Civic Patriotism as a Basis for the Legitimation of Autonomous Regions in a Time of Crisis*

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Introduction

The economic crisis has coincided with a general decline in citizen support for the State of Autonomies in Spain, according to public opinion polling, a decline that manifests in diverse ways by territory: with increasing centralist attitudes in some places and attitudes favouring “self-determination” in others. In this study we examine, first, the entity and meaning of the change in attitudes among the Spanish people towards the State of Autonomies, and we attempt to understand the phenomenon within its current political context and that of its evolution. This will lead us to an investigation of the interpretative frameworks of the territorial organisation of power that the discourses of the right, the left and the peripheral nationalists hold. Similarly, it will lead us to an evaluation of the impact the economic crisis and political dissatisfaction may be exerting on the support among the Spanish people for the State of Autonomies.

In the second section, we go on to interpret and evaluate the information presented thus far, attempting to answer the question of whether what we are seeing is a crisis of legitimacy in the State of Autonomies. To do so, first, we consider the growth in preferences in Catalonia, with predictable consequences for the Basque Country, for a State model that recognizes the possibility for autonomous communities to become independent states. This consideration will lead us to explore the viability of an alternative solution to secession, which in our judgment would involve a constitutional reform that would reconfigure Spain as an authentic plurinational federal State; a reform that would imply both institutional changes and changes of a symbolic nature, but also the development of a federal spirit. Secondly, we will examine the data related to the growth in preferences for a central State without autonomies.

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This examination will lead to a comparison of the rise in attitudes favourable toward centralism and the deligitimation of the State of Autonomies related to the broader political crisis in Spain. From there, it is proposed a vision of the State of Autonomies in which its direct relationship with the Social State substitutes the protagonism that in a somewhat artificial way has been attributed to the history and singular identities in many Autonomous Communities. Finally, we interpret and evaluate the increase in the percentage of citizens who would like less autonomy for the Autonomous Communities (heretofore referred to as ACs). Although such an increase may be worrying as it relates to the wider aforementioned process of delegitimization of the State of Autonomies, we will sustain that it does not in and of itself represent an obstacle to the development of a federal regime, like the one we propose for the territorial organization of power in Spain, at least as long as it remains clear that it is not necessary for all ACs to have the same competences. Of course, this asymmetric federalism is only possible if the dynamic of comparative grievance between territories that has accompanied the rollout of the State of Autonomies, and that is also present in interprovincial relations, is combated.

1. **Attitudes toward the State of Autonomies in Spain: the current situation in the context of its evolution**

From the early years of the transition up until the year 2000, support for the autonomic model, versus a centralist territorial organization, was rising. In the beginning of this period, favourable feelings toward autonomy were very quickly generalised. This is usually explained as a consequence of the autonomist pressure from Catalonia and the Basque Country, said to have given rise to a spiral of feelings of comparative grievance between the elites and citizens of the other territories, articulated in the form of autonomist discourses even where there was no tradition of self-governance (Gunther, Montero & Botella, 2004). Afterward, between 1986 and 1992, the institutionalisation of self-governance along with the presence of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE)) in the central government and in most of the governments of the autonomous communities served to strengthen attitudes favourable to autonomism (Montero & Torcal, 1990). The same can be said of the 1992 pact between PSOE and the People’s Party (*Partido Popular* (PP)) to broaden the competences of the communities that had gained autonomy by ordinary procedure, in order to bring them up to par with the others that up until then enjoyed greater self-governance. Both circumstances made it possible for the question of the territorial organisation of the State to be subjected to a relatively low level of political controversy, in
comparison with later times (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 133). Between 1995 and 2000 popular support for the autonomic system continues to improve, thanks to two events that served to broaden its ideological base, by weakening reluctance on the part of followers of the PP: first, this party’s victory in the 1995 autonomic elections, through which it came to govern for the first time in a number of communities; second, the governability pact between the PP, which had risen to power in the Spanish Government in 1996, on the one hand, and the nationalists of Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió (CIU)) and the Basque Nationalist Party (Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV)), on the other, a pact that allowed for the transfer of services from the Central State to the autonomies (Liñeira, 2012: 50).

