the subject.<sup>1668</sup> Also, studies about the transfers were already carried out during the dictatorship and even more so in the first years of the transition. Hence, while one can easily understand why claims of economic victimisation were not vented openly until the death of Franco, when comparing the almost immediate coincidence of the early signs of the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich in Flanders with the first academic studies on the transfers and the readiness of nationalist and separatist parties to use them, it is surprising that the same process took about a decade to occur in full form in the Spanish region. As suggested in the relevant chapter there are two reasons for that. First, the trauma of the dictatorship forced a climate of consensus over the political elite that was aware of the need to ensure a smooth transition to a democratic state. In Catalonia, this was concretely embodied by CiU's leadership in the process of *fer pags*, i.e., rebuild the Catalan cultural, economic and social fabric after Francoism. The fiscal issue was thus overshadowed by the need to ensure the establishment of autonomous institutions and the protection of the Catalan language and culture. Second, at the time of the transition the weight of the Spanish state in the economy was meagre as compared to the European average. Yet, between 1970 and 1990, public spending increased from 20.1% to 42.7% of the country's GDP, with a parallel hike in taxes, deficit and debt that considerably increased the saliency of the transfers.<sup>1669</sup>

This last consideration prompts the question whether the transfers are a sufficient condition for the rise of the nationalism of the rich. After all, in Italy other regions, such as Emilia Romagna for instance, grew at a pace similar to Veneto's in the period 1951-1981 and recently recorded comparable fiscal deficits, yet the League remained a marginal political actor there until 2011.<sup>1670</sup> Likewise, although being saddled with a redistributive

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<sup>1668</sup> LLOBERA, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>1669</sup> COMIN and DIAZ, *op. cit.*, p. 877.

<sup>1670</sup> As explained in the relevant chapter, the reason lies in political factors connected to the growing feeling of political marginalisation that developed in Veneto – and similar areas in Lombardy and Piedmont – and the increasing reliance of the Christian-Democracy in the North on clientelist relations that held progressively less as the crisis of public finance damaged northern economic interests. In Emilia-Romagna, in contrast, both clientist and ideological voting for the Left held up much better, thus preventing the League's expansion. On this see: DIAMANTI (1997) *op. cit.*; CENTO BULL and GILBERT, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-40; BIORCIO (2010), *op. cit.*, pp. XII; BONOMI, ALDO (2008) *Il rancore. Alle radici del malessere del Nord* (Milano: Feltrinelli) p. 29.



burden only slightly lower than Catalonia's, the Balearic Islands have not seen a crystallisation of the fiscal issue around national lines.<sup>1671</sup> While explanations for within-country variability have been provided in the relevant chapters, what is more interesting here is to have a look at patterns of interregional redistributions in Europe as a whole. Unfortunately, there are not so many studies comparing regional fiscal balances across several European countries.<sup>1672</sup> Such topic was examined for the first time by a Commission established by the EEC in 1974 in order to draw lessons for European integration. Despite the limitations in finding suitable data at a time in which most European countries were still highly centralised, the report suggested that the central budget of all the countries analysed entailed often 'implicit', but still substantial, interregional transfers that reduced income inequalities by about 40% on average. The same exercise was repeated in 1998 leading to overall similar results. With regard to both studies, what is most relevant to our analysis, however, are the synthetic data detailing the redistributive effort of specific contributor regions reported in Table 7.3.

Despite all the limitations of these two studies in providing reliable and comparable figures for different countries, some features can immediately be pointed out. First, the Italian northern regions stand out for their very high contributions. If one takes the 1993 data, only Madrid, and to a lower extent the Balearic Islands and Stockholm displayed similar imbalances. This might account for the peculiar nature of the Italian case, whereby the nationalism of the rich arose in a context in which there was no pre-existent national identity, but only a vague sense of cultural segmentation between the North and the South. Another consideration is that, when the capital regions are taken out of the sample, only some German regions, notably Baden-Württemberg and Hessen are left along with the Italian and Spanish ones in which the nationalism of the rich arose – with the already mentioned exceptions of Emilia-Romagna and the Balearic Islands. Yet, neither Hessen nor Baden-Württemberg have experienced the rise of any regionalist and/or nationalist party of relevance, although some authors have referred to the latter as an example of active regionalism, of the bourgeois kind theorised by Harvie, at the level of the institution of the *Land*. The total absence, or almost, of the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich here is probably due to the low cultural and ethnic differentiation from the rest of Germany.<sup>1673</sup>

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<sup>1671</sup> Here, the explanation provided in chapter 3 has more to do with identity factors, as despite being part of the Catalan cultural area and openly acknowledging a distinct regional identity, most of the people living in the island declare to feel Spanish. See IBES (2012) *Ideologia*, *op. cit.*

<sup>1672</sup> In fact, there is a wealth of comparative studies of interregional fiscal transfers, but most of them look at the overall redistributive power of the countries analysed without focusing on the deficit/surplus of specific regions. See for instance: BAYOUMI and MASSON, *op. cit.*; MELITZ, JACQUES and ZUMER, FREDERIC (1999) 'Interregional and International Risk-Sharing and lessons for EMU', *Carnegie Rochester Conference Series on Public Policy*, 51, pp. 149-188; BARBERAN ORTI, RAMON et al. (2000) *The Redistributive Power of Central Government Budgets*, Institut d'Economia de Barcelona, working paper n. 6.

<sup>1673</sup> See HARVIE (1994) *op. cit.*, pp. 63-67; KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 105.

**Table 7.3 – Interregional Transfers in European Countries, Budget Deficits of Selected Net Contributor Regions, 1960-1975 and 1993 (percentage of regional GDP)**

Region	McDougall Report 1977 *		EU Study 1998 (1993 data)	
	BF	MF	BF	MF
Île-de-France (FR)	-10%**	-7.7%**	-6%	-3%
Baden-Württemberg (GE)		-5.4%***	-5%	-4%
Bavaria (GE)			-4%	-3%
North Rhine-Westphalia (GE)		-5.1%***		
Hessen (GE)		-3.4%***	-4%	-4%
Stockholm (SW)			-9%	-6%
East Midlands (UK)	-7%			
South East (UK)	-9%		-7%	-5%
Lombardy (IT)		-12%	-14%	-12%
Piedmont (IT)		-8%	-9%	-8%
Veneto (IT)			-8%	-9%
Madrid (SP)			-13%	-9%
Balearic Islands (SP)			-8%	-7%
Catalonia (SP)			-6%	-5%

BF = benefit flow method; MF = monetary flow method.

\*The case studies in the McDougall report used data from different years for each country. These referred to the early 1970s for Italy and France, to the entire 1960s for Germany and to the early 1960s for the UK. In the first part of the table we have focused on states that lie outside our previous case studies, while in the second part we have reported data regarding the regions treated in the previous chapters in order to allow a comparison between the two groups.

\*\* The data quoted in the report were calculated as the difference between expenditure and revenue from taxes and social welfare contributions in the Île-de-France, as a percentage of the region's revenue from taxes and social welfare contributions. As at the time the French average for taxes and social welfare contributions was equal to 38.5% of GDP, the balance has been recalculated in percentage of GDP by multiplying the above measures by 38.5%. This underestimate them, as revenues in the Île-de-France were certainly higher than the average, but we consider that this figure is more useful than the data mentioned in the report in order to provide a measure comparable to those relating to other European regions.

\*\*\* The data for the German regions correspond to the average of the three figures provided by the author for the periods 1960-1963, 1964-1967 and 1968-1970. The city-states of Hamburg and Bremen recorded very high deficits, equal to -20% and -10% of their GDP. Yet, these were mainly due to the role of the two cities as the main ports of the country receiving a disproportional amount of revenues from excise duties. For this reason, they have been excluded from the sample.

Source: COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *op. cit.*, vol. 2.

In this connection, Bavaria is a more interesting case because it did show high regionalist activity, mainly based on a strong sense of cultural differentiation, and because it went through a process of economic ascent similar to that experienced by Flanders and some Northern Italian provinces, becoming, during the 1970s and 1980s, a net contributor to the federal purse. The Christian Social Union (CSU), the local independent Christian-

Democratic Party that has continuously ruled the region since the Second World War apart from a short break between 1954 and 1957, played a role similar to that of CiU in Catalonia, both by being a moderate regionalist party acting as a responsible partner in the German federation and defending the interests of Bavaria without demanding full independence, and by working for the consolidation of a Bavarian national identity and culture.<sup>1674</sup> The party has neither fundamentally put into question the federal system, nor lost substantial ground to separatist parties. The peculiarities of the German federation probably accounts for this success. On the one hand, as Derek Urwin argued before reunification, the Federal Republic ‘is a country without a centre’,<sup>1675</sup> a condition that has lingered on after 1990. On the other, its institutional structure has so far struck the right balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces, leaving great autonomy to the *Länder* and providing them with a high level of participation into the policy-making process through the federal senate (the *Bundesrat*) which clearly reduces room for claims of political marginalisation.<sup>1676</sup> From a fiscal perspective, such guarantees to the *Länder* are reflected in two aspects of the post-war German institutional architecture. The federal role in financing interregional redistribution has been lower than in most centralised countries and also in some other federations, such as Austria for instance. The peculiarity of the German system is that a substantial part of the levelling of differences in regional tax capacity is obtained through horizontal payments among *Länder*, whereby the richer ones compensate the poorer bringing their per capita fiscal capacity to, at least, 95% of the national average.<sup>1677</sup> In the 1990s, this system came under attack for its in-built disincentives for the poorer states to increase their tax base. Yet, when compared to fiscal arrangements in the countries analysed here, it seems to provide two advantages: it entails a much more transparent form of redistribution – or at least of part of it – among the federal units; it foresees a guarantee whereby a contributor state can never see its fiscal capacity fall below the national average because of its contribution, thus ruling out, or at least limiting, overcompensation effects,<sup>1678</sup> which have indeed been one of the most effective elements of the argument of economic victimisation embedded in the nationalism of the rich. The studies reviewed have provided solid evidence that such forms of overcompensation do exist, although their size, the reasons why they occur and their patterns of distribution across regions are often much more nuanced than what the parties have suggested.<sup>1679</sup>

<sup>1674</sup> HEPBURN, EVE (2008) ‘The Neglected Nation: The CSU and the Territorial Cleavage in Bavarian Party Politics’, *German Politics*, 17(2), pp. 184-202.

<sup>1675</sup> URWIN, DEREK (1982) ‘Germany: From Geographical Expression to Regional Accommodation’, in KEATING, MICHAEL (2004) *Regions and Regionalism in Europe* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar) p. 240.

<sup>1676</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>1677</sup> Whether a federated state must pay or receive a transfer is decided through a formula taking into account fiscal capacity and needs, thus reducing, although not eliminating completely, the scope for political bargaining and discretion.

<sup>1678</sup> On the German system of fiscal federalism see: COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 37-40; BIEHL, DIETER (1994) ‘Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations and Macroeconomic Management-Possible Lessons from a Federal Case: Germany’, in S. P. GUPTA, PETER, KNIGHT and WEN, YIN-KANN, *Intergovernmental Fiscal Relations and Macroeconomic Management in Large Countries* (Washington: IBRD/WB) pp. 69-121; SEITZ, HELMUT (2000) ‘Fiscal Policy, Deficits and Politics of Subnational Governments: The Case of the German Laender’, *Public Choice*, 102, pp. 183-218.

<sup>1679</sup> ESPASA and BOSCH, *op. cit.*; DE LA FUENTE (2005); VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*; RICOLFI (2010) *op. cit.*

Probably the most powerful claim embedded in the nationalism of the rich, as formulated by ERC, the LN, the N-VA and the VB, has been that the transfers have not helped but rather prevented economic convergence, thus furthering dependence for electoral purposes rather than endogenous growth. In this respect, economic analyses would suggest that such convergence has not been realised (in Flanders)<sup>1680</sup> or did occur for some decades, but slowed down considerably or even stopped at some point (in the 1970s in Italy and in the 1980s in Spain).<sup>1681</sup> Whether this is due to fiscal transfers or not, it is not clear. Despite theoretical studies arguing that redistribution might hamper growth, the empirical evidence is mixed.<sup>1682</sup>

What is clear from the case-study analysis is that the saliency of the transfers increased considerably in coincidence with situations of public policy failure and, especially, the increase of public spending and taxes, and the accumulation of budget deficits and debt in the parent states in the 1970s and 1980s. This was by no means an isolated phenomenon. Public spending growth was a common trend across industrialised societies in the post-Second World War period due, first, to the general expansion of state intervention in the economy and welfare programmes alongside the hegemony of Keynesian economics, and, since 1973, to the general process of stagflation triggered by the oil crisis. Yet, when looking at comparative figures on the growth of public spending as a percentage of GDP, in the period 1960-1980 Belgium ranked second among Western countries, while Spain and Italy recorded the quickest and second-quickest growth respectively in the 1980-1990 period.<sup>1683</sup> Since the late 1970s, in Belgium and Italy this process was accompanied by spiralling debt/GDP ratios, with the two countries topping the league of advanced economies – first and third respectively – by 1990. While Spain's debt remained low by Western standards, its increase was the largest among advanced countries between 1975 and 1990, going from 7.3% to 42.5% of GDP.<sup>1684</sup> Accordingly, tax revenues as a percentage of GDP also displayed higher than average rates, although with more variation: Belgium's tax revenue was the second fastest growing between 1960 and 1980, whereas Spain held first place in the 1980s. Italy remained at the high end of the ranking – in fifth position – during the entire 1960-1990 period and then shot up to first place between 1990 and 1996, when most other countries were successfully reducing their fiscal pressure.<sup>1685</sup>

These data would also show some correlations with the different timing of appearance and development of the nationalism of the rich in the different regions. As Belgium's fiscal position seemed to deteriorate earlier as compared to Italy and, especially Spain, this, along with the growing imbalances resulting from Flanders' emergence as the strongest region in the country from the mid-1960s on, led to the formation of the discourse of the

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<sup>1680</sup> VAN ROMPUY, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

<sup>1681</sup> GARCIA-MILÀ and McGUIRE, *op. cit.*; AMBROSIANO et al., *op. cit.*; PADOVANO, *op. cit.*;

<sup>1682</sup> MULQUIN, MARIE-EVE and SENGHER, KATJA (2011) *Interregional Transfers and Economic Convergence*, CERPE Cahier de recherche, n. 58, p. 21.

<sup>1683</sup> Our calculations on TANZI and SCHUKNECHT, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>1684</sup> See data provided by ALESINA, ALBERTO and PEROTTI, ROBERTO (1995) *Fiscal Expansions and Fiscal Adjustments in OECD Countries*, NBER Working Paper n. 5214, p. 2. Italy more than doubled its debt to GDP ratio already between 1965-1975 and the process went on unabated in the following 15 years. Since Alesina and Perotti do not provide data for Spain for the entire 1965-1990 period, but only for 1990, we have used figures from the IMF Historical Public Debt Database. As the IMF's estimate for Spain's debt in 1990 was somewhat lower than Alesina's and Perotti's (42.5% instead of 46.8%), we have used IMF data for the entire period. This choice should ensure more consistent figures with regard to average growth. See IMF-FAD, *op. cit.*

<sup>1685</sup> TANZI and SCHUKNECHT, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

nationalism of the rich already in the late 1970s. Although it was not the main reason for its electoral success, the persisting fiscal crisis of the country up to the mid-1990s contributed to delegitimising the traditional political elite, thus opening a window of opportunity for the radical claims – both with regard to interregional redistribution and immigration – of the VB. Italy showed a very similar profile in those years, although its better fiscal position at the beginning of the period – the debt/GDP ratio was only 35.4% compared to Belgium’s 67.5% – and its slower growth in public spending in the 1960s and 1970s, probably also due to more rudimentary welfare provisions, somewhat delayed the full development of the leagues’ formulation of the nationalism of the rich into the mid-1980s. Finally, Spain is a more problematic case, as its fiscal evolution should be seen as a ‘normalisation’ with regard to the Western average after a condition of extremely low intervention of the state in the economy during the dictatorship, rather than as a ‘deterioration’. The welfare state provisions that in the other countries had been introduced long before were fully developed only from the onset of the democratic period. Yet, the process was undeniably radical and, as pointed out by Francisco Comin and Daniel Diaz, ‘due to its delay, the universal system of Social Security has been built in Spain when conditions were very unfavourable: a harsh economic crisis that undermined the financial basis of the system of redistribution; a mature (sic) population which created problems for the stability of the system, and a state budget in strong deficit, which hindered the transfers to the system of the Social Security that did begin to be realised in a substantial way during the democratic period’.<sup>1686</sup> Arguably, the situation was made worse by Catalonia’s peculiarity of being a rich region in a poor country, by European standards, at a time of increasing continental integration. However, Spain’s generally better indicators – in absolute terms – might also contribute to explain why, although ERC’s discourse of the *expoli fiscal* arose in full form between the late 1980s and the early 1990s, it came to dominate Catalan politics only in the context of the recent debt crisis.

Hence, although reflecting wider trends – to which we will revert at the end of this section – the evolution of the fiscal position of Belgium, Italy and Spain’s governments relatively to other Western economies in the 1960-1990 period does seem to show more radical than average figures that, coupled with within-country uneven regional development, weakened the legitimacy of central governments and opened up a window of opportunity for the successful development of the arguments of economic victimisation formulated, in their extreme form, by the parties analysed here. Such a conclusion does not mean that the fiscal vagaries of these countries were a sufficient condition. As already mentioned fiscal strain was a general condition during the years 1970-1990 among advanced economies and other countries faced imbalances of similar magnitude, both in relative and absolute terms. Thus, these economic factors must be evaluated alongside the identity, political and institutional ones that we will treat in the next section. Yet, a comparison with a country, Germany, that as already suggested above does show some similarities in terms of domestic cultural heterogeneity and uneven economic development, seems to confirm their importance. Although Germany’s debt increased by 151.3% of its GDP in the 1965-1990 period – Italy’s did so by 183.8% – it remained much lower in absolute terms (43.6%).<sup>1687</sup> During roughly the same time, public spending grew by 39.2% or about 20% less than the Western countries’ average, while the rate of growth of tax revenue was the second lowest after the US. Finally, its fiscal deficit during the 1973-1989

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<sup>1686</sup> COMIN and DIAZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 893-894.

<sup>1687</sup> Our calculations on ALESINA and PEROTTI, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

years remained well below the OECD average.<sup>1688</sup> In other words, Germany's fiscal performance clearly offered less ground for radical contestation and for the crystallisation of redistributive imbalances around regional/national lines than in Belgium, Italy and Spain.

In many respects Scotland's recent history might be seen as the exact opposite of the situation depicted above. On the one hand, the United Kingdom was one of the most successful countries in reducing debt and containing public spending and tax revenue growth. On the other, the region's fiscal position within the British system of income redistribution has been ambiguous, being clearly in surplus before the discovery of North Sea oil, while probably in deficit thereafter,<sup>1689</sup> although with huge variability due to the volatility of crude prices and uncertainty about the exact amount of resources that would accrue to an independent Scotland. Also, in the 1960-1990 period, Scotland went through a painful process of structural change from an economy over-reliant on heavy industry to a service-based one more reliant on the public sector, which entailed a stronger defence of welfare provisions and redistribution than in the South East of England. In a provocative way, one could think of Scotland as a Wallonia endowed with the possibility of a constitutional alternative made attractive by the financial trump card of oil revenues. Yet, the situation is certainly more complex. The rise of the SNP in the late 1960s and early 1970s happened before oil was discovered. Voicing arguments of economic victimisation, that were unwarranted by existing data, out of a general sense of dissatisfaction with the solutions applied by both Conservative and Labour governments to the problems of the Scottish economy, the party exposed itself to the criticism of official and independent estimates. By 1970, although still relevant, the SNP's thrust was clearly running out of steam. This first wave of support for the National Party however had much to do with public policy failure. Although regional policy had diverted a disproportionate amount of resources to Scotland, the central government stop-go strategy badly hurt business formation in an economy more reliant than most of Britain on state spending. The foundering of the Wilson government's promise to put an end to recurrent deflationary measures and the ensuing devaluation of the pound was the straw that broke the camel's back. All this happened in a fast-changing context whereby, although it is true that Scotland's economy was underperforming compared to the rest of the UK between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, thanks to the effects of regional policy and declining growth in England, by 1965, and for the next decade, Scotland began closing the gap with the British average. Then, oil added a completely new dimension to the cause of Scottish self-determination and the 1973 crisis further contributed to the idea that the country would be better off as an independent state, by dramatically aggravating the UK's balance of payment hole – the UK being a net oil importer back then – and, at the same time, multiplying by four the prospective revenues coming from the 'black gold'. The 'social-democratic utopia' then depicted by *The Economist* was indeed an attractive scenario.<sup>1690</sup> Although it did not experience spiralling debt, the UK economy did show the highest

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<sup>1688</sup> Our calculations on TANZI and SCHUKNECHT, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-53.

<sup>1689</sup> Here we should recall that the terms surplus and deficit are used with reference to the fiscal framework used in the case-study chapters, whereby the fiscal positions of regions are calculated as the difference between expenditures and revenues. Therefore, a region receiving a net transfer from the centre records a surplus, while a net contributor region records a deficit.

<sup>1690</sup> 'Decline and Fall', *op. cit.*

inflation and lowest GDP growth rates of all the G-6 countries.<sup>1691</sup> It also recorded the third worst budget deficit in the OECD between 1973 and 1976, behind only Italy and Belgium.<sup>1692</sup> The 1976 loan from the IMF seemed the most evident sign of the inexorable decline of Great Britain and, while this appeared clear to many Scots as well as to Margaret Thatcher, it had a more bitter flavour for the former, since future North Sea revenues were used as collateral for the loan.

Hence, despite remaining a deviant case, the rise of the nationalism of the rich in Scotland did share some similarities with the other cases, notably: a reversal of economic conditions with regard to the rest of the country, although suddenly brought about by the discovery of natural resources rather than by long-term processes of endogenous growth; a context of prolonged government mismanagement and public policy failure, first in adequately dealing with the vagaries of the Scottish economy in the early 1960s and, then, in putting an end to stagflation and balance of payment deficits in the 1970s.

In chapter two, we have argued that, apart from some embryonic appearances in the rhetoric of Catalan and Basque nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, the nationalism of the rich represents a very recent phenomenon in the history of nationalist discourse. However, we did not answer the question why it is so. What fundamental novelty do we find in the second half of the twentieth century that might account for its appearance? As suggested above there is no single factor accounting for the formation of the nationalism of the rich, but rather a complex mix of processes and events that we are trying to disentangle. Nevertheless, in a longer historical perspective the post-Second World War years did mark a fundamental change in the normative, economic and social structure of Western European societies. This novelty lies in the rise of two linked phenomena: the establishment of comprehensive welfare systems based on an idea of horizontal national solidarity and providing a level of insurance and redistribution unprecedented before; and the increasing acceptance of state interventionism into the economy as a consequence of the rise of Keynesian economics to the status of dominant economic orthodoxy.

The welfare state was not invented *ex nihilo* in the years following the end of the conflict. It was rather the result of a long evolution from the poor laws adopted in England in the sixteenth century to the first forms of workers' social insurance introduced in Bismarckian Germany, to the advances in social policy achieved across the continent during the interwar years. Yet, the change obtained in the 25 years between 1945 and 1970 was radical both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The index of social insurance elaborated by Peter Flora and Jans Alber clearly shows that this period, and especially the decade 1950-1960, recorded a major and general expansion never encountered before. Contrary to the interwar years, which had displayed considerable divergence among countries, the post-1945 period stands out for their remarkable convergence. The unprecedented extension of coverage to the self-employed further emphasised the basic idea, enshrined by William Beveridge in his homonymous report, of 'national solidarity as

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<sup>1691</sup> See data reported in MAIER, CHARLES (2010) "'Malaise". The Crisis of Capitalism in the 1970s', in NIALL, FERGUSON, CHARLES, MAIER, EREZ, MANELA and DANIEL SARGENT (eds.) *The Shock of the Global. The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press) p. 28.

<sup>1692</sup> GREEN CHRISTOPHER (1993) 'From "tax state" to "debt state"', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 3(23), p. 30.

the core principle of social security'.<sup>1693</sup> European countries progressively moved away from the selectivity and differentiation that had characterised the various piecemeal legislations enacted since the last two decades of the nineteenth century towards a system based increasingly on a principle of universalism and equality. The transition was not smooth, of course, and forms of social insurance on the nineteenth century German model lingered on, but, at least up to the mid-1970s, the tendency was towards expansion, while the idea that the government had a responsibility in ensuring welfare became ever more entrenched.<sup>1694</sup> Furthermore, as convincingly argued by Hugh Heclo, the welfare states established after 1945 differed from the previous 'experimentations' because, however audacious these latter had been, they were always defended as 'dispensations' from the 'orthodox' law of healthy economics that prescribed a limited role for the state. In the post-War period this scepticism progressively gave way to a reality in which 'that the national government should and could act was taken for granted'.<sup>1695</sup>

Such interventionism was not limited to social policy but, as suggested above, extended to the realm of macroeconomic management for the fulfilment of full employment. These two elements made up the pillars of the post-War socio-economic order. The triumph of Keynesian economics was in large part responsible for the change. The great innovation of Keynesianism lay in showing that, in time of crisis, the state could run budget deficits in order to stimulate demand, instead of contributing to deflation by balancing its budget as standard theories suggested. It thus provided a stabilisation of the economic cycle that promised steady growth. It also offered a series of tools that would arguably enable governments to run an economy at full-employment. The 'Keynesian revolution', as some called it, broke out in the 1950s, although its diffusion was uneven both chronologically and with regard to its concrete applications, reaching its peak in the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>1696</sup> It was based on the social consensus reached across Western Europe, and forcefully promoted by US administrations, around the 'politics of productivity', that is, the transformation of political and class conflict into a commitment to growth and efficiency, an objective consistently pursued by both Christian and Social-Democratic parties occupying the centre of the political spectrum.<sup>1697</sup> As a result, political legitimacy has come to hinge fundamentally on governments' performance in managing the economy and assuring growth. Quoting Michael Postan: 'in all European countries, economic growth became a universal creed and a common expectation to which governments were expected to conform'.<sup>1698</sup> Although the capacity of politics to govern the economic cycle

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<sup>1693</sup> FLORA, PETER and ALBER, JENS (1981) 'Modernization, Democratization, and the Development of Welfare States in Western Europe', in PETER, FLORA, and ARNOLD, HEIDENHEIMER (eds.) *The Development of the Welfare States in Europe and America* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Books) p. 54.

<sup>1694</sup> FRASER, DEREK (1986) *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) pp. 207-239; HASSEUNTEUFEL, PATRICK (1996) 'L'Etat Providence ou les métamorphoses de la citoyenneté', *L'année sociologique*, 46(1), pp. 127-149.

<sup>1695</sup> HECLLO, HUGH (1981) 'Toward a New Welfare State?', in FLORA and HEIDENHEIMER, *op. cit.*, p. 390.

<sup>1696</sup> BISPHAM, JOHN and BOLTHO, ANDREA (1982) 'Demand Management', in ANDREA, BOLTHO (ed.) *The European Economy: Growth and Crisis*, pp. 289-292.

<sup>1697</sup> MAIER, CHARLES (1977) 'The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II', *International Organization*, 31(4), pp. 607-633.

<sup>1698</sup> POSTAN, MICHAEL (1967) *An Economic History of Western Europe, 1945-1964* (London: Methuen).



has been put into question since the end of the 1970s, the primacy acquired by economics in evaluating the action of elected executives has not disappeared.<sup>1699</sup>

The new responsibility of the state in ensuring growth and redistribution is a fundamental premise of the nationalism of the rich that goes a long way to explaining its virtual absence in previous decades. It created expectations that probably went beyond the actual capabilities of policy-makers and, in the presence of uneven development and cultural segmentation, it set the ground for a crystallisation of fiscal protest around national lines. Yet, the nationalism of the rich began to emerge more than 20 years later than the establishment of the welfare state and the 'Keynesian revolution'. This is because the 25-30 years after the end of the war were a period of enormous success. *Les trentes glorieuses* displayed an unprecedented level of prosperity spreading across Western Europe and reducing inequality among classes. During this period, the welfare state was a fundamental and very successful tool of nation-building, aimed at keeping at bay both the risk of a slide back to fascist or radical socialist change and the disintegration of countries along social, national and ethnic fractures.<sup>1700</sup> Nevertheless, in many respects, those economic conditions were extraordinary<sup>1701</sup> and such exceptionality entailed a fundamental drawback: sustained by spectacular economic growth social policy expansion was virtually cost-less in political terms. In this way, problems and debates linked to the establishment of those programmes that would be fiercely discussed in an age of slower growth – who would be paying for them? What rights and duties were entailed? Their sustainability and the implications for individual liberty? – remained unaddressed.

An example is given by the diversionary strategies that informed regional policy during the 1950s and 1960s. In a context in which Western countries were able to ensure full employment, regional policy was seen as a method to guarantee jobs in deprived areas, thus boosting state legitimacy where dissent was more likely to develop, while at the same time relieving congestion in fast-growing ones. It was a win-win situation.<sup>1702</sup> In the 1970s, all this changed because the growth machine stopped and the costs of welfare suddenly became evident. Improvements in social coverage could no longer be paid out of revenues automatically increasing with growth, but rather through higher taxes. Also, the inefficiencies of the welfare state became clearer than before.<sup>1703</sup>

One reaction consisted in the neo-liberal revolution initiated in the US and the United Kingdom in the late 1960s and that came to prominence with the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan about a decade later.<sup>1704</sup> But another one consisted in the couching of the fiscal protest contained in the neo-liberal critique in the form of the socio-

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<sup>1699</sup> See for instance the considerations of Gianfranco Poggi who was writing well into the time of the crisis of Keynesianism. POGGI, GIANFRANCO (1990) *The State: Its Nature, Development and Prospects* (Cambridge: Polity Press) p. 140.

<sup>1700</sup> ESPING-ANDERSEN, GOSTA (2004) 'After the Golden Age? Welfare State Dilemmas in a Global Economy', in (ed.) *Welfare States in Transition: national adaptations in global economies* (London: Sage) p. 27.

<sup>1701</sup> Bispham and Boltho even question the actual effect of Keynesian demand management in the 1945-1970 period, since, as a matter of fact, overall international stability and trade expansion 'implied that active fiscal or monetary intervention to stimulate activity was often unnecessary'. BISPHAM and BOLTHO, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

<sup>1702</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>1703</sup> HECLLO, *op. cit.*, pp. 397-400;

<sup>1704</sup> YERGIN, DANIEL and STANISLAW, JOSEPH (1998) *The Commanding Heights. The Battle Between Government and the Marketplace that is Remaking the Modern World* (New York: Simon&Schuster).

tropic arguments of economic victimisation examined in the previous chapters. This nationalist interpretation of the fiscal protest has enabled even a left-wing party such as ERC to adopt such an anti-statist stand. Furthermore, the more or less explicit cultural-determinist argument about the economic success of the relevant communities has allowed these parties to criticise redistribution within the parent state without necessarily rejecting the welfare state altogether. Be it a pure rhetorical device or a serious commitment,<sup>1705</sup> the representation of the nation as endowed with an exceptional hard-working ethos and abundant excess financial resources has enabled the party to present independence as a way out of the dilemma between solidarity and efficiency arisen with the end of the extraordinary growth recorded during the *trente glorieuses*. In a way, the transfers and the cultural determinist argument hold the promise of reproducing those exceptional conditions in an independent country.

Once again, the SNP is a deviant case, as the fiscal argument is much less straightforward and influenced by the economic dominance of London. Furthermore, while in the other cases, the nationalism of the rich can be considered as a reaction of the ‘bearers’ of the costs of welfare – in a socio-tropic sense – in Scotland it became stronger, in the 1980s, out of a reaction to the conservative assault upon welfare. And yet, in late 1960s and early 1970s, the SNP reaped the profits of the crisis of expectations that state interventionism had contributed to create. Also, in a general context of British decline, oil did seem to offer a new lease of life for the unprecedented levels of well-being to which the population had grown accustomed and has remained a kind of guarantee of a better future in an independent Scotland. Finally, especially from the 1990s, the party did reconcile some of the neoliberal arguments concerning entrepreneurship and the free market with its social-democratic ethos playing on the old Scottish myth of the ‘lad ‘o pairs’.

## 7.2.2 Identity and Marginalisation

In the first chapter we have presented the distinction between nationalism as a form of politics and nationalism as a mental phenomenon. We have also suggested that these two interpretations of the concept are not in contradiction but feed each other: it is the psychological process whereby people recognise themselves as being part of a specific community of sovereign equals, different from members of other communities, that provides a ‘way of seeing the world’<sup>1706</sup> whereby individual choices and interests are mediated – to different extents for different people of course – through a specific set of values and ideas that are deemed to be proper to the nation; at the same time, this ‘way of seeing the world’ is constructed and promoted by specific actors, among whom political parties play a momentous role, especially in the mass spread of national self-understandings. Despite arguably maintaining some basic common features, national identities are protean realities, constantly reshaped by their holders as well as by external agents and events. All this makes it problematic to clearly establish national identity as a dependent or an independent variable. Most empirical studies of individual attitudes treat national identity as an explanatory variable and this mainly on account of the fact that it is

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<sup>1705</sup> Many studies on welfare state retrenchment show that despite complaining about its costs, voters often oppose welfare cuts and even support an extension of benefits. See PIERSON, PAUL (1996) ‘The New Politics of the Welfare State’, *World Politics*, 48(2), pp. 143-179.

<sup>1706</sup> BRUBAKER (2004) *op. cit.*, p. 78-81.

believed to be formed through processes of socialisation occurring early in the life-cycle and because, if there are any changes, they are deemed to be the result of long-term processes.<sup>1707</sup> This is probably a correct assumption in individual analyses at specific points in time. It holds rather less when we deal with social groups in a longer historical perspective, as shown by data on the evolution of subjective national identities presented in our case studies. Hence, the need to carefully consider the ambivalent nature of national identity, especially in contexts of dual identity and in which two or more nation-building projects compete within the same social body, as those analysed here.

