AFTER 40 years of Franco’s dictatorship, the 1979 constitution offered a new political framework within which Spaniards could organise their lives. One of the major issues facing the new regime was the national question, particularly in Catalonia and the Basque Country. The new constitution radically transformed the centralist non-democratic regime inherited from Francoism by creating the Autonomous Communities System. The lack of violence in the transition to democracy, the almost immediate acceptance of Spain by NATO and the European Community, and the rapid expansion of the economy prompted a dynamism that contrasted with the backwardness and conservatism of the Franco years. What remains to be decided is whether the momentum for change has reached a stop or whether there will be further reforms towards autonomy.

**Catalonia**

The tension between centralisation and various forms of cantonalism or federalism has been a constant problem faced by Spanish rulers. The joint rule of Ferdinand and Isabella (Reyes Católicos) from 1479 over Castile and the Crown of Aragon (of which Catalonia was its main element with Barcelona its capital), placed two very different areas under a common crown. The gulf between the two regions was enhanced by different political traditions and institutions. Although both kingdoms possessed parliamentary institutions (Corts), the Castilian Courts had never attained legislating power, emerging from the middle ages both isolated and weak, whereas Catalonia, Valencia and Aragon (forming the ‘Crown’ of Aragon) shared legislative power with the Crown and were well buttressed by laws and institutions derived from a long tradition of political liberty. Apart from sharing a common sovereign, neither Castile nor Aragon experienced radical institutional change.

In the event, the so-called equality of status between Castile and Aragon did not long survive the death of Ferdinand the Catholic. A growing gulf emerged between Castile and the other territories, including the state of Aragon. A radical shift in Castilian policy towards Catalonia occurred when Philip IV appointed the Count Duke of Olivares as chief minister in March 1621 with the object of creating a powerful absolutist state. In order to do so, Olivares abandoned any
commitment to recognising internal diversity within the Spanish state. Rising tension between Castile and Catalonia climaxed with the Revolt of the Reapers (Revolta dels Segadors) in 1640, uniting Catalans against the harsh treatment of Castile. This event, often described as one of the earlier expressions of incipient nationalism in Europe, undoubtedly contributed to the rise of Catalan identity.

Catalonia maintained its rights and liberties until 1714 when after a massive Franco-Spanish attack, Barcelona surrendered. Philip V ordered the dissolution of the Catalan institutions and Catalonia was subject to a regime of occupation. Catalan was forbidden and Castilian (Spanish) was proclaimed as the official language. The industrialisation of Catalonia in the nineteenth century was accompanied by major social changes, similar to those occurring in other European countries. This resulted, in turn, in the emergence of perceptible differences between Catalonia and the other regions of the Iberian peninsula, though parallel to the situation of the Basque Country. As the most economically developed part of a country, Catalonia found itself governed by an anachronistic and backward state in which political power resided with Castile. These differences have diminished but Catalan nationalists continue to make the case for residual differences. Indeed, contemporary nationalism is merely the latest phase of a deep-rooted tradition of cultural separatism.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the influence of Romanticism inspired the Renaixença, a movement for national and cultural renaissance which promoted Catalan language and culture, leading to demands for Catalan autonomy, in the first instance as a region, then as a federal state. Thereafter, its fortunes varied—autonomy under the administration of the Mancomunitat (1913–23), suppressed in 1923 after the coup d’état of Miguel Primo de Rivera, re-established during the Generalitat (1931–38) when Catalonia had a Statute of Autonomy but abolished by Franco’s decree of 5 April 1938. Catalonia did not recover its autonomous government until 1977 after the demise of Francoism. A new Statute of Autonomy was passed by the Spanish Cortes in 1979. The president of the Catalan government, Josep Tarradellas, returned from exile in France. Jordi Pujol, leader of the Convergència i Unió or CiU) became the first president of the regional Catalan parliament after the first democratic election held in the region.

