

Professor Danuta Hübner, Ph. D. Hab.

Warsaw School of Economics

Chair of the Committee on Regional Development
of the European Parliament

Opinion on the Ph.D. Thesis in Geography with the Option of Geopolitics
“**Analyse Géopolitique de l’indépendantisme en Catalogne**”

by Cyril Trépier,

prepared under the direction of Professor Barbara Loyer and Professor Félix Ovejero Lucas, presented and defended publicly at the Université de Paris VIII, Saint-Denis on the 5th of December, 2011

I have a pleasure of presenting the following comments on the Ph.D. dissertation of Mr. Cyril Trépier:

1) On Methodology

The art of the political analysis is to transform the old, worn-out notions, categories and theoretical constructs into usable instruments in advancing the case of contemporary understanding. For that successful transformation, the analyst has to exercise hegemony over his field of inquiry that would allow him to dominate it discursively. It is thus important that in this exhaustive study the author at the start delineates the usage of the geopolitical method. He explicitly detaches it from the traditional context of imperial rivalries. In his view, which I see as correct, only the multi-level analysis can do justice to the phenomenon of transnational processes of globalization.

The rivalries over the territory is not gone – but it takes places on different levels of political actorship: communities, regions, states, supranational entities, and also in the hearts and minds of citizens. The armies marching through Europe now are not military units, but rather cultural activists: writers, media people, film makers, who give words and images for the

battles over linguistic prerogatives or controlling the representations of the past. The intermediary link in this cultural production and consumption of ideas are, at least in this specific case of Catalonia, entrepreneurs and the managerial class. They are a sort of a “discursive” middle – accepting the independentist ideas, but also trying to negotiate in the so-called “real world” in the context of business interests. The additional interesting element of the puzzle is the introduction into the existing discourse of the so-called “New Catalans” recent immigrants who have to find themselves on one or the other level of representation. Mr. Trépier’s work is in fact a study in “sociological geopolitics”, in which there exists an insoluble link between territoriality, ideational representations and political interests. Catalonia is a very good case-study to conduct such a research, because of the strong interpenetration of all these three aspects.

In my opinion, the author succeeds in presenting the interconnectedness and complexity of the issues, although the sheer mass of data, statistics and cartography can be at times overwhelming to the reader. A more concise narration, parsimony in the inclusion of all kinds of data and clearer explication of theoretical underpinnings would certainly be beneficial to the overall project.

2) Hypotheses

On Independentism and the future of Catalonia

One of the most important findings of Mr. Trépier’s study is that independentism in Catalonia is a broader formation than an emblematic issue of one, explicitly independentist party, namely ERC. It is a subterranean force in the Catalonian political discourse that transcends the traditional political cleavages and is susceptible to diffusion in society. The author shows

in great detail that the “mainstreaming” of the independentist discourse makes it more pragmatic, as evidenced in the fact, for example, that, despite the legislation favouring the usage of Catalan language, the nationalists were not able to impose on the managers other understanding of it than purely in a sense of ‘because it is good for business’ having the positive image of a given enterprise in a particular territory.

That can put to the fore a question of whether this spirit of moderation does not make independentism in its pure form in fact a latent expression of sentiment only and thus, in a political sense, a spent force ? The author refers to that possibility explicitly, quoting Jean-Marie Izquierdo that *“il n’y a pas une volonté réelle de faire sécession avec l’Espagne. Il y a un bras de fer, et cela fait partie de la négociation. (...) C’est du symbolique à vocation négociative”*.

The hypothesis can be advanced that in the predictable future there will be a confluence between “soft independentism” and an effort achieving a more substantial federalism, expressed in fiscal terms. The Catalan Statute of 2006 concentrates on expanding some symbolic issues and achieving a few new areas of jurisdiction, it does nothing to alter the principles of the financing system, constrained within a common regime autonomy statute. But, in a new model of efficient governance, only the power to implement policies with sufficient economic resources is a part of guarantee of really substantive achievement on a progression toward independence, however defined it would come to be in the future. It is characteristic that the IMF classifies Spain as a unitary state with “a few federal traits”. This new federalism, in its most desirable form, will not be a rigid construction, but a canopy encompassing the aforementioned fiscal adjustment as well as pluriformity of social and cultural (including linguistic) arrangements. This sort of an “in-between federalism” is the most attuned to development in European integration, based on plurality of voices and multiple identities.

Out of the scenarios proposed by the author for the future “l’indépendance de fait” is the most probable in this regard- keeping the symbolic use of common Spanish institutions, like the King, but having total independence in arranging own affairs. This independence, however, will not be a hard-edged, exclusionary construction based on a one-dimensional vision, but the purpose- oriented, inclusive and participatory process that would evolve on the basis of negotiating the real space with all the relevant actors, including Spain, and Europe as well.

On Catalonia and Europe

It is significant that in the multi-level progression of identification the adherence to Europe places very high. The question is whether the sources of that attitude are always healthy.

In the Catalan discourse “Europe”, like in some Central and East European countries, stands for modernization and the breach with the authoritarian past. In this case, the associative value of such an image is that linguistic demands seem to be more than return to narrow provincialism. Also, “Europe” is something that is a way out of the perceived trap of being a part of larger territory and its connection with the state. And, additionally, “Europe” functions as an image of expanding political body without a necessity of having the state. All these factors combined make “Europe”, in a sense, a substitute of something, a strategy to go around something (the state?) –the slogan “Hello, Europe, goodbye Spain” is a telling example in this regard - and not an autonomous value in itself.

The hypothesis may be advanced that this kind of understanding can be counter-productive in a long-run and limit the efficacy of Catalonian representation in Brussels.

This two hypotheses will probably be tested in reality step by step, decision by decision, case by case.

From among the wealth of analysis in Mr. Trépiér's dissertation, it would be my wish that they be elaborated and finessed further on a theoretical basis as well, by himself or by other researchers interested in the topic.

In its presented form, the dissertation merits my favourable opinion as concerns the Ph.D. degree for its author.