

The Separatist Sentiments in Spain: The Role of National and Regional Identities' Conflict¹

A.R. Zaripova² & A.R. Zakirov³

Abstract

Regional and national identities as two levels of the identification process may conflict, especially when it comes to multicomponent states. Today, against the backdrop of globalization and integration processes, regional identity is strengthening, which leads to the desire of regional communities to change the existing balance of relations with the central government, expanding the autonomy of their territorial entities, until independence. This article, using Spanish autonomies as an example, reveals the significance of regional identity in the process of intensifying regional separatism. Spain is a state that has repeatedly faced the problems of rising separatist sentiments. Historically, the Spanish regions were distinguished by cultural and linguistic diversity, and the asymmetry in the socio-economic and political situation of the autonomous regions at the present stage predetermined the developed regional self-identification of the population. This article focuses on the historical aspects of the formation of the regional and national identity of the inhabitants of Spain, discloses the stages of the process of building the Spanish nation. Based on the results of surveys on self-identification of residents of the autonomous regions of Spain, the correlation of regional national identities is determined, on the basis of this, two groups of regions are identified. The assessment of regional identity as one of the prerequisites for the development of centrifugal trends in Spain is given.

Keywords: Separatism; Regional Identity; National (National) Identity; Decentralization; Regionalism; Regional Identity.

1. Introduction

Modern Spain is the result of a centuries-old process of uniting regions and building the Spanish nation. Centrifugal trends have been characteristic of the political process throughout the history of the development of the Spanish state. The

¹ Please cite this paper as follows:

Zaripova, A. R., & Zakirov, A. R. (2019). The separatist sentiments in Spain: the role of national and regional identities' conflict. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics*, 10(SP), 1041-1048.

² Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia; aigulrzaripova@gmail.com

³ Kazan Federal University, Kazan, Russia.

reasons for the separatist movements are associated not only with modern problems of regional development and contradictions in relations with the central government. The main prerequisites were formed historically over the centuries of the joint existence of regions within the framework of the Spanish state, others were the result of the processes of transformation and democratization of Spain in the post-Franco period. One of these prerequisites is a developed regional identity and its predominance over the national (civic) identity of the inhabitants of Spain. The purpose of this article is to reveal the influence of developed regional identity on the formation and activation of separatist tendencies in the regions of Spain.

Regional identity is understood as a person's awareness and feeling of his involvement in the territory and community of the region (Murzina, 2003). Regional identity as a connecting element helps to unite the population of the region. Identity acts as a mental link, allowing residents of the region to realize their unity and contributing to the formation of a regional community, each member of which is aware of a close relationship with the region. In constructing a regional identity, both objective and subjective aspects of the life of the region can be used, they can be symbols, language, traditions, historical memory, as well as specific political institutions and the economic potential of the region.

Regional identity is one of the levels of territorial identity, acting as an intermediate between local and national identity. Regional identity does not contradict the national identity and can coexist with it, forming a double identity, when a person, recognizing himself part of a regional community, realizes involvement in a higher order community, that is, the state as a whole.

Abstract: Regional and national identities as two levels of the identification process may conflict, especially when it comes to multicomponent states. Awareness of the uniqueness of the region by its inhabitants can lead to the formation of a sense of exclusivity and "singularity" that distinguishes it from other regions, which will create difficulties in building a national identity. Competing with the national identity, regional identity can significantly weaken or replace the sense of belonging of a person to the state (Zaznaev, 2011; Mazana et al., 2019). In this case, the identity uniting the regional community may focus on differences with other autonomous regions. In those cases, when the regional community, perceiving itself as a single "we", contrasts itself with other regions or the state as a whole, regional identity can become the basis for disintegration processes (Masseti, 2013; Jahani, et al, 2016).

2. Methods

When analyzing the problem of territorial identity, in particular, the relationship of regional identity and separatist processes in the region, it is necessary to turn to the case-study method, which allows one to evaluate and analyze isolated cases and apply the results to a wider class of similar cases. In this article, the case of

Spain, which is a multi-constituent state with a high level of decentralization and regionalization, is selected as a case.