The Basque Country

The Basques are the only surviving pre-Aryan race in Europe, and their language (Euskera) is the only pre-indoeuropean language in use in Europe. The Basques ruled themselves according to the Fueros (local statutes and charters) first established between the Basque regions North of the Pyrenees and the Foix of Occitany, and subsequently between the kingdom of Castile and Basque regions south of the Pyrenees. The
Fueros, mostly codified during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries though some of them date back to the seventh century, exempted the local population from both military service and taxation, and gave provincial assemblies the right to veto royal edicts, a privilege they rarely employed. These institutions embodied the ‘rights’ of the people, rather than concessions granted to them. Throughout their history, the Basques have defended the Fueros, ensuring their autonomous status within the Spanish state. Attempts by Madrid to abolish the Fueros were vigorously contested—Basque support for the Carlist movement was directly connected to their opposition to centralism—until their final abolition in 1876 after two long civil wars (Guerras Carlistas). Thereafter the Basque country was rapidly industrialised. Modernisation transformed every aspect of social life. The emergence of a Basque working class, the displacement of population from the rural areas to the countryside and the arrival of large numbers of immigrants from other parts of Spain—widely regarded as representing the oppressor contributed to the emergence of Basque nationalism, initially as a cultural renaissance until Sabino Arana Goiri emerged as the ideologist of Basque nationalism, founding the Basque Nationalist Party in 1894.

A similar movement led by Arturo Campión and Juan Hurralde y Suit, took place in Navarra although without the dramatic changes brought about by early industrialisation in the Basque provinces of Bizkaia and Guipúzkoa. Navarra remained a primarily rural area whose nationalists merely called for a recognition as a distinctive region. The difference was seen in 1932 when a referendum on political autonomy for the Basque country won overwhelming support in the provinces of Alava, Guipúzkoa and Bizkaia but was defeated in Navarra.

The end of Francoism brought change to this region too, but in a way that contrasts with the situation in Catalonia. Although the 1978 Spanish constitution was ratified by the majority of Spaniards, most Basque nationalists were opposed. The argument was that the new constitution was ambiguous about Basque rights. In the referendum on the constitution the abstention rate was 56% in Guipúzkoa and Bizkaia. The Basque Statute of Autonomy was, however, ratified by referendum in 1979, with 61% turnout and 89% voting in favour. The president—in exile—of the Basque government, Jesús María de Leizaola returned from France and elections to the new Parliament took place in 1980. The leader of the Basque Nationalist Party, Carlos Garaikoetxea, became the first lehendakari (head of the Basque government) of the new democratic era.

National diversity within Francoist Spain

The meaning of both state and nation was contested during the Spanish Civil War. General Franco’s supporters advocated a highly centralised, uniform image of Spain which rejected the progressive government of
the Second Republic (1931–38), and its decentralisation tendencies. During the Republic, statutes of autonomy were sanctioned for Catalonia (1932), the Basque Country (1933) and Galicia (1936), although only the Catalan Statute had been implemented at the time of Franco’s coup.

The impact of Franco’s victory was marked in both Catalonia and the Basque Country, entailing not only the suppression of all autonomous political institutions and laws but the prohibition of the Catalan and Basque (Euskera) languages and cultures as well as all symbols of sub-state identity such as flags and anthems. The Francoists imposed a narrow ‘image’ of Spain emphasising national unity and condemned all forms of cultural or political diversity. This variant of state nationalism was a reaction to modern ideologies, especially socialism and anarchism, which were held to threaten traditional socio-political structures. As such, Francoism imposed a form of nationalism that was conservative, Catholic, centralist and Castilian as a brake on the modernisation begun in the early decades of the century by the Republic.

The Basque–Catalan contrast

The Basque–Catalan contrast

It can be argued that both communities, Catalonia and the Basque Country, were equally discriminated against by an authoritarian regime determined to crush intra-state differences but the response in the respective communities differed. In Catalonia resistance was altogether less violent than in the Basque Country. The reasons why violence emerged in one community but not in the other can be explained by differences not only between Catalan and Basque nationalism but in the socio-political structures of these societies.