Four of our five case-study parties – ERC, the N-VA, the SNP and the VB – did not invent a national self-understanding from scratch, but rather built upon pre-existing ones endowed with a large and consolidated set of myths, histories and cultural elements. Three of them – ERC, the N-VA and the VB – also took advantage of linguistic differentiation. All, provided a re-interpretation of part of this cultural baggage, and more specifically denied the possibility, in the long term, of a partnership with the other nation(s) inhabiting the parent state. One of them – the LN – did try to craft a new national identity building upon an entrenched, but vague, sense of cultural distinctness among some territories of the parent state. Processes of nation-formation are usually long and uneven, therefore it is probably too soon to definitively say whether a Northern Italian nation will ever stem from the process initiated by the LN. What is clear is that, for the time being, the results are far from such scenario and even ambivalent. On the one hand, there has certainly been a strengthening of the Northern Italian identity, although it is not clear what its precise content is. Also, the idea that the North has some peculiar socio-economic characteristics and would deserve targeted policies has come to be accepted, at least superficially, by members of the intellectual and political elites.<sup>1708</sup> On the other, the League has re-opened a debate about the Italian nation that had been ignored for most of the post-Second World War years, arguably favouring, as a reaction, a strengthening of the Italian identity in the rest of the country, but also, in part, in the North. As the LN is a peculiar case, we will first focus on the other cases and deal with the LN more in detail at the end of the section.<sup>1709</sup>

The three figures below (Figure 7.4, Figure 7.5, Figure 7.6) chart the evolution of subjective national identity – measured as a five choice Moreno question<sup>1710</sup> collapsed to three – in Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland. Unfortunately, the data for these regions vary in quality and length of the series. While Scotland and Catalonia can boast frequent and consistent surveys on the matter, at least from the early 1990s on, there are fewer data on Flanders in this form and none with regard to Northern Italy. Therefore the data should be taken with caution and, in some cases, complemented with information coming from studies using other techniques. However, we can see some clear trends. First of all, in absolute terms, stateless national identity (predominantly Catalan/Flemish/Scottish) is markedly stronger in Scotland than in Catalonia and Flanders. In the first, it has ranged

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<sup>1707</sup> See PINARD and HAMILTON, *op. cit.*; BLAIS and NADEAU; HOWE, *op. cit.*; MUNOZ and TORMOS, *op. cit.*

<sup>1708</sup> BIORCIO (2010) *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41; PERULLI and PICCHIERI, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>1709</sup> PATRIARCA (2001) *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>1710</sup> The Moreno question is the standard question used in opinion surveys about dual identity. It allows the interviewee to choose between five options going from 'exclusively A identity', to 'exclusively B identity', through the intermediate steps of 'more A than B', 'equally A and B', and 'more B than A'. The collapsing operation done in this section consisted of merging the results for the 'exclusively A identity' and 'more A than B' categories into a new 'prevalently A identity' category, and likewise for the new 'prevalently B identity' category.

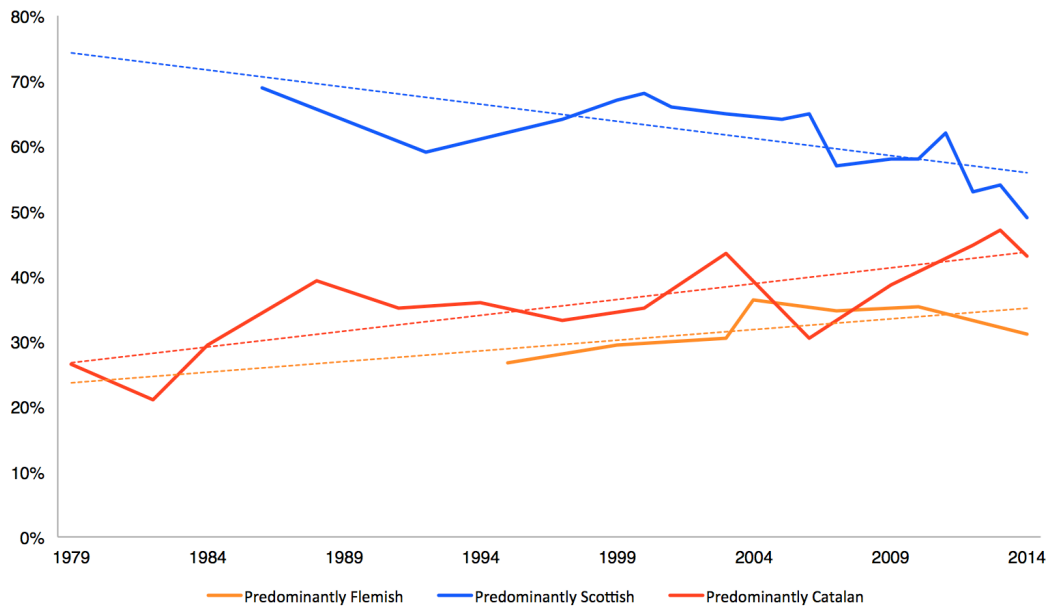
between 53% and 69% of the local population, against 21%-47% in Catalonia and 27%-36% in Flanders during the period under study. As a consequence, dual and state national identity are stronger in these two and weaker in Scotland, although, state national identities seem to have been converging around similar levels in Catalonia and Scotland in recent years. On average, dual identities have prevailed in Catalonia and Flanders (42% and 44% respectively), while predominantly stateless national identity has prevailed in Scotland (61%).

In Catalonia and Flanders there has been a clear strengthening of the predominantly Catalan and Flemish identities to the disadvantage of the predominantly Spanish one and the dual Belgian-Flemish one, as shown by the dashed trend lines in the respective charts. Yet, in both cases these results should be taken with prudence. In Catalonia, they are considerably influenced by the first two frequencies of our series, for the years 1979 and 1982, when 38% and 32% of the Catalan population declared itself to feel predominantly Spanish – and more precisely 31.3% and 23.1% declared itself to feel uniquely Spanish, which is an impressive figure as compared to the 7.5% recorded in 2009. These very high scores might have been influenced by the fact that in 1979 the transition to democracy was not yet completed. Therefore, in light of the repression of Catalan culture and language during the Francoist period, it is reasonable to think that many people were still afraid of openly declaring their real subjective national identity. This would hold less for 1982 and we indeed see a consistent decrease in strength at the Spanish end of the spectrum. Yet, in 1981 there was an attempted putsch by the army, therefore, the political climate might have restrained people from declaring a stronger Catalan identity up to the mid-1980s. However, even if we exclude the first two data and begin the series in 1984, while the steepness of the slope declines, it remains negative for the predominantly Spanish identity and positive for the predominantly Catalan. Data on Flanders, in turn, can be complemented with figures provided by De Winter – seen in chapter 4 (Table 4.1) – for the years 1979-2004 and that, despite using a different methodology, would suggest an actual positive progression of the Belgian identity up to the early 2000s, followed by the subsequent retrenchment that we spot in the figures below. Hence, the strengthening of the predominantly Flemish identity would be a quite recent phenomenon and partly reversed at the 2014 elections. On the contrary, Scotland shows a clear weakening of the prevalently Scottish identity to the advantage of dual and, more markedly, the predominantly British identity.<sup>1711</sup> The Flemish increase in predominantly Flemish identity has largely been driven by the intermediate ‘more Flemish than Belgian’ category, while Scotland’s decrease has mostly been due to a fall in the number of people feeling exclusively Scots. The increase in predominantly Catalan identity instead is almost equally related to both categories. Thus, apart from the case of Catalonia, and still to a moderate extent, there has not been any radicalisation around the extreme of uniquely stateless national identity.

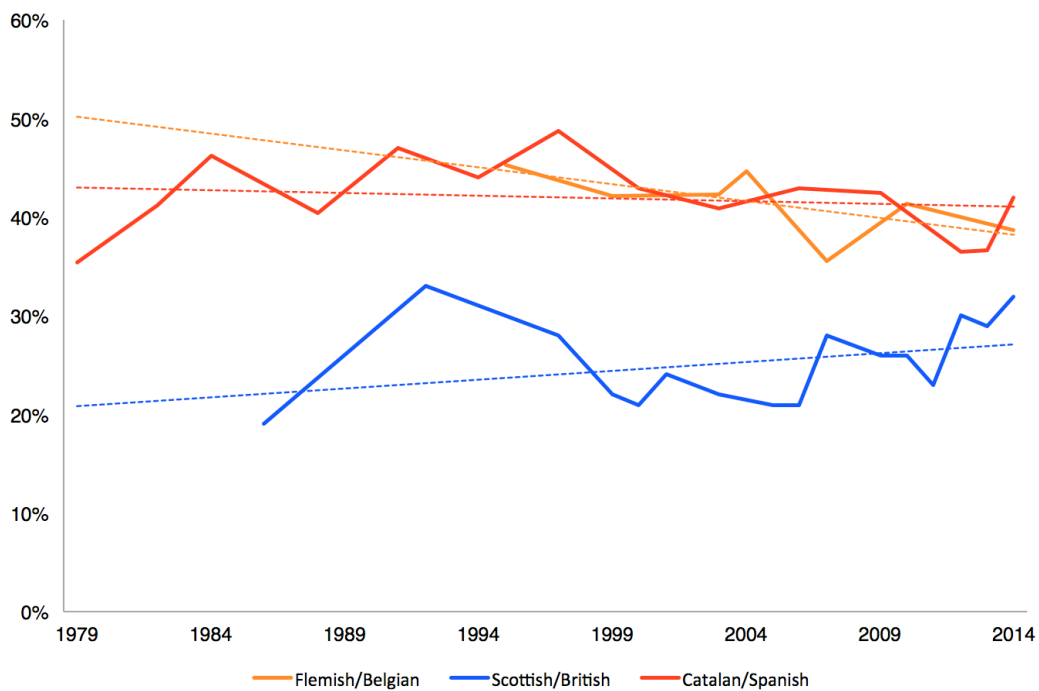
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<sup>1711</sup> This result might seem at odds with recent events in the region, which have seen a decisive strengthening of the SNP and the organisation of an independence referendum. We will come back on this more in detail in section 7.3. For the time being, suffice it to recall that it is not only the strength of national identity that is relevant, but also its meaning. As we have seen in chapter 5, Scottish identity has had a much lower influence on support for independence and is less correlated with voting for the SNP than, for instance, the same variables in Catalonia.

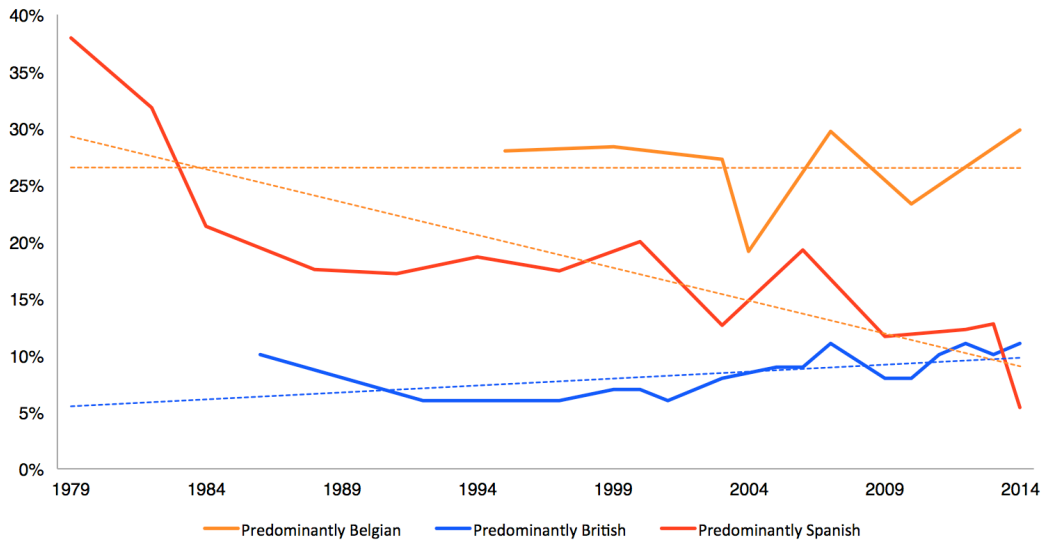
**Figure 7.4 – Predominantly Stateless National Identity, Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland, selected years, 1979-2014 (percentage of regional population)\***



**Figure 7.5 – Dual National Identity, Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland, selected years 1979-2014 (percentage of regional population)\***



**Figure 7.6 – Predominantly State National Identity, Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland, selected years 1979-2014 (percentage of regional population)\***



\* See Figure 3.11, Figure 5.13 and Table 4.2 for further details.

Sources for figures 7.4, 7.5 and 7.6: ARGELAGUET (2006) *op. cit.*, p. 437; ICPS, *op. cit.*; DE WINTER (2007) *op. cit.*, p. 581; SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2014) *op. cit.*, pp. 219-245; SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2015) *op. cit.*; MORENO, *op. cit.*; BOND and ROSIE, *op. cit.*: SSAS, *op. cit.*

The above considerations are useful to understand the recent evolution of the three identities on which ERC, the N-VA, the SNP and the VB have built in order to convey their messages of economic victimisation and political marginalisation. Unfortunately, however, apart to some extent from the case of Catalonia, they do not go as far back in time as would be necessary to have a clear picture of their relevance at the time of formation of the nationalism of the rich. The historical literature surveyed in the relevant chapters however suggests that such identities were already well-developed between the late 1960s and the early 1980s and, to varying degrees, have simply been re-interpreted by the parties analysed. In this connection, the SNP certainly is the most interesting movement, since it managed to introduce a completely new dimension into Scottish politics. Although it had been founded in the 1930s, the SNP remained a marginal phenomenon until the 1960s and could not count on the presence of any other major nationalist party. There certainly were other sister organisations, especially the Scottish Covenant Association of John MacCormick, but despite the 1-2 million signatures collected for a petition demanding a Scottish Assembly, its action remained ineffective, reflecting the dominance of unionism in Scottish politics up to the late 1960s.<sup>1712</sup> By contrast, ERC and the VB acted in the context of a much wider nationalist movement within which there already were separatist forces and they did not necessarily represent the major organisation. As a consequence, they did not hold a full monopoly over the arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation, but rather devised and spread their most radical formulations, dragging, when successful, other more moderate organisations towards more extreme positions. In other words, the nationalism of the rich

<sup>1712</sup> MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

has been more diffused in Catalonia and Flanders, while it has lain more in the hands of the SNP in Scotland.

The existence of such stateless identities have made state legitimacy more problematic. As shown by these case studies, national identity plays a critical role in legitimising the solidarity underlining the welfare state. David Miller is probably the author who has most forcefully defended the principle of national self-determination from a liberal perspective on account of social justice, precisely because of the supposed higher legitimacy that solidarity would enjoy in mono-national contexts. According to Miller, social justice needs an environment characterised by high mutual trust and this is best ensured when people recognise themselves in common values and a common culture. Hence – he concludes – strong nations will always be able to discharge better social justice.<sup>1713</sup> Yet, this perspective has been convincingly criticised by Nicola McEwen who, as we pointed out in the previous section, stressed how, in their expansive phase, welfare states were successful nation-building instruments that managed to bridge differences between national and ethnic communities. For instance, the British welfare state in the 1950s and early 1960s did provide the population of Scotland with an unprecedented level of well-being and arguably replaced empire as the main rationale for the Union. Also, as argued by Finlay, the British identity still had strong currency in the 1970s mainly on account of the achievements of the post-war welfare state. This is probably less the case in Belgium because Belgian welfare was almost totally managed by societal segments – Catholic, socialist and liberal – dominating Belgian society at the time. Therefore, the role of the state as the provider of benefits and services was hidden behind intermediate groups.<sup>1714</sup> Yet, Flemish nationalism became a relevant force only in the late 1960s and did not begin questioning national solidarity until the late 1970s.

The literature on Italian nation-building tends to stress the failure of such a process through the entire history of the country. Yet, although it stresses that, after the fascist debacle, any overt reference to nationalism was carefully avoided, it also argues that the national dimension was surreptitiously exploited by the major parties, while cultural phenomena such as cinema, radio and, later, television eroded regional differences and unified Italian society to a degree unprecedented before.<sup>1715</sup> Until the late 1960s this also coincided with an unprecedented period of social peace, while the conflicts that marked the 1970s were still framed in (state-wide) national terms. What is often neglected is that the economic boom and the distribution of prosperity afforded by the welfare institutions established in the 1950s and 1960s laid the ground for an unprecedented homogenisation of Italian society, both culturally, through the creation of a wider public for standardised products, and socially, by reducing differences in income and thus favouring the creation of a broad middle class. Although Italian welfare was potently influenced by ‘familist’ practices to the disadvantage of universal protection – thus threatening the long-term stability of the system – up to the late 1960s, the Italian state enjoyed a legitimacy unprecedented before and, arguably, later.<sup>1716</sup> It is no wonder that, when the regionalist leagues were formed between the late 1970s and early 1980s, their particularistic claims were met with ridicule and loathing. Although Italy had been for decades defined as a

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<sup>1713</sup> MILLER, DAVID, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>1714</sup> DESCHOUWER (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 204-213.

<sup>1715</sup> On this see GRAZIANO, *op. cit.*; PATRIARCA (2010) *op. cit.*; LANARO, SILVIO (1997) *Storia dell'Italia Repubblicana. L'economia, la politica, la cultura, la società dal dopoguerra agli anni '90* (Padova: Marsilio).

<sup>1716</sup> On the distortions of the Italian welfare see FERRERA et al., *op. cit.*

divided country of striking regional differences, by then, these were deemed to have been overcome by the modernisation (or ‘normalisation’) experienced by the country in the first three decades of the post-Second World War period.

Spain is a peculiar case in this respect because the creation of the welfare state was delayed until the end of the dictatorship. Furthermore, Spanish social services did not develop in a centralist environment that later decentralised, as in the other case studies, but the increased role of the state in the economy and the life of citizens coincided with the process of decentralisation. This was largely successful, as in less than two decades normalisation led the country to close the gap with the EU average in terms of social protection spending. Although it laid the basis for ERC’s fiscal protest, such a process managed to strengthen rather than weaken state legitimacy. Indeed, the dictatorship had strongly repressed peripheral nationalism without succeeding in eradicating stateless national identities altogether. Hence decentralisation, and with it its welfare dimension, was thought of as a nation-building tool.<sup>1717</sup> The success of the democratic transition, the general stability of Spanish politics up to the mid-2000s and data on the reinforcement of dual identity until the late 1990s, would confirm this, although other dynamics – seen in the relevant chapter – set in later.

Thus, with the exception of Northern Italy, at the time of formation of the nationalism of the rich in the regions analysed there were distinct state and stateless national identities, although a substantial part of the population declared itself as having dual identities. Furthermore, despite potential competition, accommodating stances, based on ideas of partnership and of negotiating forms of autonomy short of independence, were prevalent among groups representing these two identities and in all cases remained such long thereafter. Yet, these distinct self-understandings offered a frame to interpret regional fiscal imbalances in national terms, while at the same time linking them to conditions of political marginalisation of the relevant nation within the parent state.

Political marginalisation has assumed different forms in the five case-study parties and it is difficult to find a common pattern. ERC and the SNP’s discourses represent pretty standard cases of minority nationalism in which the stateless community can trace its origins back to a history of independent statehood and thus conceives of itself as a constituent nation of a multinational state. The different degrees of recognition obtained by the two national communities account for the different arguments made by the two parties. While Scotland has had a degree of formal recognition in the UK, through the union state character of the Kingdom and the institutional autonomy granted to Scotland in the realm of education, law, the Church and administration since the 1707 Acts of Union, this was not the case for a substantial part of Catalan history since the Union of the Crown. On the contrary, the two twentieth-century dictatorships, along with older histories of defeat and repression, provided a wider reservoir of grievances for nationalist parties. Accordingly, in Scotland in the 1960s and 1970s, political marginalisation was mostly defined in terms of ‘provincialisation’, whereby Scotland was receiving less attention – especially in terms of economic needs – than what it deserved as a constituent unit of the UK. ERC instead complained that Catalonia was not being given the recognition it deserved both in actual and formal terms, as the Constitution did not clearly define it as a nation. These different degrees of recognition also go a long way to explain why

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<sup>1717</sup> GUIBERNAU (2006) *op. cit.*; MARTINEZ-HERRERA (2002) *op. cit.*; MORENO, LUIS and ARRIBA, ANA (1999) *Decentralization, mesogovernments, and the new logic of welfare provision in Spain*, Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados (CSIC) Working Paper n. 99-01.



Scotland's population voted unconvincingly for political autonomy in 1979,<sup>1718</sup> while Catalonia's overwhelmingly accepted it in 1978. While the former did not necessarily need it and was more afraid of a separatist 'slippery slope', the latter was offered a way to satisfy a demand opposed for many decades. Later, the compromise struck by the Spanish Constitution worked reasonably well for about 20 years,<sup>1719</sup> whereas the 1980s reignited the cause of Scottish political marginalisation through the combination of the electoral preponderance of England over Scotland and the strictly unitarist interpretation of the British state adopted by the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher.<sup>1720</sup> As a consequence, the demand for self-government grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, leading to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. In both cases, it is important to note that political marginalisation has not been linked to the nation's representation in central parliaments. For instance, while during the democratic period Catalonia received a lower number of seats in the Spanish Congress than its demographic share of the total population, this was never mentioned by ERC as an argument for self-determination. The party has instead consistently demanded a special status for Catalonia as an equal partner of Castile and the other nations of Spain, to be recognised through special institutions, rather than equal representation within the existing institutions. Similarly, Scottish MPs had a fair representation in Westminster, even a slightly disproportionate one, but the SNP could still effectively denounce a democratic deficit.

The VB and the N-VA, by contrast, have operated in a very peculiar context, whereby a demographic and political majority has lamented the marginalisation caused by the constitutional guarantees granted to the Francophone minority. Despite the virtual absence of a history of independent statehood, this argument could be potently fed by memories of linguistic discrimination within the Belgian state that led some observers to define the Flemings, certainly until the interwar years and arguably up to the 1960s, as a 'sociological minority'.<sup>1721</sup> This condition had progressively disappeared by the late 1970s, when the nationalism of the rich was formulated, but the ideological baggage inherited from the years of Flanders's socio-economic subordination to Wallonia and Brussels could be adapted to the new circumstances.<sup>1722</sup> Paradoxically, the adaptation of the political system to the linguistic segments sought by the Flemish movement and obtained in the 1960s, endowed the francophone members of the federal Parliament with a *de facto* 'advantage' that has frustrated the majoritarian ambitions of some Flemish parties. The fact that those same guarantees are applied to the Flemish minority in Brussels has not prevented the VB and the N-VA from criticising them at the federal level.

The claims of the LN have developed in a context that lies somewhere in between the Catalan and Scottish scenario, on the one hand, and the Flemish one, on the other. The

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<sup>1718</sup> As noted in the relevant chapter, the 'Yes' won, but it did not cross the 40% threshold of all voters registered on electoral rolls that had been introduced as a condition for the referendum to be binding.

<sup>1719</sup> GUIBERNAU (2013) *op. cit.*;

<sup>1720</sup> FINLAY (2012) *op. cit.*

<sup>1721</sup> DEVOS and BOUTECA, *op. cit.*; VAN VELTHOVEN, HARRY (1989) 'The Relationship between Flanders and Brussels from 1830 to 1980. Mechanisms of Power in a Historical Context', in KAS DEPPEZ (ed.) *Language and Intergroup Relations in Flanders and in the Netherlands* (Dordrecht: Foris) pp. 11-28. The Dutch-speaking population of Belgium was a demographic majority since the foundation of the country. Yet, it became a political majority only with the introduction of universal male suffrage in 1893 (although tempered by plural voting, whereby some social categories could cast more than one vote, until 1919). Also, Flemish identity was often affected by feelings of social and cultural inferiority in a country dominated by francophone elites.

<sup>1722</sup> BOEHME, *op. cit.*, p. 558.

League has claimed the status of minority for the Padanian population – a point inherited from the previous regionalist leagues. Nevertheless, when taking into account an extended definition of Northern Italy, its population accounts for almost half of Italy's, thus making its arguments closer to those of the two Flemish parties. In fact, the League's version of political marginalisation was tailored around the grievances of some specific constituencies, notably the areas of late industrialisation in Veneto, and in some non-metropolitan provinces of Lombardy and Piedmont, that had developed around clusters of SMEs and that in the 1980s began nourishing a perception of underrepresentation compared to the South and to the northern metropolitan areas, especially on account of their greatly improved economic status.

Hence, while the SNP and ERC have demanded special treatment on the basis of their status of distinct political units and constituent nations of the parent state, the VB, the N-VA and the LN have decried the special measures granted to other communities within the country as a violation of the basic democratic principle of equality. In all cases – although in Catalonia and Northern Italy to a lower extent than in Scotland and Flanders – the claims of political marginalisation have been reinforced by a representation of the relevant nation as sharing a specific ideological profile opposed to that of the rest of the country (right Flanders vs. left Wallonia, social-democratic Scotland vs. conservative England and so on). While survey data do show different attitudes along some socio-economic and ethical dimensions, these differences are often smaller than differences in political systems and debates between centre and periphery in the countries analysed would suggest, and frequently coexist with similar or even bigger intraregional imbalances. This is due to two main factors.

The first pertains to an inclusion of ideological elements in the definition of relevant stateless national identities, especially with reference to events or historical periods that had a special influence on this process. Scottish identity, for instance, has largely been redefined during the Thatcher years, as an opposition to the relevant Other of Conservative England represented by Iron Lady's government. This would mean that, in the collective imaginary, being Scottish and being left-wing are deemed to overlap to a large extent.<sup>1723</sup> Similarly, Catalan identity was heavily influenced by the dictatorship, to such an extent that being right-wing is still associated with memories of the Francoist regime, as proven by the socialist domination of general elections (in Catalonia) throughout the democratic period and CiU's careful positioning around the political centre – rather than the right – especially in the first years of the transition.<sup>1724</sup> On the contrary, in Flanders, the radical nationalist tradition has historically been associated with the Right, as shown by the ideological origins of the VB.<sup>1725</sup> Moderate Flemish nationalism has evolved more towards the centre, but, overall, Flanders is still politically more oriented towards the centre-right and this because of long-term processes of socialisation of the Flemish masses between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century in which the Church played a prevalent role.<sup>1726</sup> In Northern Italy the association is more indirect because the northern Italian identity has been less clearly defined, the League has been wary to openly assume a right-wing label – also because it has been an incoherent right-wing party – and because right-wing parties such as *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Forza Italia*

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<sup>1723</sup> PATERSON (2002) *op. cit.*; BROWN et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>1724</sup> DOWLING, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>1725</sup> GOVAERT and or VOS.

<sup>1726</sup> ERK (2005) *op. cit.*

have been widely voted for in the South as well. Yet, the values of thrift and entrepreneurialism, the hard-work ethic and the anti-statist ethos clearly attributed by the League to the North have generally been associated in the country with a right-wing neoliberal tradition.

The second factor is to be found in the establishment of regional institutions, occurring at different times in all the countries analysed. Apart from Italy, in the other cases, regional institutions were created as a consequence of the pressure exercised by nationalist parties. Hence, they would represent what Jan Erk has called the ‘process of institutional congruence’, whereby political institutions ‘change in order to be congruent with the underlying ethno-linguistic social structure’.<sup>1727</sup> Yet, beyond marking some kind of recognition of stateless communities and bestowing upon them a form of autonomy, regional institutions have set the ground for the reinforcement of peripheral forces, by devising regional educational policies, taking over the distribution of welfare provisions and creating a distinct political arena and public sphere – especially through regional media – which have shaped debates in a different way from the central level and contributed to framing events in stateless national terms.<sup>1728</sup> Hence, regional institutions have worked as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they have assuaged conflict through the adaptation of formerly centralised institutions to the heightened perception of national heterogeneity within the country and probably also reinforced state legitimacy, at least in the short run. On the other, however, being a ‘reactive policy’ that ‘takes cultural or political divisions as given and works around them by providing a system of quasi-independence’, devolution naturally reduces ‘the level and depth of interaction between the periphery and the centre’<sup>1729</sup> thus furthering separation. It is also a ‘defensive’ policy that risks creating an imbalance in the discursive struggle between the centre and the periphery, whereby if the former does not craft an inclusive and attractive identity discourse in favour of prolonged political union, it risks being associated with a negative and anachronistic defence of the past.

Although, as suggested by Rogers Brubaker with the idea of the ‘architectonic illusion’,<sup>1730</sup> we should refrain from thinking that somewhere out there we can find the right institutional structure that can definitively quench nationalist conflicts, we should not conclude that institutional arrangements have no impact whatsoever. In the cases analysed here, in particular, one cannot but note the often chaotic and inconsistent implementation of regional reforms. These have frequently occurred without a clear plan in mind, have limited the impact of fiscal autonomy, especially in their early phases, and have lacked strong lock-in devices favouring the participation of territories in the federal policy-making process, such as a federal senate on the German model, likely to create cooperative dynamics as well as inter-territorial alliances to pursue common objectives

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<sup>1727</sup> ERK (2003) *op. cit.*, pp. 202.

<sup>1728</sup> JAAK, MADDENS and FROGNIER, *op. cit.*, p. 930; SINARDET (2009) *op. cit.*, p. 34; MARTINEZ-HERRERA (2002) *op. cit.*, p. 429; HIERRO-HERNANDEZ, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-22. This is arguably truer in presence of linguistic differentiation, although the case of Scotland seems to contradict in part such an hypothesis, as already in the 1970s Scotland showed a distinct pattern of press consumption largely privileging Scottish papers. See MILLER, WILLIAM, *op. cit.*, p. 81; FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 377-378.

<sup>1729</sup> SAMBANIS, NICHOLAS (2006) ‘Globalization, Decentralization and Secession’, in DAVID R., CAMERON, GUSTAV, RANIS and ANNALISA, ZINN (eds.) *Globalization and Self-Determination. Is the nation-state under siege?* (London: Routledge) p. 204.

<sup>1730</sup> BRUBAKER (1998) *op. cit.*

that could defuse bilateral tensions between one region and the rest of the country.<sup>1731</sup> The character of ‘permanent tension’ and the openness of the process of devolution originating from these features have certainly suited the agenda of most of our case-study parties, which, on the one hand, have adopted gradualist strategies to attract more moderate voters and, on the other, have blamed policy failures on the lack of powers held by regional institutions on account of an incomplete process of transition towards full self-government, especially with regard to fiscal autonomy. Also, such institutions have greatly increased the relevance of political forces that would otherwise be a minority in centralised Parliaments – above all the SNP and ERC, but also the LN in some northern regions. They have therefore been skilfully used as platforms to both bring further stateless nation-building processes and to promote the separatist agenda.

### 7.2.3 External Factors: Globalisation and European Integration

Our case-study chapters have mainly focused on the domestic factors that have favoured the rise of the nationalism of the rich and influenced the electoral success of the parties analysed. The international processes of globalisation and European integration have often figured in the background without having been treated properly. The aim of this last section is precisely to take a step back from the domestic context and focus on such larger phenomena in order to try to gauge what contribution they have made to the dynamics studied in the previous chapters.

In a large sense, globalisation can be defined as ‘the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa’.<sup>1732</sup> Yet, a stricter formulation centred around the economic dimension is often preferred in social sciences – not accidentally because it is easier to measure. Hence, economic globalisation can be formulated as ‘the international integration of markets, goods, services, labour and capital’.<sup>1733</sup> In practical terms, this is often quantified as the sum of a country’s imports and exports on GDP, or trade openness. A snapshot of the evolution of globalisation among advanced economies is provided in Figure 7.7: the average ratio of imports and exports of goods on GDP of 19 OECD countries went from 36.4% in 1970 to 61.2% in 2000, i.e., a 68% increase.

It is almost commonplace to assert that this process has weakened the power of the nation-state. Some scholars, such as Kenichi Ohmae<sup>1734</sup>, have even proclaimed the end of the nation-state as a meaningful economic unit in today’s global economy, while David Held has argued that ‘any conception of sovereignty which interprets it as an illimitable

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<sup>1731</sup> With its bipolarity and asymmetry, Belgium is an extreme case, in which a federal senate (by the way formally established with the 2014 reform) would not necessarily work. What, however, has been proposed in Belgium to overcome the separation between the two communities at the federal level is the creation of a federal constituency cutting across the linguistic groups.

<sup>1732</sup> GIDDENS, ANTHONY (1994) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, reprinted, p. 64.

<sup>1733</sup> CAMERON, DAVID R., RANIS, GUSTAV and ZINN, ANNALISA (2006) ‘Editor’s Introduction’, in DAVID R., CAMERON, GUSTAV, RANIS and ANNALISA, ZINN (eds.) *Globalization and Self-Determination. Is the nation-state under siege?* (London: Routledge) p. 1.