3. Results and Discussion

Spain is a prime example of a state characterized by a conflict between regional and national identity. Over centuries of coexistence, the regions of Spain have often opted for a regional rather than a nationwide Spanish identity.

Cultural and linguistic diversity, asymmetry in the socio-economic and political situation of the regions of Spain predetermined the self-identification of the population in favor of regional identity. The regional identity, rooted in the consciousness of the population of Spain, left its mark on the construction of a single Spanish nation and the formation of a single Spanish identity. Construction projects for a single Spanish nation that arose in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were unsuccessful due to social crises. During the XIX century, Spain survived two foreign invasions, the loss of possessions in Latin America and the Caribbean, two civil (carlist) wars, five revolutions (Tumin, 2017). Political transformations and economic crises contributed to the growth of regional identity and prevented the formation of a national identity of the Spaniards. The next attempt to form a Spanish identity was made during the era of the speaker regime of F. Franco. Aimed at building a national identity, the unifying policy of F. Franco completely ignored the regional identity of the population of Spain. The choice in favor of Catholicism, the Castilian language and the traditions of Castile as a basis for the construction of the Spanish identity was not accepted by the regional communities (Volkova, 2005).

The historical diversity of the regions was taken into account during the democratic transformation of Spain and was reflected in the territorial structure of Spain, which was called the "state of autonomy" and implies one of the highest levels of decentralization of state relations (Catalonia, Spain). The process of decentralization has strengthened the role of regions and strengthened regional self-identification of the population, which deliberately slowed down the process of building a united nation in Spain (Medrano, 1999).

The basis for self-identification of residents of the regions of Spain includes a feeling of "rooting in the territory of this locality, involvement in local socio-political life, readiness to defend local interests against strangers" (Kozhanovsky, 2007). Spain is a state of autonomy, the borders of which correspond to the traditional territories of residence of regional communities (Kozhanovsky, 2007). The territorial division leaves its mark on the self-identification of the population of Spain. The Center for Sociological Research in Spain annually conducts a survey in the autonomous regions regarding population self-identification. Answering the question "Which of the proposed items is closer to you?" In 2016, 22% of the population of

Spain admitted that they identify themselves exclusively or to a greater extent as Spaniards, and not as members of their regional community. 18.4% of the population expressed their preference to identify themselves more or exclusively as members of the regional community (Estudio No. 3141). The others are characterized by a double identity, they equally identify with their region and Spain as a whole. On the one hand, the results of the survey show that most of them are attached to both Spain and the region at the same time, but at the same time, the data presented show the average indicators for the country, and therefore distort the real picture of population identification. The ratio of regional and national identity is uneven because, in a number of regions of Spain, national and double identities prevail with a huge margin, while in other regions there is a sharp predominance of regional identity. Surveys conducted in the autonomous regions of Spain in 2012 - 2016 showed the predominance of exclusively regional identity over the national one in Navarre, Galicia, the Basque Country, Catalonia, Andalusia, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands (group 1) (Table 1). In this case, we are not talking about residents with a double identity, who equally consider themselves part of the regional community and the Spanish nation.

The autonomous regions with a predominance of Spanish identity included the regions traditionally considered Castilian: Madrid, Castile and Leon, Castile-La Mancha, Rioja, Cantabria, Aragon, Murcia, Asturias, Estramadura, as well as Valencia (group 2) (Table 2).