The absolute majority obtained by the People’s Party in the 2000 elections coincided with the ambition on the part of Basque and Catalan nationalist to amend a legal framework whose limit for the broadening of competences had been reached. This came to polarise the positions surrounding the issue of autonomy, which became the centre of public debate from 2004 onward, when the PSOE regained power in the Spanish Government. In fact, “nationalism” and “the statute of Catalonia” appeared on the list of the three main problems the country faces in the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (heretofore referred to as CIS)) Barometer carried out during the negotiation in the Courts of the latter, in the year 2006. The establishment of the territorial issue as the point of contention among parties has coincided with a fall in what has empirically been understood as the State of Autonomies index of legitimacy: the consideration of the autonomic model as the most suitable, expressed as a preference for maintaining it (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 146). Between 2005 and 2010, the option of maintaining the State as it exists lost 10% of support, placing it around 40%, and it would continue to decrease to just over 30% in 2012, reaching around 35% in January of 2014. The option to maintain the autonomic system correcting upwards the level of competences conferred upon the autonomous communities has also lost ground, going from 25% in 2005 to around 13% in January of 2014, after reaching its lowest point in 2011, with just over 10% support¹.

The rise in levels of dissatisfaction with the autonomic system in its current configuration and for its reform in a more centralised sense has been reflected by an increased support for the centralist option. In 2011, this option had doubled its 2005 value, roughly stabilising at over 20% in January of 2014, after having reached up to 25% in 2012. This increase in preference for centralism reverses a continuous downward trend from when it was

¹ Except where otherwise indicated, the data cited in this work comes from studies by the Spanish Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS)): 2025-2041 (1992), 2455 (2002), 2610 (2005), 2633 (2006), 2829 (2010), 2956 (2012), 2970 (November 2012-February 2013), 3011 (January 2014), and 3017 (March 2014).
first measured in 1984. And in addition, it is accompanied by non-negligible percentages of citizens who lean toward reducing the competences conferred upon the autonomous communities: around 10% of those polled in January of 2014, that is, more or less the same amount as the first measurements of this option, in 2009, after reaching a maximum level of 17% in 2012 (Liñeira, 2012: 51-54).

In light of this data, an erosion of positive public opinion concerning the State of Autonomies becomes evident between 2005 and 2012. Going from 53 percentage points over the negative opinion in 2005, seven years later it only won out by three. The main motivation the subjects presented to negatively evaluate the creation and development of the autonomous communities was that they led to increased public spending. This idea is not new: in a study conducted by CIS in 1992, one of the affirmations referring to the autonomous communities that garnered the most agreement among a battery of items offered was that the expense incurred did not translate to an improvement in services (Liñeira, 2012: 81). More recently, in 2010, the argument of cost was also the main factor for the plurality of those who offered a negative evaluation of the autonomic system: almost a fourth of them. Two years later, the percentage of those who shared this motive for their evaluation had tripled, and the distance had increased compared to the next most popular justifications, which in fact become ever more economist: increased bureaucracy, which overtakes the encouragement of separatist movements as the second reason for a negative view of autonomous communities; and increased differences between communities, which remains the third motive. It seems evident that the austerity policies of the autonomic governments associated with the reduction of their deficit would be behind the weight acquired by economic considerations when it comes to condemning the autonomic system. Now, the fact that in the past, support for the State of Autonomies was not influenced by the economic recession invites an interpretation of the distinct current dynamic as a consequence of the greater degree of party conflict surrounding the State of Autonomies (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 133, 150-152).

In any case, this questioning of the system should not lead us to forget that a plurality continues to positively evaluate the creation and development of the autonomous communities (39.9% in 2012), or the primary justification that has been found for it: decreased distance from the administration and its institutions, for the plurality of those polled (25.8%), followed by greater attention to and understanding of problems (for 22.4%), and the defence of identity, culture and language (for 13.9%). The approximation of the decisions to the citizens is the trait that consistently since 1998 has been considered most characteristic of the autonomous communities, above others such as the high cost of the autonomic system, its susceptibility to separatist movements or its capacity to improve coexistence, which is the
least recognised (Liñeira, 2012: 90). However, as a justification for positively evaluating the State of Autonomies, being close to the Administration and the knowledge of problems have surpassed in 2012 other arguments of a less economic and more identity-related nature, such as procuring greater self-governance or the management of “our” interests, which topped the list in 2010. This could be interpreted as a consequence of the economic crisis, in light of what has also occurred in relation to the justifications for being against the autonomies (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 150-151).