<sup>1734</sup> OHMAE, KENICHI (1995) *The End of the Nation State, The Rise of Regional Economies* (London, Harper Collins).

and indivisible form of public power is undermined'.<sup>1735</sup> Others, following Michael Mann,<sup>1736</sup> have however downplayed the significance of the nation-state's loss of sovereignty by pointing out that its former power had largely been exaggerated. While an in-depth assessment of this debate is beyond the scope of this section, what is undeniable is that, since the 1970s, states, or at least advanced economies, have progressively opened their borders to foreign goods and services and have become more dependent on footloose global capital.<sup>1737</sup> The liberalisation of financial markets, in particular, has had an extraordinary impact on state legitimacy.<sup>1738</sup> On the one hand, international capital mobility represented a boon for Western governments, which could raise money to a level unprecedented before. On the other, as Yergin and Stanislaw have made clear, 'while the public vote only every few years, the markets vote every minute', hence governments 'must increasingly heed the market's vote – as harsh as it sometimes can be'.<sup>1739</sup>

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century has seen a rise of separatist movements and, at the same time, a clear expansion of economic globalisation, researchers have started wondering whether the two phenomena are correlated. The overall answer is that globalisation does not cause secession and, generally speaking, it even seems to quell it rather than fuel it. Analysing a wide sample of 116 countries, Annalisa Zinn for instance claimed that open economies were less likely to develop political separatism than closed ones and concluded that 'this finding challenges the popular view that globalization amplifies the intensity of subnational threats to state sovereignty and suggests that the increasing level of trade between countries is actually curbing parallel increases in the number of active self-determination movements'.<sup>1740</sup> Yet, although agreeing with Zinn that globalisation *per se* does not cause secession, some authors have argued that, in specific conditions, especially where separatist parties and conflict already exist, trade openness can in fact have an inflammatory effect. The correlation between the two phenomena would be stronger in cases of interregional income inequality. As Sambanis and Milanovic have pointed out 'self-determination is typically demanded when the economic benefits of membership in the predecessor state are low relative to the economic and political gains of independence', although this is likely to happen as 'an indirect result

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<sup>1735</sup> HELD, DAVID (1988) 'New Times. Farewell Nation State', *Marxism Today*, December, pp. 12-17.

<sup>1736</sup> MANN, MICHAEL (1999) 'Has Globalization Ended the Rise and Rise of the Nation-State?', in PAUL, THAZHA VARKEY and JOHN, A. HALL (eds.), *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 267.  
pp. 237-261.

<sup>1737</sup> GREEN, *op. cit.*

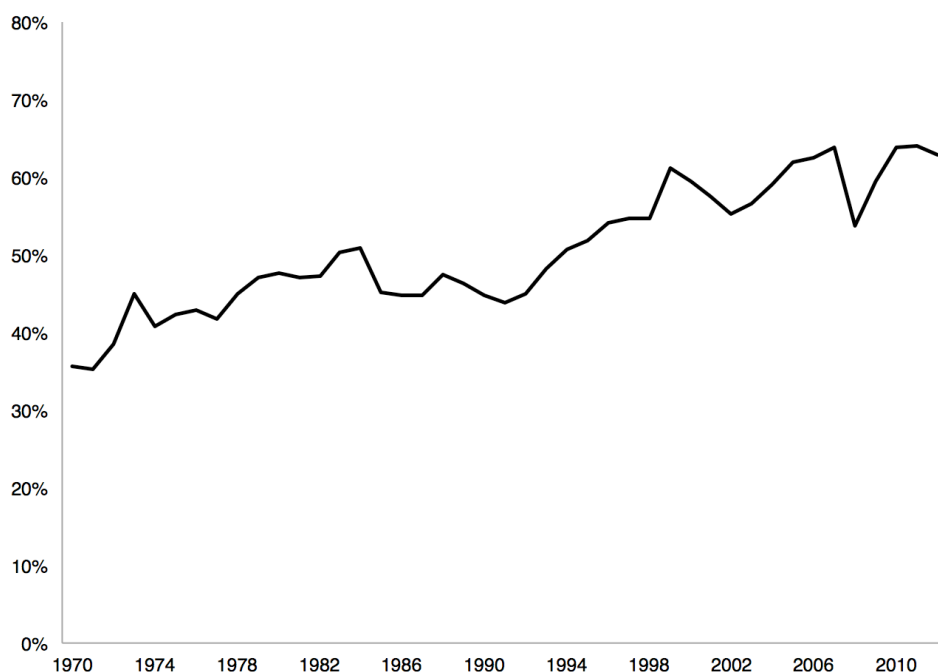
<sup>1738</sup> From 1944 to 1971 the international monetary system was based on fixed exchanged rates to the dollar. In 1971, President Nixon renounced the convertibility with gold and currencies were allowed to fluctuate, thus stimulating the expansion of a foreign exchange market entailing highly profitable speculative operations. This in turn limited countries' monetary sovereignty since currencies' values are now influenced by market forces. Also, the oil-crisis entailed a 'redistribution' in the balance of power between oil-producers and consumers. However, oil-producing countries were confronted with the need to re-invest their skyrocketing revenues. The 'recycling of petrodollars' into advanced economies was their preferred solution and greatly contributed to the development of the global financial market. American opposition also ensured that institutional actors such as the International Monetary Fund would not play a role in the governance of such flows, but would rather leave their management to private banks. See FERGUSON, NIALL (2010) 'Crisis, what Crisis? The 1970s and the shock of the global', in NIALL FERGUSON et al, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-24.

<sup>1739</sup> YERGIN and STANISLAW, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>1740</sup> ZINN, ANNALISA (2006) 'Economic Integration and Political Separatism. Parallel trends or causally linked processes?', in CAMERON et al., *op. cit.*, p. 271.

of globalization in countries with already active conflicts over self-determination'.<sup>1741</sup> Hence, globalisation does not seem to be a primary cause of secessionism, but it does seem to be relevant for the nationalism of the rich, since its impact would be most powerful among rich regions of countries affected by substantial interregional inequality, characterised by ethno-cultural difference and with active separatist parties.

**Figure 7.7 – Trade Openness, selected OECD countries\* average, 1970-2013 (imports plus exports as a percentage of GDP)**



\* The countries have been selected on the basis of data availability. The list is as follows: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the UK and the US.

Source: our calculations on OECD, *OECD.StatExtracts*, <http://stats.oecd.org/#> (accessed on January 27, 2014) for imports and exports data; WORLD BANK, *World Development Indicators Databank*, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx> (accessed on January 27, 2014) for GDP data.

The consequences of globalisation on the formation and development of the nationalism of the rich can be reduced to the following three elements: by intensifying international competition and providing more leverage to highly mobile capital as compared to less mobile labour, globalisation is deemed to have reduced the fiscal and monetary leverage of governments, as well as to have put under stress welfare expenses with obvious consequences for national solidarity; trade liberalisation is said to have reduced the 'optimal' size of countries thus creating a more enabling environment for secession; coinciding with the transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism and

<sup>1741</sup> SAMBANIS, NICHOLAS and MILANOVIC, BRANKO (2011) *Explaining the Demand for Sovereignty*, World Bank Policy Research Working Paper n. 5888, p. 225. See also SORENS, JASON (2004) 'Globalisation, Secessionism, and Autonomy', *Electoral Studies*, 23, pp. 727-752; and WEISS, MEREDITH (2006) 'Globalization and ethnonationalist movements. Evidence from Spain and India', in DAVID, CAMERON et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 247-277.

contributing to increasing interregional disparity, globalisation, it is argued, has promoted the development of regional economies.

The idea that globalisation is correlated with welfare rollback might only be the result of the fact that the sudden acknowledgment of ‘interdependence’ occurred during the painful watershed decade of the 1970s and was immediately followed by the rise of neo-liberal ideology – a global phenomenon itself – preaching budget austerity and monetary stability as the solution to the crisis of macroeconomic management that occurred in those years.<sup>1742</sup> In other words, globalisation, welfare state crisis and the spread of neoliberal ideas might only be parallel trends. Nevertheless, the correlation seems to go deeper, although one should refrain from simple conclusions about the incompatibility of trade openness and generous welfare systems. Heightened capital mobility – both in the form of portfolio and foreign direct investments – along with the reduction of transport costs and the rise of industrial capacity in the Third World, would have exercised strong competitive pressures on state budgets. The tension between the logic of capital, seeking the most profitable locations, and that of spatially-bound labour, trying to attract capital, would have favoured attempts to cut state spending and welfare provisions in order to make national economies more business-friendly.<sup>1743</sup> In practice, these attempts have been made difficult by slowing growth, increasing unemployment and an aging population, but a significant shift from progressively improving benefits and coverage to minimising the natural expansion of existing commitments seem to have occurred in many countries.<sup>1744</sup> Recent empirical studies have confirmed similar trends, but also nuanced their extent. For instance, Cameron and Kim have calculated that increased openness has led to small increases, rather than reductions, in state spending, with countries suffering from substantial balance of payment deficits recording large increases in expenses.<sup>1745</sup> Furthermore, opinion surveys on trade liberalisation and social protection in advanced countries show that citizens seem to generally support globalisation as a general phenomenon, but are extremely wary about asymmetric consequences in terms of employment and real salaries, with low-skilled individuals as the category showing the highest anxiety. This suggests that the ‘labour-market policies of governments have substantial influence on how individuals view the costs and benefits of trade liberalization’<sup>1746</sup> and that social protection and redistribution are still necessary prerequisites of support for globalisation in open economies. This would be confirmed by the strategies adopted by some European countries, especially in Northern Europe, which instead of wildly cutting the welfare state have tried to sustain substantial social protection with increases in labour productivity.

Hence, although there is evidence that globalisation has had an impact on governments macroeconomic and financial latitude, it should not be uncritically considered as a reason

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<sup>1742</sup> RHODES, MARTIN (1995) ‘*Subversive Liberalism*’: *Market Integration, Globalisation and the European Welfare State*, European University Institute Working Paper 95/10, p. 6.

<sup>1743</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 73; ESPING-ANDERSEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-31; SCHWARTZ, HERMAN (1994) ‘Small States in Big Trouble: State Reorganization in Australia, Denmark, New Zealand, and Sweden in the 1980s’, *World Politics*, 46(4), pp. 527-555.

<sup>1744</sup> CERNY, PHILIP (1995) ‘Globalization and the Changing Logic of Collective Action’, in *International Organization*, 49(4), 612.

<sup>1745</sup> CAMERON, DAVID R. and KIM, SOO YEON (2006) ‘Trade, Political Institutions and the Size of Government’, in CAMERON et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 15-50.

<sup>1746</sup> SCHEVE, KENNETH and SLAUGHTER, MATTHEW (2006) ‘Public Opinion, international Economic Integration and the Welfare State’, in CAMERON et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 82.

for the ‘crisis of welfare’ that began in the 1970s nor should we conclude that governments have been left with no leverage whatsoever.<sup>1747</sup> One also needs to question whether the path undertaken during the ‘glorious thirties’ would have been sustainable even in the absence of a transition to higher interdependence. Yergin and Stanislaw, for instance, clearly attribute the welfare crisis to economic unsustainability, the end of the ‘socialist spell’ and the rise of neoliberalism, rather than to globalisation as such.<sup>1748</sup>

More importantly, a myth that should be debunked, and which is very relevant to our analysis, is that, in an age of ever more powerless nation-states, the role of governments is growing increasingly superfluous. The opposite seems to be true in fact. As capital is more mobile and competition higher, the performance of state institutions in delivering high-quality public goods in the most efficient way has become more salient than ever.<sup>1749</sup> This also stems from the rising importance of technological development and human skills, which are highly reliant on public goods, such as education and R&D, in driving growth.<sup>1750</sup> Yet, the role of the nation-state has clearly changed, since ‘the task is not to explain why a firm operating exclusively in the nation is internationally successful, but why the nation is a more or less desirable home base for competing in an industry’.<sup>1751</sup>

Another element that has put into question state legitimacy, especially in contexts of national heterogeneity, is that progressive market integration has reduced the large-scale advantages of political unity. In a paper that has subsequently been quoted by most of the parties analysed, Alesina and Spolaore have argued that ‘the efficient and the stable number of countries are increasing in the amount of international economic integration’ or, in other words, ‘the benefits of large countries are less important if small countries can freely trade with each other’.<sup>1752</sup> In their model, the optimal size and number of nations are the result of a trade off between the benefits of large-scale political jurisdictions and heterogeneity costs, in terms of citizens’ public policy preferences. The former are mainly represented by a lower per capita cost of public goods, larger markets, better insurance against risk and security, while the latter boil down to the assumption that a bigger population will have a wider range of public policy preferences, thus making it harder for the government to satisfy them. As globalisation and, in the European context, common market integration provide small states with ever easier access to wider consumer bodies, the benefits for stateless nations of remaining within their parent state would automatically shrink. While Alesina and Spolaore do not discuss them in depth, the security advantages provided by EU and NATO membership, along with the end of the Cold War, also seem to

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<sup>1747</sup> GARRETT, GEOFFREY and LANGE, PETER (1991) ‘Political Responses to Interdependence: What’s “Left” for the Left?’, *International Organization*, 45(4), pp. 531-564.

<sup>1748</sup> YERGIN and STANISLAW, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-321.

<sup>1749</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>1750</sup> PORTER, MICHAEL E. (1990) *The Competitive Advantage of Nations* (Basingstoke; MacMillan) p. 19.

<sup>1751</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>1752</sup> ALESINA, ALBERTO and SPOLAORE, ENRICO (1997) ‘On the Number and Size of Nations’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112, pp. 1041. A variation on this framework that is even more pertinent to the nationalism of the rich, although it did not obtain Alesina and Spolaore’s visibility, has been provided by Bolton and Roland, who have modeled secession in a context of increasing integration on the basis of income differences among regions, rather than heterogeneity costs. They conclude, in line with Alesina and Spolaore, that economic integration will lead to increased political fragmentation because ‘the bigger the difference in income distribution across regions, the higher the tolerance for efficiency losses from separation’ and free trade is precisely reducing such losses. BOLTON, PATRICK and ROLAND, GERARD (1997) ‘The Break-up of Nations: A Political Economy Analysis’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112(4), p. 1066.



have contributed to present independence as a more advantageous goal than in previous decades.<sup>1753</sup> These arguments are especially interesting in light of the theories on the evolution of territorial states and the role of war analysed in chapter two. They are such also when looking at nineteenth century debates about ‘the correct size of nations’. Theorists such as Giuseppe Mazzini and John Stuart Mill postulated that there was a minimum ‘threshold’ that states had to cross in order to call for self-determination and Mazzini even suggested that a country like Ireland was not sufficiently big to be viable.<sup>1754</sup>

Yet, in their paper, Alesina and Spolaore did not discuss the risk-sharing insurance element of the equation. Empirical studies conducted by Garrett and Rodden have questioned the conclusions reached by the two authors above, precisely on account of this function of larger political units. By analysing the degree of fiscal decentralisation of a wide sample of both developed and developing countries, they found that globalisation in the 1980s and 1990s correlated with increasing fiscal centralisation. The explanation would lie in the instability brought about by trade liberalisation. As it is impossible to predict *ex ante* what sectors or regions will be hit by a shock, these will have an interest in sharing in a wider union providing better insurance, and such a dynamic would be exacerbated by the fact that increased competition promotes specialisation, thus making regions more vulnerable to exogenous factors.<sup>1755</sup> This is an argument that has featured highly in the debate over Scottish independence in the run-up to the 2014 referendum, with the Better Together campaign claiming that Scotland would be hit harder by a new financial crisis or a fall in oil prices as an independent country than as a part of the United Kingdom. Such criticism is probably less relevant to the other regions under study, where the economic imbalance with the centre is wider and less reliant on natural resources than Scotland’s, but it still is a relevant caveat to be taken into account when assessing the impact of economic globalisation.

The final influence of globalisation on the nationalism of the rich lies in the development of so-called regional economies. The 1970s were not only the decade in which the effects of ‘interdependence’ began being perceived, but also heralded the transition from Fordist to post-Fordist modes of industrial production. As the latter take huge advantage of the new opportunities offered by trade liberalisation and technological innovations in transports and information but, at the same time, require a high degree of horizontal integration and proximity among related firms in a specific area, they have increased the salience of economic disparities within nation-states. The penetration of the global market into national economies has created new links between international regions going beyond national borders.<sup>1756</sup> Furthermore, heightened technological competition has put more emphasis on the need to gain absolute advantages, which guarantee unrivalled primacy thanks to shifts in the technological frontier, rather than just comparative advantages, in which companies find their place along the same technological frontier, thus increasingly portraying global competition as a zero-sum game.<sup>1757</sup>

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<sup>1753</sup> On this see also: MEADWELL, HUDSON (1999) ‘Stateless Nations and the International Order’, in PAUL, THAZHA VARKEY and JOHN A., HALL (eds.) *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p. 267.

<sup>1754</sup> HOBBSAWM (1990) *op. cit.*, p. 14-47.

<sup>1755</sup> GARRETT, GEOFFREY and RODDEN, JONATHAN (2006) ‘Globalisation and Fiscal Decentralization’, in CAMERON et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 278-300.

<sup>1756</sup> SCOTT, ALLEN J. (2001) *Les régions et l'économie mondiale* (Paris: L'Harmattan) p. 34.

<sup>1757</sup> STORPER, MICHAEL (1995) ‘The Resurgence of Regional Economies, Ten Years Later: The Region as a Nexus of Untraded Interdependencies’, *European and Regional Studies*, 2(3), pp. 191-221.

More fundamentally, at the beginning of the 1980s, the economics literature re-discovered regions as meaningful units of analysis and fundamental actors in the post-Fordist world. Studies on the industrial districts of the Third Italy, Toyota City and the Silicon Valley, emphasised the flexible and vertically disintegrated organisation of these growth centres, but, even more importantly, they focused on some fundamental immaterial assets holding together dispersed networks of firms and explaining their global success. The introduction of concepts such as ‘untraded interdependencies’,<sup>1758</sup> ‘institutional thickness’,<sup>1759</sup> ‘embeddedness’,<sup>1760</sup> and, later, ‘social capital’,<sup>1761</sup> signalled the return of culture, identity and social institutions within theoretical thinking about economic development. The new economic regionalism thus came to ‘see the market and systems of production as socially constructed rather than the product of perfect competition and in permanent equilibrium’,<sup>1762</sup> while cultural norms and values came to be deemed to mediate interests and incentives of economic actors. All of a sudden, regional cultures, which had until then been ignored at best and despised at worst, became a potential decisive asset to compete in the world economy.<sup>1763</sup> Although most studies focused on industrial districts or metropolitan areas that rarely coincided with political, cultural or institutional regions, the concept could be easily seized for nation-building purposes and to formulate the existence of stateless national interests at odds with that of other communities within the parent state. It could also be used to support cultural-determinist explanations about uneven development.

Accordingly, the turn of the 1980s also saw a change in countries’ regional policies. The development strategies based on diversionary investment and large-scale manufacturing that had spread around Europe and North America in the 1960s and early 1970s gave way to endogenous growth plans, which shifted the focus of attention to research and development, innovation and entrepreneurship. As these have emphasised local knowledge, contacts and proximity, they have largely involved regional governments and have been accompanied by a decline of faith in the state, supplanted by market-based thinking and a taste for ‘small is beautiful’.<sup>1764</sup> Spurred by the thrust of neoliberalism, meritocracy has become an ever more celebrated value for economic success, putting solidarity, both at the interpersonal and interregional levels, into question.<sup>1765</sup>

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<sup>1758</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>1759</sup> AMIN, ASH and THRIFT, NIGEL (1994) ‘Living in the Global’, in ASH, AMIN and THRIFT, NIGEL (eds.) *Globalization, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>1760</sup> GRABHER, GERNOT (1993) (ed.) *The Embedded Firm: On the Socioeconomic of Industrial Networks* (London: Routledge); GRANOVETTER, MARK (1985) ‘Economic action and social structure: the problem of embeddedness’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(3), pp. 481-510.

<sup>1761</sup> PUTNAM, *op. cit.*

<sup>1762</sup> KEATING, MICHAEL, LOUGHLIN, JOHN and DESCHOUWER, KRIS (2003) *Culture, Institutions and Economic Development. A Study of Eight European Regions* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar) p. 14.

<sup>1763</sup> This curiously coincided with a wider transition from structural to cultural explanatory models, first in history and later in sociology, often defined as the linguistic or cultural turn, which postulated that culture not only was the product of social relations, but was itself constitutive of social reality. On the cultural turn see: ELEY, GEOFF (1990) *Is all the World a Text? From Social History to the History of Society Two Decades Later*, CSST Working Paper n. 55; FRIEDLAND, ROGER and MOHR, JOHN (2004) ‘The Cultural Turn in American Sociology’, in ROGER, FRIEDLAND and JOHN, MOHR (eds.) *Matters of Culture. Cultural Sociology in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) pp. 1-10.

<sup>1764</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>1765</sup> It should be noted though that questioning interregional solidarity does not necessarily mean rejecting interpersonal one. On the contrary, as we have seen in the previous chapters, most parties analysed here are

One could argue that the acceleration of the process of integration in a common European framework experienced by European countries since the early 1980s has run counter to Alesina and Spolaore's theoretical propositions about political disintegration going along with trade liberalisation. The authors, in fact, consider EU integration as only limited to its economic dimension. Although this is clearly an oversimplification required by theoretical parsimony, member states do remain the main gatekeeper of EU policy-making and the degree of economic integration certainly dwarfs the political dimension of the European project. Hence, along similar lines Sandro Sideri has suggested that the parallel processes of political fragmentation at sub-state level and integration at supra-state one are strategies to counteract the negative effects of globalisation. What is interesting in these insights is the idea that trade liberalisation has not spread evenly, but has rather tended to cluster around regional blocs running at different speed. Institutional architectures and agreements such as the EU Treaties and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have gone very far along the way of internal trade liberalisation, while, at the same time, negotiating more moderate openings to the outside world.<sup>1766</sup> In this perspective, European integration would thus be a sub-product of globalisation and, as such, would have contributed both to the questioning and the reinforcement of state sovereignty.

The last point touches upon an old debate in the historiography of European integration, which focuses on whether states have remained in control<sup>1767</sup> of the process or whether the process has gone much beyond what was originally meant.<sup>1768</sup> A consensus of a sort has been found around the middle-option proposed by Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe in the concept of multilevel governance.<sup>1769</sup> As Hooghe clarified: 'national arenas are not going to be rendered obsolete by transnational interest mobilisation'<sup>1770</sup>, but, at the same time, 'state executives have lost their monopoly – and – decision-making competences are shared among actors'.<sup>1771</sup> This points to a first way in which European integration has favoured the nationalism of the rich and challenges to state power from below more in general: it has added a new layer of authority above the state that has, at least rhetorically, undermined its latitude and legitimacy.

One dimension of European policy that has had a direct impact at the regional level has been the EU Regional Policy, which 'aims to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion by reducing differences in the level of development among regions and Member

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in favour of maintaining generous, although more efficient, welfare provision for the relevant nation and actually portrays independence as a tool to combine welfare and efficiency.

<sup>1766</sup> SIDERI, SANDRO (1997) 'Globalization and Regional Integration', *The European Journal of Development Research*, 9(1), pp. 38-82.

<sup>1767</sup> See, MILWARD, ALAN (1992) *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, (London: Routledge); MORAVSCIK, ANDREW (1999) *The Choice for Europe. Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht* (London, UCL Press Taylor & Francis Group).

<sup>1768</sup> HAAS, ERNST (1958) *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces* (Stanford: Stanford University Press); MITRANY, DAVID (1965) 'The Prospects of Integration: Federal or Functional', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 4(2), pp. 119-150; STONE SWEET, ALEC, SANDHOLTZ, WAYNE, and FLIGSTEIN, NEIL (2000) (eds.) *The Institutionalisation of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

<sup>1769</sup> HOOGHE, LIESBET and MARKS, GARY (2001) *Multilevel Governance and European Integration* (Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield).

<sup>1770</sup> HOOGHE, LIESBET (1995) 'Subnational Mobilisation in the European Union', *West European Politics*, 18(3), p. 176.

<sup>1771</sup> Idem.

States'.<sup>1772</sup> Initiated in 1975 with the establishment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), it then evolved into the EU Cohesion Policy in 1988, which set in place a system of wealth redistribution across the Continent that has accounted, on average, for about a third of the total EU budget. By involving regions in partnerships concerning the implementation – and in some cases even the conceptualisation – of cohesion projects, it has 'empowered' European regions informally involving them in the process of European integration and decision-making.<sup>1773</sup> The establishment of the Committee of the Regions, in 1993, further contributed to regional mobilisation by introducing a dedicated political arena for regional actors in Brussels.<sup>1774</sup> The most active and entrepreneurial among them have seized the occasion to establish missions in the European capital and carry out extensive lobbying activities.

Regional policy has had a direct bearing on the regional contexts in which our case-study parties have operated. In Belgium, federalisation was directly fed by the deepening of European integration and notably, the transition from EU Regional to Cohesion policy, as Flemish parties took advantage of it in order to speed up state reform.<sup>1775</sup> In Scotland, an already existent tradition of partnership between local government and private actors accelerated the adaptation of the administrative structure of the region, notably the Scottish Office, to the instruments of the EU Cohesion Policy. After the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, a true multi-level governance was realised, with regional actors dealing directly with European officials in devising and implementing projects, although regional policy priorities have still needed the Treasury's agreement because of the low fiscal responsibility of the Scottish Executive.<sup>1776</sup> Catalonia has largely tried to increase its power and visibility through its presence in Brussels. According to Morata and Popartan 'accession [to the EU, EDM] created the opportunity to affirm national identities in the European arena, eluding as much as possible the central government' and 'to develop a

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<sup>1772</sup> EUROSTAT (2008) *Regions of the European Union, A Statistical Portrait* (Luxembourg: Eurostat Statistical Books) p. 7.

<sup>1773</sup> This has not been due so much to the amount of money transferred, but rather to the emphasis put on, and the opportunity structure offered for, regional mobilisation. Most authors agree that constitutional regions – often not among the poorest ones – were those who mobilised most. In this respect, the principles of additionality, partnership and subsidiarity informing Cohesion Policy did play an important role in creating new avenues for regional mobilisation and empowerment. See: BOMBERG, ELIZABETH and PETERSON, JOHN (1998) 'European Union Decision Making: the Role of Sub-National Authorities', *Political Studies*, 46(2), pp. 219-235; HOOGHE, LIESBET and MARKS, GARY (1996) "'Europe with the Regions": Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union', *Publius*, 26(1), pp. 73-92; MARKS, GARY, HAESLEY, RICHARD and MBAYE, HEATHER A.D. (2002) 'What Do Subnational Offices Think They Are Doing in Brussels?', *Regional and Federal Studies*, 12(3), pp. 1-23.

<sup>1774</sup> Although the Committee's lack of powers and poor performance have largely disappointed regional actors, it certainly contributed to spurring their mobilisation in the 1990s. For a further discussion of this and the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' see BORRAS-ALOMAR, SUSANA, CHRISTIANSEN, THOMAS and RODRIGUEZ-POSE, ANDRES (1994) 'Towards a "Europe of the Regions"? Visions and Reality from a Critical Perspective', *Regional Politics and Policy*, 4(2), pp. 1-27.

<sup>1775</sup> DE RYNC, STEFAAN (1996) 'Europe and Cohesion Policy-Making in the Flemish Region', in LIESBET, HOOGHE (ed.) *Cohesion Policy and European Integration: Building Multi-Level Governance* (Oxford, Oxford University Press) pp. 129-162.

<sup>1776</sup> BACHE, IAN (2004) 'Multi-level Governance and European Union Regional Policy', in IAN, BACHE and MATTHEW, FLINDERS (2004) (eds.) *Multilevel Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp. 165-178.

direct bilateral relationship with the EU institutions'.<sup>1777</sup> Italian regions have been late-comers in the process of mobilisation at the EU level, but the most active ones have quickly caught up. This trend has gone along with an important shift from centralisation to regional devolution and, although the EU Cohesion policy has not been a primary cause of such change, it has certainly accelerated it. Until the reforms of the late 1990s, Italian regions did not enjoy substantial autonomy to develop any significant activity. Before 1996 they were even forbidden to establish official representations in Brussels.<sup>1778</sup> Since 1996, however, things began to change and especially so after the 2001 constitutional reform that considerably improved their competences. Reactions have been very uneven though. While most southern regions have paid lip service to regional mobilisation at the community level, some northern and central regions – in particular, Lombardy, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and the autonomous provinces of Trent and Bolzano – have clearly been ahead of the others: first, establishing offices even before the ban was lifted; and, later, by specialising progressively more in lobbying and networking, rather than just carrying out the basic functions of information and logistical support.<sup>1779</sup>

All that produced two main outcomes: these regions came to have a 'taste' of what independence could be, in the form of an informal 'regional foreign policy'; and nationalist parties started calling for more representation powers vis-à-vis the EU. The idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' was widely exploited by the parties analysed in the previous chapters as a way to push for constitutional change in the domestic context. This aspect points to a deeper influence exercised by the process of European integration, going beyond the direct influence of Cohesion Policy and the erosion of state power brought about by the creation of multilevel governance, and that would play out along three different dimensions: a debate has been initiated about new forms of sovereignty questioning the notion of indivisible sovereignty and introducing concepts like 'divided' or 'shared' sovereignty and 'constitutional pluralism'; the active promotion of subsidiarity has favoured devolution; new opportunity structures have opened up to minority nationalist parties in the form of the single market, the monetary union and the common security policy, which have presented independence as a less costly option than in previous decades.<sup>1780</sup> Furthermore, the indeterminacy of the European project, especially in the decade between the late 1980s and the late 1990s, seemed destined 'to rectify the incongruence between the political and the national that had consigned Europe's historic nationalities to the peripheries of sovereign states for far too long. For these reasons, it has been argued, minority nationalist parties have redefined their nation-building projects in such a way that the achievement of national self-determination has become inextricably linked to the future development of the European polity'.<sup>1781</sup>

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<sup>1777</sup> MORATA, FRANCESCO and POPARTAN, LUCIA ALEXANDRA (2008) 'Spain', in MICHAEL, BAUN and DAN, MAREK (eds.) *EU Cohesion Policy After Enlargement* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan) pp. 91-92.

<sup>1778</sup> GROTE, JURGEN (1996) 'Cohesion in Italy: A View on Non-Economic Disparities', in LIESBET, HOOGHE, *op. cit.*

<sup>1779</sup> FARGION, VALERIA, MORLINO, LEONARDO and PROFETI, STEFANIA (2006) 'Europeanisation and territorial representation in Italy', *West European Politics*, 29(4), pp. 757-783.

<sup>1780</sup> ELIAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-6. The latter element somehow replicates the arguments made by Alesina and Spolaore, although placing them in a European rather than a global context, and adds an important security dimension along with the prospect of monetary union (which was very attractive until the euro crisis).

<sup>1781</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

This promise has remained a dead letter, though, and stateless nationalist parties have grown progressively disenchanted with the idea of a Europe of the Regions.<sup>1782</sup> The EU has not given birth to new territorial hierarchies in which the regions can play as autonomous actors. Albeit weakened, state governments remain the gatekeepers of EU policy-making.<sup>1783</sup> This may have caused a radicalisation of separatist stances among the strongest regionalist and nationalist parties, since the issue of representation at the EU level has been left unaddressed, emphasising further the need to obtain statehood as a condition to have a say in EU policy-making. Even more importantly, the principle of state integrity has clearly prevailed over national self-determination in EU practice and in its set of normative principles. This has clearly been shown by the debate over Scottish independence, when the Commission repeated that the issue was a domestic matter falling outside of the Union's jurisdiction. It also pointed out that any new member arising from an eventual process of separation should apply for membership like any other candidate and even hinted that some members could veto the entry of a country arisen from a process of secession.<sup>1784</sup> Hence, although the EU has certainly offered a new opportunity structure to stateless nationalist parties, and among them our case-study ones, domestic factors have remained preponderant compared to the impact of the process of European integration.<sup>1785</sup> Furthermore, in the long run, the EU has also revealed itself to be able to be a constraint on the struggle for self-determination.

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<sup>1782</sup> GREENWOOD, JUSTIN (2011) *Interest Representation in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave) pp. 174-176.

<sup>1783</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, p. 177; KEATING, MICHAEL (2004) 'European Integration and the Nationalities Question', *Politics and Society*, 32(3), pp. 367-388; ELIAS, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>1784</sup> See: CARRELL, SEVERIN (2012) 'Barroso Casts Doubt on Independent Scotland's EU Membership Rights', *The Guardian*, September 12; PICKARD, JIM and DICKIE, MURE (2014) 'EU Commission President says Scotland membership not automatic', *Financial Times*, 16 February.

<sup>1785</sup> ELIAS, *op. cit.*, p. 140-167.

### 7.3 Support for Independence and Electoral Results

The arguments of economic victimisation and political marginalisation discussed in the previous sections have constituted the core of the discourse of the parties analysed. The socio-economic factors that have favoured the formulation of the nationalism of the rich thus are fundamental to explain the formation or revival of the case-study parties, but they are not sufficient to fully explain electoral success, or more in general, variations in electoral outcomes. Other factors need to be taken into account, with the political opportunity structure existing at different points in time and the specific electoral strategies followed by the parties as a reaction to such structure as one of the most important. Furthermore, we need to carefully distinguish between support for independence and support for these parties. Many, especially non-academic, treatments of the recent history of stateless nationalism in Western Europe claim that separatism has been on the rise in the last two decades.<sup>1786</sup> A look at Figure 7.8 and Figure 7.9 below suggests that this depends on how we define separatism and on what periods we take into account.