Table 1. *Territorial Identity in Spain: Group 1* (Estudio)

2015	Spanish	Dual identity.	Regional	Support of separatism (2015)	Average level of separatism support (2005-2015)
Andalusia	12.50%	70.40%	12.50%	9.45%	3.625%
Navarra	6.20%	44.00%	39.70%	15.8%	15.7%
Catalonia	11.00%	38.00%	47.00%	41.4%	30.775%
The Basque Country	6.50%	40.00%	53.00%	25%	25.45%
Galicia	6.35%	66.00%	26.00%	4.85%	3%
Balearic islands	25.70%	49.30%	22.30%	8.1%	7.85%
Canary Islands.	12.70%	50.60%	34.00%	3.3%	3.875%

Table 1. *Territorial Identity in Spain: Group 2* (Estudio)

2015	Spanish	Dual identity	Regional	Support of separatism (2015)	Average level of separatism support (2005- 2015)
Cantabria	22.20%	61.30%	11.40%	2.2%	2.325%
Castiile La Mancha	33.30%	60.80%	2.20%	1.6%	1.45%
Castiile Y Leon	37.80%	56.20%	1.60%	1.3%	0.9%
Extremadura:	10.70%	79.80%	8.20%	1.3%	1.45%
Murcia	13.60%	83.10%	2.20%	0.5%	0.7%
Aragon	18.00%	72.70%	4.60%	1.1%	1.725%
Madrid	36.30%	43.90%	5.80%	5.4%	3.225%
Valencia	30.50%	57.70%	7.40%	3.4%	3.475%
Asturias	12.50%	74.10%	10.20%	1.8%	2.675%
La Rioja	33.40%	55.60%	6.20%	2.5%	1.8%

The survey results allow us to distinguish two groups of regions of Spain - regions with a predominance of national identity over regional and regions with a predominance of regional identity over a national one. Most of the regions included in the first group are central regions, the regional communities of which have common historical experience and cultural features. One of the main unifying factors in this case is the recognized regional language and territorial proximity to the political center. These regions are most loyal to the center and are characterized by the predominance of a double or pan-Hispanic identity. The second group presents regions historically different from most central regions. These regions are remote from the center, occupy a peripheral or island position, have experience of self-government in the past, a language different from the common Spanish, which together determined their original culture.

The process of nation building in Spain has a long history and continues in the XXI century. Juan Linz noted that Spain is a “weak” state, formed due to the unification of regions that have never abandoned their regional identity (Zaripova, 2018), which explains Spain’s characteristic confrontation between centrifugal and centripetal tendencies.

The predominance of regional identity in a number of autonomous regions of Spain is the reason for the success of the ideas of regionalism, decentralization and separatism. On the one hand, regional identity in Spanish autonomies unites the regional community and strengthens its connection with the region, forming the

willingness of residents to act in the name of the interests of their region. On the other hand, by uniting the population of the region, identity simultaneously contributes to the disintegration of the Spanish state, since the recognition of the unity and status of the regional community takes place by contrasting it with all other groups living outside the region. Consequently, the division into friends and foes becomes an inevitable manifestation of regional identity. Regional identity in Spain does not determine the desire for separatism, but creates favorable conditions for the dissemination of the ideas of regionalism and separatism among the inhabitants of autonomy.

Addressing regional identity is becoming a key argument in the political rhetoric of separatism advocates. Relying on the cultural and linguistic uniqueness, historical memory and experience of the regional community, regional political forces create an idea of the “peculiarity” of the autonomous region and the importance of the struggle in the name of its interests and well-being, which is crucial in the development and popularization of the ideas of separatism. For example, in the case of Catalonia, proponents of independence have repeatedly addressed topics affecting the group values of the Catalans (Zaripova, 2018). The idea of uniting the regional community was connected with appealing to the feelings of regional patriotism, civic duty and the need to confront forces that threaten the welfare of the region. In our opinion, regional identity in this case is an effective tool for mobilizing the regional community to support the regional independence movement.