The considerations made so far refer to Spain as a whole. However, attitudes towards the territorial organisation of the State vary among autonomous communities, especially when it comes to Catalonia and the Basque Country. In these two regions, centralism is barely significant, while the better part of the preferences recorded for “a State in which the possibility for autonomous communities to become independent states is recognised” can be founded. These preferences have increased very quickly in Catalonia, from just over 10% in 2006 to 40.6% (42%, according to the Institut de Ciències Politiques i Socials) in 2013. In the same period, the preference for a framework that allows for independence has swung below 30% in the Basque Country, where it had grown in parallel with the negotiation of the Ibarretxe Plan, only to collapse after its failure. Taking this into account, a territorial polarisation of the preferences concerning the State of Autonomies is revealed, always bearing in mind the influence on these preferences of ideological positioning and alignment with the parties (Liñeira, 2012: 60-68; Liñeira, 2013: ).

For historical reasons, support for centralism is linked to right-wing positions in Spain. However, in both the centre and the right, the autonomist option was settled upon between 1985 and 2002. In fact, the decisive change for the acceptance of the State of Autonomies was its acceptance by those who align with the right and the centre right, in this period, as changes in the centre and even more so in the right have not had a comparable entity (Liñeira, 2012: 117). The discourse of the People’s Party (PP) on the State of Autonomies seems to have led, more than reflected, this change in attitude among the base of right-wing and centre-right voters (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 133 ss.). The populists have even promoted a regionalist discourse in communities with different languages and relatively weak nationalist movements, such as Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Navarre and Valencia, a discourse oriented toward legitimising the demands of greater competences when assuming governance of these territories, and toward stopping, if not absorbing, the expansion of other conservative regionalist parties. This also serves to channel the symbolic elements of traditional local identities into an ideology that does not question the Spanish nation in the slightest (Balfour &
Quiroga, 2007: 203-207). In light of this, the PP has positioned itself as the staunchest defender of the integrity and literal interpretation of the Constitution understood as the final stop in the process of decentralisation.

The defence of the Constitution served as bedrock for the People’s Party’s opposition to the Ibarretxe Plan and the reforms to the Statute of Catalonia. The protection of the liberties and equal rights recognized by the Magna Carta, together with economic concerns (the unity of the market) and concerns about administrative efficiency, would come to justify a recentralising correction of the autonomic system that is advocated in recent documents, such as the political paper from the PP’s 17th Congress (Muñoz, 2012: 51-55). This shift in direction toward more centralist positions is reflected in the attitudes of their electoral base. In this way, centralism is the majority option in communities governed by the People’s Party such as Murcia, Madrid and Castile and León (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 154).

As for the left in Spain, it has been traditionally associated with the more decentralising options. The critique of the Centralist State (identified with the Francoist regime) and the defence of the autonomy of the “nationalities and regions” were characteristic of its discourse during the transition. From that point on, the predominant tone has been one of satisfaction with the State of Autonomies, albeit with an inclination for the reform of the system to transfer more power to the autonomous communities; the result of both the pressures of the Catalonian or Basque federations and negotiations and coalitions with the nationalists in the national or regional area. Catalonian socialists, and to a lesser extent the Basques and the Galicians, have defended an asymmetrical federalism that offers different treatment to their territories versus those where the national identities are not as well defined. This has brought about tensions in the heart of the PSOE, as a sector of this party stands for interterritorial solidarity and the central power of the State to guarantee equal rights and duties for the citizens in the whole of Spain: in particular, it has committed itself to the so-called “Guerrista” trend, named for its connection with the vice president of the government from 1982 to 1991, Alfonso Guerra. The guarantee of interterritorial solidarity and equal rights and duties for citizens on the part of the Central State is a hallmark of Union, Progress and Democracy (Unión Progreso y Democracia (UPYD)), an activist movement against nationalism that has obtained the support of voters dissatisfied with the PSOE along with certain sectors of the right (Muñoz, 2012: 61-65). United Left (Izquierda Unida), finally, after experience with coalition governance with the nationalists in the Basque Country and Catalonia, has come to officially favour a “plurinational federal [organisation] recognising the right of self-determination” (Izquierda Unida, 2014). The Podemos (We Can) campaign (2014: 31), included in its 2014 European Elections platform the “recognition of the right to decide”.

