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Note en anglais

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(400 mots avec une tolérance de plus ou moins 10%)

Ce dossier comporte 6 pages (page de garde non comprise).

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SUJET : What are the similarities and differences between the recent referenda in Catalonia, Northern Italy and Scotland discussed in the attached articles ?

The Economist October 21st 2017

Spain's constitutional crisis

Grappling on the brink

MADRID

The government prepares to intervene in Catalonia

WITH its mastery of social media and identity politics, the Catalan independence movement is very 21st-century. But the latest chapter in its struggle with the Spanish government has featured an old-fashioned tool: an exchange of letters, delivered by fax. In these Carles Puigdemont, the head of the Generalitat, Catalonia's government, twice this week refused to clarify or revoke the ambiguous proclamation of independence that he had issued and immediately "suspended" in a speech to his parliament on October 10th. In response, the Spanish government said it will go ahead and seek extraordinary powers to impose constitutional rule in Catalonia.

Spain is thus entering its worst constitutional crisis since the 1930s. It is the culmination of years of rising discontent in Catalonia, one of the country's richest regions, which has 7.5m people and its own language and culture. Although Catalonia enjoys broad self-government, many Catalans want it to have more money, more powers, and to be recognised as a nation. Their demands grew louder after Spain's economic slump of 2008-12. Since 2015 the region's ruling coalition has been bent on secession, a possibility not recognised by the Spanish constitution of 1978.

Mr Rajoy will now ask the Senate to approve invoking the constitution's Article 155. Never before used, it empowers the government to take "all measures necessary to compel" a region to obey the constitution. Its vagueness gives Mr Rajoy broad discretion. He is likely to start by tightening control over Catalan finances and appointing a new regional police chief. "We would have to organise a parallel government," says Alfonso Dastis, the foreign minister.

Having erred in deploying riot police to try to prevent an illegal independence referendum called by the Generalitat on October 1st, the government is proceeding more gingerly. The violence was limited, but won sympathy abroad for the Catalan cause. "We wouldn't want those pictures to be repeated," says Mr Dastis. The Generalitat says 2.3m people (around 43% of the electorate) voted, 90% of them in favour. Those figures are not verifiable, but Mr Puigdemont wields them as a mandate for independence. In his letters to Mr Rajoy, he says he wants "dialogue". But what he proposes to talk about is that "the majority of the Catalan people...want to take the road of an independent state."

Since October 1st Mr Rajoy has moved more adeptly. He persuaded Pedro Sánchez, the leader of the opposition Socialists, to support the use of Article 155 in return for Mr Rajoy's backing for a congressional committee on constitutional reform, which will ultimately try to reach a settlement with Catalonia. Since Mr Rajoy's People's Party holds most of the seats in the Senate and is supported by Ciudadanos, a centre-right group, Article 155 will command a big majority.

For his part, Mr Puigdemont faces conflicting pressures. The drive for independence is hurting the economy: almost 700 companies have moved their legal domicile out of Catalonia in the past fortnight, while tourist bookings in Barcelona have dipped. Moderates want Mr Puigdemont to call a fresh regional election; radicals want a formal declaration of independence backed by a campaign of civil disobedience. All three may happen.

The radicals got a boost on October 16th when a judge of the National Court in Madrid ordered the pre-trial detention of the leaders of two secessionist social movements. They are being investigated for sedition for directing a demonstration in Barcelona in September in which protesters destroyed three police vehicles.

Help, we're being repressed

"Sadly, we have political prisoners again in Spain," Mr Puigdemont tweeted. Tens of thousands demonstrated in Barcelona against the arrests. The judiciary is independent, but secessionists argue that "the Spanish state" is ganging up on them. "It's not so simple," says Jorge Galindo, a political consultant. "Prosecutors and some judges are taking a harsher position than the government."