If we consider separatism as support for independence and the latter as a constitutional option offered to citizens within a range of alternatives including recentralisation and/or the status quo and further devolution of powers, the evolution of separatism in the last two decades has been as follows: Scotland has seen a slightly downward trend,<sup>1787</sup> Flanders a slightly upward one and only Catalonia has been characterised by a marked increase. Overall, Flanders and Scotland have displayed a stable profile, despite periodical fluctuations in the latter, while Catalonia's radicalisation is very recent. If we stop our analysis in 2007, that is, before the beginning of the recent economic crisis, the stability mentioned above appears even stronger across the three regions. As Figure 7.8 evidences, until 2007, support for independence in Catalonia was much more stable than in the following years and even slightly declining. Hence, the overall conclusion is that support for independence in the last two decades has remained limited within a specific range, radicalisation has occurred only in Catalonia, and even there only from 2008-2009 onwards. Because of lack of data in consistent form for a sufficiently long time series, we have not included Northern Italy in the charts. Fragmentary information about support for independence, however, would suggest that between 1996 and 2011, this has remained around 18-23% of the Northern Italian population.<sup>1788</sup>

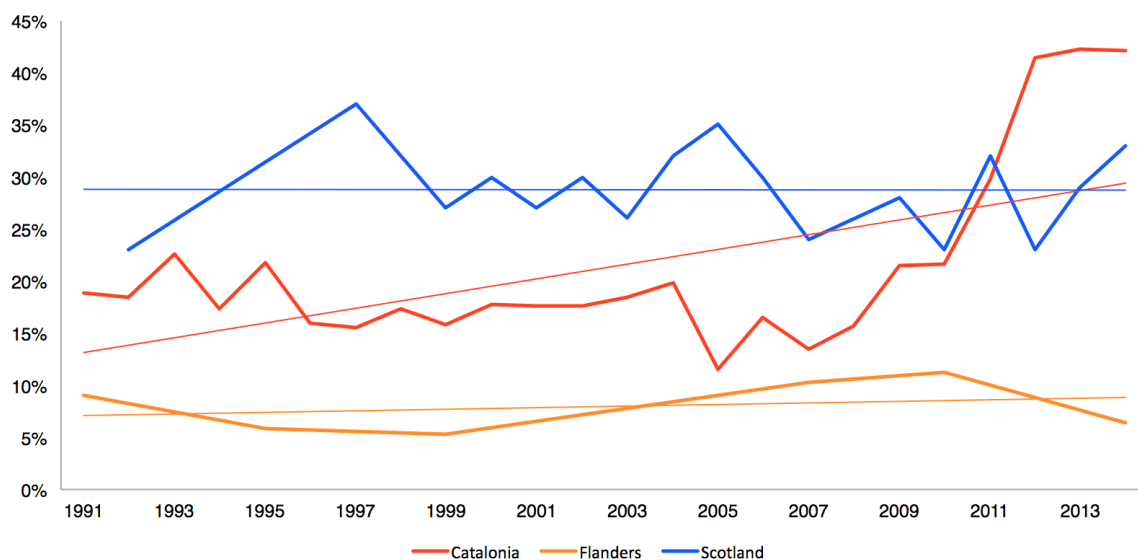
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<sup>1786</sup> See for instance: CAMPANELLA, EDOARDO (2014) 'Smaller is Better: Disintegrated Nations in an Integrated Europe', *Vox*, 12 August, <http://www.voxeu.org/article/disintegrated-nations-integrated-europe-alesina-spoloore-logic-applied> (accessed on September 26, 2015); BARDOS, GORDON (2013) 'Spectre of Separatism Haunts Europe', *The National Interest*, 17 January, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/spectre-separatism-haunts-europe-7979> (accessed on September 26, 2015); PALACIO, ANA (2012) 'Europe's Regional Revolt', *Project Syndicate*, 5 November, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/independence-calls-growing-in-catalonia-and-scotland-by-ana-palacio> (accessed on September 26, 2015).

<sup>1787</sup> The initial straight upward line in Scotland's curve is mainly due to the fact that for that period we only have data for 1992 and 1997, while after 1999 we have figures for almost every year, which also explains higher fluctuation in the second part of the chart.

<sup>1788</sup> See the figures provided by DIAMANTI (1996) *op. cit.*; BEIRICH and WOODS, *op. cit.*; and the 2011 study of the Laboratorio Analisi Politiche e Sociali, Università di Siena, quoted in D'ALIMONTE, *op. cit.*

**Figure 7.8 – Support for Independence Compared, Catalonia, Flanders and Scotland, multiple constitutional options question, 1991-2014 (percentage of regional population)\***



\* For Flanders we have used data concerning position '0' along the 0-10 scale of the 'Flanders/Belgium should decide everything' question until 2003, while regarding the independence option in the question concerning the constitutional future of the country between 2007 and 2014.

Sources: ICPS, *op. cit.*; SWYNGEDOUW and RINK, *op. cit.*; SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2014) *op. cit.*; SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2015) *op. cit.*; McEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 78; Scottish Social Attitude Survey data for 1999-2014, available at: [whatscotlandthinks.org](http://whatscotlandthinks.org) (accessed on November 30, 2014).

The perception of the evolution of separatism during about the same period, however, is very different if we compare it with the electoral fortunes of separatist parties. Figure 7.9 suggests indeed a clear radicalisation in Scotland and Flanders (when taking the VB and the N-VA together), a slight increase in Catalonia and a slight reduction in Northern Italy, although recent political trends in both these regions, and not included in the figure, suggest a strong revival of both ERC and the LN. The comparison between these two types of data simply indicates the need to clearly distinguish between voting for separatist parties and support for independence and confirms our considerations above about taking into account other factors in order to explain electoral success. Before doing that, however, we need to briefly assess the trends shown in the two figures above. As suggested by the literature on support for independence in Quebec, as well as by more recent comparative works on separatism,<sup>1789</sup> the strength of subjective national identity and the perception of the economic costs (or advantages) of independence are the two most important factors explaining support for independence. Since, with the partial exception of Scotland, in the regions under study, the advantages of independence in terms of income per capita would probably be quite high, at first glance one might wonder why support for independence has been so low. The explanation lies in the importance of dual identity, which has been prevalent in both Flanders and Catalonia, while in Northern Italy, although there are signs of the appearance and reinforcement of a distinct Northern Italian identity, this is still far

<sup>1789</sup> PINARD and HAMILTON, *op. cit.*; BLAIS and NADEAU, *op. cit.*; HOWE, *op. cit.*; SAMBANIS, *op. cit.*; SAMBANIS and MILANOVIC, *op. cit.*; SORENS, *op. cit.*



from being a clear and consolidated, hence certainly not a prevalent, reality.<sup>1790</sup> In Scotland, on the contrary, the predominant Scottish identity has been consistently stronger than a dual one, but as shown by several studies,<sup>1791</sup> it has not had a decisive impact over support for independence, because most Scottish identifiers have not perceived a stark divide between this option and devolution. In other words, despite the strength of the Scottish identity, most of the Scottish population seems to have provided only conditional support for independence.

This leads us to the economic prospects of independence. In Scotland, this has been the most important variable influencing the Yes vote in the recent referendum.<sup>1792</sup> Hence, on the one hand the SNP has been right to set the debate around it; on the other, it has lost the argument and this certainly because of Scotland's ambiguous position as a relative donor or recipient in the British fiscal system. The situations of Catalonia, Flanders and Northern Italy, by contrast, are marked by generous transfers going to other areas within the country. Therefore, there is little doubt that, by virtue of a simple economic cost-benefit analysis, independence would be an appealing scenario. Yet, apart from the identity considerations evoked above, one also needs to take into account the fact that independence is a risky option that might unleash civil conflict within the region itself and with the central government and/or other areas of the parent state. Even focusing solely on economic concerns, it may lead to disruptions of trade flows and of economic relations, as well as to capital flights and higher interest rates, with ensuing effects on growth and unemployment. Furthermore, as seen in section 7.2.3, secession can also threaten participation in the EU, thus barring these regions from privileged access to the common market and forcing changes in the currency used. All these scenarios are of course speculative, although not unreasonable, especially in the event of a unilateral secession. In this connection, the very same economic primacy that, in theory, provides the inhabitants of these regions with a strong incentive to seek independence is also a powerful motivation for central governments of the parent state to oppose it.<sup>1793</sup> Hence, independence might be a less attractive option for relatively wealthy regions than it appears at first sight.

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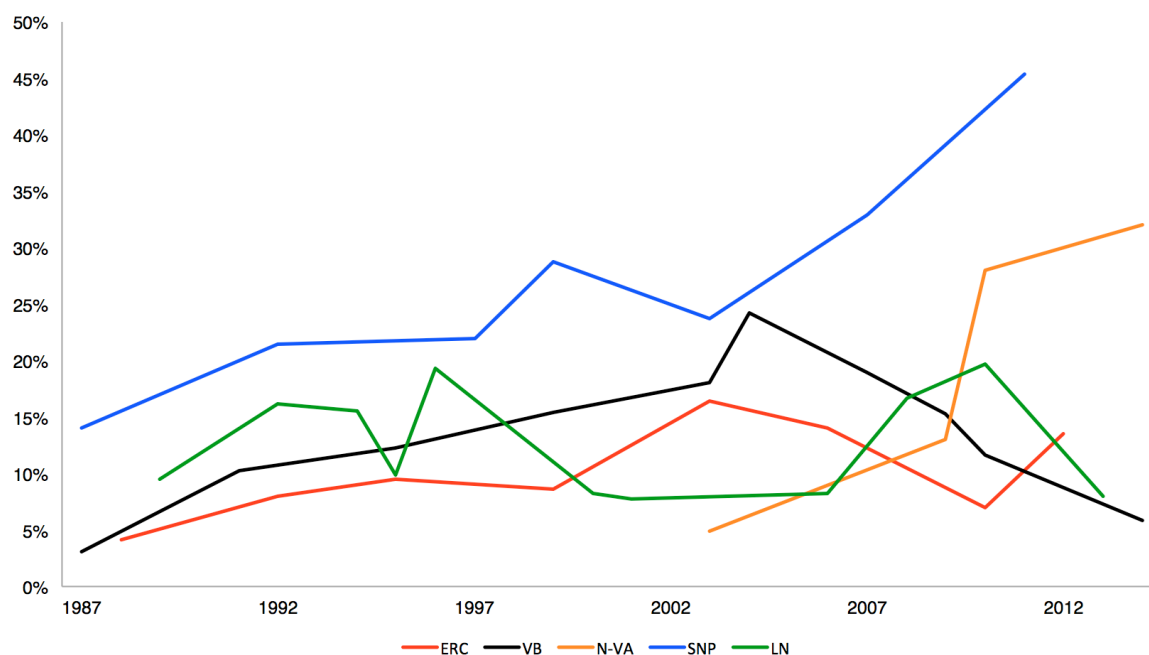
<sup>1790</sup> In Flanders, and arguably Northern Italy, not only dual, but also predominantly state national identity has remained very strong compared to substate national identity.

<sup>1791</sup> McCURONE and PATERSON, *op. cit.*, p. 74; CURTICE (2014) *Has, op. cit.*; CURTICE (2014) *op. cit.*

<sup>1792</sup> CURTICE (2014) *Has, op. cit.*

<sup>1793</sup> This would be confirmed by the current row over Catalan independence and, *a contrario*, by the British government's acceptance to let the Scottish population decide about its own destiny. Here, we do not claim at all that Spain's opposition to a Catalan referendum and British agreement to hold one in Scotland are a function of pure economic considerations, but only that these type of arguments do play an important role.

**Figure 7.9 – Electoral Results of Separatist Parties Compared, ERC, VB, N-VA, SNP and LN, regional and general elections, 1987-2014 (percentage of regional vote)**



Sources: STEWART LEITH and SOULE, *op. cit.*; THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, *Result Analysis*, <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msps/29398.aspx> (accessed on January 28, 2015); DELWIT, *op. cit.*; PAWELS, *op. cit.*; BEYENS et al., *op. cit.*; MINISTERO DEL INTERIOR, *Consulta de resultados electorales*, <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/min/areaDescarga.html?method=inicio> (accessed on January 28, 2015); MINISTERO DELL'INTERNO, *Archivio storico delle elezioni*, <http://elezionistorico.interno.it/> (accessed on February 28, 2014).

It is little wonder that in all regions most data seem to confirm a very strong demand for more devolution of powers short of independence. In Scotland, devolution has been by far the preferred constitutional option between 1992 and 2014, receiving the agreement of 54% of the Scottish population on average, against 29% for independence and 12% for recentralisation. Moreover, since the establishment of the Parliament in 1999, 65% of residents have either agreed or strongly agreed that more powers should be devolved to Scotland.<sup>1794</sup> In Catalonia, between 1991 and 2013, an average 46.3% of people living in the region have supported the status of autonomous community (which could or could not mean the status quo) and 17.6% have argued that Catalonia should become a state of a federal Spain, against 20.4% calling for full independence. Also, between 2005 and 2013 a consistent and substantial majority declared that the autonomy enjoyed by the community was not sufficient (63.4% on average).<sup>1795</sup> In Flanders, the situation has been more ambiguous, since the available statistics would suggest a demand for recentralisation up to the late 1990s, followed by a trend in support for further autonomy to the regions and communities.<sup>1796</sup> By 2010, however, there was a clear majority of 52% of the regional

<sup>1794</sup> Our calculations on McEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 78 for 1992 and 1997 data and Scottish Social Attitude Survey data for 1999-2014, available at: [whatscotlandthinks.org](http://whatscotlandthinks.org) (accessed on November 30, 2014).

<sup>1795</sup> Unfortunately, we did not find data going further back in time on this specific issue.

<sup>1796</sup> As suggested in the relevant chapter, this dynamic might have been influenced by the process of federalisation of the country, alongside with the condition of demographic and political majority of the Flemish population.

population calling for more devolution of powers and only a minority of 12% demanding the split of the country, although calls for more autonomy were much less important in 2014, probably as a result of the extensive state reform achieved in the four previous years.<sup>1797</sup> Finally, in Northern Italy, data about support for autonomy has been surprisingly lacking. Nevertheless, a 2001 ITANES survey (Italian Election Studies) showed that 86% of residents of the North agreed that regions should be given more powers and 71% that all taxes should be managed by the regions.<sup>1798</sup>

Evidence from Catalonia would suggest that radicalisation would only occur in case of a major economic crisis and if independence is perceived as a solution to the distress arising from it. This conclusion is only half true. On the one hand, it is certain that the impact of the economic crisis has not been the same in the four regions under study. Catalonia has suffered most, especially, from unemployment. Whereas this shot up from 8.9% to 23.1% – and 50.2% among the under 25 – between 2008 and 2013, it has remained comfortably below 10% in all other regions. On the other, although it is reasonable to expect less tolerance concerning the transfers in such harsh conditions, there is no straightforward reason why responsibility for the cuts to public sector employment and social services that have been made both by the Spanish government and the Catalan *Generalitat*, as well as for the economic crisis more in general, should have been attributed to the Spanish government rather than to the EU or the financial markets, or even to the Catalan government led by CiU. The reason why the protest has crystallised around the demand for self-determination is complex, but has much to do with the contemporaneous constitutional crisis, begun in 2005-2006 and intensified in 2010 with the ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal. It also owes a lot to the framing activity of some civil society organisations that, borrowing heavily on ERC's discourse, have channelled the protest into a demand for self-determination and presented independence as the key to get out of the crisis and towards a more prosperous future for the region. The strictly legalistic reaction of the Spanish state further reinforced such demands. Hence, it is not the economic crisis *per se* that has promoted independence, but rather the combination of an economic and constitutional crisis in association with the strategies pursued by specific actors channelling and opposing popular discontent.

With this argument we do not want to subscribe at all to a reductionist ethnic-entrepreneur approach, whereby the current mobilisation in Catalonia is seen as an elite driven project. On the contrary, radicalisation there has clearly been propelled by grassroots civil society organisations, and only in a later phase political parties have taken the lead. But, as in any mobilisation process, leadership and framing are important factors in order to understand specific outcomes. What instead we want to suggest is that the current surge in Catalan separatism is not a functional result of the economic crisis, but a much more complex process. This is also shown by similar events in Northern Italy and Scotland. In the former, although unemployment has been contained, the country has been badly hit by the crisis, arguably much more so than Scotland and Flanders, and especially from 2012 onwards. At the end of 2011, Italy was on the verge of financial collapse and many observers wagered it would be the next country, after Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, to require a bailout from the EU and the IMF. The technical government that followed, led by the former EU-Commissioner Mario Monti, imposed harsh austerity measures that, aiming above all at increasing revenues rather than reducing costs, had a

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<sup>1797</sup> SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2014), *op. cit.*, pp. 223-230; SWYNGEDOUW et al. (2015), *op. cit.*

<sup>1798</sup> ITANES, *op. cit.*

disastrous impact on the already fragile productivity of northern enterprises. The two following years were very tough for the manufacturing sector. By December 2013, industrial production, heavily concentrated in the areas of major support for the League, was only 80% of its 2010 level,<sup>1799</sup> or about equal to the level reached between the late-1970s and mid-1980s.<sup>1800</sup>

Yet, this dramatic impact did not lead to a clear radicalisation around the North-South fracture. As explained in chapter 6, in 2011 the LN was on an upswing and seemed poised to launch another secessionist drive. With the fall of Berlusconi's government, the party was again in the opposition and began radicalising around the protest against the new executive and its austerity policies considered detrimental to the North. The following financial scandal, however, plunged the party into a year and a half of infighting from which it emerged only by fundamentally redirecting its discourse towards an even stauncher anti-euro and anti-immigration policy. In order to save the party from virtual disappearance, the new leader, Matteo Salvini, decided to sacrifice, at least temporarily, the northern profile in order to expand in areas beyond the North. Hence, mainly for electoral purposes, the party preferred to channel popular discontent primarily against the EU rather than against the government. This was certainly due to the weakness of the Northern Italian identity compared to the Catalan one as a cleavage around which to mobilise the population. Yet, a mobilisation around national/regional lines was not an unreasonable outcome back in 2011-2012, as shown by the party's stance on the issue before the scandal and by the successful, at least partially, mobilisation of the movement for Veneto's independence arisen between 2010 and 2013.

Similarly, one would have expected a strong mobilisation for Scottish independence in the first half of the 1980s, when the Scottish economy was hit very hard by structural adjustment, with unemployment peaking at 14% in 1986, and the Conservative government promoted austerity measures that would later be remembered as strictly 'un-Scottish'. The expectation is not due so much to the bad times the region was going through, but rather to the fact that, meanwhile, oil production was at its peak. As shown in Figure 5.10, oil revenues in constant prices never went back to those levels, not even during the price hike of the end of the 2000s. And yet, until the later part of the decade, popular discontent was channelled in different directions. Politically it was mostly favourable to the Liberal-Democrats, who polled 24.5% in 1983 and 19% in 1987, close to the levels recorded by the SNP in the 1970s. But, it also gave way to a Scottish cultural renaissance unprecedented before, which captured the energies of those who were disenchanted with the way in which mobilisation had ended in the 1970s.<sup>1801</sup> The main reasons for this are that, until the late 1980s, the SNP was divided and ineffective, but also that the 1979 referendum had shown that the Scottish population was undecided about self-government.

As we have seen, we can have situations in which support for independence increases, while the electoral results of separatist parties stagnate or even plunge. This was the case, for instance, of ERC in the 2008-2011 period. Likewise, separatist parties can enjoy important breakthrough at specific elections, without any substantial change in support for

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<sup>1799</sup> The data refers to the entire country, but industrial production is mainly concentrated in the North. Figures from ISTAT, <http://dati.istat.it/#> (accessed on January, 28, 2015).

<sup>1800</sup> EVANS-PRITCHARD, AMBROSE (2013) 'Italy's industrial output falls back to 1970s', *The Telegraph*, 20 May.

<sup>1801</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, p. 377-378.

independence. This has been the case of the VB between the early 1990s and the mid-2000s, and the SNP in most of the post-devolution period. The specific political opportunity structure, along with the strategies and internal resources deployed by the parties are thus useful to understand this apparent inconsistency. The concept of political opportunity structure has been developed in the context of the study of social movements and contentious politics, as it is primarily relevant for the analysis of political challengers. Although they cannot be assimilated to social movements, our case-study parties share some of the traits typically associated with social movements, especially the radical challenge to the status quo that they claim to be willing to pursue – in the form of their threat to the territorial integrity of the parent state. The political opportunity structure available to a specific challenger at any given time can thus be defined, broadly speaking, as encompassing two main dimensions of a political system: its institutional structure (mainly the openness or closure of the political system, as well as its stability) and ‘the configuration of power among relevant actors’ within it.<sup>1802</sup>

In institutional terms, we can distinguish two fundamental elements: the electoral system and the existence, or not, of devolved institutions endowed with legislative powers. Concerning electoral rules, the sample is divided evenly between proportional systems characterised by high fragmentation (Belgium and Italy) and regimes with majoritarian tendencies (the UK and Spain).

With regard to the former group, Belgium was a two-and-half party system until the 1960s, when linguistic territorialisation led to the division of national parties along linguistic lines and, hence, to higher fragmentation. The process was furthered by the ‘crisis’ of traditional parties from the late 1970s – in part due to secularisation and the fall of ideological voting – that opened up a window of opportunity for political challengers in the 1980s.<sup>1803</sup> In this period, the country thus moved from one consociational system, based on religious and ideological pillars, to a territorial form of consociationalism grounded on linguistic segments, which furthered decentralisation and centripetal forces, progressively hollowing out the centre.<sup>1804</sup> Post-war Italy was also a divided society, although primarily along ideological lines. While the consociational label has been used to describe Italy’s political system, a more accurate analysis suggests that ‘polarisation’ rather than ‘segmentation’ was its principal feature. Yet, this led to ‘invisible consociationalism’, or *consociativismo*, as a form of hidden elite collusion, whereby group representatives denied collaboration in public, but pursued it behind closed doors and, especially, through consensus style policy-making in parliament, notably in the opaque sessions of the legislative commissions, rather than in the government.<sup>1805</sup> Both systems were characterised by proportionality, fragmentation, oversized ministerial cabinets, and the distribution of posts within state institutions according to factional (religious, linguistic or ideological) identities (*verzuiling* in Dutch, *lottizzazione* in Italian). They both became expensive, inefficient and were prone to large-scale corruption. Both advantaged insiders – although the introduction of public financing for political parties in Belgium only in 1989 *de facto* advantaged a challenger like the VB, because being already represented in

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<sup>1802</sup> KRIESI, HANSPETER (1995) ‘The Political Opportunity Structure of New Social Movements: Its Impact on Their Mobilization’, in CRAIG, JENKINS (ed.) *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press) pp. 167-168.

<sup>1803</sup> DELWIT, *op. cit.*, pp. 327-332.

<sup>1804</sup> HOOGHE (2004) *op. cit.*

<sup>1805</sup> BOOGARDS, MATTHIJS (2005) ‘The Italian First Republic: “Degenerated Consociationalism” in a Polarised Party System’, *West European Politics*, 28(3), pp. 503-520.

Parliament the party could receive funds as all others did, while in Italy such a system was already in place when the League arose – and both were weak in the face of the challenge of populist parties denouncing the elitism of traditional parties and their distance from ‘the people’. In the 1990s, corruption scandals played a fundamental role in spurring the first electoral expansion of both the VB and the LN, by exposing the extent of profiteering that had spread within state institutions and by inevitably delegitimising traditional parties.<sup>1806</sup>

While corruption scandals were not limited to these two countries, they did reach massive proportions there and especially in Italy, where they led to a restructuring unseen elsewhere of the institutional system.<sup>1807</sup> Interestingly, in these two cases, where the ‘minority status’ of the relevant stateless nation is most ambiguous because – taken in its broadest geographical definition – it in fact represents an actual, or a near, majority, consociationalism and proportionality, which are usually deemed to guarantee protection to minorities, have been a potent cause of criticism against the system and fuelled the first electoral breakthrough of these two anti-system parties.

There were considerable corruption scandals also in Spain in the early and mid-1990s that ERC exploited in order to delegitimise both the Socialist government of Felipe Gonzales and the CiU one led by Jordi Pujol, as well as to reinforce its anti-transfers rhetoric. Public revelations of political corruption favoured the first expansion of ERC, between 1988 and 1995, but not to the same extent as similar events in Italy and Belgium did for the LN and the VB. Spain has a proportional electoral system with strong majoritarian tendencies. Since the transition, the combined share of votes of the two major parties has continued to increase, thus limiting the room for other parties, especially if their support is not territorially concentrated. The system falls well short of pure bipartitism, as it has advantaged peripheral nationalist parties, especially in Catalonia, which have often offered their support to either Socialist or Popular minority governments in exchange for substantial advances in the process of devolution of powers – except for the 1982-1986, 2000-2004 and 2011-2015 legislatures, when PSOE/PP obtained absolute majorities.<sup>1808</sup> Yet, the advantage enjoyed by Catalan nationalist parties has not changed the structural status of minority of such forces in the Spanish Parliament, as the region is only allocated 13.5% of the total number of parliamentary seats. Hence, they, and especially ERC, have demanded a special status for Catalonia within state institutions, with recognition of the region’s sovereignty and specific constitutional guarantees that the Spanish majority would not be able to overrule its autonomy. The drawbacks of Catalonia’s minority status and the fundamental majoritarian nature of the Spanish democracy have become clear in the recent constitutional crisis, whereby, although a wide majority of Catalans have demanded the right to decide about their future in a referendum, these demands have remained unanswered because of the fundamental opposition of the majority of members of the Spanish Parliament. Contrary to Catalan parties, until the establishment of the Scottish Parliament, the SNP has consistently suffered from ‘vote

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<sup>1806</sup> Corruption did not come out of nowhere, but rather was a widespread practice in the 1970s and early 1980s. What changed was its social acceptance. The increasing intolerance towards corruption was due both to international factors, such as the end of the Cold War and increased economic competition, and internal ones, especially the inefficiency of the system. Hence, the VB and the LN were not only favoured by the changed perception that led to the scandals, but they were also a way of expressing such reduced tolerance.

<sup>1807</sup> PUJAS and RHODES, *op. cit.*; DESCHOUWER (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 244-245; MAESSCHALCK and VAN DE WALLE, *op. cit.*

<sup>1808</sup> CAPO GIOL, JORDI (2008) ‘Les élections en Espagne: continuité et changement’, *Pouvoirs*, n. 124, pp. 47-62.

inefficiency'. The very important distortions introduced by the first-past-the-post electoral system badly impacted on the capability of the party to transform votes into seats. Hence, although recording important electoral results in the 1970s and the 1990s, the party had no governing potential and very little blackmail potential – except for the 1974-1979 period.<sup>1809</sup> Hence, the strong majority character of the British democracy certainly contributed to the development of the perception of a democratic deficit in Scotland, but it also harshly penalised the SNP in its electoral competition against Labour. At the same time, the UK system has been characterised by much less 'constitutional dogmatism' than Spain and the recognition of a special status for Scotland, albeit often implicit, has been greater. Although receiving political autonomy later than Catalonia, Scotland was guaranteed informal autonomy since the very beginning of the Union. The first electoral success of the SNP led fairly quickly to the organisation of a referendum on the establishment of a legislative assembly. Later, although Margaret Thatcher's interpretation of the UK as a unitary state did fuel a sense of minoritisation in Scotland, her government openly suggested that if Scotland was not content with the Union it just had to vote for the SNP.<sup>1810</sup> Finally, the holding of the 2014 referendum (not the results) clearly recognised Scotland's sovereignty – meant as a right to decide about its future.

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament and the adoption of a mixed, majority and proportional, electoral formula for the election of MSPs has greatly reduced the effects of the vote inefficiency suffered by the SNP.<sup>1811</sup> Overall, the transition that occurred in Scotland reflects wider trends across the sample. Regional legislative institutions have provided better representation to these parties, which have used them as platforms to promote their separatist agenda through gradualist strategies, and have created new political arenas that have shaped debate differently from those at the centre. The SNP is an illuminating case in this respect. The party has been transformed by the establishment of the Parliament and mainly because this has enabled it to have much greater political impact than before. Within such improved institutional environment, the party definitively moved to a clear gradualist position that has accepted the new legislative body as a stepping-stone towards full sovereignty. Such an understanding of independence as a process rather than an event,<sup>1812</sup> combined with a clarification of the social-democratic profile of the party and the use of an instrumental argument for self-determination, whereby independence would be a tool to achieve better economic performance and democracy rather than as an end in itself, allowed the National Party to attract a wider pool of voters, made up of 'conditional nationalists' and people deluded with Labour's performance. This explains why the party managed to win a relative majority in the Scottish Parliament in 2007 and an absolute one in 2011 without any major grassroots radicalisation for independence. The same strategy as in Scotland has been successfully followed by the N-VA. Until 2014, the Alliance has been very skilful in playing an oppositional role at the federal level – effectively delaying the negotiations for the formation of the government coalition both in 2007-2008 and 2010-2012 – while being in government at the regional one. It has thus been able to attract electors willing to support a strong stand in favour of more autonomy short of independence – by playing on the idea of confederalism and using an instrumental argument similar to the SNP's – and to find a niche on the right side of the Flemish political spectrum between the VB and the liberals

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<sup>1809</sup> MITCHELL (2009) *op. cit.*

<sup>1810</sup> FINLAY (2005) *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355.

<sup>1811</sup> HASSAN (2011) *op. cit.*; CURTICE (2009) *op. cit.*; MACKAY (2009) *op. cit.*

<sup>1812</sup> HEPBURN (2009) *op. cit.*

of the *OpenVLD*, while avoiding the trap in which the VB fell in the late 2000s of not being able to have a political impact because of its formal exclusion from governing positions at any level.<sup>1813</sup> The same happened within ERC during the leadership of Carod-Rovira (1996-2008), which postulated the need to combine national and social struggle through the idea of the *catalanisme del benestar* and by taking part in the regional government in order to cater for the everyday life of the Catalans, rather than just for the long-term goal of independence. The party thus joined two government coalitions at the head of the Autonomous Community, playing a fundamental role in initiating the reform of the Statute of Autonomy and proposing the transformation of Spain into a plurinational federation.

The role of autonomous legislative institutions, however, has been less important in the success of the VB. It has never seriously tried to become a governing party, but rather profited from its anti-system position, its monopoly of the Flemish Right (until the coming of the N-VA) and the *cordon sanitaire* raised around it by the other parties in order to play a ‘whip role’. This has required the maintenance of an extremist profile, both with regard to the nationalist and the right-wing dimensions. A change seemed to be under way around the mid-2000s, when, according to some, the party took advantage of the Court of Appeal’s ruling to implement a long-planned softening of its stand and image in order to move to the centre.<sup>1814</sup> However, whether such a move towards a more moderate nationalist and right position would have eventually been realised is impossible to say, because the rise of the N-VA simply filled the gap in the moderate nationalist and right-wing end of the Flemish political spectrum.

The role of devolved institutions in the case of the LN is ambiguous, although they do seem to have had an impact, notably in terms of their fragmentation. Unlike the other parties in the sample, the LN could not profit from a unified institutional structure ruling over the entire North – the so-called northern macro-region – on which to focus its electoral effort without having to compromise in Rome. While the N-VA, ERC and the SNP can have a decisive political impact by ruling at the regional level, without having to take part in federal coalitions at the centre, the League has been able to do so only in a series of uncoordinated regional institutions representing only part of the diverse northern landscape. It has thus had no alternative but to form alliances in Rome with parties defending interests often at odds with those of its constituency, thus having to trade electoral power for executive power. As a consequence, the party has alternated confrontational and compromising stands, with the former prevailing during the 1990s and the latter during the 2000s, when it took part in two government coalitions with Berlusconi’s FI (later PdL), but generally recording better electoral results in the first case (as in 1992 and 1996). In a way, the LN has played both the role of the VB and the N-VA – as conveyed by the slogan ‘fighting and governing League’ – according to the need and the opportunity structure of the time.

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<sup>1813</sup> SWYNGEDOUW and ABTS, *op. cit.*; for a more in-depth comparison of the gradualist strategies pursued and the instrumental arguments for independence made by the SNP and the N-VA see DALLE MULLE, EMMANUEL (2015) ‘New Trends in Justifications for National Self-Determination: Evidence from Scotland and Flanders’, *Ethnopolitics*, DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2015.1008786.

<sup>1814</sup> ERK (2005) ‘From Vlaams’, *op. cit.* In 2004, the party was judged guilty of violation of the law against racism and xenophobia. It was then forced to re-organise in a new form, with a programme respectful of the law, to be eligible for public funding.



The electoral success of these parties however is also a function of the configuration of power among the other relevant players in the political arena. Thus, the SNP has profited from the decline of the Conservatives in the region, which, despite being largely due to historical circumstances, also depends on specific strategies pursued by the Tories.<sup>1815</sup> Similarly, ERC's breakthrough was delayed by the dominant position held by CiU and its leader, Jordi Pujol, in Catalan politics up to the early 2000s and the stability that it provided to the overall system. In 2003, the party profited from the exhaustion of CiU's domination, and the change at the top of that party, as well as from the PP's opposition to further devolution during the majority government of José Maria Aznar between 2000 and 2004.<sup>1816</sup> The VB on the contrary could take advantage of an unexploited niche on the right-wing of the Flemish spectrum and, especially, of the virtual monopoly over the issue of immigration, while the N-VA provided a liberal-conservative nationalist alternative to the VB itself, more moderate along both the nationalist and ideological axes, but still radical enough to convince most of its voters that it is the best party to bring about an institutional reform of the country and defend the Flamish interest.<sup>1817</sup> Finally, the LN gained ground against traditional parties – especially the Christian Democracy – weakened by corruption scandals in the early 1990s, but later heavily competed with Berlusconi's FI for northern liberal-conservative votes and had to move further to the right. The revival experienced in 2008 and, more recently, in 2014, have equally been influenced by the activities of the other actors making up the Italian Right. On the former occasion, the League collected the discontent of part of the constituencies of *Alleanza Nazionale* and FI after their merger into the PdL.<sup>1818</sup> The latter instead has seen the LN partially filling the void left by the PdL's collapse.

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<sup>1815</sup> PATERSON (2006) *op. cit.*, pp. 63-64; CURTICE (2012) *op. cit.*, pp. 119-123.

<sup>1816</sup> DAVIS, *op. cit.*

<sup>1817</sup> SWYNGEDOUW and ABTS, *op. cit.*

<sup>1818</sup> BIORCIO (2010) *op. cit.*



## Conclusion

This research project has inquired into the nationalism of the rich that we have defined as an ideology that aims to put an end to the exploitation of a wealthy nation – or so represented by the parties analysed – and supposedly carried out by poorer regions and/or inefficient state structures. The nationalism of the rich is made up of two major arguments: one relating to economic victimisation whereby the relevant nation is held back by a more backward core and exploited through the system of social redistribution of the parent state; and one of political marginalisation whereby the victimisation of the national community is carried out through more subtle ways than open discrimination and oppression which have taken different forms in the each case study: the lack of recognition of its status as a nation for Catalonia; an imbalance between the political and economic power of some areas of recent industrialisation in Northern Italy; the provincialisation of a formal equal partner in a union state, first, and the unitarist tendencies of successive Conservative governments, later, in Scotland; the frustration of the ‘majoritarian illusion’ of a political majority on the part of a minority protected by ‘excessive’ constitutional safeguards in Flanders.

The first claim that we have made consists in the assertion that the nationalism of the rich is a novelty in the history of nationalist discourse. By reducing it to the basic idea of an advanced periphery held back by a more backward core, we have looked for precedents in the past. Guided by theoretical works suggesting that nationalism most often originated in backward peripheries, we searched for exceptions to this rule fitting our definition of the nationalism of the rich. Likely candidates such as Czech and Hungarian nationalisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Hapsburg Empire, or Italian nationalism in Lombardy under Austrian rule before 1859, or again Belgian nationalism between 1815 and 1830, did not stand up to scrutiny. While the first two cannot qualify as an advanced periphery compared to their respective centres and nationalist forces did not define the debate in these terms, the third simply ignored the Austrian Empire in any discussions about modernity and did not produce a consistent Lombard interest. The fourth did display some grievances concerning the greater vigour of the Belgian economy as compared to the northern part of the Low Countries, but these arguments remained marginal and inchoate. What did represent instead a forerunner of the nationalism of the rich were the nationalist movements that arose in Catalonia and the Basque Country between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. There we have a clear claim of a periphery being more modern than the centre and feeling held back by this latter. In the Catalan case, this argument is made more interesting by the idea that the strings coming with Castilian domination were much more intolerable on account of the recent economic rise of the region after centuries of economic slump, which reproduces a dynamic identified – although much later – in all the other case studies. However, Catalan, and even more so Basque, nationalism at the time cannot be considered more than forerunners because their arguments only marginally concerned fiscal exploitation, but rather referred to the traditional need to ensure protection for the local industry from foreign competition through trade tariffs, which clearly conveys a dependence on the wider market offered by the parent state which is nowhere to be found – and is even in contradiction – with the discourse of the nationalism of the rich as defined here.

The four central chapters of this dissertation have provided each a case study, focused on the analysis of the discourse and strategies of a separatist party – two in chapter four –

that has contributed a specific formulation of the nationalism of the rich. The examination has been conducted at three main levels of analysis. The first consisted in the dissection of the arguments of the nationalism of the rich and their evolution over time, by means of a study of the parties' propaganda divided in six major thematical dimensions – economic and political relationship with the parent state, definition of the nation, ideological profile, position on immigration and attitudes towards Europe and the EU. The second provided an inquiry into the socio-economic contexts that have favoured the formation of these arguments, and their success, or not, focusing on the core claims of economic victimisation and political marginalisation. Here, we have tried to explain why the nationalism of the rich arose at a specific point in time in the propaganda of the case-study parties and what has been its evolution. The third looked at the relationship between support for independence and the electoral results of the case study parties. The ultimate aim of this section has been to gauge how much of the evolution of these two phenomena has been influenced by the factors favouring the formation of the arguments of the nationalism of the rich and how much by other factors. Reproducing this three-step procedures, chapter seven has brought together the main findings of each case study and provided a wider comparative perspective, introducing, when possible, references and examples from contexts not included in our sample, and dealing more extensively with external process left in the background in the case studies such as globalisation and European integration. For reasons of space, here we limit ourselves to summarise the main conclusions reached in these comparative chapter. Before exposing the findings however it is important to remember that the Scottish National Party is a deviant case and that most of the points made here apply to it only in part.

At the level of discourse, the most important discursive strategy adopted by the case-study parties consists of a cultural-determinist argument, resembling a popularised version of Weber's the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, whereby the economic success of the relevant nation would descend from its extraordinary work-ethic and entrepreneurialism, which would justify it to reject state solidarity without being accused of selfishness. Indeed, the very same notion of solidarity, as applied by the parent state, is put into question, arguing that the fiscal transfers realised through the system of social redistribution have financed dependency and corruption, rather than true solidarity and endogenous growth. In this connection, the economic argument at the core of the nationalism of the rich has turned what in other contexts would be an inter-personal dispute over redistribution into an inter-territorial one. In most cases, this has gone along with a claim to represent a local constituency of SMEs that would embody the economic values of thrift and entrepreneurship at the core of the parties' formulation of the relevant national identity. Hence, to some extent, the argument of economic victimisation reproduces the rhetoric of the 'producing people' used by North American populist parties and centred around the idea of 'the existence of a noble and hardworking middle class that is constantly in conflict with malicious parasites which are lazy and guilty, and found at both the top and bottom of the social order'.<sup>1819</sup> While the LN, N-VA and VB clearly fit this category, ERC represents a left-wing version focusing on the 'enemies from above' represented by unaccountable state bureaucrats and political elites nourishing dependence in other Spanish regions. The SNP in turn is once again a deviant case, since despite having represented Scotland as a nation of hard-working and talented people, it has consistently lacked a SMEs constituency. What is common to all cases however is that the

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<sup>1819</sup> JAMIN, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

transfers – and oil revenues in the case of the SNP – have acted as a trump card that has enabled the party to present a bright future in an independent country endowed with unlimited resources to finance welfare and boost growth. In this way, to different extents, most of these parties have made an instrumental case in favour of independence that has postulated external self-determination as a means, rather than an end in itself, and precisely as a means to ensure solidarity and efficiency in a context of high international competition – as already pointed out by Keating with reference to the wider context of the rise of nationalism in advanced economies.<sup>1820</sup>

The arguments of economic victimisation have gone along with claims of political marginalisation that have, however, assumed peculiar features in each case study. Hence, it is difficult to identify common patterns across the sample. Yet, we can point to a subdivision into two groups. While the parties representing national communities holding a clear minority position within the parent state – ERC and the SNP – have based their claims on the denial of adequate recognition for their status as a distinct polity, therefore calling for special rights, those representing less clear minorities, if not outright majorities – as the LN, the N-VA and the VB – have rather complained about the measures of affirmative action taken to advantage other groups within the state over them. In some of the cases, the condition of marginalisation, rather than oppression or discrimination, is also clear from the adoption of gradualist strategies accepting devolution as a step towards full sovereignty. More in general, all parties have accepted to attain their objectives through democratic means and from within the existing institutions of the parent state. They have also attempted to reduce perceptions of the possible negative outcomes associated with separation by outlining plans to achieve smooth consensual divorces rather than violent, radical and even unilateral ruptures; accepting, and in some cases even eagerly embracing participation in the EU and in wider processes of trade liberalisation; trying to maintain a relaxed attitude towards the central government and/or representatives of other regions.

The socio-economic conditions that have favoured the formation of the nationalism of the rich in the regions where the case study parties have acted are varied and often linked to the interaction of contextual variables that is very hard to see repeated in other contexts exactly in the same way. However, by putting together the elements that do appear in all, or at least most cases, we can point to some explanatory factors. Once again, Scotland needs to be treated as a deviant case for which the considerations below apply only in part. First, the transfers denounced by these parties do exist, are considerable, persistent and generally accompanied by overcompensation effects and lack of economic convergence. In Flanders, Northern Italy – and in a way also Scotland – they also are the result of a recent reversal of relative economic conditions between territories of the parent state, whereby a former poor area acquired economic primacy leading to demands for change in the relative distribution of powers within the country. In Catalonia a similar dynamic can be seen at play in the forerunner movements of the late nineteenth century. In a more comparative perspective, what is interesting to note is that, at the European level, similar imbalances are mostly displayed by capital regions, which are unlikely to experience feelings of political marginalisation. The only exceptions are represented by the Balearic Islands, where the main explanation lies in the high identification of the local population with Spain, and by the German *Länder* of Bavaria and Baden Württemberg. While

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<sup>1820</sup> KEATING (1998) *op. cit.*, pp. 74-78.

considerations in line with those made for the Balearic Islands apply to the latter, Bavaria did produce a form of mild nationalism of the rich embodied by the discourse of the local Christian Social Union, which has dominated politics for the entire post-Second World War period. The party, however, never put into question German unity and no other strong secessionist force has arisen. This is probably due to the institutional peculiarities of the German federation which does not have a strong centre, guarantees a much more extensive participation of the *Länder* in federal policy-making, and provides safeguards against possible overcompensation effects brought about by the system of inter-territorial solidarity.<sup>1821</sup>

But what appears to be more important in all cases is that the saliency of the transfers increased in tandem with situations of public policy failure and worsening public accounts, with ensuing increases in debt, deficit and taxation. Although from the mid-1970s on this was a general trend across most of Western Europe, the countries dealt with in our case studies, and, above all, Belgium, Italy and Spain, did record some of the most radical trends across the continent in the period between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. Again, Germany is a useful counter-example here, since despite showing similar advanced peripheries recording sizable fiscal imbalances and patterns of uneven development, it displayed much healthier public finances throughout the same period, which contributes to explaining the weakness of the nationalism of the rich in this context.

In a wider historical perspective, however, the role of the transfers and of public finance point to a much more fundamental and long-term factor explaining the rise of the nationalism of the rich in the last quarter of the twentieth century as well as its absence in previous years. This is the establishment across Western Europe, mostly in the 30 years between 1945 and 1975, of extensive forms of social redistribution and state intervention in the economy underpinned by the dominance of Keynesian economic theories. The welfare state was based on the idea of national solidarity and, at the same time, was used as a powerful nation-building tool. The unprecedented level of prosperity that it delivered along with the faith in the macro-economic capacity of state interventionism put economic performance at the core of government legitimacy, thus accounting for the importance of economic considerations in the nationalism of the rich. What is often forgotten is that most welfare states were built during a period of extraordinary economic growth that made the establishment of such extensive forms of redistribution virtually costless from a political perspective. Yet, when the growth engine began to falter in the 1970s, the costs became increasingly visible. One reaction consisted in the neoliberal revolution initiated in the US and the United Kingdom in the late 1960s, leading to the Thatcher and Reagan governments in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Another version however consisted in the couching of the fiscal protest contained in the neo-liberal critique in the form of the socio-tropic arguments of economic victimisation examined in the previous chapters. This nationalist interpretation of the fiscal protest has enabled even a left-wing party such as ERC to adopt such anti-statist stand. On the other hand, the more or less explicit cultural-determinist argument about the economic success of the relevant communities has allowed these parties to criticise redistribution within the parent state without necessarily rejecting the welfare state altogether. Be it a pure rhetorical device or a strongly felt belief, the

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<sup>1821</sup> The system of calculation of transfers from one German *Land* to the others foresees a guarantee whereby a contributor state can never see its fiscal capacity fall below the national average because of its contribution, thus limiting overcompensation effects.

representation of the nation as endowed with an exceptional hard-working ethos and abundant excess financial resources has enabled the parties to portray independence as a way out of the dilemma between solidarity and efficiency arisen with the end of the extraordinary growth recorded during the *trente glorieuses*. In a way, the transfers and the cultural determinist argument hold the promise of reproducing those exceptional conditions in an independent country. The SNP is again an exception as its arguments did not assume the form of fiscal protest and were rather reinforced by the neoliberal ‘assault’ brought by Margaret Thatcher against Scotland. Yet, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the SNP reaped the profits of the crisis of expectations that state interventionism had contributed to create. Also, in a general context of British decline, oil did seem to offer a new lease of life to the unprecedented levels of well being to which the population had grown accustomed and has remained a kind of guarantee of a better future in an independent Scotland.

Yet, in the case studies we have made clear that a fiscal transfer is not sufficient to bring about the rhetoric of the nationalism of the rich, as identity and institutional factors are equally necessary. In most of these cases, the nationalism of the rich profited from the pre-existence of a fully-fledged national identity. In Northern Italy, this built upon an entrenched but vague perception of a cultural segmentation between the North and the South of the country. The process, however, has not led to the formation of a new national identity, although territorial attachment to the North has been reinforced. Hence, the nationalism of the rich has mostly been a re-interpretation of existing identities, rather than a complete innovation. These existing identities offered a necessary framework to interpret fiscal imbalances along national lines, linking them to perceptions of political marginalisation. Furthermore, the demands for autonomy formulated by these, and other, nationalist parties and organisations have led to the creation of regional institutions that, while assuaging conflict and successfully acting as nation-building tools aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the parent state, have also offered a suitable platform to separatist parties. In most cases, these have adopted gradualist strategies enabling them to have an impact on policy-making, while, at the same time, avoiding compromise at the central level and leaving them open the possibility to lament the limitations of the devolved schemes. The result has been a situation of ‘permanent tension’ towards ever further devolution of powers.

All this has been furthered by the external processes of globalisation and European integration, although their role should not be uncritically accepted. Economic globalisation, defined as increasing trade openness, has certainly created a more suitable environment for the separatist drives of our case study parties. However, as most of the studies on the impact of globalisation on separatism and demand for sovereignty have made clear, it does so by exacerbating contextual factors and creating new opportunity structures for smaller nations rather than by creating the underlying causes themselves. Furthermore, globalisation can also create powerful centripetal forces, as for instance through the need for stronger stabilisation mechanisms against asymmetric and unpredictable shocks. That said, globalisation did have an impact on the nationalism of the rich and mainly in the three following ways: by intensifying international competition and providing more leverage to mobile capital as compared to less mobile labour, globalisation has contributed to reducing the fiscal and monetary latitude of governments, as well as to putting under stress welfare expenses with obvious consequences on national solidarity; trade liberalisation might reduce the ‘optimal’ size of countries thus creating a more enabling

environment for secession, especially for prosperous nations; coinciding with the transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism and contributing to increasing interregional disparity, globalisation has promoted the development of regional economies. Furthermore, contrary to popular belief, globalisation has made the role of governments more, rather than less, important. As capital is more mobile and competition higher, the performance of state institutions in delivering high-quality public goods in the most efficient way has become more salient than ever. This is also the case with regard to the process of European integration. As the EU plays an ever bigger role in the life of citizens by influencing domestic legislation and, at the same time, the role of state governments as the main gate keeper has not fundamentally changed, having a direct say in the decision-making process becomes ever more important and requires independent statehood. Likewise, by providing an overarching institutional structure ensuring security and participation in a wider market than the national one, the EU has certainly reduced the perception of the costs associated with independence. Yet, as in the case of globalisation, the EU can also be a source of powerful constraints on the activities of separatist parties, as shown by the European Commission's repeated warning to the SNP that an independent Scotland will have to reapply for membership.

Finally an analysis of the relationship between the arguments of the nationalism of the rich, support for independence and the electoral results of the parties analysed enables us to draw three main conclusions: while economic victimisation and political marginalisation make up the ethos of the parties, they do not necessarily explain their electoral success; furthermore, support for the parties is not necessarily related to support for independence; finally, in line with the results obtained by studies on the demand for sovereignty in Quebec, stateless national identity and perceptions of the economic consequences of independence are the main variables explaining support for independence. With regard to the first, institutional factors and the political opportunity structure available to each party at any given point in time are often more powerful explanatory factors in order to explain specific electoral outcomes, while the arguments of the nationalism of the rich, and their underlying conditions, are more useful to account for the parties' formation, or revival. The specific strategies adopted by the parties are also fundamental in order to explain electoral success. In this connection, the adoption of well-rounded ideological profile including issues going beyond self-determination have been key in enabling the parties to expand their electorate beyond the core of unconditional nationalist supporters. Also, in all cases except for Catalonia after 2009-2010, there has been no radicalisation in favour of independence and increased devolution has been the population's preferred constitutional option. Hence, the adoption of gradualist strategies has similarly enabled the parties to attract a wider pool of voters. The dynamic currently ongoing in Catalonia would suggest that a major economic crisis is a necessary prerequisite for mass-support for independence. The available evidence however is not sufficient to draw this conclusion. Other situations of major economic distress – admittedly not quite as dramatic, but still of relevant magnitude – have been recorded in Scotland during the 1980s as well as in Northern Italy during the recent economic crisis. Yet, in the former they have not led to overt political challenges to the integrity of the UK, although support for independence did increase during that decade. In the latter, they have only lately been seized upon by the League, but, because of internal reasons explained in the relevant chapter, they have not been channelled towards the goal of Padanian independence, but rather towards a fundamental questioning of the project of European integration. All this points to the need to recognise the role of agency in framing economic



and political issues. What is important in order for the nationalism of the rich in its separatist version to be successful is a perception that the economic distress suffered by the relevant community is due to the behaviour of the central government, that independence is achievable and that it would deliver considerably better economic prospects. Such perceptions are not obvious but rather shaped by the way actors talk about things and events, and by the way the public accepts or internalises them.

Finally, although the electoral success of these parties does not necessarily coincide with substantial changes in support for independence, such successes seem to show a novelty compared to previous decades, that is: voting for a separatist party is no longer taboo and, generally speaking, independence, although not a majority option in most of the regions analysed, is nevertheless a subject of discussion, even a possible outcome in the near future. In other words, what these parties have achieved through their different strategies is a 'normalisation' of separatism that was unprecedented before. The acceptance of democratic means to bring this goal about, the reassurance that it would be implemented through a smooth and orderly process and the use of instrumental arguments for independence, as well as the existence of a larger institutional structure embodied by the EU that, at least at the level of discourse, can be thought of as reducing the costs of separation go a long way to explaining such an important change.



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## Annex 1: Biographies

**Annemans, Gerolf Emma Jozef** (1958– ): a lawyer, he joined the VB in 1985 and became a member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in 1987, where he sat until 2014. He currently is a member of the European Parliament. Annemans led the party between 2012 and 2014.

**Barrera, Heribert** (1917–2011): an academic chemist and physicist, he began his political activity in the 1930s and, after about a decade of exile in France, he came back to Catalonia in 1952, where he reorganised ERC in clandestinity. He was ERC's Secretary General (1976–1987), Member of the Spanish Parliament (1977-1980), and Member of the Catalan Parliament (1980–1988), holding the position of President of the Parliament from 1980 to 1984. In 1991, he was elected to the European Parliament, where he sat until 1994 and President of ERC, position that he held until 1995.

**Bossi, Umberto** (1941– ): an electronic technicians by formation, he founded the Lombard and the Northern League, which he led until 2012. He was elected Member of the Italian Senate (1987-1992), Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1992-2004 and 2008-2013) and Member of the European Parliament (2004-2008). He was Minister for Institutional Reforms and Devolution (2001–2005) and Minister of Federal Reforms (2008–2011). In 2012 he resigned from the position of LN's Federal Secretary because of a financial scandal that hit the party and members of his family, notably his youngest son Renzo. He currently is Federal President of the LN.

**Bourgeois, Geert Albert** (1951– ): a lawyer and former member of the *Volksunie* and party chairman (2000–2001), he later founded the N-VA and was party chairman from 2001 to 2004. He has served as Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs, Foreign Policy, Media and Tourism (2004–2008). He was Vice-Minister-President of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Administrative Affairs, Local and Provincial Government, Civic Integration, Tourism and the Vlaamse Rand (2009–2014) and currently is Minister-President of Flanders and Minister for Foreign Policy and Immovable Heritage (since 2014).

**Carod-Rovira, Josep-Lluís** (1952– ): a philologist by formation, he was active in politics since his young age. After many years in the extra-parliamentary separatist Left he joined ERC in the late 1980s and became Secretary General first (1996–2004) and President later (2004-2008). He was Member of the Catalan Parliament (1988-2010), First Minister of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia (2003–2004) and vice-President of the *Generalitat* (2006–2010). He left ERC in 2011.

**Colom, Angel** (1951 – ): founder of *La Crida*, he joined ERC in the late 1980s and was appointed Secretary General of the party (1989–1996). In 1996, he left in order to found the Party for Independence. He joined *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC) in 2000. He was a member of the Catalan Parliament between 1988 and 1999.

**Craxi, Benedetto 'Bettino'** (1934–2000): former Secretary of the Italian Socialist Party, he was Prime Minister (1983–1987) and a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1972–1994). After having been put under official investigation in the framework of the *Bribesville* enquiry, he sought refuge in Tunisia to avoid being arrested, where he died in 2000.

**Crawford, Douglas George** (1939–2002): Scottish politician and journalist, former Industrial Correspondent for the *Glasgow Herald*. He served as SNP Director of Communications in the late 1960s before becoming a Vice-Chairman of the party in the early 1970s. He was elected a Member of the British Parliament for Perth and East Perthshire between 1974 and 1979.

**Crispi, Francesco** (1818–1901): one of the fathers of the Risorgimento, he helped design the Expedition of the Thousands. He was a member of the Italian Parliament from 1861 until his death and Prime Minister of the Kingdom in the years 1887–1891 and 1893–1896.

**De Wever, Bart Albert Liliane** (1970– ): graduate in History at the University of Leuven, before becoming a professional politician, he collaborated as a researcher to the *New Encyclopedia of the Flemish Movement*. He joined the *Volksunie* in the early 1990s and at the split opted for the N-VA. He has been chairing the party since 2004, the year in which he was elected to the Flemish Parliament (2004–2007 and 2009–2014). He also was a Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (2007–2009) and the Belgian Senate (2010–2013). He was elected mayor of Antwerp in 2013 and Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in 2014.

**Dewinter, Philip Michel Frans ‘Filip’** (1962 – ): a journalist by formation, he founded a few youth nationalist organisations such as the *Vlaamse Studenten Actie Groep* (Flemish Student Action Group) and the *Nationalistisch Jong Studenten Verbond* (Nationalist Young Students League), before joining the VB in 1983. He was President of the VB Youth movement (1987–1989), Member of the Belgian Parliament (1987–1995), Member of the Flemish Parliament (1995–2014) and Member of the Belgian Senate (2010–2014).

**Dillen, Karel Cornelia Constantijn** (1925–2007): an employee working at the Antwerp Taxi Company, he founded the VB and was President of the party until 1996. He formerly was a member of the *Volksunie*, but later founded the nationalist organisation *Were Di* and directed the newspaper *Dietsland Europa*. He was a Member of the Belgian Parliament (1978–1987), of the Belgian Senate (1987–1989) and of the European Parliament (1989–2003).

**Ewing, Winifred Margaret ‘Winnie’** (1929– ): Scottish lawyer and icon of the SNP. She won the historic by-election of Hamilton in 1967 and was a Member of the British Parliament in the periods 1967–1970 and 1974–1979. She also was Member of the European Parliament (1979–1999), before becoming a Member of the Scottish Parliament (1999–2004). She was SNP President between 1987 and 2005.

**Geens, Gaston** (1931–2002): a lawyer and an economist by formation, he was a senior member of the Flemish Christian-Democratic Party and held the position of Minister-President of Flanders between 1981 and 1992. He had previously been Belgian Minister of Financial Affairs (1977–1980) and Minister for Cultural and Scientific Policy (1974–1977).

**Happart, José** (1947– ): an agricultural technician, he became a leading member of the Walloon Movement. His election as mayor of the municipality of *Voeren/Fourons* in 1987 triggered a controversy concerning the use of languages in municipalities with facilities that led to the fall of the government. He was Walloon Minister for Agriculture (1999–2004), Member of the European Parliament (1984–1999) and Member of the Walloon Parliament (1999–2009).

**Heath, Edward ‘Ted’** (1916–2005): British Conservative politician. He was leader of the Tories between 1965 and 1975, serving as leader of the opposition in 1965-1970 and 1974-1975, and as UK Prime Minister in 1970-1974. He was a member of the British Parliament between 1950 and 2001.

**Hortalà, Joan** (1942– ): an economist, he was a member of the Catalan Parliament (1980–1984) and Minister of Industry and Energy of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia (1984–1987). In 1987, he became Secretary General of ERC, but was ousted out by Angel Colom in 1989. He left ERC and founded *Esquerra Catalana*, which in 1993 joined CDC.

**Junqueras, Oriol** (1969– ): an historian and Professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, he was elected Member of the European Parliament (2009-2012) and became President of ERC in 2011. He became a Member of the Catalan Parliament in 2012 and Leader of the Opposition in the Catalan Parliament in 2013.

**Leoni, Giuseppe** (1947– ): an architect and journalist, he was one of the founders of the Lombard League. He was a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1987–1992, 1996–2001 and 2006–2013). He has been one of the main representatives of the Catholic current within the League.

**MacCormick, John** (1904–1961): Scottish lawyer, he helped form the National Party of Scotland in 1928 before leading it into a merger with the Scottish Party in 1934 to found the modern SNP. He resigned from the party in 1942, following his failure to persuade it to adopt a devolutionist stance, and kept fighting for Home Rule by founding the Scottish Convention.

**MacDonald, Margo** (1943–2014): a former teacher and broadcaster, she was an SNP Member of the British Parliament for Glasgow Govan (1973–1974). She served as Deputy Party Leader in 1974-1979. She left the Party in 1982 after the ban on the 79 Group, of which she was a member. She returned in the mid-1990s and was elected as a Member of the Scottish Parliament in 1999. Considered as a fundamentalist, she was officially expelled in 2003. She was elected again as an Independent Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Lothians region (2004–2014).

**Maragall, Pasqual** (1941– ): a graduate in law and economics, he joined the Catalan Socialist Party in the 1970s and became mayor of Barcelona in 1982 (until 1997). In 2000 he became President of the PSC (until 2007) and, in 2003, he was elected President of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia (until 2006).

**Maroni, Roberto** (1955– ): a lawyer by formation, he is President of Lombardy since 2013. He was elected Federal Secretary of the LN between 2012 and 2013. He previously held the appointments of: Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2001-2006) and Ministry of the Interior (2008-2011). He also was a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (1992–2013).

**Mas, Artur** (1956– ): an economist, he currently is Secretary General of CDC and, since 2010, President of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia. He has also been Leader of the Opposition in the Catalan Parliament (2003–2010), First Minister of Catalonia (2001–2003) and Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs of Catalonia (1997–2001).

**Maxwell, Stephen** (1942–2012): Scottish nationalist politician and intellectual, he was SNP’s Head of Press in the early 1970s. He later joined the 79 Group and authored the influential pamphlet ‘The Case for Left-Wing Nationalism’.

**McIntyre, Robert** (1913–1998): a doctor and SNP's Chairman (1947–1956). In 1945 he won the Motherwell by-election, becoming the SNP's first Member of the British Parliament ever. After his appointment as chairman, he held the position of Party President between 1958 and 1980.

**Miglio, Gianfranco** (1918–2001): a jurist and a political scientist, he was Professor of Constitutional Law at the Catholic University of Sacro Cuore, Milan. He joined the League as an 'independent' candidate between 1990 and 1994, but left in disagreement with Bossi. He was a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies between 1992 and 2001.

**Puigcercos, Joan** (1966– ): he joined ERC when he was only 21 and was appointed Secretary General of the youth branch of the party (JERC) (1987–1994). He later became Secretary General of the party (2004–2008) and President (2008–2011). He was a Member of the Spanish Parliament (2000–2006) and of the Catalan Parliament (2006–2012).

**Ridao, Joan** (1967– ): a law scholar, he joined ERC in 1988 and was a Member of the Catalan Parliament in the 1995–2008 period. Between 2008 and 2013, he was Secretary General of ERC and a Member of the Spanish Parliament.

**Rovira i Vergès, Marta** (1977– ): a lawyer by formation, she joined ERC in 2005 and became Secretary General in 2011. She was elected to the Catalan Parliament in 2012.

**Salmond, Alex:** (1954– ) he joined the SNP while at University, in 1973. He worked for a while as an oil economist at the Royal Bank of Scotland. He later was a member of the 79 Group, which caused him a temporary expulsion from the party in 1982. He became Leader of the SNP in 1990 and remained in office until 2000. He took over again as Leader in 2004 and held the position until 2014. He has been an Member of the British Parliament (1987–2010 and again since 2015), a Member of the Scottish Parliament (1999–2001 and again since 2007) and he was Scottish First Minister between 2007 and 2014.

**Salvadori, Bruno** (1942–1980): a journalist and politician, he became a prominent member of the *Union Valdostain*, an autonomist party from the Valle d'Aosta region. He had a lasting influence on the regionalist leagues that arose in the late 1970s in Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto. He prematurely died in a car crash in 1980.

**Salvini, Matteo** (1973– ): he joined the League when he was very young, in 1990. He then became actively involved as a local politician in Milan and within the League's youth movement *Giovani Padani* (Young Padanians). He worked as a journalist for the party paper *La Padania* and radio station *Radio Padania Libera* (Radio Free Padania). He was a Member of the Italian Chamber of Deputies (2008–2009) and currently sits in the European Parliament (he was a member already in 2004–2006 and 2009–2014). In 2012, he was elected Secretary of the Lombard League and became Federal Secretary of the LN in 2013.

**Sillars, Jim:** (1937– ) a former railway worker, fireman and member of the Royal Navy, he became involved in politics in the late 1960s. He joined the Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC), first, and the Labour Party later, being elected as Member of the British Parliament with the latter in 1970 (until 1979). In 1976, he founded the Scottish Labour Party, strongly in favour of a Scottish Assembly, and eventually joined the SNP in 1980, especially the 79 Group. He was again Member of the British Parliament (1988–1992) and later became Deputy Party Leader of the SNP (1991–1992).

**Sturgeon, Nicola** (1970– ): a former solicitor, she was elected to the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and she has kept the seat since. Within the Scottish government she was Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (2007–2012) and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities (2012–2014). She became Deputy Leader of the SNP in 2004 and Deputy First Minister of Scotland in 2007. In November 2014, she took over as Leader of the SNP and First Minister of Scotland after Alex Salmond’s resignations. She is the first woman to hold either position.

**Swinney, John:** (1964– ) a former insurer, he joined the SNP in 1979, at age 15. He became a Member of the British Parliament in 1997 (through 2001) and has been a Member of the Scottish Parliament since 1999. He was Leader of the SNP between 2000 and 2004. He currently is Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Employment and Sustainable Growth in the Scottish Government (since 2007) and Deputy First Minister of Scotland (since November 2014).

**Terradellas, Josep** (1899–1988): President of the Executive Council of the Catalan *Generalitat* during the Civil War, he was exiled to France where he became President of the *Generalitat* in 1952 and coordinated the anti-Francoist struggle abroad. He came back to Catalonia in 1977 as President of the re-instated *Generalitat* and remained such until the first elections in 1980.

**Thatcher, Margaret** (1925–2013): Conservative leader between 1975 and 1990, she is the longest-serving (1979–1990) Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of the twentieth century, and the only woman ever to have held the post.

**Vanhecke, Frank Arthur Hyppolite** (1959– ): former member of the *Volksunie*, he joined the VB in 1978. He worked as a press officer, first, and personal assistant of Karel Dillen at the European Parliament, thereafter. He was elected party chairman in 1996 and held the position until 2008. He was a Member of the European Parliament (1996–2014) and of the Belgian Senate (2002–2003). He withdrew to private life in 2014.

**Verhofstadt, Guy** (1953– ): active within the Flemish Liberal Party since his time at university, he became party leader in 1982 (at age 29) and Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Budget between 1985 and 1988 (he was nicknamed ‘Baby Thatcher’ for his young age and his neoliberal ideas). He then left the party for some years in the early 1990s and came back obtaining the leadership again in 1997. He was Prime Minister of Belgium between 1999 and 2008. He currently is a member of the European Parliament since 2009.

**Wilson, Gordon** (1938– ): a former solicitor, he joined the SNP in the late 1950s when he also founded Radio Free Scotland. He was Assistant National Secretary (1963–1964) and later National Secretary (1964–1971). He played a leading role in devising the SNP’s Oil Campaign in the early 1970s. He then was a Member of the British Parliament (1974–1987) and Leader of the SNP (1979–1990).

**Wilson, Harold:** (1916–1995) leader of the Labour Party between 1963 and 1976. He served as UK Prime Minister in the 1964–1970 and 1974–1976 years.





## **Annex 2: Interviews**

### **Questions**

**The following is a grid of questions used for the interviews. They are presented here in a standard form, but have been adapted to the specific circumstances of the interview (including references to the interviewee's past, party rhetoric/action, current or past relevant issues or events and so on) as well as to the answers provided by the interviewees. They have been formulated taking into account the three principles below:**

1. questions in semi-structured interviews should be 'grand tour questions', i.e., questions that *'ask respondents to give a verbal tour of something they know well'*.
2. questions should move from the easiest to the hardest one;
3. one should avoid presumptuous questions, i.e., questions implying that the interviewer already know the answer or that presume something about the interview that has not been established yet.

**Furthermore, they are centred on four clusters of discussion:**

#### **Cluster 1 – Reasons for joining the party:**

**Would you please tell me how did you happen to join the party? Is there any specific event in our life that pushed you to begin political activity and that you would like to tell me? What are the main reasons that motivated your political engagement at the time you joined the party? Have they changed or they are the same today?**

#### **Cluster 2 – View of the national community and the relevant other:**

**Can you briefly describe what you think are the main differences between Catalonia/Flanders/Padania/Scotland and the rest of the country/relevant other? Is Belgium/Italy/Spain/the UK a democracy?**

#### **Cluster 3 – Economic victimisation:**

**Do you think that Catalonia/Flanders/Padania/Scotland has been deliberately exploited?**

#### **Cluster 4 – External factors: European integration and globalisation**

**What is your opinion of the European Union? If you could change it at your own pleasure, how would you modify it? Do you think that an independent Catalonia/Flanders/Padania/Scotland would be a viable state? What would be the major threats to an independent Catalonia/Flanders/Padania/Scotland?**

## Answers

Here, a summary of all the interviews conducted, except one for which the interviewee denied authorisation, is reported. Answers are not always given in the same order as the questions of the grid above. Also, other themes have been touched upon according to the replies of the interviewees. Overall, however, the main themes addressed in the grid have been covered in almost all interviews.

### Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya

Josep-Lluís Carod Rovira (born 1952) – Former Secretary General of the Party and Former Vice-President of the *Generalitat* of Catalonia – 10/07/2013

He first does not define himself as a nationalist and distinguishes between aggressive and defensive nationalism. Citing Joan Fuster and Rovira i Virgili, he says that ‘a nationalism exists because there is another one opposing it’. He continues saying that nationalism for him is when somebody thinks that his/her own nation is the best, while this is not his opinion. He does not think that Catalonia is the best nation in the world, but it is his own nation.