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The attitudes of the voters on the left and its sympathisers reflect the significant tensions in the discourse of the elites on Spain and the autonomies. Predominant in them is an understanding of the national Spanish identity as a community of citizens with equal rights and duties, rather than constituted on cultural bases, together with an affective difficulty to relate with Spain as a distinctive entity, even among the youths, motivated by the rejection of Francoist nationalism and a tradition of rights. As a consequence of this, although the majority of citizens on the left refer to themselves as “as Spanish as of their autonomous community” in the polls, the tone is that their being Andalusians, Galicians or Catalan is perceived as something “natural”, while their being Spanish is something not completely integrated or articulated, something associated with formal, political and economic traits (Ruiz, Jiménez & González, 2010). As far as the position of the social base of the left and the centre concerning the autonomic system, they became more favourable toward increasing the autonomy of the communities between 1985 and 2002, particularly during the years of the Aznar government. In the decade following 2002, however, a segment of those who consider themselves leftists would abandon the option to increase the competences of the Autonomous Communities (ACs), preferring the current configuration of the autonomic system. The Basque Country is an exception, along with Catalonia, as detailed below (Liñeira, 2012: 116-118, 122-136).

The existence of conservative nationalist parties strongly established in the Basque Country and Catalonia detracts from the left/right variable as a conditioner of attitudes more favourable toward decentralisation and even toward “self-determination”. In these places, especially in Catalonia, the preference for a greater autonomy than the current situation has been linked primarily to a feeling of belonging primarily or exclusively to the respective autonomous community. However, from 2010 onward, the exclusive Catalan identity would become strongly linked with the option to break up the State of Autonomies in a manner that allows for the ACs to gain independence. This can be explained by the predicament this separatist option presents among CiU and PSOE voters after the shift in nationalist parties and movements in favour of the “right to decide” that followed the decision of the Constitutional Tribunal strictly interpreting the amendment of the statute approved by the Catalan parliament and passed by referendum. The link between the exclusive Catalan identity and the option to break away from the autonomic system seems to be very dependent on the political circumstances, and thus it became less significant in 2012 than in 2010, for example (Liñeira, 2012: 130-134; Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 166-167). Not only that, an increased or decreased nationalism in the Catalan voters, particularly those of the PSOE and especially those of the
CiU, has also swung significantly as time has passed in relation to the political circumstances (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2014: 8-10).

We started this work by stating the coincidence of the economic crisis with the significant erosion of support for the State of Autonomies in public opinion polls. This begs the question of what is the causal relationship between one phenomenon and the other. According to a study conducted by Pérez Nievas (2013), the main effect of this crisis has to do with the erosion of support for the State of Autonomies in communities that are net contributors to autonomic funding, for the period of 2010-2012. This was the case in Madrid, to the benefit of the centralist option, and above all in Catalonia, favouring the independence option. These two communities lead the ranking in percentages of citizens who in 2012 negatively evaluated the growth and development of the autonomies due to their impact on public spending, more than double the 2010 numbers. In the case of Catalonia, the status of being a net contributor community is accompanied by two other factors: the first, a high deficit that weighed down upon the autonomic administration and that led to cuts in public services even earlier than in other ACs; the second, an unemployment rate that, while still slightly lower than the Spanish average, has been increasing since the late 90s. And all of this is taking place within a context of political confrontation linked to the debates surrounding reforms to the Catalonian statute, first, and 14 articles of this statute being declared unconstitutional as a result of an unconstitutionality provision added later by the People’s Party. These circumstances surely explain that the disaffection for the State of Autonomies has become more evident in Catalonia than in Madrid and particularly among the youths, and also among the unemployed in Catalonia, that is, the groups most vulnerable to the crisis (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 153, 165-166, 181-185).

For Spain as a whole, the perception that the economic situation of one’s own Autonomous Community is better than that of the country correlates negatively with support for the State of Autonomies. However, it did so in a more pronounced way in 2010 than in 2012, which could be taken as an encouraging sign for the legitimacy of the system, as it is understood in quantitative studies (Mata & Paradés, 2013: 22). Another hopeful sign comes from the relationship between economic factors and support for the State of Autonomies is ambivalent, this support perhaps having benefited from the crisis when it comes to vulnerable groups from communities such as Andalusia. In any case, it should be pointed out that, although the effects of the economic factors on support for the State model are significant, their scope remains weak. The economic crisis has been accompanied especially by a lower
evaluation of the creation and development of the autonomies (Pérez Nievas et al., 2013: 163-185).

With all this in mind, it is the political variables more than the economic ones that have caused the State of Autonomies to lose support among the citizenry, in a process that began in 2005. This begs the question of whether among the variables mentioned above the general loss of confidence in politicians and institutions is significant. Starting in late 2009, the Spanish people started to perceive politicians, politics and parties as a growing problem, placing them as the third most important problem in Spain, after unemployment and economic struggles. A few months earlier, those who characterised the political situation as bad or very bad had grown to a majority, almost 80% of those polled by CIS in March of 2014. Since 2008 the percentage of those who identify as being very satisfied with the democracy has been in a decline, while those who identify as being not very satisfied or not satisfied is growing: 65% in 2012, higher than the dissatisfaction manifested in the peak of the economic crisis of the 90s, at 54% in 1994.