The arrests mean that the government is likely to slow the application of Article 155, hoping protests die down. The road ahead is fraught with danger, especially for Catalonia. Despite Mr Puigdemont's claim, there is no evidence that secession commands a majority. "Today, the main problem is not the divide between Catalonia and Spain, but the fracture among Catalans themselves," Màrius Carol, the editor of *La Vanguardia*, a Barcelona newspaper, wrote this week. Judicial overreach in Madrid will not conceal that for long. ■

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THE TIMES October 9th 2017

Catalonia on the Brink

The Spanish government must enter mediated dialogue with the separatists in Barcelona rather than just shake a fist at them

Among the many anxious protest marches across Spain last weekend, one stood out. The demonstrators paraded in white, wove no flags, and called out "Let's Talk!" in Spanish and Catalan. This surely is the appropriate response to the crisis that is rattling the eurozone's fourth largest economy.

The country has been taken to the edge of a violent rupture by mediocre leadership, populism and miscalculation. The Catalan parliament is due to hold an emergency session tomorrow and the separatist leaders may use the opportunity to declare unilateral independence from Spain. It will then be up to the prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, to respond. At the weekend he was notably reluctant to rule out the imposition of direct rule on Catalonia. That would entail snatching away any semblance of autonomy for the region, stationing large numbers of national police there and perhaps even arresting Catalan politicians.

Unless one side blinks, there is likely to be a violent outcome. There was a small foretaste of things to come on the day of the Catalan referendum last weekend, when some 900 people were injured in clashes with the national police. Masked officers seized ballot boxes having declared the vote to be illegal. Catalans have been questioned on sedition charges. The operation needlessly stoked anger.

The bungled progress of this crisis suggests that Mr Rajoy is confident of nationalist support against the Catalans and his belief that an isolated Barcelona will soon come to its knees. It is not the behaviour of a strong leader. The Spanish authorities have admittedly apologised for police brutality but now the government has to go an important step further. It must accept that its row with Catalonia is not just an infringement of the constitution, an illegal act that has to be brought under control with strict policing, but a political problem requiring a political solution.

Catalonia has a distinct culture and language; it contributes to about a fifth of Spain's output and more than a quarter of its exports. Catalonia, and Barcelona in particular, accounts for a large chunk of foreign tourism. Resentment about how much it contributes to the central Spanish budget fuels the separatist cause. Yet that is neither sufficient to justify a case for self-determination nor proof that it can survive and flourish as an independent state. The region is not, despite the clashes on referendum day, under the knuckle of an authoritarian regime. It is an integral part of a democratic state that has granted it wide-ranging autonomy.

Since trust has been destroyed between Mr Rajoy and the Catalan leader, Carles Puigdemont, this conversation will have to be mediated. The European Union has, despite Catalan hopes of internationalising the crisis, rejected the role of broker. Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, calls it an internal affair even though Barcelona argues that its 7.5 million people are EU citizens and deserving of protection. The fact is the EU is worried that the separatist flame will pass to the Basque lands, northern Italy and Flemish activists. In fact, the EU just wants the status quo upheld and the crisis to disappear.

Mediation then has to come from elsewhere. Switzerland is ready to help and according to some accounts so is the Vatican. Mr Rajoy should swallow his pride and accept that outsiders can help. A conference that includes all of Spain's autonomous regions could work out how to modify the constitution. It should be possible with good will to offer Catalans the power to retain more of the region's tax revenue and protect its language, and to recognise it as a national entity within the Spanish nation state. That will be too little for some separatists but will probably satisfy many Catalans for now. The alternative is years of confrontation, a divided Catalonia, a divided Spain and a divided Europe. It is past time for the two sides to step away from the brink.

Italy's referendums

Autonomous movement

ROME

Northern Italy is not asking for independence, yet

MORE than 5m Italians took part on October 22nd in two referendums on granting more autonomy to the rich, northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto, which drew inevitable comparisons to the independence ballot three weeks earlier in Catalonia. Few in Italy travelled as far to cast their votes as Maurizio Zordan. The 53-year-old executive recently moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, to run the American subsidiary of his family firm, which sells shop fittings for luxury-brand stores. But he felt so passionately about the referendum that he flew back to vote in his home town of Valdagno.