Catalan nationalism manifests a predominantly civic character with a tradition of participating in Spanish politics, whereas Basque culture is altogether more exclusive: there are, for instance, allusions to the uniqueness of the Basque race and blood in the very early formulations of the Basque nationalistic doctrine. Sabino Arana promoted the idea of Euskadi (the Basque Country) as a country occupied by a foreign power. The Francoist regime, with its obsession to root out all symbols of Basque culture, merely gave plausibility to Arana’s theory of alien occupation. Ideological preferences were also rooted in broader cultural differences. For example, though official language policy proscribed both Catalan and Basque, the number of people who could understand and speak Catalan greatly outnumbered those who could understand and speak Euskera.

The profound social and economic transformations which affected the Basque Country in the 1950s brought an uncontrolled industrial expansion around the main Basque cities and a large inflow of Castilian-speaking immigrants from other parts of Spain. The Castilian language is often referred to as Spanish, a fact that reflects the dominance of Castile over the other peoples of Spain. Meanwhile, both the Basque
language and its culture suffered erosion, being confined to ever-smaller circles of native Basques. In Jáuregui’s view, this fact encouraged both the rejection of Castilian culture and hostility to immigrants; the presence of a strategic elite of Castilian origin, regarded as an agent of linguistic and cultural oppression, increased native hostility to Castilian-speaking migrants. Linked to this was an underlying fear of wholesale assimilation into mainstream Castilian culture. In short, there was a widespread sense of the Basque Country as a colonised country, and a conviction that all available means should be used to ensure freedom from foreign (Spanish) domination. It was in this context that ETA emerged as a paramilitary organisation embracing a radical nationalism with the clear aim of expelling colonial occupation by the use of force, and replacing it with self-government. ETA understood its role as waging a war of liberation akin to the revolutions in Cuba, Algeria or Angola. According to this rationale, armed struggle was the only available strategy since peaceful dialogue had failed.

The Francoist state responded to ETA’s violence by increasing its repressive measures in the Basque Country. This served to enhance Basque national consciousness and to publicise ETA.

The Spanish transition to democracy

The transition to democracy after Franco’s death was an attempt by the political class to synchronise Francoist institutions with the requirements of a modern society. A profound dislocation occurred during the 1970s between the social and the political spheres, highlighting the political system’s incapacity for resolving the problems of Spanish society. Spain was now no longer a wholly rural country. There were zones of heavy industry in Catalonia and the Basque Country, and a demographic explosion occurred in the Sixties which, together with great internal migrations, led to the growth of urbanisation. Illiteracy substantially decreased from 50% in 1931 to 11% in 1981. Furthermore, the entrenched Catholicism which had been one of the principal pillars of the Francoist regime, began an irreversible decline which led, in turn, to the onset of a new secular society. A new middle class emerged, and even some sectors of the bourgeois who had supported Franco demanded reforms. All these changes needed to be seen in the context of a new international political scenario within which Spain would only be fully accepted if it embraced democratic values. The isolation of the Spanish economy persuaded these new sectors to press for Spain’s integration into the then European Community. In this context, reforming the political system along democratic lines became the antidote to the country’s image as reactionary, underdeveloped and Conservative.

Though Francoism had endorsed significant changes in order to confront social change, it proved incapable of managing a society that
had undergone far-reaching transformations since 1939. With unemployment standing at some one million and inflation reaching 30% by 1975, the sheer limitations of Francoist policies had become patently clear.

Dislocation or reform were the options facing Spain after Franco’s death in 1975. The political establishment chose reform, but even this option meant a fundamental break with the past. The transition to democracy came from above, leading to an unusual situation: thought the Francoist regime had disappeared, its public administration and most of its institutions remained intact. In this context, it has been argued that democratic transition could only succeed from a combination of three distinct factors. First, from the institutional stability provided by the leadership of King Juan Carlos I who unequivocally backed the reforms. Second, a consensus reached between the various political factions over the terms of democratic transition, once the reform agenda had been sanctioned by the Spanish people in the first democratic elections (1977). And finally, the active mobilisation of large sectors of the population in favour of democratisation in stark contrast to the altogether more cautious attitude of significant parts of both the Catholic Church and the Army. A process of disentanglement of what, according to Franco’s political last will, was ‘tied up and well tied down’, reached a turning point in the 1978 referendum when Spaniards ratified the new democratic constitution. It was at this moment that the need to replace a ‘culture of resistance’ with a ‘culture of democracy’ emerged.