Liñeira (2012: 89-90) examined CIS data from 2010, coming to realise that, in aggregate terms, the evaluation of the political situation had a greater impact on that of the State of Autonomies than that of the economic situation. Even so, this was a modest impact. Liñeira (2012: 90-103) also analysed the same data relating, on the one hand, preferences concerning the territorial model, and on the other, the evaluation of the political situation and faith in institutions, understood as a combination of faith placed in political parties and in the Congress of Deputies. This analysis revealed a certain correlation among a preference for the territorial status quo, faith in institutions and satisfaction with the political situation. Dissatisfaction with the political situation and institutional distrust would therefore be associated with separatist options: independence movements in the Catalan and Basque context, centralism in the rest of Spain, although less significantly. Even so, this dissatisfaction and distrust may not be conditioning support for the State of Autonomies to a great extent, in comparison with other variables such as ideology and, above all, national identity. More statistically significant is the association between discontent with the autonomic system, on the one hand, and political interest and involvement, on the other; which confers a greater capacity for movement upon the critics of the system.

2. A legitimacy crisis of the autonomic system? Evaluating legitimation difficulties facing the State of Autonomies and proposing normative responses to deal with them
In light of the data presented so far, what can be said about the autonomic system’s crisis of legitimacy? To start with, there is no doubt that the increase in those who would prefer a State model that recognises the possibility for some ACs to become independent constitutes an enormous challenge to the continuity of the State of Autonomies. The support for this option is concentrated in the Basque Country and Catalonia, as laid out above. Additionally, in October of 2013, 49% of those interviewed by the Institut de Ciències Politiques i Socials stated they would vote in favour of Catalanian independence, if a referendum like the one being proposed by the Catalan Government were held. However, given that adherence to nationalism seems to have made more progress with the elites of the traditionally majority parties in Catalonia and the Basque Country than with the citizenry (Bermúdez & Cordero, 2014), it is reasonable to think that an agreement among political parties in a different sense than the configuration of Catalonia as an independent State could also garner popular support, which could be repeated in the Basque Country. An operation of this kind could be of interest to the parties that are against independence, but especially for those whose electorates are divided on this issue. These parties were, in October of 2013, Convergence and Union (with 16% of those polled against independence, and 19% distributed between abstention and not sure), Initiative for Catalonia Greens (Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds) (with 33% against, and 25% leaning toward abstention, blank voting or not sure) and the Socialists’ Party of Catalonia (Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya) (with 42% against, and 36% leaning toward abstention, blank voting or not sure). We are referring, therefore, to parties that fill a wide majority of the seats in the current Catalan Parliament (over the previous data, v. Liñeira, 2013). However, it must not be ignored that Catalonia’s governability on the part of Convergence depends on the support of the independence-movement Republican Left of Catalonia (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya) party, or that this party displaced CiU as the most-voted power in the May 2014 European Parliamentary elections and also beat out Convergence in voter intent according to the CIS July 14 Barometer.

The situation surrounding the challenge that the growing support for recognising the possibility for some ACs to claim independence poses for the State of Autonomies is, therefore, quite uncertain. With the data available as of now, in Catalonia there would not be a “clear majority” willing to vote in favour of secession. That is, the legitimacy requirement that the Supreme Court of Canada, in its ruling from August 20, 1998, considered necessary for Quebec, to reference a very similar situation to Catalan nationalism, would not be met, and
this in concordance with what has been put forth by the president of the Generalitat himself. However, leaving the situation as it stands doesn’t seem viable either. A reform of the autonomic system in the sense of a plurinational federalism, like the one developed by Máiz (2007) or Martín et al. (2014), would be, in our view, the best of the options within this context. This would mean diverse institutional changes, such as turning the Senate into an authentic house of territorial representation, and others of a symbolic nature, such as the recognition of the co-officiality of all the languages in Spain in the state environment as much as it is economically and administratively viable to do so, ideally for all effects as proposed by Caminal (2012). However, like any other federal project, plurinational federalism in Spain would also require a broadly shared federal spirit: the desire to live together in the same state with the same freedoms, mutual respect and recognition and a commitment to maintaining this value (Burgess, 2012: 322).