His national consciousness was acquired through the perception of the distinct character of the Catalan language. One day when he was in primary school, his teacher, who taught them in Spanish, gave them as homework to write ‘Merry Christmas’ in order to make a card for their parents. He then went to his uncle, whom he looked up to, and asked him how to write it in Catalan, because that was the language they spoke at home. He then found out that his uncle did not know how to write it in Catalan. Then, when he was older, he wrote statements such as ‘long life to Catalonia’ on the walls of Terragona (all this is also written in his autobiography).

At 18 he moved to Barcelona to attend university and there he joined the PSAN (*Partit Socialista d’Alliberament Nacional*, Socialist Party of National Liberation), a separatist and Marxist organisation. He had always found that national and social oppression coincided, that is why he decided to join the PSAN. In 1973, he was put in jail because he took part in meetings of the Assembly of Catalonia. In 1980 he founded *Nacionalistes d’Esquerra* (Nationalists of the Left, NE), another left-wing pro-independence movement. Finally, in 1986, he wrote a famous article in favour of re-founding ERC. Thus, he sums up the process as such: linguistic oppression made him aware of national oppression, which, in turn, he interpreted as coinciding with a social oppression. Therefore, he is separatist in order to make Catalonia independent, progressive, open, in order to defend values such as justice, equality of opportunity, solidarity and in order to assure a democratic and material quality of life accessible to everybody.

He and his fellows decided to re-found ERC because NE failed. NE was a party of intellectuals (poets, artists, literates) and therefore it represented a minority of the Catalan society. It thus could not mobilise a wider portion of the Catalan people. ERC has had a good organisational structure and a great history. It was a good brand, but, at the same time, it was an old party. Furthermore, it came from a leftist, but not dogmatic tradition. He points out that in Catalonia there were two leftist traditions, the marxist-leninist dogmatic one and another one, social-democratic but with a libertarian nuance that has always been very important in Catalonia. It is a non-authoritarian left. Well, ERC represented this second tradition and that is why he wanted to exploit and renew that

tradition. He thus contacted Heribert Barrera, they wrote a manifesto and this is how everything began.

He has always been separatist. He believes that a state has two main functions: to ensure a good level of welfare to his citizens; to reproduce the national culture. Thus, if a state has these two functions, he quickly realised that Spain was not his own state. He thus never was either autonomist, or federalist, or anything else, because Spain has always been a state allergic to difference and therefore there never would be a possibility of co-existence between Spain and Catalonia. It is not worth spending time, money and energy to try to achieve this.

For him, language is a very important component of national identity, but it is not the main reason to seek independence. In his book entitled '2014', he set out the main arguments in favour of independence. They are four. The first is based on historical rights, Catalonia was a nation already many centuries ago and therefore should have a state like all other ancient nations in Europe. He respects this argument, but thinks that it is rather weak – by the way, he says, Spain denies the existence of historical rights for Catalonia, but it uses the same argument concerning Gibraltar. The second is based on the Catalan language and culture. This goes along with the historical rights one, but it clashes with a sociological reality whereby many Catalans do not speak Catalan in most of everyday life situations. The third is the economic argument. This is the most important one today, but it is the one that can be linked, for instance, with movements like the Northern League – that he does not like because he finds it conservative and regressive. Yet, it is undeniable that there is a huge fiscal imbalance between Catalonia and the rest of Spain. The first two reasons were the most important, he says, until about a decade ago. During this period, however, separatism was a minority movement precisely because it was only based on language and historical rights. In this connection, he points out that until about ten years ago, the separatists were only intellectuals, especially humanist intellectuals, while now, the separatists are the economists. The difference lies in that today the economic crisis has accelerated, it has heightened, the awareness of the national consciousness. Thus, people who live in Catalonia and did not necessarily feel strongly Catalan, or Catalans who were not separatist, have today become such. The fourth reason, and for him the most important, is the democratic will. Thus, if the Catalan people want to be independent, they have a right to be such. That is why the entire debate, today is about the right to decide.

When asked whether the impossibility of a plurinational society is only limited to the Spanish context, because of the Spanish 'allergy' to difference that he mentioned, or whether it is a general phenomenon, he answers that in his opinion a plurinational state is impossible or very difficult, because there is always a majority that rules over the other nationalities. If finding the right balance is difficult in countries with such a long democratic tradition as Canada or the UK, this is definitely impossible in Spain. In this context, he points out a transition that has occurred in Spain. During the dictatorship Castile had 'kidnapped' Spain, i.e., it purported to represent the whole of Spain. After the dictatorship, it is Madrid that has 'kidnapped' the rest of the country. So, the country has gone from Castile=Spain to Madrid=Spain. He says that during the period of the *Lliga regionalista*, but also in the first years of the democratic period, with the dominance of CiU, there was a tacit agreement whereby Madrid took care of politics and Barcelona of the economy. Yet, later, Madrid decided to make both, which means that there is a permanent competition between the two countries rather than a 'specialisation'. Another very recent transition is the rise of separatism as an hegemonic force in Catalonia. He tells

an anecdote. In 1992, there was, for the first time in the Catalan Parliament, a vote on independence. Three people voted in favour, out of 135, while today more than 80 are in favour of it.

He then points to another very important change. The democratic and socio-economic factors have made possible the incorporation within the nationalist movement of non-autochthonous Catalans. When the independence of Catalonia was based only on language and historical rights, these people could not feel concerned, while with the democratic and socio-economic argument they can. In this connection, he argues that Catalonia, in this moment, is a nation in the making, it is an open process, while Spain is a closed one. And this allows many immigrants to feel Catalan, to be part of this process. He says that in this context, independence can be the objective of those who feel 'only Catalan' and those who feel 'also Catalan'. Since he conceives of Catalonia as the result of a will, one does not necessarily have to abandon its previous identity. Yet, when asked whether this civic identity might indeed hide some less civic components, for instance the imposition of the Catalan language, he argues that certainly Catalan must play a central role and everybody should be encouraged to learn it, but also, those immigrants who have been living in Catalonia and never learned it, will never do so in any case, thus it makes no sense to ask them that and, also, it is not a problem. Furthermore, today's Catalonia is not the Catalonia of the 1970s, with two major languages, but rather a multi-linguistic environment (with, in fact, more than 200 languages spoken). Thus, his idea is to have Catalan as the official language of everybody, a kind of *lingua franca*, but, at the same time, linguistic freedom and some form of recognition for everybody.

Catalan today is not a language in danger, not anymore. It is a language spoken by 13 million people in four countries. In other words, it is easier to learn Catalan in Europe than Dutch. The problem is another one. In the other Catalan countries, that is, in the Valencian countries, in Aragon and in the Balearic Island, the PP has promoted ideas that deny the Catalan origin of the local variants of Catalan and actually linked them to Spanish. This is because the PP fears that, if Catalonia becomes independent, these communities as well would like to join it on the basis of the common linguistic identities. Thus, the threat lies in the other communities but not in Catalonia.

Asked whether the Catalan economic superiority is the direct result of the Catalan culture, he says that Catalonia certainly is the result of the effort of the Catalan people, who share a belief in the values of thrift, entrepreneurship and so on. Catalonia has probably been the only region that has carried out the industrial revolution without having the fundamental ingredients: water, coal, iron ore and a state. Thus, in Catalonia, entrepreneurs are successful, with or without subsidies. Yet, he does not like to make comparisons between Catalonia and other Spanish regions. He says, however, that Catalonia is the southern European region in which there is the highest number of SMEs per inhabitant and the smallest number of civil servants, while in Extremadura it is exactly the opposite, as most people work for the state.

Commenting on the role of the EU, he says that it is important especially because it ensures that Spain will not make use of force against Catalonia. He also says that there was the illusion that the EU would somehow make the independence of Catalonia easier and this is not at all the case. Furthermore, Switzerland and Norway are not part of the EU, but are very successful countries. In Catalonia as well, there is a great disappointment with the EU. Asked if he thinks that there are competences that have been devolved at the EU level that should be taken back by the member states, he answers that, in fact, if these were

to be given back to Spain, it would be better to leave them with the EU because it would certainly manage them better.

Finally, he points out two other changes. The Catalans do not fear anymore to express their own opinion and they have stopped believing in a pluri-national Spain. The idea that a partnership, a pact, is possible does not hold anymore.

Cesc Iglésies (born 1971) – ERC’s Vice-Secretary of General Political Action – 15/07/2013

He was born in Barcelona, but grew up in the province of Girona. He started doing politics when he began university in Barcelona, mainly because living in the capital he became much more sensitive to social issues. He tells that, there, in 1989, for the first time in his life, he saw homeless people sleeping on the street and this profoundly marked him. The other fact that he realised was that Barcelona was not the capital of Catalonia in fact, because so many people spoke Spanish there. He said this also struck him as strange, for instance, when entering some shops and asking the price of some goods in Catalan, he was requested to repeat it in Spanish. He did not understand that.

At the time, at the university there were some separatist left-wing groups and, in 1992, he decided to join the *Groups d’estudiantes independentistas* (Group of separatist students). By 1994 they were the leading student union at the University of Barcelona. He ended his activity in the student union in 1996 and was not active in politics until 2003, when he started being a militant in ERC from his native municipality in the province of Girona. He decided to join precisely at that time because he found that the party’s discourse had evolved into a much clearer and more social alternative. This late entry was also due to a substantial mistrust of political parties. In the period when he did not participate in politics, he mostly devoted himself to his professional career at the University of Vic.

He says that in Catalonia there is a sociological majority that is a little bit more left-wing than the rest of Spain. He mentions as an example the debate about a proposal to introduce a law in favour of gay rights in 1995, which had a clear majority in Catalonia, but was opposed in Spain. He also mentions the fiscal plundering, saying that if Catalans were able to keep their taxes for themselves they would not need to cut the welfare state so much during the crisis. In this context, solidarity is not solidarity but rather an imposition, why should not Catalonia be solidary with other countries, such as Morocco for instance? He however insists on the difference in policy preferences between Spain and Catalonia and adds another example. He says that the Catalans would be very happy to introduce laws in favour of more direct democracy, but in Spain this is a problem. He concludes that in Catalonia it is much easier to reach a consensus over certain priorities than in Spain. There are then two different populations in Spain and Catalonia and two different mind-sets. More precisely, he thinks that the culture of Castile and Madrid is hegemonic in the rest of Spain. He admits that there might be slight differences in Andalusia and probably in some northern regions, but, in general, Spanish institutions have been constructed around the Castilian culture. Asked whether such cultural differences lie at the roots of the economic difference between Catalonia and other Spanish regions, he answers that this is better explained by history and then adds that modernity and the industrial revolution happened much earlier in Catalonia than in the rest of Spain. Yet, since Catalonia did not have natural resources, the industrial revolution there was mainly the result of the work of its population. He also thinks that Spain and Castile have been profoundly marked by the

institution of the monarchy and by not having experienced a true liberal revolution. On the other hand, Catalonia has a longer history of republican institutions and also a much more advanced and progressive attitude. In the early twentieth century, for instance, Catalonia was a country that looked already at France and the other most advanced countries. It was much more European.

When asked whether Spain can be reformed, he says that he does not believe that this is possible. He argues that this is especially the result of the transition because the state did not understand the meaning of the constitutional pact. Many Spanish institutions, especially the army, were very afraid of democracy and thus, while the Constitution talked about nationalities and regions and inaugurated a model of asymmetric federalism in which the historical nationalities could enjoy a special status, they did not accept it fully. Hence, in 1981 there was the attempted coup and in 1982 the *Ley organica d'armonizacion del proceso autonomico* (Organic law of harmonisation of the process of autonomy, LOAPA). This acted as a break on the process of autonomy, which went from the asymmetric model to the *café para todos*.<sup>1822</sup> The next two decades were years of construction of the institutions of Catalonia. Then, they got to the step of the new statute of autonomy, which was accepted by everybody in Catalonia and coincided with a change in government at the *Generalitat* after more than two decades of domination by CiU. He then describes the process of modification of the statute.

He however makes clear that in 2005 the party had accepted the idea of a smooth transition to independence and that federalism could be an intermediate step towards that goal. But the outcome of the process of reform of the statute confirmed that Spain cannot be reformed. He also thinks that even if the state made a proposal in favour of reforming the relation between Spain and Catalonia, it would not keep its word. In any case, such a pact is not possible because the PP today is a very anti-Catalan party. The PSOE as well is very divided on such an issue. Both could only offer something that is not enough for the majority of Catalans. He argues that in the last 40 years, and decisively since 2010, Catalonia has experienced a change in the political panorama whereby there is a majority that has gotten to the conclusion that all alternatives to independence are exhausted. This is because there is the impression that there is no alternative. The problem with federalism is that there is no partner, Spain does not want to be a partner on a par with the other members of an hypothetical federation.

Asked to elaborate more about solidarity, he says that one of the main problems of the Spanish state is that it has mismanaged public resources and this is a consequence of a mind-set whereby the state can easily get indebted because it will be eventually able to balance the books in one way or another. He mentions for instance the money wasted in building up the biggest network of high-speed trains in Europe. Similarly, Spain has more airports than Germany. The conclusion is that public works have been undertaken without any consideration of utility and economic efficiency. On the contrary, in Catalonia there is a 99% majority in favour of a high-speed train line connecting Barcelona with Southern France, but Madrid does not consider that a priority and prefers to invest in the Madrid-Extremadura axis, for instance. The idea is that 'the vote of a Catalan does not matter'. This is why the theme of democratic regeneration is important. He says 'our vote will never be considered in Spain, we will always be a minority'.

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<sup>1822</sup> Literally 'coffee for everybody', it indicates the adoption of symmetric federalism.

He then says that in Madrid there is an idea that the Catalans are those who take advantage of the Spanish state and resources, rather than the other way around. As far as solidarity is concerned, he trusts Brussels more than Madrid. For solidarity to work, the money used must go to precise destinations and uses, and must be evaluated according to indicators and objectives. Also, it must not be unlimited, it must not be mixed with other money used to pay current expenses. The 'Spanish state must abandon the culture of subsidies and begin practice more the culture of entrepreneurship'.

Then asked to state the most important problem between Spain and Catalonia, he mentions the fiscal plundering because the social problems derive from there, because Catalonia is deprived of money that it can use to cater for the Catalans. The second one is the cultural, educational and language policy. This is because Spain has trouble accepting pluri-nationality and difference. Language is certainly in a better position than 30 years ago. Today the main problem concerning language is about the *Lley Wert*. He then argues that Spain has not been a pluri-national country. The state has never assumed a neutral position concerning language. Also, the Spaniards do not want to be changed by Catalonia.

Concerning language, he mentions that Catalonia today is approaching the threshold of only 30% of people who learn Catalan within the family, which is considered by many socio-linguists as a dangerous threshold [yet this data might probably refer to Barcelona only, EDM]. Furthermore, there is about 30% of the population of Barcelona that is perfectly bilingual. All these data confirm the idea that an independent Catalonia could defend better the Catalan language, but in a Catalan state, Catalan and Spanish would both be official languages, although in school Catalan would enjoy preferential treatment. He mentions the model of the Netherlands, where the elite schools are the public ones. Yet, educational policy would go much beyond language, it would be a tool of shaping citizenship. The slogan is: 'una escola laica, pública i catalana' (a lay, public and Catalan school). The idea is to have a trilingual school (Catalan, Spanish and English) and likewise for university studies.

He thinks that an independent Catalonia outside Europe is very unlikely, because it is against the interests of all. However, Catalonia could live well even outside the EU. He confirms that the EU actually is a reason for independence, because the idea of the Europe of the regions collapsed and power remained in the hands of the states. Although he agrees that Brussels could become another Madrid, he argues that they trust much more the democratic standards and sensitivity of Brussels than the Spanish ones. He concludes with the usual slogan that 'Spain is too big a country to solve small problems and too small to solve big ones'.

Jordi Solé (born 1976) – Member of the Catalan Parliament – 09/07/2014

He studied political science at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and then moved to Germany to do a master's in European studies. He was involved in politics since he was in high school. At the time, he founded with some friends the *Bloc d'estudiantas independentistas* (Bloc of students for independence) in his small town in rural Catalonia, Caldes de Montbui (17,000 inhabitants) where he is now mayor.

An uncle of his was active in politics, he was a member of CiU. The grandparents fought in the Civil War on the side of the Republicans. One of them survived the war and used to



talk to him about the War and the Republican period. He thinks that this probably had an influence on his formation.

After having studied in Bonn, he went to work at the European Parliament (he said it mostly happened by chance). In the meantime, he was in contact with members of ERC in his native town. In Brussels he worked as an assistant for an ERC MEP (first for Miquel Mayol from Perpignan and then for Berna Joan from Ibiza). He then joined the party in 2003, while he was still an assistant in Brussels. In 2007, he was elected mayor in his town and, in 2012, he became MCP in Barcelona.

He had already been in contact with people from ERC before joining the party and somehow always been attracted to it, since it seemed to him that ERC defended most the interest of Catalonia and the social values that he identified with. Also, he admired the history of the party. So there was no specific event that urged him to join. It could have happened before or later, but it had been there as a possibility for a while.

He stresses that ERC's project is certainly based on an emotional feeling of belonging to a nation, but it is also based on the rational assumption that Catalonia would be better off as an independent country and could cater better for its citizens and improve their economy. So the emotional and rational go together.

Asked what makes a Catalan different from a Spaniard or the member of any other national community, he mentions things such as history (going back to the middle ages), geography, institutions, culture and so on. But there is an important element that he stresses and it is the fact that the Catalans have expressed a willingness to live together. Also, he points out that people have realised that their future within Spain is not as bright as it would be if Catalonia were an independent country. This is because, he says, it is impossible to change Spain from inside.

He agrees with the idea that the economic differences between Catalonia and other communities, say Extremadura, are the result of cultural factors, such as Catalonia's stronger work ethic and entrepreneurial spirit, although he nuances this reasoning by resorting to institutional explanations. He mentions for instance the fact that land ownership in Catalonia was more widespread than in Spain and the aristocracy was less important. This, rather than a generic idea of culture, would explain, in his opinion, the attitude to working hard of the Catalan people. He also mentions the existence of a Parliament in Catalonia already in the Middle Ages with the three orders represented there already back then.

Since when he began doing politics in 2003 not much has changed. The overall situation is the same. Catalans are a nation that does not want to disappear within the Spanish state and the Spanish state keeps not recognising the pluri-national nature of Spain. What has changed is that separatism was a minority force in Catalonia, while today it is hegemonic. The problem is that there is a majority of Spaniards who don't want to move towards a true recognition of the pluri-national character of Spain. The socialists for instance want federalism, but the federalism they want is shallow, it is only a change in the form, not in the substance of things. However, even if there were a majority of Spaniards in favour of such recognition, he would be in favour of independence, because he believes that the Catalans would be better off outside Spain. Probably, however, there would not be a majority for independence in the rest of Catalonia.

He points to the judgement of the Constitutional Tribunal as a major factor in the rise of support for independence because it confirmed the idea that Spain does not want to change things, therefore reform from within is useless. Also, the judgement annulled a text that had a very broad political legitimacy, as it had been approved by two parliaments and ratified through a popular referendum. Thus, it was perceived as an attack against democracy. He also believes that the economic crisis did not play a role at all, as the process began in 2006, although it is true that the big protests in 2010 happened while the country was already in recession. Hence, he later admits that the economic crisis has shown even more clearly that the Spanish economic and political system is a true mess (he mentions that corruption in Spain is higher than in Catalonia). The crisis also showed that the economy of the country was mismanaged during the last years. This reinforces the idea that a Catalan state would handle things better.

Asked whether ERC would drop the holding of a referendum if Spain offers a better fiscal deal, he says that it would never happen because the party has committed to holding the referendum before the Catalan people. Furthermore, Mas had already proposed a fiscal agreement in 2012 and Rajoy rejected it. If CiU does drop the pledge to organise a referendum, it would be punished by the people because there is a clear and very broad support for that.

Talking about the Catalan language and culture, he agrees that Catalan today is in a much better position than it used to be 20 years ago, but the Catalans still have to fight against the encroachments of the Spanish state. He adds that there is very broad social acceptance of education in Catalan in schools. Only about ten families out of some hundred thousands asked to switch to Spanish as a language of instruction. The problem with the *Ley Wert*, he says, is more about the state encroachment over the Catalan exclusive competences than a true threat to the existence and good health of Catalan.

Concerning Europe, he says that ERC is aware that the current relationship between Spain and Catalonia is considered as an internal dispute, thus the EU is not concerned by this dispute. The EU will only take a stand after an eventual referendum is held. Generally speaking, he is in favour of deepening the process of European integration, especially in areas such as foreign policy, defence and regarding some mechanisms of the internal market. However, the EU also has a problem of legitimacy, especially the fact that the European Commission is not elected. Therefore, he argues that the Commission should reflect better the balance of powers within the European Parliament and, probably, the President of the Commission should be elected by the Parliament.

He thinks that the European market and the process of globalisation have largely lowered the costs of secession because Catalonia depends much less on the Spanish market. Catalonia would be like many other current countries in Europe that fare pretty well, so he doesn't see a problem at all in this case.

Juan Manuel Tresserras (born 1955) – Former Minister of Culture and the Media of the Catalan *Generalitat* – 14/07/2013

He began the interview by interrupting me while I was explaining the subject of my thesis and immediately started commenting on the fitness of the Catalan case to the model proposed. This put off to later questions about his personal engagement. He says that Catalan nationalism was not the result of the activity of a Catalan bourgeoisie. He

basically repeats the standard interpretation whereby the Catalan bourgeoisie became autonomist only after having been excluded from power by the other Spanish elites and yet it kept believing in the possibility of a pact with Madrid. Yet, he says that the true Catalan nationalism was a popular movement. He then mentions the *Renaixença*,<sup>1823</sup> but suggests that, while other European Romantic movements were exploited by the bourgeoisie to justify national unification as a means to acquire state power, in Catalonia such a political project was absent. People mainly focused on the economy and on local, even family ties.

He then makes a long historical digression to explain his point. The eighteenth century saw the birth of a Catalan market, first, and a Spanish market, later, mainly built up, he argues, by the Catalans themselves. He then explains the development of a national identity and the industrial revolution in Catalonia as a result of some specific institutions. First, the inheritance law in Catalonia was based on the rule that the oldest male inherited everything but had to pay a quota to the other siblings. On the one hand, this favoured the creation of a free work force that mainly moved to Barcelona, but at the same time, the strengthening of family ties through the link between the oldest male and the other members of the family. It also favoured the use of capital as the other siblings were left only with their capital and nothing else. They therefore had to put it to good use, which was a fundamental factor in the birth of industrialisation in Catalonia. They also had an idea of family enterprise that they inherited from previous generations. In the nineteenth century, internal migrations from the countryside to the urban centres brought people sharing, he says, a popular Catalan culture into the cities. These made up the proletariat and the lower-middle classes and determined an identity change based on the cultural oral relationship developed within the family and around the medium of the Catalan language. Once in the city however these people received their education in Spanish, which was not their mother language, and established a hierarchical relationship between Spanish and Catalan. The *Renaixença* was an attempt, on the part of these people, to adapt the old popular national patrimony to the new context of urbanisation and to preserve it. Thus, he denies that the *Renaixença* was a movement animated by three poets suffering from nostalgia. This would be the reason why separatism in Catalonia is left-wing, because it is popular and not bourgeois. The Catalan high bourgeoisie has always feared losing its privileged contact with the Spanish state and the Spanish market.

In his opinion, there are many reasons for the current change in the support for independence in Catalonia, but the most important has been a transformation of the 'social hegemonic bloc' [he uses this Gramscian expression, EDM]. He argues that in nation-states, the state, and therefore the bourgeois elites that dominate it, establishes what it means to be a member of the sovereign nation. It is something that is already established and newcomers have to comply with. In Catalonia there is no state and thus the national project is still an open one. The Spanish state does not have a Catalan project, it has a Spanish project within which Catalonia is a problem. Therefore, there has not been a Catalan project. In the last 30 years, many more Catalans, especially those coming from the middle-classes have gone to university. Education in general has improved a lot. This has brought much many people into the social hegemonic bloc. These people realised that there will never be a Catalan project within the Spanish state and that the Catalan higher bourgeoisie will never work for such a project. They have then understood that they have

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<sup>1823</sup> The term refers to the Catalan cultural movement that spread around mid-nineteenth and celebrated the use of the Catalan language and of 'old' Catalan traditions.

to take action and have done so through organisations such as the Assembly of Catalonia and other similar ones. Talking about Carod-Rovira, he then says that he should be credited for having turned the Catalan national project from a doctrine based on the claim of lost rights to one based on the definition of a common future.

ERC in the early 1980s still was the party of the 1930s and made up of quite old people. At the end of the 1980s, Colom, Carod and other people entered ERC and turned it not only separatist, but also already left-wing. Most of those people came from the *Moviment d'unificació marxista* (MUM). He argues that being Marxist in Catalonia naturally leads to being separatist, although Carod and others found another way of mixing together the two. He then argues that many separatists of the late 1960s and 1970s came from Marxism and anarchism. Some of them also were against the state as an institution, so: why do they call for a Catalan state now? They plead for a different kind of state. Therefore, they aim at building up a state oriented against social domination and for the protection of the liberties and rights of all within the social body, not only the majority. The current Catalan struggle is thus a process of democratisation. Independence and the state are a means to bring about a social revolution. They also aim at promoting a voluntaristic conception of national identity. 'To us being Catalan is a right, not an obligation'.

He began politics at university in Barcelona with some student groups of the far left, immediately to the left of the PSUC (*Partit Socialista Unificat de Catalunya*, Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia) – at the time the most important Marxist nationalist formation. When he was 20 years old, he could not write in Catalan and had had no classes in Catalan in his life. He thus started studying it on his own, not understanding why the language used at home would not be taught in school. He argues that during Francoism people kept nourishing their Catalan national consciousness in many daily life ways (through a *peña* of the FC Barcelona (local fan clubs of the Barcelona football team), by dancing *sardana*, by singing popular songs and so on).

He then argues that the connection between the language and the national identity was possible also because in the Middle Ages Catalan was already a high-culture language and this allowed for its use as a national symbol during the *Renaixença*. This enabled the development of a literary tradition of high level in the nineteenth century that was later repressed by the Francoist regime, but survived. He then says that this heavy inheritance allowed the survival of the Catalan culture, but was also a burden once the dictatorship was over because many people indulged in the nostalgic evocation of the past. As the minister of culture of Catalonia, he strove for convincing the people of Catalonia that culture is a process and that they had to forget the trauma of the dictatorship and build up a new cultural process. In this, he strongly defended an effort to integrate the immigrants into this project. He also argues that the Catalan identity has for centuries been an identity of resistance, while he would like it to become the identity of a project. Thus, one should not aim at rebuilding the country, but at constructing a new one, keeping some elements of the past inheritance (the Catalan language above all) but adding new ones. He goes on saying that the survival of the Catalan language is a miracle that shows how the Catalan identity truly is an elective one, because millions of immigrants speaking Spanish as their mother tongue in a country in which the official use of Catalan was proscribed decided to learn it. He suggests that Catalan has survived because it allowed upward mobility to the immigrants, who then had an interest in learning it (he gives the example of two people applying for a job in a shop, the bilingual one will always get it). Thus, the linguistic

immersion in Catalan is a tool to guarantee the preservation of Catalan but also the integration of immigrants and their social opportunities.

After the dictatorship he joined a very small political group called *Collectiu comunista catalan* (Catalan Communist Collective), that strove to combine Marxism and separatism. Their aim was to show that the social and national struggle were compatible and this because Catalan separatism was not an offshot of the bourgeoisie, but rather a popular phenomenon and it was rather co-opted later by the bourgeoisie for reasons of consensus. At the end of the 1980s, he joined *La Crida*, but, earlier, he had also supported *Nacionalistes d'Esquerra* (whose members later joined ERC en masse). Only some of the members of *La Crida* however joined ERC, another part, *La Crida dura i pura*, continued on its own. He left but did not join ERC. He later collaborated with Carod as a kind of spin-doctor. With some friends, he organised a platform called *Carod President*, advocating that Carod become President of an independent Catalonia. He thus worked from outside the party but within its orbit. He says he was a kind of 'official independent'. In 2006, Carod and Puigcercos offered him a place in the government and he accepted because he found the leftist coalition that was in power at the time very attuned to his ideas. He had previously taught history of the Catalan culture and at the same time had worked with a foundation on the defence and promotion of the Catalan culture. Plus, he had been teaching communication for many years, therefore he was a good candidate for the position. He however accepted only one mandate, thus he implied that his adventure would be over after four years.

He thinks that the Catalan culture had been in great danger during the dictatorship. Today is much better but who knows how things would evolve. Catalonia has the problem that in her capital, Barcelona, there are about 300,000 people (out of about a million) who do not speak Catalan. He says that the other main problem is that Spain does not recognise the status of national language to Catalan. Thus, while Canada, for instance, takes pride in the cultural difference of Quebec as a sign of the richness of the country, Spain denies or is ashamed of the pluri-nationality of the country. He concludes that today Catalonia can easily compete in the global world, although it is certainly a small culture.

Today the main problem is the democratic deficit, although the fiscal one is very important and unsustainable, but it is not enough. The main point today is that people must have the right to decide about their future.

He does not believe that the economic difference between Catalonia and Extremadura is the result of a cultural difference, but rather of social structure and of the relation of power between the dominant classes and the state. If Extremadura has not developed as Catalonia has, it is because its elites did not have to do so. They had no incentives to develop industry. He says that in Catalonia this happened because in the region, there was the highest proletarian concentration in Europe [this however is causal reversion, he is taking the effect for the cause, EDM]. He, however, adds that the Catalans certainly had a technical culture and an admiration for work and also suggests that the huge amount of capital accumulated in Catalonia during the nineteenth century was appropriated by the Spanish state, because there was no Catalan bourgeoisie ready to reinvest that capital into the region itself.

He concludes talking about the strengths and weaknesses of the Catalan economy today. He argues that Catalonia has not evolved as it should have done to stand foreign competition. This is, however, mainly the fault of the Spanish state that has tried to

artificially create an industrial belt around Madrid, mainly based on attracting multinationals and keeping there all the old Francoist monopolies, today privatised. This has been coupled with no policy of help to the Catalan SMEs, rather, favouring the big Spanish industries around Madrid has been a form of unfair competition against SMEs. He adds that in case of independence nobody fears a Spanish boycott because Catalonia has always been enduring one. He says for instance that no Catalan construction enterprise wins tenders in Spain, only abroad.

#### Alba Verges (born 1978) – Member of the Catalan Parliament – 09/07/2013

She has always been interested in politics since she was young and she had always voted for ERC, but she joined only in 2012. They asked her to stand for the municipal election of her town. She was not sure she wanted to be elected with a party, so she ran as an independent. She was not elected, but she liked the experience and the party proposed that she work as a militant there because the local ERC organiser was going to retire and the new one needed some help. The party then asked her to run as a candidate at the November elections and she accepted because, she says, things had changed a lot in Catalonia in the months between the municipal and Parliamentary elections. She felt that it was the right time, when Catalonia could actually become an independent country. There was nobody in her family who was officially involved in politics, but both her father and her sister have always been very interested in politics (the sister studied with Jordi Solé).

Her list of grievances that motivate her support for independence are:

- the low quality of the Spanish democracy;
- the bad, centralised administration;
- Spain's lack of respect and understanding for other cultures and identities.

She then says that independence is the solution because the Catalans have tried for a long time to find an accommodation with Madrid and make Madrid change, but these attempts have always failed, therefore there is no need to try anymore.

She does not think that being Catalan or Spanish is something that relates to a single person, but it is rather a different idea about how the community is built up and how one feels within the national community. She mentions for instance the hard-working ethos and entrepreneurial spirit of the Catalans. But she also points out that it is not true that Spanish people are not open-minded or progressive, the problem rather lies with the administration and the Spanish state institutions which are cumbersome and undemocratic. In this connection, she argues that all the main progressive protests and fights that were later won or fought in Spain began in Catalonia and extended from there.

She does not think that the Catalan language is currently in danger, but it could easily be again in danger if the Spanish state passes new legislation that might break the primacy of Catalan in the education system that has been achieved. In this connection, the *Ley Wert* was an attempt to step over the competences of the *Generalitat*. She also mentions that the language policy pursued so far is a tool of integration. She does not think that the right for families to choose the language of instruction of their children is a problem per se, because very few have done so. Yet, if allowed, immigrant families, especially from Southern America, who do not know the reality of Catalonia, might choose Spanish not out of an

informed decision but because it is easier for them. She says that this would lead to a situation in which these families 'will not have the opportunity to learn Catalan and this is not the country that we want'. [In other words, there is the assumption that Catalan is better for them, although it is supposed rather than explained, it rather seems to mix up elements of concern for the cultural integration and upward mobility of the immigrants, as well as the defence of the native community, EDM]. She concludes that therefore it is a matter of offering the same opportunities to everybody [although this remains unclear, EDM].

She says that the party would accept an interim financial deal with Madrid if Rajoy offers it, but this would in no way stop it from pursuing independence. This is also the case of the holding of the referendum. ERC would never accept to withdraw the proposal to have a referendum, although CiU might do that. In any case, she concludes, this is never going to happen, because Spain will never offer that to the Catalans. She then mentions Spain's relationship with her colonies and when asked whether she thinks that Catalonia is a colony, she answers that it is 'treated like a colony, but it is not a colony'. She goes on saying that Spain exploited her colonies and then eventually lost them and this is what is happening with Catalonia as well. She says that it is a stupid way of doing things, but it is their way. Thus, centralising and having an imperialist attitude would be part of the Spanish culture. She also makes the parallel with France. Regarding people from other Spanish regions, especially those such as Andalusia and Extremadura, which are dependent on state transfers, she concludes that they support this Spanish centralising mentality mainly out of interest.

Regarding Europe, she argues that the current EU is the Europe of the states, so they will never have a say in the process of self-determination. After the referendum, however, the EU will probably support Catalonia because at that point the Catalans will have democratically voted in favour of independence and the EU cannot ignore that. She says that it might not be possible to organise a referendum, because Spain can hamper it. In that case, there will be a new election clearly on the issue of independence.

She recognises that the situation in Spain is very tense, but she does not think that it could turn violent and if that happens it will be because Spain uses violence, in which case, Catalonia would win, because the international community will never find a violent action against the Catalan people legitimate.

She does not really have a clear idea about how the EU should be organised, but she is in favour of expanding its competences to other areas such as social policy and culture, rather than only monetary and economic matters.

She is not afraid at all that independence could be disruptive to the Catalan economy. Even Spain would realise that the two economies are so interconnected that there is no benefit for anybody to retaliate against Catalonia after independence.

## **Lega Nord**

Lorenzo Fontana (born 1980) – Member of the European Parliament – 07/11/2012

He began politics in 1996 (he was 16 years old) at the local level in his hometown, Verona, and after some years there he was elected to the European Parliament in 2009. Right before the interview, he had just become chair of the LN's MEPs in Brussels. He comes

from a family that did not show any particular interest in politics. That notwithstanding, he began very early to be interested in the subject, probably because while he was in high school *Tangentopoli* broke out and was all over the news. At the time, there was much talk about the need for national unity and the homogeneity of the Italian reality, but he could not make sense of this, seeing the huge variety of the different Italian localities. He also made clear reference to the stereotypes held by foreigners about Italians as all having the flaws generally attributed to Southerners. Thus, he certainly felt the need to see the northern, and even more so, the local identity recognised. Also, he believed that the state was overtly discriminating against the north, because most of the bureaucracy in the North does not come from the north. All non-elected, appointed functions, or most of them, have been given to Southerners. He understood that this phenomenon has historical roots and is also the responsibility of Northerners, but he wondered why this could not be changed. He thus felt that this was an injustice and that Northerners had to begin to defend themselves. However, he does not perceive this as an ethnic problem. He is totally fine with people from outside settling down in northern Italy, but all positions of power, especially the non-elected ones, within the public administration should be held by somebody who has lived in that reality and knows it. This seems common sense to him, but it probably is not for the state, which fears local identities and tries to undermine them in order to legitimise its power.

Therefore, for him the recognition of local identities has been very important (the possibility of feeling Venetian, or from Verona, or northern, without feeling any guilt or shame in it). The main problem has been that the state has been based on a centralised, Jacobin model that, fortunately, has not worked completely (as everybody can see in Veneto). Local cultures have however been eroded. From World War II this has mainly been due to the media in which the Venetians have not excelled, probably mainly because of the lack of a big city, and because of the education system. Also, there has been a clear attempt to belittle dialects and to make people feel guilty about their 'native' dialect. Erasing dialects is a crime, because there is an entire way of thinking, an entire culture that goes with them. He is not against the fact that Italian be used as the national language. It is totally fine to use it as the lingua franca of the country, but dialects should have remained alongside it and be considered as a resource, rather than a drawback. This is also true concerning local history. Why, for instance, should people from Verona not know the history of the Venetian Republic after 12 years of schooling? The Catalans are totally autonomous in devising their own school programmes in this respect.

He perceives a difference between Northerners and Southerners (also because of climatic reasons, he says). Northerners are probably less convivial and more hard-working, while Southerners are more footloose. In the north, people tend to abide by the rules, even if they are clearly unjust, while, in the south, violating them is common practice. These are two completely different societies. Furthermore, he thinks that the south has adopted this kind of behaviour as a reaction against the Italian state, that it has seen as an invader. In any case, the North certainly belongs more to the northern cultural area, while the south more to the Mediterranean one.

He feels first and foremost *Veronese*, then Venetian and then Padanian. Although there are differences even in a small unit such as Verona, it has a peculiar character that you do not find elsewhere.

Padania is an idea that was born during the 1990s especially in relation to the process of European integration and to the Maastricht criteria. The movement absolutely wanted the



North to enter into the common currency because it fulfilled all the criteria, while the south and the Italian state did not. Therefore, it stressed the differentiation between the two areas. However, it is undeniable that there is a difference between the people who live 'above the line of the Po river' (sic) and those below that everybody has always perceived. The euro has been a mistake, not in itself, but, as the LN said already at the time, because it has integrated those areas that did not fulfil the criteria. It would have been better to leave them out, with the power to devalue their currency and attract investment and join at a later time.

The idea of the EU is sound, but it should be lighter and competences should be reshuffled even within the member states. The EU should have competences for defence, foreign affairs and big infrastructures, while all the rest should be left to macro-regions. Taxes should be collected by macro-regions, which should pay a fee to the central state for solidarity with poorer areas and for the services provided.

He would not be against an idea of a United States of Europe, with federal elections on the entire territory to elect a government that is in charge of the competences mentioned above. In such a scenario, the existing state would become useless. Yet, the EU must not become a European super-state. In actual fact, the EU has been badly conceived because the process has begun from monetary integration instead of from more important sectors, such as defence and foreign policy, for instance.

He is also sceptical about globalisation. He thinks that the current crisis is due to the extreme competition unleashed by such a process, whereby countries with high labour costs (because they respect workers rights and environmental standards) compete with developing countries. There, Europe should play a role, but it does not.

He makes clear that a people is not an ethnic concept in the sense of blood and common ascendancy, but it is rather the result of a process of transmission of cultural features and practices. Also, a people is aware of its distinctiveness.

Talking about Maroni's idea of a European macro-region he tried to clarify that there are two different things going on. On the one hand, the northern regions can create European macro-regions to tackle common problems, such as the case of the Alpine macro-area that some party representatives were negotiating with Carinthia and other Alpine areas. On the other, there is the northern macro-region, which is just a domestic affair. This latter can have an impact at the European level if the offices of the northern regions in Brussels would merge in order to speak with a single voice and gather their strength.

In the case of a federal reform that would divide the country into three macro-areas, the regions could either disappear or remain as purely administrative structures. The most important thing is that competences be divided clearly and that the institutions work. Macro-regions should at least keep 70% of the taxes collected on the territory. Secession is the *extrema ratio*, but if the system is not reformed it would be the natural conclusion because the system, as it is right now, is unsustainable. The main problem, in his opinion, is the size and efficiency of the public administration and this is especially the case in the south.

Europe could play a role in defending our economy [he does not specify whether Italian or northern Italian, EDM] from Chinese competition, but it does not. Free trade is a good thing, but up to a certain point. He argues that European countries should defend themselves from the unfair competition coming from poorer countries.

Oreste Rossi (born 1964) – Member of the European Parliament (until May 25, 2014) – 15/11/2012

He started really young, he felt politics was very corrupt and joined the movement founded by Gremmo. He, along with some other members, however, left because of Gremmo's authoritarian manners and along with Gipo Farrasino founded *Piedmont Autonomista*. Later the movement joined the other leagues within the LN. Bossi put him in charge of creating the Southern League as a twin movement for the reform of the country into a federal structure. The Southern League was eventually abandoned in 2001 (mainly for reasons of costs). He had been elected as an MP in Rome in 1992, 1994 and 1996. He then was twice councillor at Piedmont's regional council. He was finally elected to the European Parliament in 2009. In any case, the main reason why he joined the movement lay in that he deemed the autonomist movements, first, and the league, later, the only parties that did defend the interests of the north, but also of the south, as he is convinced that, if the south were left free to manage itself, it would achieve far better economic results. He also regrets that the League was not able to bring about the change it promised. Socio-economic variables seem to be more important for him than cultural factors in identifying the specificities of the north. He makes clear that cultural matters, such as the defence of language, also were an issue, but he immediately goes back to socio-economic arguments, by mentioning for instance that Northerners were discriminated against in the distribution of public employment and social housing. From this he moves to the topic of immigration, both from Southern Italy and Third World countries, saying that it only impoverishes the areas of origins. Richer areas should help poorer ones creating conditions favourable to job creation and growth. He confirms that there was a strong attachment to the local language in Piedmont, but this was not important to him.

He is a strong supporter of federalism. He is for a federal Europe divided into homogenous socio-economic areas. He does not advocate breaking-up Italy, but the country could be divided into two macro-areas with different needs and characteristics. Europe should therefore be modified in federal terms, by adding a federal senate, with representatives from these macro-areas and a stronger Parliament. Thus, he is totally in favour of a federal Europe of areas with an elected parliament appointing a government. This should coincide with a reform on the domestic level along the lines of the three macro-regions proposed by the League in 1992. In such a model, Europe should be in charge of general matters such as fiscal rules, energy costs, transportation and so on. The macro-region would then be competent for everything connected to the local economy. He says that fiscal rules should be harmonised across Europe and, when asked whether this is against the LN's rhetoric that fiscal leverage should be kept as close as possible to local realities, he answers that this is true only for local taxes. Fiscal harmonisation is important to avoid competition among European firms because, he says, the enemy is outside Europe: the US, that ignore environmental regulations that are enforced in Europe; and China and other Asian countries. He is also open to a solidarity fund with poorer areas either at the European or the Italian level of about 20% [probably of local resources, but he does not specify it, EDM].

He says that Europe is not geared to the needs of the citizen, but has been created only to solve the economic interests of the state.

Talking about these economic interests he goes back to the idea that European firms should cooperate against foreign competitors. However, he distinguishes between industrial firms that create jobs and produce goods in Europe and those that simply trade, that is, buy goods where they are cheaper and sell them in Europe. These are against tariffs but do not create wealth in Europe. The EU should clearly favour those groups that produce in Europe. Those who do so in Europe have an interest to having tariffs because competition from outside Europe is unfair. He concludes that Europe today is not functional, it is rather a source of costs.

Francesco Enrico Speroni (born 1946) – Member of the European Parliament (until May 25, 2014) – 08/11/2012

He began politics because he felt compelled to do something to solve some issues that he considered vital at the time. Its most important concern was about local identities. He first approached the Liberal Party (the LN did not exist back then) and later the Lombard League. By local identity he mostly means the municipal level. The economic and cultural dimension of this local focus were, and still are, equally important to him. Later, however, he clarifies that dialects are important elements of local culture that must be preserved, but the management of local resources and the provision of services to the community are overriding. He then argues that the Lombards always felt exploited, at least since 1861. The reason why they did not protest before is that there was nobody to make them aware of their exploitation. This changed with the coming of Umberto Bossi. In other words, the potential was there before, but a catalyst was missing. Then, even when Bossi began, it took him a while to rally people behind him and this because he had no resources and the political system was extremely closed. Not only parties, but also the media, tended to exclude outsiders.

He stresses that fiscal exploitation, the rise of taxes especially, was fundamental to convince him to begin political activity. He has also been convinced ever since that there is a fundamental cultural difference between the North and the South. The people from the North have a much stronger work-ethic, those from the South are much more used to welfarism. He argues that the idea of a North as a homogenous identity existed already at the time, but only if limited to the work-ethic. When asked how this led to the invention of Padania, he says that it is a natural consequence. He makes clear that he is secessionist and has always been so. The reason why the League has put the idea of independence on the backburner is that it had to adapt to the circumstances in which it has operated, where such an idea is not ingrained in the population at large. Clearly within the LN there are people with different personalities, thus some are mainly interested in the economic aspects of the Northern Question and accept a light definition of the northern identity, while others are more culturally-oriented and would prefer a more vigorous identity-building effort. He personally is in favour of the former, also because it would be really hard to impose a more homogenous identity over the entire north.

From a constitutional perspective, he consistently chooses as the best option the separation of the country on the model of Czechoslovakia. This being practically impossible in the current circumstances, Miglio's idea of a division of the country into three macro-regions, which manage 75% of their own resources is the second best option. He then mentions the possibility to bring about the northern macro-region through a 'shortcut' provided by art. 132 paragraph 1 of the Constitution that allows the regional councils to vote the merger of

regions (although the merger must be requested by a third of municipal councils of each region and in any case be approved by Parliament). This, however, is a cumbersome procedure that in the first place requires the approval of the majority of the regional councils, which are not held by the League alone, but also by the PDL, whose members will not necessarily vote in favour.

He also makes a historical digression about the artificial character of the process of Italian unification and argues that Lombardy was freer under Hapsburg rule. The original sin of the Italian state is that it has been formed through a military expedition led by the Crown of Savoy. The second original sin was that, once created, Italy should have been turned into a federal country.

The reason why the necessity of federalism was not felt so strongly for most of the history of the First Republic is that opposition to the Communists and the ideological framework of the Cold War was too strong.

He points out that in the 1980s, many people thought that the EU could help the transformation of the country into a federal one. This was based on a gigantic misunderstanding. The EU is fundamentally indifferent to whether a member state is organised in a federal or a centralised way. In the case of the creation of a northern macro-region, he would keep the provinces and rather eliminates the regions. The error of the EU, as well as of the Eastern Enlargement, has been to put together countries too different from each other. The Euroarea should thus be redefined in order to allow in it only countries with similar economies in order to save the euro itself. The North would clearly respect all the criteria to be a member in this new Euroarea.

He confirms that the Europe of the Peoples is a concept that has not been defined yet, also because it is very hard to do so.

Gianvittore Vaccari (born 1956) – Member of the Italian Senate (until March 14, 2013) – 03/03/2012

He began politics presenting a candidature for mayor in 1993, but he had been a member of the Liberal Party for a couple of years before. At the time he was working in the private sector. He graduated as an engineer in Pavia (Lombardy) and then came back to his home town in Veneto (Feltre). The main reasons of his political engagement were and still are: the need to reform the state in a liberal sense (but he points out that he is a moderate liberal); a kind of disgust for traditional politics, although less pronounced than the former.

Although having always been sensitive to the cultural dimension, at the beginning of his political career he privileged other policy dimensions. Yet, the weight of the cultural component became heavier later on. There has been no substantial evolution during his political career in terms of the main motivations behind his political engagement, except, probably, for a little higher attention to welfare issues concerning services to the eldest and the young that he acquired by working as mayor for many years. In this connection, he sees no contradiction between welfare concerns and liberalism. Liberal principles should orient the working of the public administration by imposing market standards to the provision of public services. This does not mean that the state should make profits, it should just adopt the same practices of good administration that private companies are forced to abide by because they live by market rules. At the same time, the state should

also regulate the market, otherwise, if everything is left to the private sector there is the risk that services would not be available to everybody. Therefore, less state and more enterprise, more civil society as well, is compatible with a liberal perspective, especially if it does not become extreme liberalism, which he does not subscribe to. Today, unfortunately, we have gone too far, especially in the financial sector, with the unbridled globalisation of capital. The state must regulate this system, otherwise the strong prevails over the weak. People thought that in an open world, the economy could grow much more and thus increase overall welfare. In fact, if you do not set rules, only some profit from the process to the disadvantage of those who were already lagging behind at the outset. Indeed, inequality in countries such as Italy has grown, rather than decreasing. Thus, there is room for public intervention, to regulate the market, but such intervention must always be inspired by liberal principles, rather than Marxist ones.

In terms, of the provision of services, he agrees with the general party line that members of the local community should be given priority over others, although for him, local community, here, means the municipality. Apart from that, he is not in favour of overtly discriminating between anybody coming from outside, be he/she Lombard, Southern Italian or Northern African. What is important is that local rules be respected and that newcomers be willing to integrate in the local society. In this connection, he argues that the people from Veneto have always been open to foreigners and are a naturally multicultural society willing to be solidary with everybody (this is also – he adds – because generally speaking foreigners living there are willing to respect local rules and integration works).

Asked about the meaning of the Padanian nation, he argues that it is a light identity unifying people who believe in individual enterprise and responsibility. The Padanians, therefore, would share the same work-ethic, the same self-help ethos. Admittedly, Padania is less a culturally homogenous reality. There are different dialects, different histories and this is also reflected by the confederal structure of the party. The North therefore is less ‘welfarist’ than the rest of the country. This has also led many Northerners to ignore politics as a professional career. Politics has thus become important only recently, when the flaws of the system have made the system unsustainable.

Generally speaking, he is not in favour of secession from Italy. He is a federalist, leaning more towards the idea of dividing up the country into macro-areas on the model proposed by the Agnelli Foundation in the early 1990s rather than Miglio’s, with about 60% of taxes levied locally and 40% going to Rome. However, if this federalisation does not happen, he is open to support independence. In any case, the current situation is no longer acceptable.

He believes that the process of European integration had a relatively low impact on his personal experience, and on the wider public. He thinks that in Italy there has never been much interest in the idea of Europe, or much attention to the potential that this process might unleash. He points out that, in electoral terms, the League underperformed at the European elections until 2004, because the stronger focus of the movement on local realities made people ignore it for European matters. This has changed around 2004 because people have begun perceiving much more the impact of EU policy on their daily life and, since the LN has been the only party vocally criticising some aspects of the EU, they have voted for it not much differently from the reasons why they voted for the LN to punish the bad policies of the Italian government in the early 1990s.

In this connection, he points out that local realities, such as his province, have suffered because of globalisation, and more precisely from Chinese competition, although to varying degrees according to each specific sector. Textiles have suffered most. Others have been able to adapt. These latter either have been able to delocalise and take advantage of new comparative advantages or have been less affected. Unfortunately, local politics have not done much to help enterprises get out of the crisis unleashed by the process of globalisation, or at least, it has not had a decisive weight. In the few cases in which political support has been successful, it has always been through targeted action concerning few enterprises. This is mainly due to the fact that the major policy instruments, in terms of advantages that can be offered to enterprises, belong to the area of fiscal policy. Also, these powers are fiercely held by the central government in Rome, and, therefore, cannot be used at the local level. The municipality or the region can attract firms by offering them cheap land and other infrastructures, but they cannot offer them long-term advantages in fiscal terms. That is why macro-areas should be endowed with fiscal latitude in order to attract investments.

Concluding, he has a positive attitude towards globalisation, he believes that people have taken advantage of it, but, as he said above, the system is lacking rules. Now, the situation is a little bit like the Far West, where there were no rules and these have to be devised. Here, is where politics can intervene positively, although always in line with liberal principles, especially in the sector of banking and finance. For instance, investment and retail banking should be kept separated.

### **Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie**

Jan Jambon (born 1960) – Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (until May 25, 2014, currently Belgian Minister of Internal Affairs since October 11, 2014) – 18/12/2012

His family was moderately nationalist, but this was not a trigger. He became interested in politics already at high school and did so alone. He just started reading the news and got interested in the matter. He then entered the youth movement of the VU (after 1978) and remained there until 1988, but he was already a separatist (apparently this was the mainstream within the VU's youth movement, while the VU itself was federalist). He did not join the VB. At the time, it was mainly an Antwerp phenomenon and very marginal. However, he does think that the Egmont Pact was a disaster and, after the Pact, about at the time he joined, the VU was looking for a new direction. He and his colleagues in the youth movement thought that the key lay in a radicalisation of nationalist demands. This created tensions between the youth and the party. In 1988, he quit because the VU violated three basic points of the nationalist movement: it accepted the creation of the Brussels region (which had been put in the constitution in 1970, but not implemented until 1988); the language facilities; the law for the regions' funding.

He then moved to the wider Flemish movement, made up of civil society organisations. He joined the VVB (Flemish People's Movement) led by Peter de Roever and wrote a book on independence. He did not join the VB, although he was offered this opportunity, because it was too extreme. He shared with it the goal of independence but found that its socio-economic policy was too statist (he thinks that on socio-economic matters it has more in common with the socialists than with the N-VA) and it was too right-wing.

In 2001 the N-VA was formed and he immediately became a member. The party almost disappeared in 2003 and to avoid that, in 2004, it formed an alliance with the CD&V. He was then CEO of a company, but, in 2005, Bart de Wever offered him the opportunity to run for office. He thought it could be a once-in-a-life-time chance to have a political impact. Thus, he was elected alderman in 2006 in his municipality and a year later to the Belgian Chamber of Representatives.

The main problem with Belgium, in his opinion, is that issues cannot be solved in a way useful to the people. The ambition of the N-VA is to provide welfare for the people, but nothing changes. The solution would be to devolve everything to the regional level because there one has the consensus needed to implement policies, while this is not the case at the federal level. Things are too different in the two parts of the countries.

He thinks that the cultural argument could be dealt with in a federal state and actually this has been done with the territorial division of Belgium in monolingual areas. BHV is not a priority for him and in any case it has been split now. It was an issue, but now is not that important anymore. If the Flemish culture is in danger in the future, it will be the Flemings' fault.

Thus, the transfers are the true problem and the fact that Belgium is, in fact, divided into two different countries, with two different public opinions and diverging interests. Furthermore, it is not so much about the transfers themselves, but rather that welfare is deteriorating in Flanders, therefore, the Flemings should keep their money to first address their own problems and then give what is left to the Walloons. Also, solidarity as it is currently managed in Belgium is unacceptable because nobody knows where the money goes and how it is spent. He argues that the N-VA does not have an interest in seeing Wallonia becoming poor. There is always room for solidarity, but not the Belgian solidarity, whereby nobody knows how much is spent, for what and there is no improvement. The EU structural funds should be a model for a new solidarity and if, at the end of the day, they do not work solidarity should stop.

About confederalism, he says that the N-VA's statute clearly says that the party is for an independent Flanders in the EU. This is its long-term vision. Yet, there is no majority in Flanders for that. Running with a goal that is not shared by most of the people is not really smart. People are afraid of the split. Hence, confederalism means that everything that pertains to the socio-economic level should go to Flanders. The Basque Country can be a model, meaning that Flanders keeps all the money and pays a fee to Belgium for the services provided. People support it, they are not afraid of that. So, it is a strategy, but we are very clear that the long-term goal is an independent Flemish Republic. Belgium could keep defence, for instance, in the short run, but in the long run it should be devolved to the EU.

The PS is the main reason for Wallonia's lower standard of living because it has furthered dependency. The PS has a personal interest in doing so. In Wallonia 40% of people work in the public sector, while in Flanders figures are much smaller. Flanders is based on SMEs and foreign investments, especially thanks to the port of Antwerp. Wallonia instead sticks to a big industry model, which is also the reason why trade unions are stronger there.

About Europe, he is not in favour of a federal state. Smaller states can take decisions more quickly. He is in favour of a reshuffling of competences. Some should be taken back, while others could be devolved. But the party is debating the issue. In 2002, they were very much in favour of a federal Europe. Now, the situation has changed. The Parliament

should get more powers. At the same time, the nation-state should not disappear. But the party is not in favour of cross-country lists and direct election of the Commission or of the President of the Commission.

Flanders is about average in size among European countries. Furthermore, the ten richest countries in the world are smaller than Flanders. Independence will certainly be a boost to Flemish welfare. The main threat in his opinion is the possibility of remaining outside the EU if Flanders becomes independent. This would be a catastrophe for a country that exports so much. The referendum is not a good strategy, because if you lose the issue is killed for the next couple of decades. Finally, Brussels will decide what it will do in an independent Flanders. The party is open to a kind of co-management of Brussels, either at the Belgian level or by two independent (Walloon and Flemish countries). Brussels decides, but the important question, he argues, is: who pays for it? The citizens of Brussels know that they would be better off in Flanders.

Paul De Ridder (born 1948) – Member of the Brussels Parliament (until May 25, 2014) – 16/01/2013

He comes from a nationalist family. His grandfather was a member of Daensist Movement (a Christian democratic party for the defence of nationalism founded by priest Adolf Daens from Aalst). He says that the movement radicalised in the 1930s, mostly as a reaction to francophone scorn and arrogance (he mentions for instance the soldiers dead in the First World War because they did not understand French). During the German occupation the movement hoped to obtain more autonomy from the Germans, but this did not happen. His father was a typographer, self-employed. De Ridder joined politics in 1982. He did not join the VB, because he thinks that it is a racist party. The N-VA wants to manage immigration but it is not against it in principle. In this connection, he points out that learning the language is extremely important.

He argues that there is no consensus in Belgium and that is the main problem. This does not mean that the Flemings are better, but they are different from the Walloons. He then adds that the N-VA is not against Belgium in principle, but only because it is a problem for Flanders. Were it not a problem it could remain as an overarching structure uniting the two regions, for instance, in the realm of historical archives and culture when dealing with matters of common heritage.

Initially the cultural argument was preponderant for him. He later became familiar with the economic argument.

The different mentality between the two regions is the result of a different culture. They have a southern mentality. He does not understand how it is possible that Wallonia cannot improve its economic condition. After all, Wallonia is not Somalia and, yet, one finds families whose members have been unemployed for about four generations. Then, they say that when Flanders was poorer Wallonia paid for it, but this is not true. There was no social security, no welfare at the time. The Flemings have worked hard in the Walloon mines. In any case, he makes clear that, even if Wallonia was richer, the Flemings would still want their autonomy.

It is true though that the economic argument is better understood by the population than the cultural one. The Flemish culture today is safe, although many things could be improved.



Belgium is not really a democracy. It is not a tyranny either, but the Walloons do not accept the idea that the majority decides. Federalisation has prevented secession and a fracture existed already in the 1950s.

A Flemish francophone elite still exists, mostly in Brussels, but it is a minority and it is not organised. In the meantime, Brussels has become a cosmopolitan city and today English is a language that might become dominant in the city. Currently, many children in Brussels go to the Flemish schools because there is a tradition of learning other languages, while this is not the case with the francophone schools (he says that this is due to the fact that the Francophones tend to think that French is a universal language).

Brussels has been the main victim of the Belgian state. The city has been deliberately Franchised. The reason why Brussels became a problem only in the 1960s, despite that the Frenchisation happened mostly in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, is that the movement focused first on Flanders, ensuring that Dutch be safe there, but they paid the price in Brussels. Now, there are many Flemings who say that the Flemings should let go of Brussels.

He argues that the price paid for BHV has been too high because now it is not sure that there will be a representative of the Flemish community of Brussels at the Federal Parliament. The Flemings of Brussels are thus left on their own. As is often the case in Belgium, the compromises that are reached are unclear, this has been the case in the past as well. In this way, each community can interpret compromises as it wants. For instance, the Francophones say that the facilities were permanent, while the Flemings argue that they were temporary.

If it wins the elections in 2014, the N-VA will start negotiating confederalism, which means that only defence and foreign policy will remain at the federal level. Brussels will be an autonomous region with territorial competences, while the cultural and welfare competences will stay with the communities, with the possibility to choose, so the two systems will compete to provide better services to the citizens.

#### Kris Van Dijck (born 1963) – Member of the Flemish Parliament – 18/12/2012

His family was politically engaged. His mother was a member of the town council. The grandfather had been accused of collaboration with the Nazis, although he was innocent. Basically, he said that his grandfather was smeared by some economic competitors (he had a shop). The grandfather spent half a year in jail. During detention, he developed nationalist ideas as a reaction to how the Belgian state was dealing with the collaboration. His father and mother assimilated those ideas and passed them to him. Later the Flemish movement became ever more radical and in favour of separatism, mainly because the majority cannot rule the country and it is, in fact, a political minority. For instance, in order to change the constitution and special legislation one not only needs a two-thirds majority, but also 51% within each linguistic group. Hence, in practice, 31 francophone MPs out of 150 can block important legislative changes. There is nothing wrong in defending the minority, but these rules turn the majority into a minority. Furthermore, at the beginning, in the 1930s, the Flemings were in favour of a truly bilingual country. It was the Francophones who turned that offer down. This would have been the only way to save Belgium, turn it into a truly bilingual country.

Anyways, in the late 1960s, there was a proliferation of student groups in favour of independence. Later they were attracted also to the events in Ireland and the Basque Countries. That was also the time of *Voeren*, a period of huge popular mobilisation. He entered politics in the 1980s, joining the VU, but he was already for secession at the time. He was never interested in the VB. He simply did not believe in that party.

For him both the cultural and economic arguments were important. He also felt that there was an emotional component linked to the construction of a Flemish Republic. Today, the main problem is that democracy does not work. Thus, he has come to the conclusion that the problem lies in the framework, the Belgian framework.

To him independence is a process. He believes in evolution rather than in revolution. There will be a party congress in early 2014 on confederalism and Brussels. Brussels should become a kind of autonomous region within Flanders, on the model of Washington DC. But he is open to co-management with a future Walloon state. Also, he is more in favour of negotiations rather than a referendum. This is also because politicians should take responsibility for this choice. If it can help to increase the legitimacy of the act that is fine, but the last time Belgium had a referendum was in the 1950s and it did not work out well.

Wallonia has more big companies and more powerful trade unions, while Flanders is more rural and Catholic. Wallonia also shows a more dependent mentality and this is the fault of the socialists and the trade unions. This did not happen in Flanders because of the influence of the Church and the Northern European mentality. Flanders is more liberal and more Catholic-conservative.

The EU will probably evolve into a federation, but it will be desirable that it does so only when there is a consensus and also when the differences in the social and economic outlooks of the countries are lower. Until now, the process has gone too fast. Most Eastern European countries should have joined later. The question is also how big can Europe become? Can Turkey come in? It is not only about religion, but about the economy and democracy as well. By the way, the party is sceptical about Turkey's accession. It is certainly too soon for that country to join.

In the nineteenth century, countries relied only on the domestic market, so the bigger, the better. Today, we live in a global economy, he says. Small state can offer better welfare to their citizens because they can act more quickly and efficiently. If one looks at the richest countries in the world, most of them are small, not only because of size, but also because they are more homogenous. In the Flemish Parliament, we mostly talk about details, but the main points are shared by everybody, this is not the case at the federal level. He does not see major threats from the world economy, apart from the competition of emerging countries that spend much less in welfare services than Flanders, and other advanced economies. He does not believe in tariffs, but he rather thinks that the government should invest in innovation and people should probably work longer hours for the same wage. He believes in welfare, but he wants to limit state involvement in the economy. People have rights and duties. For instance, unemployed people should be helped, but they should also adapt to new skills.

## **Scottish National Party**

Linda Fabiani (born 1956) – Member of the Scottish Parliament – 03/12/2013

She was a Labour voter, although she was sympathetic with the SNP's nationalist ideas. She was just not happy with the social policy defended by the party in the 1980s. Yet, towards the end of the decade, the nationalists started changing in that respect, so she decided to join.

In terms of motivations, she came to the conclusion that in order to achieve social justice you need independence. She was totally against Thatcher's policies but, at the same time, she was not convinced that the policies proposed by Labour were sensible alternatives. She felt that Labour had not moved on, while the SNP had. The reasons for her engagement are basically the same today, although now there is the Parliament and the party has improved its policies, it has brought them from being an aspiration to being a fact.

She agrees that there is a difference between England and Scotland because Scotland has a more egalitarian value system, although one cannot say that this is fundamentally different from the English one, because England is a big country and there are regions whose values and views are similar to Scotland. Yet, the power basis is in London and the surrounding areas, therefore most of the policies are drawn from there. There is certainly a difference between Scotland and the South East.

She is totally fine with having a dual identity. She, in the first place, has a dual identity (Italian and Scottish). If one lives and works in Scotland and accepts the values engrained in the Scottish constitution that will be enough to be a Scot. She also says she is 'relaxed' about national identity.

The UK, technically, is a democracy, but there is a deficit because the sizes of the two countries (England and Scotland) determine that larger England will always rule over smaller Scotland. The Parliament is not enough because it has not enough powers to defend the values of the country. The Iraq war is a clear example in this respect. Also, devo-max is not a solution because there would still be policy areas such as defence and foreign affairs that are out of reach for the Scottish people.

She does think that Scotland has been deliberately exploited by the UK. Everything is geared around London and the South East as the centre of power. She argues that the figures shown by the UK Treasury whereby public spending has consistently been higher in Scotland are not reliable. Other figures would show that spending is not higher than average. Also, oil is usually not included in those calculations.

The European Union has certainly made clear that the Scots are part of something much bigger than Great Britain. Furthermore, Scotland is not substantially smaller than most EU states and there is nothing that would make Scotland less able to be a viable and successful state. With regard to the Royal Bank of Scotland bail out, every country bails out the banks that operate on its own territory, so an independent Scotland would have simply dealt with the liabilities of RBS in the country and not in the rest of the UK or further abroad.

Bill Kidd (born 1956) – Member of the Scottish Parliament – 03/12/2013

He joined the SNP in 1983 and ran as a candidate for a seat at Westminster in 1987, but he was not elected. He eventually became a Member of the Scottish Parliament in 2007. He comes from a family that was in favour of home rule [although he does not specify it, this probably means the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, EDM]. His parents were members of the Scottish Independent Labour Party. He has always been interested in politics and showed a left-wing and nationalist orientation. Joining the SNP, however, was rather accidental. He was walking in his city and went past an SNP office. He then decided to join just because he thought he should. Six weeks later an early election was called and he started campaigning. The main reason why he engaged in politics is that he believed that Scotland should have more powers since the UK government would ever do anything for the country. He saw both Labour and the Conservatives as helpless. They did not improve the lives of the Scots. The SNP, however, while quite close to Labour, was much more focused on Scotland.

At the end of the 1980s, the SNP was stagnating. Also, he would have liked it to move further to the Left. Thus, he left and rejoined after the Scottish Parliament was established and the SNP had put itself together again after the internal fights of the 1980s. The devolved Parliament was fundamental in his choice because he thought that it was the right time to have an impact.

Talking about value differences between England and Scotland, he argues that, in fact, values are largely the same across Europe, but, at the same time, he does think that Scotland has a more 'community-based' society than England. Scotland's values are fairly homogenous across the country and this makes the Scots somehow sit uneasily within the UK.

He believes that one of the reasons why the Conservatives are so weak in Scotland is that they have no power base and their constituency is very thinly distributed across the country. This would also reflect the much lower differentiation within Scotland as compared to England. In other words, he reaffirms the idea of Scotland as a homogenous society with homogenous politics and concludes that Scotland and England have a different political culture.

In terms of democratic-deficit, he holds that the democratic choice of the Scots, who are a quite homogenous society, is overwhelmed by the democratic choice of the English people.