The national question in the new democratic Spain

The most dangerous legacy of Francoism was the aggravation of the national minorities question, an issue that had been accentuated by the centralism of the regime. After almost forty years of mutual antagonism between the two sides of the Civil War—between outright winners and losers—there was growing pressure for what the Left and some progressive Catholic groups called ‘national reconciliation’.

The 1978 Spanish constitution and the consensus between the main political parties emerged from the first democratic elections. The need to obtain support from both Francoist reformists and anti-Francoists generated endless discussions about the constitution and persisting ideological differences contributed to textual imprecision. Nevertheless, the outcome was a constitution that, for the first time in Spanish history, was not the consequence of the exclusive product of one dominant political tendency. Regardless of some limitations, the political model enshrined in the constitution was neither exclusive or divisive, but a model for integration. The extreme conservatism of the Francoist variant of Spanish nationalism was confronted in the 1978 constitution and it led to a double consensus: the transformation of Spain into a democratic state, and recognition of the existence of national minorities.
The Preamble acknowledges the ‘will’ of the ‘Spanish nation to protect all Spaniards and all the peoples of Spain in the exercise of human rights, their cultures and traditions, languages and institutions (Constitución Española: edición comentada, Centro de estudios constitucionales, Madrid, 1979). Likewise Article 2, the most controversial in the entire text, reflects an abiding tension between national unity and the pressure to recognise the existence of historic nations such as Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque Country: thus, ‘The constitution is founded upon the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and indivisible patria of all Spaniards, and recognises and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions integrated in it and the solidarity among them.’

**The autonomous system**

During the Francoist regime, the demand for recognition of national identity and democracy had been central to Catalan and Basque calls for the political transformation of the state. The makers of the constitution devised a model of symmetric decentralisation widely referred to as ‘cafe para todos’ (coffee for everyone). Rather than directly responding to Catalan and Basque demands to be recognised as nations within Spain, they preferred a system of seventeen autonomous communities some of which—Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia—are historically and culturally distinct, whereas others are artificially created, without any sense of territorial identity, for instance, La Rioja and Madrid. While the ‘historical nationalities’, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia, were immediately allowed to practice a degree of ‘full autonomy’, the other regions had to undergo a five-year period of ‘restricted autonomy’ before doing so. But, once full autonomy has been achieved, the constitution makes no distinction between the communities.

Allowing substantial powers to the historical nationalities, had two particular consequences. On the one hand, it fulfilled the nationalist aspirations of Catalans and Basques; on the others, it generated resentment amongst those communities with a restricted devolution.

Regardless of these variations, all communities are similarly structured: each has a regional legislative assembly consisting of a single chamber; deputies are elected on the basis of proportional representation, and the leader of the majority party or coalition usually assumes the Community presidency. The President heads a regional executive—ministers run administrative departments which, for the most part, though not in every case, follow the pattern of central government, depending on how much power is devolved to the respective autonomous community.

In many respects, the Autonomous Governments operate as states with regard to their devolved competencies. The Catalan and Basque governments, for example, provide wide-ranging public services—
education, health, culture, housing, local transport, agriculture. They even control their own autonomous police force which coexists with the Spanish National Police and Guardia Civil. The powers reserved to the central government are as follows: exclusive jurisdiction over defence, the administration of justice, international relations and general economic planning. A Compensation Fund administered by central government allocates special resources to poorer regions and is intended to promote equilibrium and solidarity among all autonomous communities.

Catalan nationalism

These novel arrangements raise some critical questions about the nature of democratic government in the post-Francoist state. How far does regional nationalism pose a threat to the governance of Spain? To what extent decentralisation makes for unstable central government? A brief review of the role of the main Catalan nationalist coalition (CiU), in government since 1980, sheds some light on these issues.

Tension between Catalonia’s current place in the Spanish state and the aspiration for greater autonomy lies at the heart of the CiU’s nationalist discourse. The coalition has been in power since 1980 with its leader, Jordi Pujol, consecutively re-elected as president on six occasions. The CiU defines Catalonia as a ‘nation’ in its own right but does not challenge the overarching idea of Spanish unity. The CiU supported the Socialist government (1993–95) in Madrid when it lost its overall parliamentary majority, and is currently backing the Conservative Popular Party which failed to obtain a majority at the 1996 general election, thereby illustrating Pujol’s claim that it is quite feasible to be a Catalan nationalist as well as contributing to state governance. The rewards of this policy have helped to sustain the twin-track strategy: support for the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party), at a time of widespread political corruption, brought a substantial development of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy including the right to retain 15% of the taxes collected in Catalonia. Concessions have also followed the CiU’s liaison with the Popular Party. After negotiations, the Catalan Government (Generalitat) managed to increase the percentage of taxes retained in Catalonia to 30%. Decentralisation in Catalonia, far from fostering uncompromising or extreme nationalism, has in fact opened channels for participation that have vastly improved both the Catalan economy and the quality of life in the region.

After twenty years of political decentralisation

The fact remains, however, that after some 20 years of political and administrative autonomy, the aspirations of Catalans and Basques for self-determination are not satisfied. They still desire fully to express their specificity, and to be recognised as nations within Spain. They demand yet more special treatment and show increasing reluctance to
accept the ‘coffee for everyone’ option. A more asymmetrical arrange-
ment, they argue, would better reflect the present Spanish reality.
References are made to the recent decentralisation of power in Britain,
where Scotland and Wales are being given substantially different
degrees of political autonomy to reflect the intensity of their nationalist
claims and the resurgence of national identity. This variant of devolu-
tion is now referred to as a model for Spain.
Both Catalans and Basques favour the asymmetrical decentralisation
of Spain. They want to be recognised as nations within a ‘multi-
national’ Spain. This contradicts the 1978 constitution under which
devolution to the nationalities and regions has been carried out at
different speed but with the intention that, at the end of the process,
there will be no distinction between historical and newly created
communities. It is in this sense that the Spanish decentralisation model
is defined as symmetrical, and this is precisely what Catalans and
Basques oppose. The 1998 Declaration of Barcelona raises this issue, as
follows.
In July 1998, the main nationalist parties in Galicia, the Basque
Country and Catalonia—the Galician Nationalist Bloc (Bloque Nacion-
alista Galego or BNG), the Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ-PNV) and
the Convergence and Union Coalition (CiU)—signed a joined declara-
tion demanding that Spain be defined as a multi-lingual, multi-cultural
and multi-national state. After twenty years of democracy, Spain contin-
ues (as they see it) to retain its essentially unitary character and has not
yet resolved the national question. In the words of the Declaration:
‘During this period we have endured a lack of juridical and political
recognition, and even social and cultural recognition of the specificity
of our national realities within the Spanish state. This recognition,
which if fair and democratic, is absolutely essential in the context of a
Europe enmeshed in the process of political and economic re-structura-
tion which in the medium term will involve the redistribution of
political power amongst its different layers of government. A Europe
whose union should be based upon respect for and the structuring of its
different peoples and cultures.’ (Declaració de Barcelona, BNG, EAJ-
PNV, CiU, Barcelona, 1998.)
The principal demand of the nationalist parties who subscribed to
the Declaration is for the recognition of Catalonia, Galicia and the
Basque country as nations per se rather than merely as regions. We
should recall here that, according to the 1978 constitution (Article 2)
Spain consists of a single nation containing some ‘nationalities and
regions’, though these entities are never substantively defined. The
consequences of recognising the historical nationalities as free nations
would be two-fold. It would imply a substantial revision of the consti-
tution which presently acknowledges the existence of a unique Spanish
nation. And it involves acceptance of the idea of Spain as a multi-
national state. The Declaration of Barcelona brought a negative
response from the main Spanish political parties, the PP and the PSOE, a rejection which underlined the differences between elites at the centre and those in the regions.