The institutional changes needed to convert the State of Autonomies into a Plurinational Federal State are associated with a Constitutional reform. A reform is only possible if the Constitution is not considered a definitive end point. Certainly, the viability of a politically decentralised State depends on the loyalty of institutions, elites and citizens to the pact that the Constitution represents. However, this pact must not be conceived as something intangible achieved in one foundational moment, but rather as a set of values and principles governing an interaction process (conflict, deliberation, negotiations) that reaches successive states of equilibrium by virtue of the experience and the challenges presented by the changing internal and external contexts (Máiz, 2007: 266 ss.; Tully, 1995: 183-185). Among these values and principles, the most basic is that any political decision must be justifiable for the whole of the citizenry (Müller, 2007: 58). Now, a federal solution requires an understanding of that citizenry as a compound and complex power, even on the constituent level. This multilevel constitution is not outside the realm of contemporary Spanish constitutionalism, part of whose lexicon is the concept of a constitutional block, which refers to the conjunction of the Constitution and statutes of autonomy. However, our institutional design still owes much to the theory of popular unitary sovereignty, and thus does not incorporate the intervention of the ACs in the naming of the members of the Constitutional Tribunal or in amending the Constitution (v. Máiz, 2007: 266).

From the viewpoint of individual attitudes, which are what we are most interested in for the sake of this work, the viability of a Federal State depends on a broadly shared federal

2 “Mas says the sovereignty process will have to be approved by a broad social majority,” El Periódico, 09/29/2012: http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/politica/mas-president-cdc-proceso-soberanista-amplia-mayoria-social-2214820 [accessed 08/05/2014].
spirit as defined above. In concert with this, dual loyalties, both to each of the member states and the federation, must be generalised; as they in fact are in Spain, except when it comes to a significant number of Basques and Catalan, as we’ve established. These conditioning attitudes for the success of a federal system can only prosper as a result of socialisation processes deliberately designed to promote federal values and a civil society that assures federal democracy, among which processes the mimesis of a few exemplary elites in this regard stands out (Burgess, 2012: 321-322).

The challenge for the legitimation of the State of Autonomies that comes with the increase of those who would prefer “a State with a single Central Government without autonomies” is not a small one. However, it must not be forgotten that this currently represents a fifth of the population of the whole of Spain, after having made up a fourth in 2012, and subsequently, declining. In addition, this is a group that does not make up the majority base of any political party with a high capacity for citizen mobilisation. Nor is any important party openly committed to a Central State without autonomic governments. All of this makes the articulation of a desire to recentralise viable with the positions that imply greater conformity with the autonomic status quo. Significantly, it could be contributed to by the People’s Party, whose platform strategy is that of a recentralising correction of the autonomic system rather than a State without autonomies, but they govern in communities where the option for the Unitary State model is chosen with greater frequency in the polls.

On the other hand, examining the data concerning these communities where the centralist option is the favourite among those polled reveals inconsistencies that lead to a questioning of the relevance of the preference shown for a central government with no autonomies. In Madrid, for example, 36.8% leaned toward such an option, while only 18.1% wanted the State to adopt the maximum centralism in its organisation, according to the latest CIS Autonomic Barometer, from 2012. According to the same study, 41.6% of Murcians opted for a central government without autonomies, but only 31.2% wanted less autonomy for Murcia, among which about 9.4% wanted a downward correction of the competences conferred upon the ACs. These inconsistencies call for a reconsideration of the habitual practice in empirical studies of identifying legitimacy with verbal support for a given option on the part of the poll responders. It’s rather questionable to link the fundamental defining characteristic of a political system with the expression of an opinion with no practical consequences for the one who gives it, and without a formal connection to the laws relating to the exercise of power. Therefore, in parallel with what is being done in the area of studies concerning support for the Welfare State, more than the relatively static phenomenon of the
Deficit of legitimacy we think the interest must be cantered around the process of *delegitimation* that leads to the withdrawal of expressions of support from the State of Autonomies.