The governments of the two regions staged the ballots ostensibly to give themselves a popular mandate to open negotiations with Rome (even though they could have demanded talks without a vote). Both administrations are dominated by the Northern League, which once advocated secession for the richer north.

Few people opposed to more autonomy bothered to vote against it, so the size of the turnout was crucial. In Veneto, which includes Venice and its flat, agro-industrial hinterland, the turnout was 57% (with 98% of the votes in favour). But in Lombardy, the region around Milan, it was a mere 38% (95% for autonomy).

Currently, five of Italy's 20 regions have more extensive powers than the others. If Lombardy and Veneto joined them, they would hang on to a greater share of the taxes collected there. And since the two regions generate about 30% of Italy's GDP, that could mean much less money for distribution to the poorer south.

Even though he is a member of the centre-left Democratic Party (PD), Mr Zordan would welcome that. "The moment has come for Italians to take responsibility for themselves," he says. The south, he argues, is mafia-infested and backward, despite almost 70 years of subsidies. The regional governments of Lombardy and Veneto claim to have a combined annual fiscal deficit with the rest of Italy of more than €70bn ($82bn), equal to 8% of national government spending.

As in Catalonia, the Italian votes reflect the impatience of rich northerners with poor southerners, whom they consider corrupt and spendthrift. But there the parallels end. The referendums in Lombardy and Veneto were indisputably legal and endorsed by the Constitutional Court. Neither proposes independence. And advocates of autonomy in Italy invoke cultural and linguistic identity far less than secessionists in Spain (even though, for over a thousand years, Venice was an independent republic, and its dialect is considered a separate language by many linguists).

So what now? The most cynical view is that the Northern League pushed the referendums merely to raise its profile ahead of a general election due early next year, and that the party leadership may drag its feet in its pursuit of autonomy. Matteo Salvini, who has led the party since 2013, has shifted his focus away from purely northern issues, trying to build a right-wing populist movement with national appeal. He has even gone fishing for votes in the south.

The referendums were non-binding, and while autonomy won a majority of all registered voters in Veneto, in Lombardy it won only among those who voted. In Milan, barely 30% of registered voters supported it. The governor of Lombardy, Roberto Maroni, said the central government had agreed to talks. But Rome is under no obligation to reach an agreement. And any deal would need to be approved by both chambers of the national legislature.

Nevertheless, the example of Catalonia suggests that calls for autonomy can change inexorably into demands for independence. In an interview before the vote, Mr Maroni scoffed at the comparison with the Spanish region, which he said wanted to be the 29th state of the EU. "We, no," he said. But he added: "Not for now." ■

New York Times October 19th 2017

With little fanfare, 2 Italian regions face autonomy votes

MEMO FROM LOMBARDY
MILAN

Point of the campaigns isn't to seek secession, but to get more local control

BY ELISABETTA POVOLEDO

Catalonia has been racked by sound and fury over a drive to secede from Spain, but on a recent morning in Lombardy, which will vote on Sunday on whether to demand greater autonomy from Italy, the mood was distinctly more laid back.

