

Forum: United Nations Membership Council

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TOPIC 2: The Membership of Catalonia

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I. Introduction to the Topic

The United Nations Membership Council aims to obtain the approval of the membership of autonomous regions such as Catalonia while still guaranteeing international peace and security, promoting the well-being of the populations, and international collaboration. This year's theme “How can we use multilateral diplomacy to surmount the challenges of rapid societal change?” is certainly in agreement with the topics addressed in this committee, which explores how multilateral diplomacy can be used to overcome the challenges that will be debated upon.

Catalonia is an autonomous community located in northeastern Spain. Ever since the early 2000's contemporary independence movements began in Catalonia.

It is during the mid 19th century that the earliest separatist movements have strongly emerged in the region, such as the Renaixença, a cultural movement that sought to revive the Catalan language and literature. Catalan nationalism became a serious force during the late 19th century. Catalonia became fully autonomous in 1979, later on the region was granted “nation” status and given the level of taxation responsibility as the Spanish central government. In 2010 Spain's constitutional Court reduced the autonomy of the region by declaring that Catalans constituted a “nationality” but that “Catalonia” was not itself a “nation”.

In 2017 the Catalan Parliament passed a law authorising a referendum on Catalonia's independence. The same year a referendum was conducted regarding the regions independence, 90% of voters were in favour for Cataloni's independence. However the Spanish Courts rejected the referendum claiming it was conducted illegally. The rejection of the referendum rocketed the issue into a constitutional crisis, with the Spanish government imposing direct rule on Catalonia and arresting several pro-independence leaders.

In 2022 the United Nations Human Rights Committee revealed that Spain violated Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by suspending former Catalan Government and Parliament members by suspending them from public duties.

If Catalonia were to become independent the region of 7.8 million inhabitants would gain control of fiscal resources and economic policy allowing Catalonia to collect its own taxes and finance public services by itself, which could lead to a surplus of 8% of GDP. However, there are potential costs and difficulties to independence, including the possibility of economic ramifications such as trade boycotts and repercussions, particularly if Spain does not recognize the independence. Catalonia would also have to pay for the establishment of new state entities (embassies, central banks, etc.), which comes at a high cost.

Additionally Catalonia's independence would have ramifications for its commercial relations with the European Union and Spain, its two main trading partners. If Catalonia leaves the EU, it will have to trade with the EU and Spain under World Trade Organization regulations, which might cause disruptions and higher trade barriers.

It is primordial to mention that Catalonia's independence is complicated and multidimensional. The repercussions would be determined by a number of circumstances, including the Spanish government's response, the European Union's attitude, and the reactions of other nations and international organisations.

Currently the Catalan independence movement is still active as of 2023, but it has faced challenges and setbacks, even though pro-independence supporters continue to show their discontent in regards to the situation.

II. Definition of Key Terms & Concepts

Sovereignty: According to international law, sovereignty refers to a government's entire control over matters inside a defined region or borders.

In this question, it is primordial to evaluate Catalonia's independence and its current state as an autonomous region.

Autonomous community: Instead of being dominated by others, a community that is autonomous rules or regulates itself.

An autonomous community is the first sub-national level of political and administrative organisation in Spain, established in accordance with the 1978 Spanish Constitution that grants limited autonomy to the nationalities and regions that comprise Spain.

Referendum: A referendum is a vote in which all of the people in a country or region decide on an important issue.

In 2017, the Catalan Parliament enacted legislation permitting a referendum on Catalonia's independence. Despite a suspension order from the Constitutional Court and police intervention, a referendum was held on October 1, 2017, 90% of voters voted favourably to the question of Catalonia's independence.

Nationalism: Nationalism is a political ideology that emphasises the value of having a common national identity, culture, and history.

Catalan nationalism is the idea that Catalans constitute a unique country. Intellectually, modern Catalan nationalism began as a political concept during the abortive attempts to form a federal state in Spain under the First Republic.

III. Key Stakeholders

Catalan Government: The Generalitat de Catalunya, or Catalan Government, is the institutional system through which Catalonia organises its self-government as a Spanish autonomous community.