When it comes to the aforementioned process of delegitimation, as has been established, the autonomic question has become one of the focuses of political conflict in Spain starting in 2005. The economic crisis and the growing unemployment, starting in 2008, were accompanied by a series of notorious corruption cases, which provides an explanation for how politicians came to be considered the country’s third largest problem in the 2010 CIS Barometer. In this context, interventions were made, public endorsements and even capital injections into different savings accounts, entities very closely linked with the autonomic governments, while different measures were being taken to cut social spending. The 15-M movement also came about, in 2011, with a discourse in which the rejection of corruption and the privileges of the *political class* played a fundamental role (Escámez, 2011). And the financial troubles plaguing the Autonomous Communities made news, and the National Government demanded discipline from them. In this context of economic turmoil, growing unemployment, accusations of corruption and evidence of insufficient management of public spending a debate arose on the part of the president of the confederation of businesspeople and relevant politicians concerning the dimensions of the Public Administration and the number of functionaries in Spain. All of these circumstances must be taken into account when interpreting the fact that a more negative evaluation of the autonomic system is made on the basis of economic and efficiency considerations, as noted above. Similarly, it is these circumstances that in our view must adopt as a given any relegitimation strategy for the autonomic system. In particular, the relegitimation of those ACs whose basis for community can hardly be ethnic in nature, which is where we find the rise in preferences for centralism.

Taking all this into account, it is adequate to offer a vision of the State of Autonomies in which its direct relationship with the Social State substitutes the protagonism that had been somewhat artificially attributed to history and singular identities (Rivière, 2000). A good number of public services traditionally associated with the Welfare State have autonomous communities as direct borrowers, and their deployment has been associated with the communities themselves. These are services that the citizens consider essential to their wellbeing, such as health, public education or dependent care support (AEVAL, 2013: 30). The satisfaction of the Spanish population in general, and even more so that of the users, with policies such as the health system grew significantly between 2005 and 2010, comparable to that of countries like the Netherlands or Switzerland in 2008-2009 (Escuela Andaluza de Salud Pública, 2012: 140). Asturias, Aragon, Castile and León, Castilla-La Mancha and Cantabria
surpassed in 2009, in that order, the Spanish average, with over 60% of those polled very or fairly satisfied with the effectiveness of the public health system. As for public education, the Spanish average satisfaction is approximately the same, highest in Asturias, La Rioja, Aragon, Murcia, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and Galicia, in that order (Del Pino et. al, 2010). These are all assets available for use in lending legitimacy to the autonomic system. The important thing is to do so without allowing the achievements to be appropriated along party lines, and with a sense of collective conquest that serves to inspire reaching toward new challenges. It would also contribute to the relegitimation of the autonomies to incorporate the critical sense of the achievement needed to, among other things, strengthen the trust that any welfare system relies on.

So plausible is it to lay the foundation for the trust needed in a shared national identity like in a political project that it also is; a project like ensuring freedom and equality in civil, political and public welfare terms. In fact, solidarity based on an ethnocultural identity starts out more vulnerable to the changes that can occur in political culture and the collective interpretation of said identity than solidarity built around real practices (Müller, 2007: 71-74).

The percentage of citizens who would prefer less autonomy for the communities has grown from 4.8% in 2010 to 13.9% in 2012 in Spain as a whole. In ACs like Andalusia and Valencia, this percentage reaches a fifth of the population. On the one hand, this phenomenon is worthy of concern, as it is associated with the process of deligitimation described above. From the perspective of the political elite, especially inclined towards decentralisation (Martínez & Paradés, 2014: 28), the fact that their citizens do not show the same enthusiasm for the autonomies could be perceived as an ominous sign. However, the fact that a correction in the decrease in decentralisation reached is required need not represent any risk to our political system. At the end of the day, we find ourselves in a time when there exists within the political debate the possibility of a constitutional reform to, among other things, reorganise the territorial distribution of the State, a reform that, as its defenders say, would result in the current necessary circumstances.

In many aspects, the efficiency of public policies creates economies of scale. In a decentralised State, this may be achieved either via coordination of the actions of the federated units, or by attributing certain competences to the Federation. In this sense, it is possible that the effectiveness of the autonomist system will rely on the recentralisation of competence areas. Accepting this should not endanger the integrating capacity of the system, as long as it is clear that the institutional equalising will not be precise for all the Autonomous Communities, “whose demand for homogeneity is met not with the generalised repetition of
organisational structures, but with the guarantee of political decentralisation in all cases,” as Solozábal (2014) correctly points out. The problem, in this sense, is that the comparative grievance seems to have been installed from the beginning as a guiding principle of the autonomic process. As Moreno (1992: 24) points out, exercising the right to autonomy on the part of the ethnoregional Autonomous Communities has been spurred by the refrain of “not being less than” others, whether the histories were ethnonational or also ethnoregional. With that in mind, Moreno proposes a “reinterpretation of the ‘coffee for all’ formulated at the beginning of the autonomic process not so much as a neocentralist strategy meant to homogenise the 17 Autonomous Communities, — and in so doing distort the principle of the differential reality — but more as a ‘we all want coffee’ articulated by the ‘second-tier’ regions.” The viability of reconciling two opposed refrains that are shared by two sectors of the majority citizenry in different parts of Spain — the call to reduce autonomic competences, on the one hand, and that of greater self-governance, on the other — depends on the abandonment of comparative grievance as a fundamental measure of the implementation of the State of Autonomies, abandoning this grievance not in terms of feelings associated with an idea of reasonable distributive justice, which does warrant consideration, but as a product of a misunderstood regional pride. It does not escape us that distinguishing between one and the other can be difficult. The fact is that the effort to resolve the ones we found in the public debate has been, for the moment, rather scarce, particularly among those who exercise public duties.