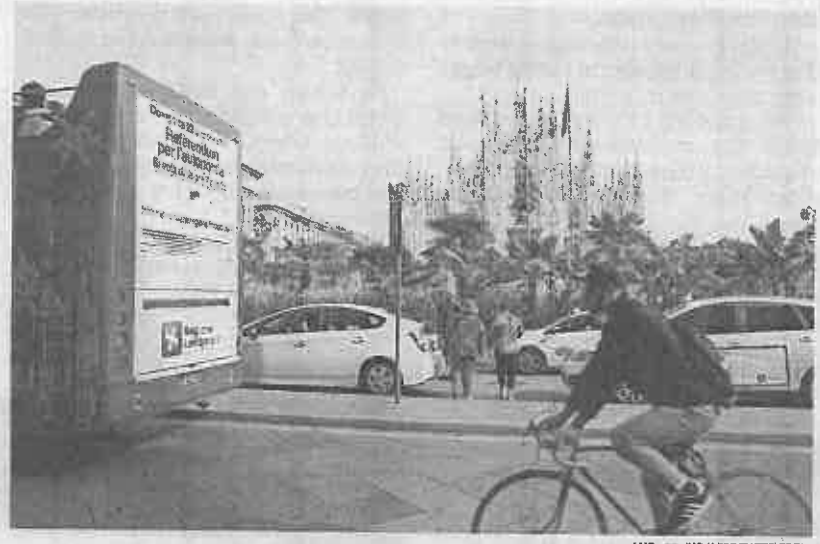
Men and women who looked as though they had just stepped out of a fashion store display perused stylish goods. Tourists snapped selfies in front of the richly sculpted facade of the Duomo, the colossal cathedral of Milan, the capital of Lombardy. Members of the sharp-suited Milanese business class gobbled down panini in the various new eateries that have sprung up in the city center.

If it weren't for the occasional taxicab door displaying a reminder for citizens to cast their ballots this month, or the odd billboard here or there, a casual visitor might not even know a vote was about to take place.

The one-question query that will be put to voters in this prosperous northern region of Italy on Sunday is whether they want their representatives to negotiate with the central government in Rome on "particular conditions of autonomy," and on getting greater return on their taxes.

Veneto, the northeast region that includes Venice, is voting in a similar poll the same day.

In contrast to Catalonia — where tens of thousands of Catalans took to the streets for the independence referendum held there, in some cases clashing violently with the police — the mood in Italy is much calmer.



LUCA BRUNO/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A poster advertising the autonomy referendum on the back of a bus in Milan.

Less is at stake; the referendum results will not be binding. But the regional governments are counting on a robust showing at the polls to strengthen their hand in bartering with Rome.

"The more people vote, the greater bargaining power I will have," said Roberto Maroni, the president of Lombardy, whose party, the Northern League, once embraced a secessionist mantra. He now calls that a "revolutionary phase" that did not work out.

Coming on the heels of the Catalan vote, the Lombardy and Veneto referendums are yet another signal of the homegrown conflicts that persist in many of the European Union's member states. Separatist movements are also simmering in Britain — where voters in Scotland rejected independence in a 2014 referendum but continue to debate the issue — as well as Belgium, France, Germany and Romania.

Even though the vote has not elicited much reaction in Milan, political parties see opportunity before national elections that are expected early next year.

Italy's governing Democratic Party, which is in the opposition in Lombardy, is not openly endorsing either side in the referendum. But many of the party's regional mayors have established a committee in favor of the initiative — a move many see as politically calculated given that the "yes" side is expected to win by a wide margin.

Mr. Maroni's government has singled out 23 sectors that it wants to control, including those related to security and immigration, education, scientific research and environmental protection. The regional government has calculated that it sends 54 billion euros, or about $63.5 billion, more in taxes to Rome than it gets in return, an equation it hopes to change.

"In an era of globalization, when Lombardy's industries are competing against China and India, it has to reinvest its resources in its territory," said the Northern League's regional secretary, Paolo Grimoldi. "It's economic good sense."

Though control of those sectors would give Lombardy substantial autonomy and resources, Mr. Maroni has been careful to say that the vote would not undermine Italian unity.

"Like the Catalans, we have decided to give voice to the people," he said. "The difference is that what we ask for is allowed by the Italian Constitution."

The Catalan movement has reverberated in a number of places in Italy. A Veneto group, Plebiscito.eu, issued a statement comparing its impact to "the collapse of the Berlin Wall for Eastern Europe." The South-Tyrolean Freedom Movement gave play-by-play details on the Oct. 1 balloting. And the social media sites of some Sicilian and Veneto groups supported the Catalan vote.