Devolution to non-historical nationalities and regions. From the perspective of the mainstream Spanish political parties, one can quite understand the reluctance to concede too much autonomy from the centre to some regions to the detriment of others. The historical nationalities, however, see things altogether differently. How then should we evaluate the trend to political decentralisation from the perspective of the newly created autonomous communities, most of whom have a limited, even non-existent, sense of common regional identity? Three main aspects need to be considered here.

1. The creation of political autonomous institutions has added to the dynamism of civil society, generating a sense of common regional identity where it did not previously exist, and strengthening where it was never more than a feeble idea. Devolution has contributed to the generation of regional identity amongst the people of various communities, with their own flags, anthems, and the promotion of folklore, cultural traditions and regional art. But while some of these elements originate in the local cultures now integrated within the boundaries of the autonomous community, others are the product of invention. Whether indigenous or invented, cultural distinctiveness both generates and strengthens the collective identities of each autonomous community. It is possible then to claim that the devolution of power—and with it, the creation of regional institutions corresponding to autonomous communities without previous historical or cultural identities—is likely to lead to the emergence and, thereafter, the strengthening of separate regional identities. Nowhere more so for Spain’s historical nationalities where there is a clear connection between past and present experiences of autonomous institutions, law and a separate political and cultural identity that accounts for the sheer force of nationalist feelings. Max Weber reminds us that shared political memories are elemental in the construction of a common national or ethnic identity, which are more than likely to persist for long periods after these communities have lost their political independence.7

2. Political decentralisation tends to strengthen democracy in as much as it brings decision-making closer to the people. Problems are identified, analysed and resolved where they emerge. Regional politicians usually have greater awareness of the needs, and aspirations of their electorates, and the following table reflects the high percentage of Spanish people in favour of decentralisation. It also shows a greater number of people in Catalonia in favour of transferring further powers to the communities when compared
with the rest of Spain. It is also striking that while over a fifth of Catalans favour granting the right to secession to Autonomous Communities, less than a tenth favour it in the rest of Spain (see Table).

3. The devolution of powers to regional institutions requires the reallocation of resources to facilitate discrete policies and regional budget planning. These processes, in turn, contribute to revitalise civil society, encouraging local and regional initiatives including cultural, economic and social projects. Among other endeavours, autonomous communities are promoting regional businesses, restoring ancient buildings and creating regional cultural networks such as universities, museums and libraries. Some 20 years after the creation of the Autonomous Communities System, the particular national identities of Catalonia, Basque country and Galicia have been considerably reinforced through the promotion of their languages and culture together with the development of social and economic policies to improve the quality of regional life. None of this is necessarily inconsistent with sustaining an overall Spanish political identity. In Galicia, for instance, the conservative Popular Party has remained in government throughout the period of regional autonomy. Ironically, the new regionalism has been encouraged by Manual Fraga Iribarne, president of Galicia but formerly a minister under Franco. Galician nationalism was virtually non-existent when the autonomous government was established, but it has registered a substantial increase in support, the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) becoming the main opposition to the Popular Party. The nationalist parties which have ruled both Catalonia (CiU) and the Basque region (EAJ-PNV) since the onset of autonomous government, whilst defining themselves as nationalist, do not pursue secession from Spain but a greater autonomy within the current devolved framework.

After considering the likely impact of the Declaration of Barcelona on the shape of the Spanish state and the temper of nationalist politics, we may ask whether the nationalist discourse of these regional parties fully meets the aspirations of Catalans and Basques. We might include, too, Galicians in this political calculus. In short, are these newly assertive regional identities likely to settle for the status quo; or are they representatives of a transitional nationalism which will eventually seek full independence? The experience of Belgium and Canada might be
instructive in this regard: two federal and democratic states that have been obliged to grant a substantial degree of autonomy to the provinces of Flanders and Quebec, though this has not satisfied nationalist demands for even greater self-determination. Does it mean that nationalist claims can only be satisfied by achieving independence? Once the Statutes of Autonomy of Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia are fully developed, will their citizens be satisfied or will they regard autonomy as a step towards independence?