4. Summary

Summing up, we note that Spain can be described as a state with strong peripheral identities, in which not a national but a regional identity plays a significant role. The dominance of regional self-identification in several regions of Spain has a significant impact on both regional and national policies. The steady predominance of regional identity in regions such as Catalonia, Basque Country, Navarra, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands allows them to oppose themselves to both other regions and the center. It is the protection of regional interests that acts as the subject of conflict between the center and the regions in Spain, the result of which is separatism. However, it is worth emphasizing that regional identity can only serve as a basis for the formation of separatist sentiments and is not a factor in the activation of separatism. This is primarily due to the fact that any identity is a complex social construct, the formation of which requires a long period of time and is not subject to sharp fluctuations, and separatism is associated with dynamic changes in the moods of the regional community. Separatism is not determined by regional identity, but ideas of independence are more likely to gain popularity in regions with a predominance of regional identity (Serrano, 2013). The formed idea of the uniqueness of the regional community and its difference from other regions make the population more susceptible to the ideas of self-determination and the possibility of creating an

independent state. In our opinion, modern centrifugal trends in Spain should be considered as part of the confrontation of two levels of territorial identity, and the disintegration potential of regional identity should be considered one of the prerequisites for regional separatism in Spain.

5. Conclusions

The conflict of regional and national identities is a reflection of centrifugal and centripetal tendencies that have been characteristic of the political process of Spain throughout its history. Existing cultural, political and economic differences between the regions of Spain reinforce regional identity, alienating regional communities from each other.

An appeal to historical experience, the identity and uniqueness of culture and language, regional self-awareness, ideas about the place and role of the region in the system of inter-regional relations, awareness and assessment of the prospects and ways of development of the region helps to contrast the regional community with the Spanish majority - regions that do not have a unique combination of cultural features and not aware of the special, excellent path of development of their region. Such a contrast can be a fertile ground for the formation of separatist sentiments within the regional community.

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

References

- Catalonia, Spain. *OECD Review of Higher education in regional and City development* (2008). URL: <http://www.oecd.org/education/imhe/46827358.pdf>
- Estudio No. 3079, 3086, 3087, 3088, 3089, 3090, 3091, 3092, 3093, 3094, 3095, 3096, 3097, 3098, 3113, 3154, 3155. *Centro de investigaciones sociologicas*. URL: <http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/index.html>
- Estudio No. 3141 / 0-0 Preelectoral elecciones generales 2016. *Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas*. URL: http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/Archivos/Marginales/3140_3159/3141/es3141mar.html.
- Jahani, A., Rostami, V., & Shabanzadeh, M. (2016). The impact of management duty duration on the operational cycle duration of the companies listed in Tehran stock exchange. *UCT Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 4(1), 15-24.

- Kozhanovsky, A. N. (2007). *Spanish case: Ethnic waves and regional cliffs*. Nationalism in World History. Moscow: Nauka.
- Kozhanovsky, A. N. (2007). *State identification in Spanish*. Spain: Full face and profile. Moscow: All World.
- Masseti, E. (2013). Between autonomy and secession: Decentralization and regionalist party ideological radicalism. *Party politics*, 22(1), p. 61.
- Medrano, J. D. (1999). *Naciones divididas: Clase, politica y nacionalismo en el pais Vascoy Cataluna*. Madrid: Centro De Investigaciones Sociologicas.
- Mazana, M. Y., Montero, C. S., & Casmir, R. O. (2019). Investigating students' attitude towards learning Mathematics. *International Electronic Journal of Mathematics Education*, 14(1), 207-231. <https://doi.org/10.29333/iejme/3997>
- Murzina, I. Ya. (2003). Regional identity and regional identity. *Discourse PI*, 1(3), p. 102.
- Serrano, I. (2013). Just a matter of identity? Support for independence in Catalonia. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23, 523-545.
- Tumin, A. D. (2017). Spanish national identity: The origins of the crisis. *Culture and Civilization*, 7(4), p. 760.
- Volkova, G. I. (2005). *Political history of Spain of the XX Century: Textbook*. Moscow: Higher. School.
- Zaripova, A. R. (2018). Conflict between the center and Catalonia in Spain: An analysis of political discourse. IZvestiya Saratov University. New Series. Series of Sociology. *Political Science*, 2, 232-237.
- Zaznaev, O. I. (2011). *National state identity: Foreign experience and Russia*. Political identity and identity policy: Essays. Kazan: Fatherland.