That said, to interpret and evaluate the growth of citizens who would prefer a cutback of competences, it must be taken into account that this would be a general cutback for the whole of the autonomous before for one’s own. This is a phenomenon that is clearly demonstrated in Andalusia, for example. According to the CIS autonomic barometers, the percentage of those who would prefer to cut back autonomic competences or recentralise them was, in 2012, seven points higher than the percentage of those who wanted less autonomy for Andalusia; in 2010, eight points. More recent data on this is not available, but it seems reasonable to expect continuity. Among the Spanish people, a tendency has been demonstrated to simultaneously support self-governance of regions and that there be no differences in services and benefits between ACs (Martínez & Paradés, 2014: 28). This tendency reflects the tensions that exist in the discourse of the majority parties on the national stage, in the heart of which we find both defences of regionalism and even nationalism, within a dynamic of interterritorial competition, as well as of the central power of
the State to guarantee equal rights and duties for the citizens of Spain as a whole, as mentioned previously.

Therefore, a greater number of citizens who would like a cutback of autonomic competences can pose a credible cause for worry, insofar as it can be linked to the aforementioned deligitimation process; but in our judgment it is not a cause for alarm. Another question is that of the regional or provincial concentration of these preferences. Returning to Andalusia as an example, those who would like a cutback of competences for the autonomies are concentrated in Jaén (making up over 90% of those polled) and Córdoba (at almost 70%), which are precisely the provinces where the fewest residents positively evaluate the creation and development of the ACs. Even so, in Córdoba, a positive evaluation reaches slightly over four of every 10 respondents, while in Jaén it doesn’t even break one in a dozen. Note the contrast with the eight in 10 in Oviedo or a similar percentage in Granada who positively evaluate the autonomic process, who are also the ones who show the greatest support for the autonomic status quo and the least inclination toward restricting the decentralisation of all Andalusia (Marqués Perales, 2014: 15-19).

It would be useful to further examine the reasons for the significant dissatisfaction with the autonomic process in certain provinces. One could venture that it could be related to the supposed territorial discrimination on the part of the Autonomic Administration. An examination of this question implies great methodological complexity, and thus disputability. However, if we go back once again to the example of Andalusia, of the estimations from Hierro et al. (2009: 36), it stood out that, during the budget exercise of 2001, precisely in the most-populated provinces, Sevilla and Málaga, we found the least benefit per inhabitant for the Junta of Andalusia’s spending, while the greatest we found in Huelva and Jaén. Related to this, the official figures concerning fiscal balances for the autonomous communities yield a “deficit” for the communities with the highest level of income and a “surplus” for those of lower levels (Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 2008). Therefore, it would be helpful to find a way to debunk the unfounded belief, but which is referred to repeatedly in the context of the debate on autonomic financing, that the State of Autonomies financially favours the richest regions, and to do so while avoiding confrontation between communities to preserve social and territorial cohesion. The legitimation of the State of Autonomies as an autochthonous form of arrangement for the Welfare State that we are backing in this paper carries with it a political kind of solidarity that is especially vulnerable to the dynamic of comparative grievance between territories.

Easier to refute is a supposition that threatens the legitimation of the State of Autonomies and that has to do not with interterritorial solidarity, but with the equality
generated by the system. According to the latest *Autonomic Barometer* conducted by the CIS, in 2012, most of those polled in Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura and Galicia, among other communities, believed that the differences in prosperity and wealth among regions and nations had tended to increase since the establishment of the ACs. It truly is complex to make a calculation on this matter, but it is in no way evident that this belief is founded in fact. If we take the Human Development Index as a reference, we find that the deviations on the average of four of the five communities with lower absolute values in 1980 had reduced by 2010: this was true of, precisely, Galicia, Extremadura, Castilla-La Mancha and Andalusia (Herrero, Soler & Villar, 2013: 16-18).

**REFERENCES**


