

THE CATALAN WAY: PEACEFUL SEARCH FOR INDEPENDENCE

On 11 September 2013, about 1.6 million people in Spain participated in making a 250-mile human chain in support of Catalan independence. This event became known as *The Catalan Way towards Independence*, or simply *The Catalan Way*. It was organized by the *Asamblea Nacional Catalana* (Catalan National Assembly), an organization that seeks the political independence of Catalonia from Spain through the establishment of a free and democratic state. Catalan nationalists have chosen public demonstrations and electoral politics over violence, in sharp contrast to hard-core

Basque nationalists, who have long embraced militancy, attacking the Spanish state and its institutions with bombs and guns. It appears that the Catalan strategy has been much more successful than that of the Basques. Not just Spaniards at large, but the majority of Basques themselves have been so disgusted with the terrorism of the separatist ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) that the movement for Basque nationhood has lost its impetus. Catalan nationalism, by contrast, is gaining ground.

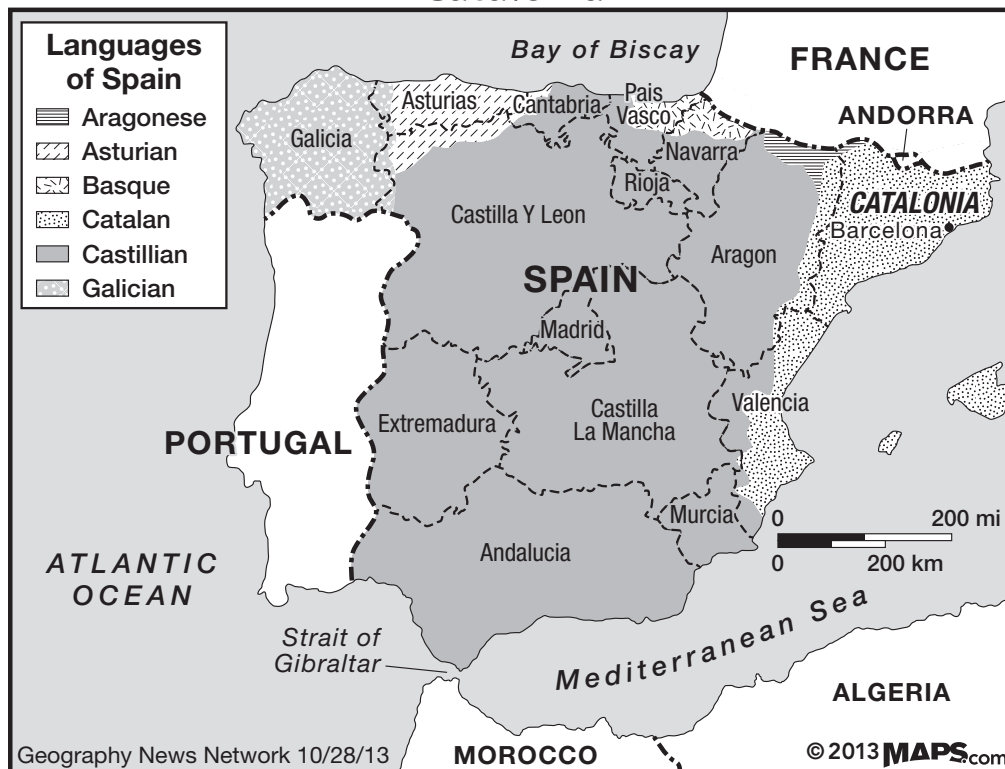
The desire for political separation in Catalonia—and in other regions of Spain—goes back to the days of dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975), who presided over a centralized state that suppressed regional languages and identities, which in turn intensified secessionist sentiments. To maintain the integrity of Spain yet satisfy regional aspirations, the country's post-Franco leaders crafted an intricate terminological and geopolitical compromise, which they institutionalized in the new constitution. Spain, they declared, was an indivisible *nation* that joined together several territorially defined *nationalities*. "Nationality," in the process, was redefined to refer not to a group

of people possessing or aspiring to political sovereignty, but rather to a region whose inhabitants have a strong, historically constituted sense of identity. Initially, the three most linguistically distinct regions were offered substantial autonomy as historical nationalities: Catalonia in the northeast, the Basque Country in the north-center, and Galicia in the northwest. Autonomy was promised to Spain's other regions as well, but at a reduced level. As a result of this political rearrangement, Spain has become a decentralized state, divided into seventeen "autonomous communities": Galicia, Asturias, Cantabria, Basque Country, La Rioja, Navarre, Castille and Leon, Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Madrid, Murcia, Castile-La Mancha, Extremadura, Andalusia, Balearic Islands, and Canary Islands. In addition, Ceuta and Melilla, Spanish possessions in North Africa, were reconstituted as "autonomous cities" in 1996.

One of the reasons behind the Catalan independence movement is the desire to protect the local culture, which revolves around the Catalan language. Like Spanish, Catalan is a Romance language that evolved from Latin after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in the 5th century CE. But despite being spoken in the Iberian Peninsula, Catalan is more closely related to French and Italian than to Spanish. For example, the Catalan word for 'summer' is *estiu*, derived from the same root as French *été* and Italian *estate* but not Spanish *verano*. Similarly, the verb 'to want' in Catalan is *voler*, closely related to the French *vouloir* and Italian *volere*, whereas Spanish *querer* is clearly different. Both Catalan and Spanish incorporated words from Arabic, but not necessarily the same ones: Catalan borrowed *alfàbia* meaning 'large earthenware jar' and *rajola* meaning 'tile', whereas Spanish adopted *aceite* and *aceituna*, meaning 'oil' and 'olive', respectively.

The Catalan language, however, is not limited to Catalonia. It is the national and only official language of the tiny country of Andorra, and

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a co-official language of the Balearic Islands and Valencia in Spain. It is also spoken, without official recognition, in parts of Aragon and Murcia in Spain, and in the French region of Roussillon. Because Catalan culture extends well beyond Catalonia, many sources explain the surging Catalan independence movement in economic rather than cultural terms. Catalonia is one of the wealthiest

parts of Spain, and the taxes collected there subsidize the poorer parts of the country. With Spain's current economic crisis, many of the region's residents feel that they can no longer afford to support Extremadura and other poorer parts of the country. Such economic issues have the potential to bind indigenous Catalans with migrants from other parts of Spain who now live in the region.

The Spanish constitution bans

outright votes on secession, and it is unclear whether most Catalans want full independence or merely enhanced autonomy. Even so, Catalonia appears to be well on the path "by which the citizens of Catalonia will be able to choose their political future as a people", as stated in the recently adopted Catalan Sovereignty Declaration.

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