"In Italy, there has been a resurgence of separatist energies," said Antonio Rapisarda, who has been tracking separatist movements for the daily newspaper Il Tempo. "From the South Tyrol to Sicily, passing through Rome, there are separatist movements throughout Italy that are rooted among some of the people who live there."

Some observers see a potential for the referendum to boomerang. Roberto D'Alimonte, a professor of political science at Luiss Guido Carli University in Rome, said the vote could curtail the Northern League's ambitions to transform itself from a regional powerhouse into a national party in keeping with the agenda of its brash young leader, Matteo Salvini.

The Economist October 14th 2017 15

Europe's other separatists

Lord, make me free—but not yet

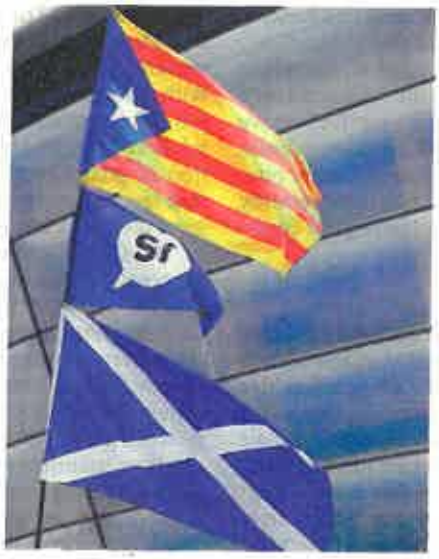
GLASGOW

As independence becomes more distant, Scotland's nationalists focus on governing

"WHAT kind of country do we want to be?" asked Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister and the leader of the Scottish National Party, in her closing speech at the SNP's annual conference in Glasgow. A heckler provided an answer: "An independent one!" The crowd cheered. But Ms Sturgeon winced.

The shout was a painful reminder that the party's ultimate aim of independence is some way off. After an aborted push for a second referendum earlier this year (the first such plebiscite was lost by 45% to 55% in 2014), Scotland's nationalist party now hesitates on the topic. Independence will come "as soon as we can", said Angus Robertson, the SNP's deputy leader. Beyond that, details are thin. The newfound reticence is simple: 52% of Scots oppose holding an independence referendum within the next five years, according to polls by YouGov. But not many of this number were in Glasgow. Any mention of a second vote on independence was met with wild enthusiasm by SNP supporters that belied the project's indefinite timeline.

Their zeal clashed with a leadership desperate to use the three-day gathering to portray the SNP as a party of government, rather than just independence. Catalan-flag-wielding delegates were treated to a buffet of new policies to compensate for the absence of the one they really want.



After ten years in power in Scotland, the SNP's support is waning. It lost 21 of its 56 MPs in the general election in June, after half a million voters deserted the party. Its remaining 35 MPs have small majorities: the SNP's safest seat has a cushion of fewer than 7,000 votes, whereas 22 have majorities of under 3,000. In June it was squeezed by both the resurgent Scottish Conservatives, who picked up much of the unionist vote, and by Labour, which outflanked the SNP on its left. Labour's revival in England also weakens the SNP's argument that independence is the only way that Scots can avoid being governed by Tories in Westminster.

In the Scottish Parliament, where the party has 63 out of 129 members, it is on track to lose seats in 2021. Though it is likely to remain comfortably the largest party, it may lose the narrow parliamentary majority in favour of independence.

Brexit adds more confusion, providing the SNP with both a rallying cry and a schism. The party's desire for Scotland to remain in the EU, in line with the vote of 62% of Scots last year, has been full-throated. But that sits uneasily with polls showing that about a third of SNP supporters voted to leave. An independent Scotland would face barriers to trade with England, its main trading partner, if one country were inside the EU and the other outside it. Yet some Scottish nationalists are banking on Brexit being such a disaster that clamour for separation grows. Independence, say several MSPs, is a "lifeboat" from the soon-to-be-shipwrecked Britain. "The strategy as such is simply: stay in power, and then hope that someone makes some awful screw-up," says Alex Bell, a former SNP staffer.

