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The forbidden fruit: the concept of Tabarnia

Introduction

Independent Catalonia became the object of desire for separatists and their supporters, along with the crystallized thought of independence in the region in the early twentieth century. However, it did not gain broad support. A clear change in the approach of political elites and part of the society towards the idea of creating their own state became evident in the first decade of the 21st century. We are currently witnessing a significant radicalization of Catalan independentism, one of the conducive factors being the birth of the independence movement at the turn of 2005 and 2006. Its creation was primarily associated with initiation of work on the autonomous statute reform. However, the explosion of independentism took place relatively recently, because after 2010, with the publication of the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court on the new Statute of the Autonomy of Catalonia in 2006.

Catalonia's independence should be considered not only in the context of the metaphor of the forbidden fruit, but also the project of creating Tabarnia, i.e. the new autonomous community of Spain. Both unreachability and interest in the concept somehow results from a "double prohibition": on the one hand, it is a consequence of the radicalization of independentism. A consequence that supporters of the possible emergence of the Catalan state do not want to bear. On the other hand, the vast majority of central decision-makers do not take into account any division of the region, which may weaken the socio-economic potential of the Spanish monarchy. Although the project is fictitious and satirical, it illustrates the far-reaching effects of the escalation of the Spanish-Catalan conflict.

Catalan independentism: causes and catalysts of radicalization

While broadly interpreting independentism as a political thought within the framework of a demand that is made to obtain the independence of a country or a region in relation to the state limiting it, it is worth remembering that, as a political thought, it constitutes a "fundamental" level, while at the "operational" level it takes social and political form, within which political parties, organizations and individual units operate.

Sources of intensification of pro-independence attitudes in Catalonia can already be sought in the adoption of the accelerated procedure of obtaining autonomy by the region, resulting in adoption of autonomous statute in 1979, granting broad powers to regional authorities, and more importantly, it opened the way for political elites to expand successively. As an example of conducting effective policy in this aspect were the activities of the CiU federation for the resuscitation of Catalan culture, especially language. On the other hand, the original reform proposals, and even the final shape of the statute adopted in 2006, shows a focus on a very significant extension of Catalonia's autonomy, which was partly due to the region's previously sanctioned importance.

The community's strong position was built (and still is) on deep correlations between the regional political scene and the political center in Madrid. Catalan political parties, including nationalist and independentist parties, especially CiU or ERC, have become an attractive force in cabinet tenders at the state level, which allowed for negotiating many privileges for the region, as well as contributing to the adoption of the new statute. The mentioned document has become the factor for deepening the crisis in the periphery-center relations. The cited judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal turned out to be a cognitive opening in the process of radicalization of independentism.

A thriving regional economy is an important element for the reconstruction and maintenance of the Catalan identity. Therefore, the economic crisis in 2008 had a major impact on the increase in independence tendencies, which affected the Catalans painfully. It also brought socio-political crisis: the birth and activity of *Los Indignados* - the increase of social dissatisfaction with current politics, as well as a decrease in trust caused by, among others, corruption in national policy (e.g. *the Gürtel affair, the Bárcenas case, the Flick case*) and regional policy (*the Millet case, el caso Pretoria, the 3% scandal* or the many years of financial transfer to the so-called tax havens by Jordi Pujola and his family). Catalan independentism was additionally stimulated by the crisis of the Spanish monarchy, which was caused by scandals (including moral related to the king's affairs) and financial embezzlement of the royal family (e.g. *the Nóos case*). In parallel, the conflict between Barcelona and Madrid was personalized to a large extent: the successors of the current Catalan independence aspirations became the successors of the Generalitat presidents, i.e. Artur Mas, Carls Puigdemont, Quim Torra, while in the opposition the Spanish prime ministers: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Mariano Rajoy and Pedro Sánchez. In addition, fierce confrontation took place on the level of legal acts adopted by the Catalan Parliament, and on the other hand their annulment or blocking by central authorities.

In addition, the radicalization of independentism was also fueled by exogenous processes. In this aspect, special roles should be attributed to: Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence and the growing aspirations of Scottish independentists, especially during the period immediately before the independence referendum in 2014.

Tabarnia: a new autonomous community of Spain?

The radicalization of Catalan independentism has far-reaching consequences: social, political, legal and economic, both for the region, Spain and many other areas, especially those where independence tendencies were born or revived under the influence of intensified activities in Catalonia. Polarization of society in the region is one of the most important repercussions related to the escalation of independence aspirations. The scale of the problem may be demonstrated by the emergence and relatively high in popularity *Plataforma por Tabarnia* - a social initiative to oppose the independence of the entire region. The platform was founded by merging various organizations, primarily based on the *Barcelona is not Catalonia* association and non-affiliated entities. It was established as a social movement that aims to create a new Spanish autonomous community of *Tabarnia*.

The concept of creating a new region of Spain appeared in 2015. At that time, the *Bcnisnotcat.es* domain belonging to the *Barcelona is not Catalonia* platform published a statement, that Catalonia consists of two completely different zones. These differences concern the economic, social, political, linguistic and identity levels. As members of the Platform say, the concept of separating area, significantly close to the territory of the former County of Barcelona, was created during the foundation meeting of the organization *Barcelona is not Catalonia* in 2012. Daniel de la Fuente is most often considered the creator of the concept.

The name *Tabarnia* is a neologism resulting from the merger of the names of two Catalan provinces: Barcelona and Tarragona, and was founded in 2013. The separated region would consist of two basic areas: *Alta Tabarania*, i.e. area of Barcelona's influence, and *Baja Tabarnia*, i.e. Tarragona's impact zone. It would consist of a dozen or so existing *comarcas*. Therefore, the future region has its place on the map, its own flag, anthem, and population. The Spanish theater actor Albert Boadella titles himself as president of *Tabarnia*, while Jaume Vives (Spanish journalist, writer, social activist) calls himself his secretary. The future autonomous community also has a football team worshiped, i.e. Girona FC, inspired by Barcelona FC.

According to the supporters of the project, the population living in the area is primarily distinguished as sovereign of the Spanish nation, not the Catalan one (as opposed to

independentists), and thus the opposition to Catalonia's secession. In addition, according to them, the specificity of Tabarnia is to be defined by strong ties with other autonomous communities and Europe, real bilingualism (Catalan and Spanish), multiculturalism and tolerance, a high degree of urbanization and economic development, cosmopolitanism, as well as greater support for regional unionist parties ("constitutionalists"), like C's, PPC and PSC.

At the same time, the independentist part of Catalonia, in the view of spokespersons of Tabarnia, is characterized by a high rate of support for the idea of independence and political groups that want to implement it and are therefore hostile to the Spanish state. In addition, these areas, according to the regional economy, which combined with the unfair representation of the provinces of Barcelona and Tarragona in the Catalan Parliament, while over-representing Girona and Lleida, have an adverse impact on Tabarnia's financial balance (high deficit). Recalling the rhetoric of independentists, they show disproportions and the imposition of richer Catalan provinces (Tarragona and Barcelona) over the poorer.

In addition, they argue that the above inequalities not only manifest themselves in unfair business investments, but also compulsory electoral law does not ensure equal political representation. This results in the fact that part of the party, which includes even a small electoral advantage in the provinces of Lleida, Girona, i.e. overrepresented ones, may *de facto* get more seats in the Catalan Parliament than the one that offers the majority of votes in the region, although it is noteworthy that Tarragona is also included in the group of overrepresentative provinces. According to supporters of Tabarnia, this fact is used by independentists, because the provinces of Lleida and Girona have always had a larger electorate supporting the independence of Catalonia, and therefore they do not seek to reform the electoral law.

From the perspective of the spokespersons on creation of a new autonomous community in Spain, a symptomatic feature of the (likely) Republic of Catalonia is a very strong sense of its own identity, which is often referred to by *Tabarnés* as "obsessive", hence it may be accompanied by xenophobia, closure to "others", as well as emphasis on, for example, monolingualism with the leading role of the Catalan language and discrimination against Spanish speakers. Referring to the above, Tabarnia supporters are eager to emphasize that their future region will promote shared identity, and the phenomenon of "dual identity", i.e. Spanish and Catalan, will become something normal, free from social ostracism.

To validate their concept, *Tabarnés* cite the *Canadian Clarity Act* on Quebec. In addition, they use rhetoric which is a reflection of independentists' postulates regarding the existence of a Catalan state in the history. They emphasize that there has never been such a country, but there was the County of Barcelona, to which the concept of Tabarnia refers.

Tabarnia's vision is relatively popular. Particularly large interest in the project accompanied the accelerated regional elections in Catalonia in 2017, mainly due to the interest of Spanish and foreign media. Importantly, *Tabarnés* use rhetoric derived from an independentist narrative, building counterarguments on its basis. Although the supporters of the new Spanish community themselves admit that this is a mocking and satirical idea or they call it a "serious joke", it is *de facto* aimed at exposing the differences within Catalan independentism itself, indicating "independentisms of many speeds and motivations", which would weaken the position of pro-independence entities in the eyes of Catalans. On the other hand, *Tabarnés* wants to force a situation when "independentists" will have to apply counterarguments of a unionist nature to them, that is, those that flow today from the government in Madrid and opponents of Catalonia's secession against supporters of the Republic of Catalonia.

Conclusions

The fact is that the proposed concept is imaginary and mocking in relation to the actions and demands of Catalan independentists and would be extremely difficult to implement due to the unfavorability of many Catalans, as well as Spaniards from other regions. However, the project is of great social and political importance. It shows how deep the polarization of Catalan society is in the context of the idea of independence. In parallel, it is accompanied by mobilization within its own pro-independent or unionist bloc. Both of these phenomena can lead to social tensions and conflicts. For strategic reasons, the concept is supported by political actors and parties against secession. In the opposition there are independentists, which naturally leads to a deepening of antagonisms, and also hinders the search for consensus through constructive dialogue. At the same time, it reveals the inconsistency of Catalan independentism

In addition, there is an interesting *Tabarnés's* proposal to use gerrymandering strategies during voting, e.g. in an independence referendum, in opposition to the practice, in their opinion, adapted by independentists. This mechanism forces questions about voting on the issue of independence of areas, namely who should vote, when and how. In this context, the creators of the project also refer to pro-independence narrative. They raise a rhetorical question: why, in the face of the announcement of a unilateral declaration of independence by separatists in October 2017, Tabarnia could not do the same? This debate is closely linked to the still lively discussion around peoples' right to self-determination. In fact, it is difficult to expect that in the future someone will reach for the "forbidden fruit" which is Tabarnia.