The regional government plays a core role in the promotion of a pro-independence agenda

Spanish Government: The Spanish government is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with a prime minister as head of government and the monarch as head of state. The central government located in the capital city, Madrid, opposes the separatist movements occurring in Catalonia, considering the movement as unconstitutional going to the extent of taking legal and political measures to suppress the movements.

Businesses and economic stakeholders: The Catalan independence movement has economic ramifications for both Catalonia and Spain as a whole. One of the reasons Catalonia wants to gain independence is related to its desire to control fiscal resources and economic policies,

however if Catalonia were to be granted independence there is a possibility that it might face economic difficulties.

International Communities: The international community has demonstrated varied degrees of interest and involvement in the Catalan independence movement, including foreign governments, organisations, and people. Some countries such as Denmark, Belgium, Latvia, Lithuania, Ireland and others have shown support towards Catalonia's right to independence, while others have stressed the need of preserving Spain's geographical integrity and constitutional order.

IV. Key Issues including Background Information

Economic factors: Catalonia is one of Spain's most prosperous and productive areas. Some independence proponents contend that Catalonia contributes more to the Spanish economy than it receives in return, and that independence would give them more control over their economic resources.

Cultural Identity: Catalonia has its own culture, language (Catalan), and history, all of which contribute to a feeling of regional identity and a yearning for self-determination. Catalan language and identity preservation has been an important part of the fight for independence.

Repression and political conflict: The Spanish government's harsh response to the 2017 independence referendum, which was deemed unlawful by Spanish courts, strengthened the independence movement even more. The brutal attack on voters by Spanish police, followed by the incarceration of separatist leaders, provoked global indignation and protests.

European Union Membership: Catalonia's future participation in the European Union has also been a source of worry. The EU did not acknowledge Catalans' right to vote in an independence referendum or contemplate Catalan membership in the EU during the 2017 independence campaign. The absence of EU assistance hampered the sustainability of the independence movement.

V. Timeline of Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of event
March 25th and 27th 1892	Manresa Bases, the first proposal for Catalan self-government promoted by Catalan nationalism, was made in 1892.
September 18th 1979	Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia of 1979.
June 18th 2006	Catalonia's autonomy statute is reformed, giving the regional government greater powers and financial autonomy.
June 28th 2010	Reduction of Catalonia's independence as an autonomous region by Spanish Courts.
October 1st 2017	Referendum regarding the question of Catalonia's independence.

VI. Possible Challenges & Solutions

Regional Stability: Delegates should consider the potential outcomes that may be caused if Catalonia becomes independent. This can include advocating in favour of a peaceful resolution that considers the interests of both Spain and Catalonia.

Cultural Identity: Though Catalonia is part of Spain, the autonomous region has a cultural identity that it wishes to preserve, delegates should consider Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity that states: "Freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equal access to art and to scientific and technological knowledge, including in digital form, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity."

Repression and political conflict: Delegates should acknowledge that Spain previously violated Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The tensions that are persevering between the two parties should be tackled and resolved according to the UN charter.

Economic factors: Delegates should assess the economic challenges that may be faced by the region if it would be granted independence. Avoiding the economic distress of the region and country should be the aim of any solution.

International Mediation: International mediation may be proposed as a potential solution to the Catalan independence crisis. This might include the UN or the European Union acting as a go-between for the Spanish government and Catalan authorities.

VII. Recommendations for Resolution Writing including Research

The question of Catalonia's independence and membership has significant implications that date back from centuries ago. During their research and while writing their resolutions delegates should acknowledge the complex multilateral aspect of this question, considering the cultural, historical, economic and political facades that englobe this question. Delegates should be aware of issues that bear within this question and should tackle each issue in their resolution. Furthermore Resolution should seek to solve the ongoing tension that subsists between Catalonia and the Spanish Government. In their resolutions delegates should pursue the mediation of the international community including the European Nation.

VIII. Bibliography

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IX: Additional Resources

Map of Catalonia in Spain:

