

ECONOMICS OF THE EUROPEAN SECESSION

Ekonomie evropské Secese

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Abstract: Even deeper European integration in the EU is during the last decade accompanied by the decentralisation pressures in the several European regions. Successful secessionist and separatist parties and movements arise not only in Catalonia, Scotland and Flanders, but also in the French, Italian or Scandinavian regions. In this paper we analyse the relationship of secessionist regions to the European integration regarding the EU funding, citizen's attitudes toward the EU and its institutions as well as the European orientation of the main secessionist parties and movements. For the aim of this analysis we used data from the Eurobarometer survey, European Commission's structural funds dataset as well as the political programs of the secessionist parties. The results show that despite being often seen as nationalist, the secessionist movements are also strongly pro-European because of the crucial role of the economic integration within the EU for the economy of the secessionist regions.

Abstrakt: Stále hlubší evropská integrace v rámci Evropské unie je v poslední dekádě provázena decentralizačními tlaky v evropských regionech. Úspěšná secesní a separatistické strany a hnutí vznikají kromě Katalánska, Skotska a Vlámka i ve francouzských, italských či skandinávských regionech. V tomto příspěvku analyzujeme vztah secesních regionů k evropské integraci z hlediska přijímání evropských dotací, postojů občanů vůči Evropské unii i jejím orgánům a evropské orientaci hlavních secesních stran a hnutí. K analýze byla použita data z šetření Eurobarometr, databáze strukturálních fondů Evropské komise a politické programy secesních stran a hnutí. Z výsledků studie vyplývá, že ačkoli jsou secesní strany často chápány jako nacionální, jsou zároveň silně proevropské, neboť ekonomická integrace v rámci Evropské unie je pro hospodářství secesních regionů klíčová.

Keywords: Eurobarometer, European integration, Secession, Separatist parties and movements, Structural funds

Klíčová slova: Eurobarometr, evropská integrace, secese, separatistické strany a hnutí, strukturální fondy

JEL classification: F15, H73, H77

Introduction

Secession is a dominant way of new states' emergence. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 the world was divided into the national states as the individual political units (Calvet, n. d.). Just in the one century between 1816 and 1916 about 63% of the new states were created by secession. Similarly, 73% of new states were created by secession in the 20th century.

Today, the secessionist movements in Europe are again on the rise. Separatist pressures in Ukraine (especially in Crimea, Donetsk and Donbas), regardless their international geopolitical context, supported existing secessionist movements all over the Europe. Scottish independence referendum in 2014 was followed by the referendum in Spanish region Catalonia. In spite of the fact that this self-determination referendum was not binding¹, 80.8 % of the voters supported the independence (Cuadras-Morató 2016: 36). On the 28th of September 2016 President of the *Generalitat of Catalonia* Carles Puigdemont said, that “*Catalonia will hold a referendum on independence from Spain next year whether or not the central government in Madrid agrees to one*” (Berwick, Cobos 2016).

Secessionism has been further promoted by the special secession in kind: *United Kingdom European Union membership referendum*², which was held on 23th June 2016, can be understood as British secession (Baker, Schnapper 2016: 2015).

Those secessionist pressures are closely connected to the deeper European economic integration within the European Union. There is ample evidence that integration goes hand in hand with the secession (compare Alesina and Spolaore 1997, Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg 1997 or Lipovská 2015). Crucial question then is, if the secessionist regions and secessionist movements are Pro-European or Eurosceptic.

The aim of this contribution is to analyse the relationship of secessionist regions to the European integration regarding the EU funding, citizen’s attitudes toward the EU and its institutions as well as the European orientation of the main secessionist parties and movements. Firstly, we discuss the political and economic context of the secession under European integration as featured in the literature. Then, we analyse the secessionist political parties’ attitudes towards the EU membership. Thirdly, data and methodology are introduced. Finally the results of our research on the secessionist aspects of the European economic integration are presented.

1 Secession and European integration

European integration, especially in terms of the economic integration, is substantial secessionist factor. On the one hand, the *even deeper integration* should lead to diminishing of the national differences. As Brubaker highlights, European Union is based on *post-nationalism*, because the term *nation* starts to be considered as “suspicious, connected to intolerance, xenophobia or militarism” (Brubaker 2004). As mentioned by Keating (2004), the European integration is part of the *state transformation*, weakening the national state’s competences and loss of the state hegemony. European Union plays the role of the “third side” (Walker 2014) between the secessionist region and the rest of the country.

However, such *demystification of the state sovereignty* (term used by Keating 2004) results in creation of the new structures within the national (secessionist) movements try to find their new place within the EU. European economic integration provides the European secessionist regions with the protective umbrella. It allows the regions to concentrate more on the co-operation with other European regions than with the centre of their own countries. Independence within the EU is safer than independence outside EU (Keating 2004). Such pro-

¹Spanish Constitution does not recognize the right to secede (compare Calvet, n. d.):

- according to the Art. 2, the Spanish nation is indivisible;
- according to the Art. 8, the Spanish Army has to protect the territorial integrity of the Kingdom;
- according to the Art. 487 of the Criminal Code, the secession is equated with rebellion.

² Also known as Brexit referendum.

secessionist tendencies are even promoted by the EU organs such as *Committee of the Regions*.

Committee of the Regions was created on the basements of Maastricht Treaty (1992) as the advisory body. Its role was strengthened by Lisbon Treaty in 2009 (Walker 2014). Secessionist regions were furthermore supported by the administrative reform which established *The Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics* (NUTS), especially the NUTS 2 regions (compare Baranyai 2013). These regions are of the highest importance especially in terms of the redistribution of the European structural funds (Baranyai 2013, Walker 2014). This reform helped many regions to appear on the European map which was for example the case of Cornwall, England (Deacon 2003).

As Calvet (n. d.) claims, modern secessionism highlights not the borders and external sovereignty, but so called *cosmopolitan sovereignty* (Pogge 1992). Cosmopolitan sovereignty requires the relationships with international organisations such as EU or OSN (Calvet, n. d.). Keating (2004) goes even further, when speaking about *post-sovereignty*, defining post-sovereignty as “the loss of the monopoly on the sovereignty”.

From the EU point of view, the secession is both desirable as well as undesirable. Disintegration of the national states strengthens the role of the EU. On the other hand, it can also trigger disintegration of the supranational European Union itself. This is possibly the reason, why the opinions of European Commission on the secession develop. Walker (2014) shows, that former chair Barroso and Prodi were against the Scottish secession, while Juncker is in his opinions less brusque.

2 Secessionist political parties and their attitude towards EU

The great opportunity for small secessionist parties (called *ethnonationalist* parties by Deacon 2003) presents not the general elections, but the second order election such as regional or European Parliament election. As Keating (2004) mentions, the direct elections to the European Parliament introduced in 1979 resulted into the creation of *European Free Alliance* (EFA) in 1981. EFA associates regional secessionist parties. Since 1999 it forms the political group in the European Parliament together with the Greens (Watts 2008: 160).

Moreover, the importance of the secessionist parties is further enhanced by the structural funds, which – as Keating (2004:377) claims – are “a source of funding independent of Member States” and “an arena for symbolic politics, in which regional politicians can claim to have established a funding link to Brussels”.

Supranationality of the European [Political] Union therefore provides the secessionist regions with the opportunity of *paradiplomacy* (Walker 2014). Paradiplomacy, or the parallel diplomacy, is considered as “direct international activity by subnational actors supporting, complementing, correcting or challenging the nation-states’ diplomacy” (Tavares 2016). Due to this EU support, most of the secessionist movements are pro-European. However, Keating (2004) mentions also some Basque independence movements, Irish *Sinn Féin*, Gallic *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* or the radical left groups in the French Bretagne and Occitania which are anti-European.

Based on the political programs and statements of the secessionist parties, most of the secessionist movements require their region to become an independent state within the EU (e.g. New Flemish Alliance 2016, Plaid Cymru 2016 or Scottish National Party 2016). For

example Belgian *New Flemish Alliance* claims, that its “final target is indeed an independent Flanders as a European Member State” and that the “currency, defence, migration or internal market competences must be transferred to the European level” (ibidem). Similarly the *South Tyrolean People’s Party* in Italy supports “unified Europe of the Regions” (Südtiroler Volkspartei 2016). Italian *Party of Sardinians* goes even further when it advocates “future United States of Europe” (Party of Sardinians 2016).

On the other hand, even the pro-European secessionist parties as Welsh *Plaid Cymru* or Scottish *Scottish National Party* call for the EU reforms. The smallest group of the secessionist parties is Eurosceptic. For example the Belgian party *Vlaams Belang* emphasizes that it has “critical attitude towards the European Union with its bureaucracy and tendency to meddle where the sovereignty of the people should prevail” (Vlaams Belang 2016) and Finnish party *Future of Åland* suggests, that Åland should become “sovereign, neutral and demilitarized microstate in the ever growing and more and more respected European family of microstates” (Future of Åland 2016).

Table 1 covers the secessionist parties in seven European countries³, which are represented in the regional or local parliaments. Most of them (14, which stays for 56%) claims to be the left-wing parties (L). Those parties prevail in Galicia, Catalonia, Scotland, Wales or Corsica. The right-wing parties (R) are weaker, prevailing just in Flanders and being represented in South Tyrol, Sardinia as well as Basque. Rest of the parties declare that they are centrist (C). The highest total pro-secessionist support is revealed in South Tyrol Parliament (Südtiroler Landtag), Italy, where it stays for 70.8%, and in the Council of the Valley as well as in the Basque Parliament. On the other hand, the weakest representation has the secessionist movement in Finnish Åland.

Table 1: Dominant secessionist parties in the selected European countries

Country			
Regional representation		Election Year	
	Abbrev.	Votes [%]	L/C/R
Belgium			
Flemish Parliament		2014	
Vlaams Belang	VB	5.9	R
New Flemish Alliance	NVA	31.9	R
Total support		37.8	
Finland			
Lagting (Parliament of Åland)		2015	
Future of Åland	AF	7.4	C
Total support		7.4	
France			
Corsican Assembly		2015	
Pè a Corsica		25.35	L
Total support		25.35	

³ For detail information on the selection see the following chapter.

Italy			
Südtiroler Landtag			2013
South Tyrolean People's Party	SVP	45.7	C
Die Freiheitlichen	dF	17.9	R
South Tyrolean Freedom	STF	7.2	R
Total support			70.8
Regional Council of Sardinia			2014
Party of Sardinians	PdS	2.66	L
Red Moors	RM	2.63	L
Independence Republic of Sardinia	iRS	0.82	L
Sardinian Reformers	RS	6.02	R
Sardinian Action Party	PSd'Az	4.67	L
Sardinian Democratic Union – Nationalist Project	UDS	2.6	R
Total support			19.4
Council of the Valley			2013
Valdostan Union	UV	33.5	C
Edelweiss	SA	12.2	C
Autonomist Federation	FA	2.2	L
Autonomy Liberty Participation Ecology	ALPE	12.4	L
Total support			60.3
Spain			
Parliament of Galicia			2012
Galician Alternative of the Left	AGE	13.91	L
Galician Nationalist Bloc	BNG	10.11	L
Total support			24.02
Parliament of Catalonia			2015
Together for Yes	IPA	39.59	L
Popular Unity Candidacy	CUP	8.21	L
Total support			47.8
Basque Parliament			2012
Basque Nationalist Party	EAJ	34.16	R
EH Bildu	EHB	24.67	L
Total support			58.83
United Kingdom			
Scottish Parliament			2016
Scottish National Party	SNP	46.5	L
Total support			46.5
National Assembly for Wales			2016
Plaid Cymru	PC	20.5	L
Total support			20.5

Source: Author. Based on the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (2016), and the parties programs.

As was mentioned above, the European Parliament elections are for the secessionist parties of the high importance, though their representation in Brussel and Strasbourg are not great. In

the recent European Parliament (elected in 2014), the Belgian secessionist parties have 5 members (from total 21), Italian 6 (from 73), Spanish 4 (from 54) and British 3 (from 73). Nor Corsica, nor Åland have its secessionist representation in the European Parliament (European Parliament 2016).

3 Data and methodology

For the aim of this study, eleven secessionist regions in six Western European countries were selected. Apart from the traditional regions (Belgian Flanders, Spanish Catalonia and British Scotland), which are widely analysed in most of the researches dealing with secession and separatism, our dataset covers also Åland Islands in Finland, Corsica in France, South Tyrol, Sardinia and Aosta Valley in Italy, Basque and Galicia in Spain and last but not least Wales in the United Kingdom.

Data on the results of general as well as regional elections and voter turnout were collected from the *European Election Database* (Norwegian Centre for Research Data 2016). Data on the regional distribution of the European structural funds were used from the DG Regional Policy *Data for Research* dataset (European Commission 2016). Regional economic and demographical statistics by NUTS 2 classification were taken from the Eurostat database (Eurostat 2016). Finally, data on the citizen's satisfaction with current economic situation as well as their trust in their political representation on the regional and national level were taken from the *Flash Eurobarometer 427*. Survey for the Flash Eurobarometer 427 was conducted from the 3rd to 23rd of the September 2015 on the basis of fieldwork at the NUTS 2 level.

Table 2 summarizes 4 questions, selected from the total of 17 Eurobarometer questions, which were used in our research.

Table 2: Questions used from the Flash Eurobarometer 427

Code	Question	Answers [%]
Q1.1	How would you judge the current situation in the quality of life in your region?	Total 'Good' = Very good + Rather good Total 'Bad' = Rather bad + Very bad Don't Know/No Answer
Q1.2	How would you judge the current situation in the situation of the economy in your region?	
Q4	I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in the European Union. Could you please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?	Tend to trust Tend not to trust Don't Know/No Answer
Q5	From the following political representatives, which ones are best placed to explain you how European policies impact your day-to-day life?	Members of the European Commission. Your (NATIONALITY) political representatives. Your regional or local political representatives.

Source: Eurostat (2015), Authors.

Table 3 summarizes eight main theoretical hypotheses, which will be analysed in the following section.

Table 3: Theoretical hypotheses

H1	<i>More developed regions prefer secession.</i>
H2	<i>Trust in the national representatives is higher in the non-secessionist regions in comparison to the secessionist regions.</i>
H3	<i>Trust in the regional representatives is higher in the secessionist regions.</i>
H4	<i>Citizens from the secessionist regions trust in the European Union more than their fellow citizens.</i>
H5	<i>Secessionist regions receive higher amount of the EU funds.</i>
H6	<i>General election's results in the secessionist regions differ from the total results.</i>
H7	<i>Citizens in the secessionist regions are more apathetic in terms of the general election turnout.</i>

Source: Eurostat (2015), Authors.

Hypothesis *H1* is supported by the Hechter's theory of economic exploitation. Huysseune (2002) shows that secessionist movement *Lega Nord* (in the northern Italy) speaks about the North of Italy as the "colony" of the Italian South (so called *intern colonialism*). It is supported also by Calvet (n. d.) who quotes catchword of the Catalanian secessionist parties "*Spain robs us!*" If the region is more developed and its citizens are more satisfied with their quality of life, they would prefer to be independent not to pay for the poorer rest of the country. This theory is based on the assumption, that the interregional solidarity is relatively weak and does not work effectively.

Even hypotheses *H2* and *H3* are backed by the Hechter's theory. According to Huysseune (2002), the exploited secessionist regions are underrepresented in the national parliaments. If the national representatives do not reflect the preferences of secessionist region, regional voters might trust more to the regional representatives.

If the European integration was desirable for the economy and well-being of the secessionist regions, we might expect, that the citizens tend to trust in the EU more (and that they trust in the EU representatives more than to the national representatives). Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that such secessionist regions benefit from the EU membership more than the rest of the countries even in terms of the EU funds (hypotheses *H4* and *H5*).

Hypothesis *H6* suggests, that the preferences of voters from secessionist regions differs significantly from the preferences of the other voters. This might result in the fact that the country's winner of general election did not succeeded in the secessionist region.

Analogically, we would expect, that voters from the secessionist regions are less enthusiastic about the general election (in case that the national representations do not reflect their preferences), so the turnout is lower in comparison to the other regions as well as to the regional election (*H7*).

For the aim of this study we used the standard methods of the mathematical descriptive statistic (arithmetic means, frequency tables and Pearson correlation) as well as standard statistical tests (independent samples t-test, paired-samples t-test).

4 Results

Table 4 summarizes the main inter-categorical results. As for the variables *Quality of life* and *Situation of the economy* (*H1*), citizens from the secessionist regions really seems to be more satisfied than their fellow citizens from the rest of the country. Nearly 5 p. p. more respondents from the secessionist regions in comparison to the rest of the country evaluate their quality of life as good. Difference in the satisfaction with the situation of the economy is even deeper (8.2 p. p.). This is just emphasised by the fact that the GDP per capita in secessionist regions is 1 776 € higher than in non-secessionist regions (30 903 € vs. 29 127 €). Nevertheless, difference in the Eurobarometer satisfaction is not supported by the t-test, which might be caused by some extreme values in the very small data sample.

Voters from the secessionist regions trust more in the regional representatives than in the national representatives (*H2* and *H3*), difference (12.9 p. p.) is nearly 4.5 times higher than in case of the non-secessionist regions (2.3 p. p.). This difference is statistically significant. Lower level of trust in the national representatives might be influenced even by the fact, that the secessionist regions have just very rarely their "native" prime minister. For example in 1917–2016 there was no Finnish PM from Åland and in 1958–2016 there was the only one

French PM from Corsica. After the fall of Franco, there were just two Spanish PMs from the Spanish secessionist regions and from 1922 to 2016 only three British PMs from Wales and Scotland. On the other hand, after the World War II altogether 11 Italian PMs and even 15 Belgian PMs came from the secessionist regions. This might be the reason why the highest trust in the national representatives is seen in Belgium (26%).

There is also statistically significant and very high correlation between the variables *Quality of life* and *Trust in regional representatives* ($\rho = 0.71$), as well as the variables *Situation of economy* and *Trust in regional representatives* ($\rho = 0.75$). It means that if the citizens are more satisfied with their quality of life and situation of the economy, they tend to trust significantly more in their regional representatives (however, the same is not true for the national representatives or EU Commission).

In spite of the fact that the average trust in the EU is higher in the secessionist region in comparison to the non-secessionist region, this difference of 1.7 p. p. is not statistically significant (*H4*). For both the secessionist and non-secessionist regions, the trust in political representatives is derived from the principle of subsidiarity: citizens tend to trust most to their regional representatives, less to their national representatives and the least at all to the EU representatives. The inflow from the EU Funds to the secessionist regions is (per capita) slightly higher than to the non-secessionist regions (*H5*). Nevertheless, this difference is not statistically significant, probably because the secessionist regions tend to be more developed which is translated into the lower level of the structural funds inflows.

In accordance with our assumption, votes for the winner of general election as well as voter turnout are lower in the secessionist regions in comparison to the non-secessionist regions (*H6, H7*). However, none of these differences is statistically significant. Similarly, there is no significant difference between the voter turnout in general election and turnout in regional election in the secessionist regions.

Table 4: Main results

	Region	
	non-secessionist	secessionist
Current situation in [%]		
Quality of life	78.7	83.5
Situation of the economy	50.5	58.7
Trust in [%]		
European Union	49.8	51.5
European Commission	10.8	10.5
National representatives	20.8	16.7
Regional representatives	23.1	29.6
EU funds p.c. [€]	178.0	226.5
General election [%]		
Votes for winner	29.1	20.7
Turnout	70.6	63.5

Source: Authors

Conclusion

However the secessionist parties might be pro-European, their voters do not share such Europeanism. According to the results presented in this study, secessionist parties highlight the theoretical importance of the EU for the economy of their regions. They back also kind of the romantic Europeanism based on the post-sovereign idea of the Europe of regions instead of the Europe of states.

On the other hand, citizens living in the secessionist regions do not trust in the European Union and its representatives more than the other citizens. Actually, the trust in European Commission is in such regions nearly three times lower than their trust in the regional representatives. This might be the result of the lower economic benefit from the European economic integration for the secessionist regions. These regions are usually more developed than the other regions, which results into the lower inflow of the EU flows. In terms of the Hechter's theory of economic exploitation, the secessionist regions want to stay alone to avoid paying bills for rest of their country. Within the supranationalist European Union, they would have to exert financial solidarity not only towards the regions in their original country, but also to the other poorer EU regions.

Difference in the sentiments towards EU between the secessionist parties and their voters is caused by two different attitudes. According to the parties, the small nation cannot be isolated from the rest of the Europe and needs to benefit from the European economic integration as is suggested for example by Alesina and Spolaore (1997) or Alesina, Spolaore and Wacziarg (1997). On the contrary, the citizens are not willing to accept the trade-off between the independence on the original national state and dependence on the supranational European Union. These very different attitudes should be made clear before every independence referendum anytime and anywhere in the European Union.

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