Independence is still the aim, but an increasingly distant one. Ms Sturgeon closed her speech with a plea for patience. For now, governing comes first. ■

New York Times October 17th 2017 (6

E.U. absent from Catalonia crisis

LONDON Amid the crisis in Spain this month — as Catalonia voted in an illegal referendum and threatened to declare independence, and Madrid has struggled to keep control of the situation — many people wondered: Where is the European Union?

The truth is, there is plenty of blame to go around for the Catalonia crisis, and the European Union certainly shares some of it. European Union officials did hold closed-door meetings to try to calm tensions, but they could have done much more earlier to encourage dialogue between Barcelona and Madrid before it was too late. They also should have been clearer in their condemnation of police violence against Catalan voters on Oct. 1.

The problems in Spain are just the latest chapter in the ongoing battle between populism and the European Union.

This probably won't be the last time such a situation like this arises. Catalonia is just the latest battle in the European Union's war with populism — a war that it seems to be losing.

In recent years, referendums have become the populists' weapon of choice. They have been used increasingly over the past few years to give "the people" the chance to answer direct questions. In Hungary: Should we participate in the European Union's refugee relocation program? (Indecisive: Referendum didn't get sufficient turnout.) In the Netherlands: Should the European Union-Ukraine free trade agreement go ahead? (No.) In Britain: Should we leave the European Union? (Yes.)

These referendums give an impression of democracy, but it is unclear that they really are an expression of the people's will rather than a way for populist movements to force democratically elected governments' hands. Still, the European Union, on the losing side in two out of three of these examples, is struggling to fight back against these blurred lines and to defend itself as a project on the side of democratic values.

The key to a referendum is the ability to frame the question. The 2016 Brexit vote is a clear example. Although the referendum was posed a straightforward question ("Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"), discussion around the issue incorporated everything from austerity to "the establishment" to feelings about the government.

In Catalonia, the referendum — which didn't have constitutional approval — asked whether Catalonia should choose independence from Spain. But in holding the vote illegitimately, the independence movement provoked a response from the Spanish government that changed the question to whether the Spanish government is handling some Catalans' desire for independence respectfully and peacefully, and indeed why other actors, like the European Union, are not ensuring that it does so. In widening the issue, the separatists have won more sympathy for their cause than they had before the vote.

The reality is that given that there have been missteps on all sides in the Catalonian crisis, Brussels can do little more in the immediate situation than put pressure on both sides behind closed doors. The European Union is an intergovernmental organization constructed with the nation-state as its building block. One of these blocks is Spain. Mediation between the two sides in a dispute is not an option when one of the parties forms part of your decision-making body.

Equally, megaphone diplomacy — like calling out the unconstitutional behavior of the Catalan independence movement — sounds hypocritical with allegations of unwarranted violence by the Spanish police being investigated. But quiet diplomacy has real value, and given the depth of the crisis, European Union leaders should be putting all their power behind it for now.

That's just in the short term, though. The longer-term responsibility of the European Union's political leaders is to deal with the causes, not the symptoms, of the growing power of populist forces, of which the Catalonian independence movement is just one.

They need to defuse the desire for an alternative on which populists are playing, by tackling the issues that European citizens care about — identity, jobs, responsive public services and security. The European Union won't be able to find necessary coherence to provide for its own security, much less project stability into its neighborhood, unless it is able to manage these types of problems. And elected governments delivering on issues close to voters' hearts can expose the lie that the only solution to their grievances is to vote against the system, in a one-off referendum, rather than to work with it.

SUSI DENNISON *is a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations and the director of the council's European Power program.*