**Conclusions**

Notwithstanding current criticism of the autonomous system, it has permitted the peaceful accommodation of substate nationalism during the Spanish transition to democracy. Even so, decentralisation has not been without residual conflict and continuing tension between the regional and central governments. The demand, for instance, that additional resources and more powers should be allocated to the autonomous institutions has characterised most of the relations between the Generalitat—the Catalan government—and the central government in Madrid. Conflict has arisen particularly over the nature of taxes to be collected in Catalonia—whether these revenues should be retained as own resources by the Generalitat rather than having them re-allocated by Madrid.

Conflict has arisen, too, over the sensitive issue of language rights. Laws concerning the use and promotion of the Catalan language issued by the Generalitat were challenged by the central government and examined by the Spanish Constitutional Court (Tribunal Constitucional) which subsequently ratified their constitutionality. Tension arose, too, when some autonomous communities complained about what they perceive to be better treatment by the state of the historical communities.

A major consequence of Spanish decentralisation has been the redefinition of Spanish identity as a result of the strengthening not only of Catalan, Basque and Galician identities but also of other emergent regional identities in the so-called non-historical communities. In the new democracy, the state has played a creative role in mediating between regional and Spanish identities. The process is by no means completed. The definition of Spain will continue to be examined and reformulated in the light of current and future experience.

The power structure of the Francoist state imposed its own constructed image of Spain, persuading local communities, if necessary by force, to adjust to it, at least in their public life. This cultural hegemony is now finally over and contemporary Spanish identity has to be redefined in accordance with prevailing conditions; it has to reflect the aspirations and new-found political confidence of its constituent nations. At the same time, these nations are struggling to recover and develop in accordance with their particular identities long suppressed
under the Franco regime. What is at stake here is the very definition of Spain as a nation and as a culture. By redefining themselves as nations per se, Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia have challenged the homogeneous image of Spain as this was expressed both by Francoism and, indeed, by an influential tendency within Spanish socialism, heavily induced by the universalist, cosmopolitan variant of state nationalism championed by the French Jacobin tradition. As such, these radical elements share with their conservative opponents much the same antagonism to substate autonomy as conceded to Catalonia and the Basque country and they remain critical of further demands to expand its scope.

The new democratic regime allows for multi-level government located in central, regional and local institutions and devolution has contributed more than institutional variety to Spain’s democratic culture. It has encouraged the emergence and strengthening of different layers of identity and, as such, has made it possible for many to hold multiple identities: to define themselves as both Spanish and as Catalan or Basque. This related outcome does not, of course, apply to those separatists who still seek Catalan or Basque independence. The two layers of identity are further complemented by an extra layer of identity stemming from membership of the European Union.

In summary, decentralisation has indeed reinforced regional national identity but, so far, it has not encouraged the emergence of large pro-independence movements in Catalonia, the Basque country and Galicia. At the same time, the ‘non historical’ autonomous communities have benefitted from a decentralisation process which has generated a clear separate sense of regional identity. That too has contributed to the development of civil society and has brought decision making mechanisms closer to the people.


2 According to Conversi, ‘although the Fueros were slowly eroded, before their abolition the señorío (“seigniory”) of Bizkaia was working as a state within the Spanish state, and was even expanding its powers (Agirreazkuenaga, 1987)’. D. Conversi,. *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain: Alternative Routes to Nationalist Mobilization*, Hurst & Company, 1997, p. 45.


8 In Catalonia, 11.5% of the population define themselves as more Spanish than Catalan; 36.5% as Spanish as Catalan; 25.7% more Catalan than Spanish. Those who define themselves as only Catalan...
represent 11% and 12.9% define themselves as only Spanish. In the Basque country, 43.6% is in favour of independence and 32.2% against it. About 25% do not answer. In Catalonia, 33.6% are in favour of independence and 50% against it. See Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, *La Vanguardia*, 16 February 1997. See also ICPS, *Sondeig d’opinió Catalunya*, vols 1989–95.