He stresses he is Scottish, not British, and this is what also the members of his family thought of themselves. However, it is undeniable that Scotland has taken part in the history and the institution of Britain. So claiming a British identity on the basis of that is totally fair. But, the British identity is an historical one and is set to disappear. Scotland has bonds with the rest of the UK, but the country is growing, developing and changing, although it is still in a state of flux. In his opinion, national identity will become ever more important, not as an historical anachronism, but rather as something to be used for the benefit of the people.

He also thinks that Scotland has been exploited by the UK. Exploitation is usually carried out by the ruling class in any country. The problem is that in Scotland the ruling class was English. Natural and human resources have been used to the advantage of the South East of England. In this respect, oil and gas would only be the last manifestation of such domination. The money has been wasted and used for the City of London as well as for

aggrandizement through nuclear weapons. It should have rather been used for social benefits for the people.

On devo-max, he thinks that it is better than nothing, but it is definitely not enough. For instance, even with more powers a Scottish Parliament within the UK could do nothing to stop Scottish involvement in the Iraq war and to get rid of nuclear weapons from the country.

He supports a confederal, rather than a federal EU. He would like nations within the EU to keep wider autonomy. In any case, an independent Scotland in the EU would enjoy much more sovereignty than the one currently available within the UK. Also, Scotland does not want to isolate itself from the rest of the world. Europe can also certainly contribute to assuage the existential fears of those who have a Scottish and British identity and that could feel lost after a break-up.

An independent Scotland would have certainly been affected by the financial crisis, but he does not see why it could have not been able to deal with it. Regarding the bail out of the Royal Bank of Scotland, he argues that it grew into the Behemoth it currently is, precisely because of the speculative behaviours so endemic to the City of London. Furthermore, the regulators who failed to stop the casino banking that was going on back then were in London.

#### Stewart Maxwell (born 1963) – Member of the Scottish Parliament – 02/12/2013

He has always been interested in politics and was in politics already before joining the SNP. He studied social sciences between 1981 and 1985. Those were the Thatcher years, there were no jobs, thus he joined the Labour party and stayed there for some years. He left Labour in 1990 because he sensed hatred against the SNP on the part of Labour and could not understand that. Two years later (1992), he entered the SNP.

He had always had sympathy for the SNP. In 1974, for instance, he wanted it to win, although he was a child and came from a Labour environment (in Western Scotland everybody was for Labour and his family was for Labour).

He joined the Labour party for reasons of social justice, mainly because of the policies applied by the Thatcher government. It was a reaction against her and her language of self-interest. In any case, the most important thing is that he has always been for independence. In his opinion, independence is neither right nor left. Independence simply is the only way to change Scotland in the way people want. For instance, the Scots are generally against nuclear weapons. The Labour party will never get rid of them. It is simply inconceivable. The same is true regarding economic and industrial policy.

Today, he is a nationalist mainly for the same reasons that motivated him in the early 1990s, although the idea of individual responsibility has come along later. This individual responsibility boils down to the idea that Scotland is strong enough and mature enough to take care of itself. He says: ‘this Parliament isn’t enough because this Parliament only deals with education, health, justice etc., a limited number of things. I logically cannot understand people who are on the no side of the argument who say that it is right that we control local taxation, but it is wrong that we would control national taxation. It is right that we control health, but it is wrong that we would control welfare. I cannot see the logic

in the argument. If we are grown up enough to control what we control than we are grown up enough to run all of our own affairs’.

But the problem also is, ‘how can you create social justice in a country when you don’t control taxation, when you don’t control the economy, when you don’t control the welfare and benefit system...how can you possibly do that?’. It is a matter of empowerment and responsibility. The current Parliament just spend the money coming from London, there is no incentive to making the economy grow. This is neither logical nor sensible. Devo-max would be better than what Scotland currently enjoys, but it is not sufficient in this respect, because it could not avoid involvement in events like the Iraq war or an eventual nuclear war decided in London against the will of the Scots. Furthermore, without control of the defence budget Scotland could not adjust its policy. Scotland could get by with a better defence system for about half a billion pounds less – he asserts –that could be invested in other policy areas.

He agreed that differences in culture and values between Scotland and England are there, but are small and often overplayed. For instance, talking about immigration, he argues that there are substantial disagreements between Scottish and English parties on the issue, but he also points out that the context is completely different. England and especially the South East have to deal with much stronger flows than Scotland does. Thus, they certainly have a number of problems that have not affected the Scots to the same extent and this is again a reason why differences should not be over-emphasised.

The conversation switched to the subject of dual identity. He thinks that some people can share two identities without any clash. He personally finds that puzzling, although he accepts it. He clearly is Scottish not British, although he says he does not care about identity politics. A polity should only seek a minimum understanding around basic commitments, but he does not define them. It is certainly not just paying taxes, it is more than that. It is about sharing the values of the community. It does not mean that we need to have the same views, but just to connect to the society and be willing to be Scottish and share costs and rewards.

He does not think that Scotland has been exploited economically. He does believe though that Scotland has suffered within the Union and loses out. The problem is that the nature of the UK economy is such that all resources are sucked by the South East of England and this is detrimental not only to Scotland but also to other parts of England.

Asked whether the UK is a democracy or not, he answers that it is a kind of democracy. He confirms the existence of a democratic deficit that can only be resolved through independence. Devo-max, for instance, would not solve this. When asked whether Scotland is not fairly represented in Westminster since it gets a 9% share of seats, which is roughly equal to its demographic share of the UK, he argues that this claim is valid only when thinking of the UK as a unitary community, which it is not. Scotland is not a region, but a country with a distinct history and culture. This is a fundamental difference.

Also, the SNP wants to break-up the 1707 Union, but not the Union of the Crowns that was there before. He is a Republican, but the party has decided to keep the Queen and he is fine with that, because in the end it makes no difference. It is just a symbolic issue that should not hamper the way towards independence at all.

He sees the EU as a kind of insurance policy, as a safety net that can soften the rough edges of independence by placing Scotland within a bigger community. He agreed that the

current economic crisis did not provide the best environment for an independence referendum, but that has been a party commitment ever since devolution and it could not renege on its promises. He further suggests that the best way to hold the referendum would be when the economy goes well because people, being more self-confident, could be motivated to change.

He is aware that if the party loses the referendum the issue will be put on the back-burner for a long time. He does not believe however that the SNP will be torn between gradualists and fundamentalists as happened after the 1979 referendum. The SNP today is a much more united and professional party than it was at the time. Furthermore, after the referendum, the party will still be in power until spring of 2016 and will work to improve the life of the Scots.

He also thinks that even if it wins by a very narrow edge, the population will accept it. A narrow victory will not polarise the Scottish society. After all, this is the agreement. People care deeply about this choice, but it is true that the interest is not visceral, is not as emotional as a similar question would be lived in other societies. Why? 'Because we are just not that type of society'. Also because once it happens everybody will be willing to be on the winning side, they will enjoy change.

Scotland could be a perfectly viable independent country. Most countries in Europe and the world are small. In fact, most small countries are very successful, not all of them are, but many of them are, so there is no reason why Scotland could not become one of them, also because, most small countries do not have the resources, in oil and gas as well as renewables, that Scotland enjoys. With regard to the Royal Bank of Scotland, he argues that an independent Scotland could have easily managed the situation simply because RBS was a global bank and Scotland would have been responsible only for the operations in Scotland, other countries would have been responsible for RBS operations within their own borders. Furthermore, the government did not really bail them out, it just gave a guarantee that was never spent, but at the same time has generated interests that the bank still pays to the Treasury.

#### Gordon Wilson (born 1938) – Former Party Chairman – 04/12/2013

He became involved in politics when he was 17 and he was not living in Scotland at the time. He in fact grew up in the Isle of Man. He was at school and read that the government wanted to set up a rocket range in a Gaelic speaking area. He then began to get active and organised a petition at school. That was his first direct contact with politics. He then went to Edinburgh and studied law. There, he joined the university nationalist club. Later he founded a radio, 'Pirates of the Air', Radio Free Scotland. Three years later, he was invited to join the SNP and be the assistant of the National Secretary on recommendation. During the 1960s, the SNP grew substantially and he contributed a lot to that. In 1973, he was elected to Westminster in Dundee East and also later became party chairman.

At the beginning, the main reason why he decided to engage politically as a nationalist is that he recognised Scotland to be a nation and, as such, it was entitled to the right of self-determination. Furthermore, in those years Scotland was suffering from two twin evils: the decline of heavy industry and emigration. He also saw the UK as a sinking ship and thought that Scotland should not be left going down as well. Oil did not change much his opinion about independence. He also connects the victory at Hamilton to the global unrest

sweeping Europe at the end of the 1960s, arguing that Scotland could not be left untouched.

Talking about the cultural differences between England and Scotland, he argues that Britain is not a single country. There is huge variation between its different parts and, accordingly, the attitudes of people in different areas diverge a lot. The North of England for instance features attitudes closer to Scotland's than the South of England. He thus agrees that there are big differences between Scotland and the South of England. This is due to the fact that England adopted neo-liberalism. Since then, it has lost interest in its periphery and in manufacturing, relying only in finance and services. This drove a gulf between the North and the South. Even now, most of the recovery is in the South and the Labour party, in order to be elected, will increasingly have to sacrifice the North to get votes in the South, which is also demographically more important.

The British identity developed in Scotland as a result of the Union, but especially because of the Empire, although this did not really happen in England, as the English thought they had taken over Scotland. Later on, London began to interfere in Scottish affairs, especially during the interwar years. Furthermore, Scotland experienced terrific casualties in the First World War, about 26% of Scottish soldiers died, twice as much as the English ones, and Scotland kept relying a lot on heavy industry. These are problems that were experienced in other areas, especially in the North of England, but the difference is that Scotland has identified the solution in national identity and self-determination, while these other places, for obvious reasons, cannot do the same and continue to bear the dominance of the South.

He stresses that, although the political issue of Scottish self-government was already there, oil brought together the political and economic aspects, which was a powerful combination. This powerful combination could not be exploited by the SNP in the 1980s because the party was nearly destroyed by the defeat in the 1979 referendum, but not only the SNP. Scotland became defeatist and looked for British solutions. Also, at the time the main party in Scotland was Labour, which was very much centralist and unionist. Labour could have ignited the issue of the democratic deficit, with the idea that Margaret Thatcher had no legitimacy in Scotland, but it did not. Thus, the issue was not brought up. But Labour is a British party, so they did not see any democratic deficit, because in the British sense that was just the British democracy. Thus, Scotland had to wait that some other events occurred, the main one being Labour embracing the idea of devolution – which they came to accept only after they lost Glasgow Govan to Jim Sillars in 1988.

Britain in his opinion is not a democracy, but an oligarchy, an old and corrupted institution. He also thinks that Scotland was deliberately exploited by Britain, especially through the exploitation of cheap labour, oil and the use of soldiers to fight in imperial wars. Yet, for point of view of the English there would be nothing wrong with it because Scotland had been incorporated by England and because Scotland is a minority. In terms of taxes, he says, Scotland, apart from London and the South East, provides more tax revenues than any other part of the UK.

Devo-max is not sufficient because Scotland still would not get to control of foreign and defence policy, which are very important. Also, its economic policy would be very limited.

He does not think that the EU has played a great role. The SNP used to be anti-EU, mainly because of fishing, and about 30% of the Scots are against the EU. He also believes that the SNP has been intellectually lazy in not re-examining its position regarding Europe in accordance with the changed institutional circumstances. Initially, the SNP's shift towards



the EU in the 1980s was caused by the idea that, being within the EU, you could reduce the costs of independence, especially in terms of security concerns. Yet, the EU in the meantime has grown into an ever more centralising organisation that could end up being a federation. Thus, he is personally open to alternative solutions, such as membership of EFTA and the EEA. Scotland could be better off either within or without the EU. It all depends on the terms of accession.

He does not think that an independent Scotland would have suffered more than within the UK from the collapse of the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Bank of Scotland because all of them were already controlled by English groups, thus the UK would have to intervene as well in any case. He does not fear that Scotland could suffer from an external shock as Iceland and Ireland did. By the way, he finds Iceland a very interesting case because Iceland defaulted, but now is growing at 3% a year and it is voluntarily paying back its debts.

### **Vlaams Belang**

Gerolf Annemans (born 1958) – Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (until May 25, 2014, currently Member of the European Parliament since May 2014) – 22/11/2012

He grew up in a family of small business owners and his parents were Flemish nationalists. They supported the VU but were not members. However, as soon as this started being like today's N-VA, they stopped voting for it. He was intellectually attracted to the radical movement founded by Karel Dillen. One day, as a member of the student movement, he was invited by Dillen for an interview and on that occasion Dillen invited him to join the party because he was looking for youngsters to rejuvenate it. He thus joined around 1985 and became a Member of Parliament in 1987.

He was for independence since the very beginning and that is the same for the VB, which was founded against the federalist outlook of the VU. Thus, the VU was like the N-VA today, the only difference is that the VU said it wanted federalism, while the N-VA calls it confederalism, but the substance is the same. Asked about what is more relevant between the economic and the cultural argument he makes clear that culture is primary, while the N-VA is putting much more emphasis on economics. The VB's most important principle is cultural. Sure there are economic arguments in their propaganda, but these are not the fundamental reason for the rise of the VB nor the rationale for its action. This is the case with the N-VA. The N-VA is mainly about that, but not the VB. What is more, he pits the VB's nationalism against previous understandings of national identity that were based on race. The VB predicates the Flemish national identity on culture, meant as something fluid in constant change and evolution. Can someone become a Fleming? Can he acquire culture? Migrants have to assimilate. If they do that, they will be accepted. He is skeptical about the amount of immigration that Flanders can assimilate, but he is not against it in principle. Furthermore, it is not just about learning the language, the N-VA says that but it is not enough. It is about values, it is about being willing to be a Flemish. What are the values that define being Flemish? They are in the law he says: 'I would be already very glad if everybody respected the law'. He refuses to enter into an argument about describing what the Flemish values are. They are already there in the legal system. Thus, the immigrants who do not respect our values are immigrants who do not respect the law. Then, he adds: 'of course I would like to change some laws, introduce more values in the

current system. But, starting with respecting the law would already be a good thing'. So, he is very clear that he stands for assimilation and not for multiculturalism.

He is in favour of European integration, but much more in the cultural realm than in the economic one. The current EU is thus the result of centralising policies on the model of Napoleon and 'Hitler' centralism. This is because today's European unity is forced.

About Europe, at the time of the interview, the party was debating its position in light of the recent crisis. It still was not clear whether there would be a qualitative change in its discourse whereby the Union would be considered not only as flawed and in need of change, but also to be dissolved altogether. In this second case, however, the party would not, in any case, advocate for a return to the age of the nation-state as it was in the last century. The party would support collaboration between peoples and especially between small nations, such as Denmark, for instance. Generally speaking, then, they do not want Europe to fall apart, but rather to redraw its contours and its scope. A confederal Europe would be a much more suitable model. The euro has been abused to force through other projects that boils down to a tyranny against small peoples like Flanders.

Asked whether the N-VA is separatist or confederalist, he says that nobody actually knows. In any case confederalism is a silly concept. Technically speaking, confederalism is about two separate entities coming together. Now, if the Flemings can ever muster the energy needed to break apart, why should they be willing to come back together in a different way?

Basically, what the N-VA wants to say with confederalism is that once the federal budget will be smaller than the regional budget, then, their confederalism will be achieved, in other words, it is all about money. Furthermore, confederalism is a way old concept in Belgium, even the Christian-Democrats have used it, and that is only because they want to win the elections in 2014, while before they were having a true debate about shutting down the country. What will happen in 2014 is that the N-VA will win the elections, but it will not know what to do with it.

The VB has always been a pan-Dutch party and the idea is still there, although in the Netherlands they do not understand that. However it is not a priority. The argument is that if the Flemings ever become independent, they should first deal with establishing their own state and then see how they can unite, in some way, with the Netherlands. They should thus first take the time to create the Republic of Flanders and sort out all the issues connected with the split of Belgium. Also because establishing altogether an association with the Netherlands could offer an excuse to the Francophone in Brussels to secede from Flanders. In any case, all the Belgian citizens who live in Flanders will be Flemish citizens [so not all the residents, EDM] mainly because they do not want to make the process too complex.

Furthermore, the EU will accept that and will not hamper the process. On the other hand, a referendum is not the right way. It makes everything much more complex as the Catalan case clearly shows.

Asked whether gradualism is a way, he argues that yes, but so far any step forward has been compensated by two steps backwards in favour of the Francophones. This kind of gradualism is not the way ahead. The difference between the VB and the N-VA is that the VB has a clear plan, while the N-VA has not.

Frank Creyelman (born 1961) – Member of the Flemish Parliament (until May 25, 2014) – 28/11/2012

He comes from a working class background and studied history. He said that, if one studies the history of Flanders, he/she naturally becomes a Flemish nationalist. Thus, he started militating in the *Vlaams Militanten Orde* (Order of Flemish Militants). Then, a personal episode happened that further convinced him to pursue a political career, that is, his sister wanted a job in the public administration and the local Christian-Democratic politicians asked them to vote for the Christian-Democrats and they will have later arranged the hiring of his sister. He could not understand that, he was disgusted. Also, being a Flemish nationalist, especially an extreme-right Flemish nationalist as he was, was not easy at the time, it was not something that was socially accepted, they were marginalised. So he found it attractive. He says that it is difficult even now, though. Anyways, he began active politics in 1977–1978.

When asked about the motivations of its political engagement he said that Flanders have always been oppressed in history and this mainly because it was a rich region. With Belgium cultural oppression came along, because Belgium had to be French. Moreover, Belgium was created to be a buffer state in order to contain France after the Napoleonic Wars.

Also, he had always been in favour of Flemish independence and this claim mainly stems from the fact that the Flemings are a majority in the country, but the francophone minority rules. Furthermore, the two regions have very different ideological outlooks and interests. This makes that the two want to organise the country and their lives in very different ways, but they cannot agree on how and everything gets inevitably stuck.

The Walloons want a much stronger and bigger state, while the Flemings do not. These are extremely important differences when one has to rule a state. Flanders has already given much more than what West Germany has given to East Germany. This situation has been going on since Belgium was founded and nothing has changed.

Things have changed, however, to some extent, because, when he and his colleagues began, people laughed at when they mentioned Flemish independence. Today they do not laugh anymore. Independence has become a subject of political debate.

Brussels is totally Flemish. It was not a francophone island, but it became such because of the Belgian state. Brussels will in any case be given special rights, the city will be bilingual, although the VB will promote the learning of Dutch in the city. In the administration for instance, people will be required to be truly bilingual, not as it is now that the rule is not really enforced. But, this will happen naturally because when the Francophones will realise that Flanders is a Dutch-speaking country, they will adapt and it will not even be necessary to enforce bilingualism through legislation.

In any case, they cannot leave up Brussels.

Asked whether there is a conflict between Flanders and the rest of Brussels, he replies that this is certainly true. The people from Brussels are the last Belgians, they are Flemish, but speak French. Furthermore, the people from Flanders who work in Brussels do not feel at home there. The people of Brussels do not want to learn Flemish, there is also a wide Arab population that people are a little afraid of. There is also crime in Brussels. All this makes that the Flemings do not really love Brussels.

Pan-Dutch feelings are still there, in part of the Flemish movement. He is in favour of the idea, but it is not a priority (neither here nor in the Netherlands). The best would be to first establish the Flemish state and then, after some years, they could work together on some kind of partnership.

Asked whether there is still a fracture between French-speaking Flemings and Dutch-speaking Flemings, he answers positively, but also clarifies that the francophone Flemings are a tiny minority. There were francophone journals in the major Flemish cities (Antwerp, Ghent, Bruges), but they are all gone. The Flemings in Brussels, in contrast, are moving outside Brussels, but the rich Francophones do that as well. Brussels is spilling over as an oil spill around Brussels. That is why the VB wants to shut down the facilities, although the Francophones will still keep being arrogant and pretend to speak French in Flanders. The francophones are fundamentally convinced that Belgium is bilingual and thus they are allowed to speak French wherever in the country.

He wants a Europe of the nations, of smaller communities that put together policies like the military and foreign policy, but not more. Europe became strong because the different countries competed one with the other. Now, the EU is a straitjacket. The EU should be re-organised around smaller (but size is not really an issue because, for instance, Belgium is not much bigger than Flanders, even if there are clearly bigger countries such as Germany, that in the current EU dominates over the others) and more homogenous communities. The EU should probably split apart in two, because the northern and the southern countries think differently. Furthermore, the union should be organised around matters like security and other things, but not many. All the rest should remain within the competences of the states.

He then says that Flanders accounts for about 80% of the Belgian economy, so, if the Flemings could manage all that on their own, they would be better off of course. He makes clear that Flanders has both big and small firms. The VB was largely supported by SMEs, but now many of them are supporting the N-VA. Hence, in a way, the N-VA is harvesting what the VB sowed.

He argues that immigration has been a way to attract people and sensitise them on other themes, such as Flemish nationalism and suggests that the fact that the N-VA does not have such a strong focus on immigration means that people have become accustomed to the issue of Flemish nationalism thanks to the VB.

He concludes saying that Flanders has a high cost of labour, so it is not easy to compete with Slovenians, Brazilians and other countries with cheaper workforce. The only thing to do is to get better than the others at doing things. He is against protectionism in principle, however, it is in favour of imposing the same standards apply on Flemish products on those goods that are imported from abroad: 'It might be protectionism but it is good protectionism'.

Filip Dewinter (born 1962) – Member of the Flemish Parliament (until May 25, 2014, currently Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, since May 2014) – 19/12/2012

The family was not involved in politics. When he was 15/16 years old, he joined the Flemish Student Action Group because it was the time of *Voeren* and it seemed like a fight, it was adventurous, it was spectacular and he was attracted to this. Later, he became the

leader of the Nationalist Student Organisation and thought it was a good idea to move on and join a political party. He then founded the *Vlaams Blok Jongeren*, the student movement of the VB and became President. He helped introducing new people and new themes into the party (immigration, security, multiculturalism). He was separatist from the very beginning and this has always been the most important theme for him, but he and his colleagues understood that by adding other themes they could draw more people and sensitise them to the nationalist fight. This is the only way to convince people of the righteousness of the fight for independence and has been very successful. At the time, people were not very interested in independence, while now it is a subject of political debate. He thus thinks that the party played a very important role in making people aware of the salience of independence.

It is true that the institutional structure of Belgium has changed and of course there have been improvements. But this is not enough, because the most important competences are still at the federal level. Social security is a crucial thing, because this is what keeps the country together. If that goes, the Walloons will be the first to secede, because they will not have an interest anymore in keeping Belgium together. The Walloons are dependent on the transfers from Flanders and this because culture is different there. The Flemings are more entrepreneurs and dynamic. The Walloons are lazier and suffer from a dependency mentality. The socialists in particular are responsible for the development of this dependency.

If Flanders becomes independent Brussels will stay within Flanders because Brussels needs Flanders. It will be the capital of Flanders, it will be its window on the world and, also symbolically, even if only a minority of people there speak Dutch, it is important that it stays in Flanders. Bilingualism is not an issue. The fact that the majority is francophone will be recognised in the law.

Belgium is not a democracy. Democracy cannot work in a two-nations state. Here the minority has more rights than the majority.

Asked whether there is some form of hostility between Flanders and Brussels, he answers that yes, the Flemings do not feel at home in Brussels because people there do not speak Dutch and there are too many Arabs (sic). Furthermore, the city has always despised the countryside.

Asked if it is true that they are in favour of a strong welfare, he answers that this is right, but it is because Flanders can afford it. If you can afford it you should do it for your own people. He stresses that he is not a liberal, he is a nationalist and if social services help the people they should be implemented.

Europe should become more democratic and should be founded on culture, rather than economic interests. Of course, he is in favour of a Europe of the nations, but he says he is also realist and knows that it will not happen any time soon. Furthermore, Europe must remain European, this means that Turkey, for instance, should not be let in because it is a Muslim country, it belongs to a different civilisation. Eastern Europe is fine. The Eastern European countries probably were not ready when they entered and access should have been delayed, but they are part of the Christian civilisation.

Asked whether the Southern European countries should remain within Europe, he says that it is a little bit like the clash between Flanders and Wallonia. The northern countries pay for the southern ones and this cannot go on much longer. Therefore, he is in favour of a

northern EU, with Germany, Denmark, The Netherlands, the Scandinavian Countries and others of the like. Thus, there is a difference even in the European cultural area between Germanic and Latin countries, but they all have a common European origin.

He denies the argument that Flanders is too small to stand alone in the global economy. First it is bigger than a lot of other European countries. Second, he does believe that 'small is beautiful'. Small countries fare better in today's world economy because they adapt more quickly. And if Flanders needs more robustness in negotiating with bigger partners, there is where the EU can be useful. He thus makes clear that he does not believe in an isolated Belgium. International cooperation with other European countries will be part of the policy of an independent Flanders.

#### Bart Laeremans (born 1966) – Senator (until May 25, 2014) – 03/12/2012

His grandfather was among the founders of the VB. He was 12 years old at the time and he already helped sticking posters. In 1995 he became Member of Parliament. Before he had been active in the *Taal Aktie Komitee* (Committee for Language Action) that fought against the Frenchisation of Flanders. Then, from age 16 on, he entered the *Nationalistische Studentenvereniging* (Organisation of Nationalist Students) that had been founded in the mid-1970s. He was twice appointed president of the organisation in Louvain. He was also editor in chief of *Branding*, a nationalist newspaper.

He points to the artificiality of Belgium and to the linguistic conflict as the main problems to be solved at the time he joined the party, or better, when he was more mature, since he joined when he was 12. The motto at the time was: *Verbrusseling: tegen of ondergaan* (Brusselisation: oppose it or perish).

His father came from Wezembeek-Oppem, which is a community with facilities in the Brussels periphery, where Frenchisation went along with internationalisation (whereby he means the immigration of people from other countries). In these areas there were/are very few people, especially children in schools, who speak Dutch. This is the result of an active policy of encouragement of francophone immigration on the part of the municipalities. The main problem there is the arrogance of the Francophones who believe to be superior and create a hostile environment. This, however, has slightly changed because most of the inhabitants of Brussels are foreigners. The francophone bourgeoisie has left the city.

He says that there are no longer many *Fransquillons* (French-speaking Flemings) in Flanders and in any case they are not organised. Thus, today, the Dutch community is not in danger, except for the area around Brussels. He argues that the split of BHV is not satisfactory, because the municipalities with facilities remain there and the residents can still vote for the francophone parties of Brussels, but the Flemings in Brussels cannot vote for the Flemish parties in Flanders. Thus, overall, the Francophones have again been reinforced. Furthermore, in Brussels the Flemish parties cannot pool together their votes for the House of Representatives and, because there is a high entry threshold, there is no interest in having Flemish parties in Brussels anymore. Therefore, the Francophones have won. The system now pushes Flemish politicians to join the francophone parties and get assimilated. This means that Brussels will definitively become a francophone city.

However, he makes clear that, in case independence will be achieved, Brussels can only choose Flanders: first because the two economies are perfectly integrated; second, because only Flanders has the financial resources to support Brussels. In any case, Brussels will

remain bilingual, but, in principle, the facilities will go. However, if the facilities are the price to pay for independence, well, in that case they can stay. He then adds that, practically speaking, Brussels is in Flanders, but since it is a separate region, the Francophones could claim to be an independent city-state. Furthermore, what could happen is that, when Flanders declares the demise of Belgium, the Walloons and the Bruxellois accuse Flanders of seceding and, in this way, Belgium does not disappear. In that case they could claim Brussels. Nevertheless, he would be ready to accept even the idea of a Flanders without Brussels, although good relationship must be guaranteed.

He points out that, after the last elections (in 2010), everybody talks about the Plan B, that is, the dissolution of Belgium. And even the Francophones are preparing for that.

He says that Belgium is not his state. It is an emotional thing. Belgium is an artificial state. Thus, it is not about money. Money is just an argument to convince people that secession is the solution. Yet, the economic argument is important because the two countries are very different. On the one hand, Flanders is based on SMEs, while on the other Wallonia mainly relies on big industry. Furthermore, Flanders is much more liberal. Wallonia is much more socialist, although the welfare state is important and defended in Flanders as well. Therefore, Flanders and Wallonia need two different policies. Culture has played an important role in differentiating the two regions. Socialism in Wallonia became stronger because industrialisation came earlier, while in Flanders it arrived later and the influence of the Church remained longer, so socialism put less roots.

On the N-VA, he concludes that its members are not true separatists and also that the N-VA is more liberal than the VB. They still think in Belgian terms, while the VB thinks that Belgium cannot work. Every reform increases, rather than reducing the transfers. In this way, democracy is weakened. Democracy cannot work because the two communities are too far apart. Democracy needs a common public sphere and this is missing in Belgium. He stresses that the main problem is that nothing changes. The Flemish majority is blocked since the 1970s. This is a problem especially in the government because there is parity between the two communities while the Flemings are the majority. The other major problem are the qualified majorities that block everything. Then he quotes the vote on the split of BHV in the Parliamentary commission and the ensuing alarm bell procedures triggered by the Francophones in the Federal Parliament, the Walloon Parliament, the German Community parliament and the French Community Parliament, only to delay the adoption of the measure adopted by the majority.

Finally, on Europe, he suggests that nation states must remain strong. Schengen must be reviewed and along with it many other competences must be repatriated. Yet, the party still needs to discuss this. He is not in favour of the direct election of the Commission for instance. So he is against a stronger Europe. It is also an issue of size. A democracy of 500 million people cannot possibly work. Democracy works better in small, cohesive communities. It does not mean that a country cannot be solidary with other peoples, but one has to be more solidary with his/her own people.

Peter Logghe (born 1959) – Member of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (until May 25, 2014) – 22/11/2012

He was born in a separatist family and was involved in politics since very young, although never with any affiliation to a specific party. He then worked in the banking and insurance

sector for a while and after 25 years of professional career he decided to actively engage in a political party, although he had always been interested in politics. The former president of the *Vlaams Blok*, and a personal friend of him, Frank Vanhecke, proposed him to join the party in 2004 and after about three years he was elected as a Member of the Belgian Parliament (2007) in the seat of Roeselare.

He immediately makes clear that his region (West Flanders) is a region of late industrialisation based on SMEs. There is a really low unemployment rate in the area, about 4%, also shortage of workforce, so there are a lot of workers coming from neighbouring France, but, he says, the Walloons do not want to go there, although they would need jobs. Why? Because they do not want to learn the Dutch language, he argues.

He makes clear that West Flanders was not an area of strong VB presence in the past. The VB was rather strong in the Antwerp area, where industrialisation was rather based on big enterprises. Yet, he denies that the Flemish economy is divided between big enterprises in the East and smaller ones in the West and rather argues that there are only two economies in Belgium: Flanders and Wallonia.

The main reason for his political engagement has always been the struggle for independence. This has not changed over time also because the structure of Belgium has changed only on the surface but not substantially. The main political problem is that the Flemings are a majority but they cannot act as such, because they are endlessly (by the Belgian Constitution and by all kind of legal mechanisms) blocked by the Walloons. This is even worse because of the economic weight of Flanders that is bigger than the demographic one (he points out that 81% of the Belgian exports are in fact Flemish exports, although demographically Flanders account for about 65% of the country).

He says that the party still wants to re-unite with the Netherlands. The idea was put on the backburner for a while, but has come back recently. He argues that even the N-VA would like that. After all, they come from the same movement, the former nationalist party, VU. Thus, to him the VB basically is a pan-Dutch movement. He also stresses that the movement's fight is not all about money. Culture is fundamental, meaning by culture the 'way people live'. Hence, even without fiscal imbalance, he would like to secede. The defence of culture and the struggle for recognition are the primary motivations for his political engagement.

However, he makes clear, the transfers from Flanders to Wallonia are higher than what East Germany received from West Germany after the re-unification, about 16-20 billion euros a year. Brussels is a hole in the budget of the state, pretty much like Berlin.

The party wants to eliminate the facilities around Brussels, but Brussels can stay bilingual. According to him, the settling down of Francophones in these municipalities is an asocial phenomenon, they do not want to get integrated into the local Flemish community. Furthermore, they are often rich and buy very expensive houses, thus prices for real estate go up to the disadvantage of the locals. He argues that the Flemings thought of the facilities as a temporary measure, while the Francophones saw them as permanent. This makes that there is an inevitable clash.

In his opinion, the N-VA is much more liberal than the VB, especially in economic terms. They have divergent ideas on that. He also thinks that about a third of the N-VA voters are for independence, another third are indifferent and the last third are undecided.



He believes that, in 2014, nothing will work anymore, but the N-VA will not separate the country. And yet, everything can be divided quite smoothly, the only problem is Brussels. He proposes co-managing Brussels. There are different scenarios, but in any case, Brussels is not self-sufficient, thus the city will need Flanders. He concludes that only Flanders can offer a future to Brussels.

He is not a liberal in socio-economic terms, but he is rather closer to a socialist position in this respect. The party is originally a nationalist party, but then integrated other strands. However, he says that he can immediately recognise from how one speaks where he comes from (in ideological terms) and why he is in the party.

The party thinks that Flanders shares a European heritage and culture, with its own values, but it does not support the current EU. By Europe he means both Western and Eastern Europe. Asked about Flanders' membership of the EU if the region becomes independent, he answers that yes, that will be the case, but there is a split within the party: some are in favour of a stronger EU, others are not and they must have a debate on that. In any case, they do not just want an economic union but also a political one and the majority does not like the way things are handled in the EU at the moment.

He touches upon immigration as well, arguing that not only society must give people a chance to get integrated, but the migrants must make the effort to integrate, mainly learning the language. The Flemings have always had the tendency to learn languages easily. He stresses that newcomers have to adapt to the local culture and attending classes and learning Dutch should be compulsory.

He points out that the party does not really want to organise a referendum on independence. He is not very confident with the option of a referendum. Therefore, he would prefer to negotiate the split with the Francophones. When asked whether he thinks that a referendum would increase the legitimacy of the split, he says that there is no need for that because the linguistic frontier has already been fixed. In a way, thus the country has already been split.