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The position of the Spanish monarchy and Catalan separatism in the 21st century

Introduction

In the last two decades, the phenomenon of Catalan separatism (independentism) has gained international popularity. This was mainly due to its radicalization after 2010 and, consequently, the escalation of the Catalan-Spanish conflict. In this light, the question of the causal factors and circumstances conducive to the process of radicalization seems particularly interesting. In addition to the most frequently mentioned, i.e., the enactment of the new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia and the judgment of the Constitutional Court of Spain in this case, the economic crisis of 2008 and the social and political crises associated with it, and as a result of the increase in mobilization among the Spanish people, which has led to the emergence of new social movements and political parties, an important stimulus has been the decline in confidence in state institutions. The latter is closely related to the numerous corruption, financial and moral scandals in which the most important central and regional politicians played a leading role, as well as members of the royal family headed by a monarch. In this context, the question of the position of the Spanish monarchy and its impact on maintaining the unity of the state deserve special attention. Importantly, this position represents both an added value, symbolic and real, in the current internal and external policies of Spain.

This article attempts to determine the potential relationships between the position of the Spanish monarchy, the person of King Juan Carlos I, and then his son, King Philip VI, and Catalan independentism. The above analysis also aims to indicate the influence of the position of the monarchy on the independence process and the possible consequences of the weakening authority of the monarchy in the context of the further development of Catalan separatism, especially independentism.

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Reform of the Statute of Catalan Autonomy as a new opening for the Catalan cause

The sources and stimuli of the crisis-generating Catalan-Spanish relations in the context of the aspirations for independence can already be found in the region's centuries-long history, but today the period immediately after the fall of the military dictatorship of General Francisco Franco gains a unique dimension. The emergence of a new legal and political system, a specific territorial system, and the economic and social transformations of this period have had a direct, and sometimes indirect, impact on the emergence of an upward trend in the region since 2008 to support the idea of independence¹. The correlations between the Catalan and central political scene after 1975, i.e., the so-called tied transactions between individual political actors (especially political parties), which for a long time determined the position of Catalonia against the background of the whole state (Sobolewska-Myślik, 2012), were also of great importance in this respect. Moreover, these relations and dependencies have for decades constituted the Convergència and Unió (CiU) coalition/federation as the political hegemon in the region (Myśliwiec, 2014: 2006).

Separatism and, to put it more narrowly, Catalan independentism², which as early as in the 20th century functioned almost exclusively as a political thought, gained a new shape at the beginning of the next century – a socio-political movement³, which greatly facilitated its later radicalization. The next phase of independentism ensured greater effectiveness of the phenomenon, as it reached a fundamental (theoretical) level and reached an operational (functional) level. The birth and evolution of the movement progressed gradually with the beginning and continuation of work on the new statute of autonomy, i.e., since 2003. Its fundamental determinant was the collective action, activation and consolidation of many groups and individuals that united under the banner of shared views and ideas. Until now, the idea of independence was present almost exclusively in the circles of radical catalanistas or independentists, and the involvement of other individuals was ephemeral. The social stir and concentration around the most important regional legislation did not cease after the adoption of the reformed statute in June 2006. On the contrary, a state of permanent mobilization among the Catalans persisted, largely in response to the complaints made to the Spanish Constitutional Court⁴ regarding the unconstitutionality of some articles of the Statute. These were

¹ Particularly noteworthy is the possibility given to autonomous communities to broaden the scope of their competences.

² Separatists can set one of the main goals: 1) autonomy of the region or expansion of an existing one; 2) the irredenta – connection of the region to another area (state) within which it is currently located; 3) independence of the region and creation of its own state. The latter is at the same time the rudimentary goal of the independentists. Therefore, the concept of independentism will refer to those activities that aim exclusively at the independence of the region.

³ Independentism gained the form of a socio-political movement at the turn of 2005/2006.

⁴ This became particularly evident from 2006 to June 2010, i.e. during the period of waiting for the Court's ruling.

put forward, among others by Partido Popular⁵, autonomous governments of the Balearic Islands, Valencia and Aragon and the Spanish ombudsman (Husar-Poliszuk, 2020: 360). Thus, in the interpretation of many inhabitants of the community, the mobilization was a response to an attempt to eliminate or limit their sense of separate identity.

The entire process of drafting the statute, negotiating and adopting it by referendum was accompanied by demonstrations and strikes by both opponents and supporters. Some Catalans did not hide their dissatisfaction with the final shape of the changes: some saw it as an act that introduced too radical reforms, while others considered it too moderate compared to the original draft (Jackiewicz, 2013: 408). This mobilization was, therefore, naturally accompanied by a process of polarization and an increase in antagonism not only between Catalans and inhabitants of other Spanish autonomous communities with Unionist views, but also within Catalan society. Independentism, however inspired from above, has acquired a new quality and bottom-up expression, coming directly from society.

Given the importance of the new statute and the social and political tensions that accompany its adoption, the decision of the Spanish Constitutional Court of 28 June 2010 (Tribunal Constitucional, 2010) on the compliance with the Basic Law of the new Statute of Catalan Autonomy should be considered a cognitive opening to the process of radicalization of Catalan independentism. In accordance with the judgment, 17 of the 223 articles were declared unconstitutional, while 27 were indicated as necessary for reinterpretation. The most significant changes concerned the Catalan language which was deprived of its dominant position over Spanish in education and administration. Furthermore, the Court pointed out that the use of the term nation for Catalans is only possible in the preamble of the text, although it is not binding and has no legal consequences (Idzik, 2011: 104; Ferret Jacas, 2011: 5), so it will be more appropriate to use terms such as Catalonia, Catalans or nationality, because in the legal sense there is only one nation in Spain – the Spanish nation (*Trybunał: w Hiszpanii istnieje tylko jeden naród...*, 2010; García, 2018: 894-897). Other reservations of the Court were related to the creation of an independent Catalan justice system, the organization of referendums, a separate banking system, or the conferral of powers in the field of immigration law. The ruling met with negative perceptions from the majority of Catalans (Líndez Borràs, 2013) who saw it as an attempt to limit the ability of their autonomous community to acquire further competences, to disregard their cultural diversity in the broadest sense of the word, to violate the rights of the community and the sense of national belonging, and to undermine the right of peoples to self-determination. As a result, public dissatisfaction turned into a wave of protest, culminating on July 10, 2010 (Kraus, Gifra, 2017:

⁵ Spanish Labour Party (PP). A political grouping strongly opposed to the secession of Catalonia. The Catalan independentists, personifying the region's dispute with the central authorities, see in the person of former Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of the PP one of the main culprits of the deterioration of relations between Catalonia and Madrid and the escalation of the conflict between them.

13-16). The manifestation took place under the telling motto: “We are the nation, we decide” (Mora, 2013), which was organized by Òminium Cultural, currently the second most influential independence organization in the region after ANC⁶. The opposition to the ruling was encouraged by the autonomy authorities, including the President of the Generalitat Arthur Mas, the regional nationalist and independents groups, as well as by the then Prime Minister of Spain himself, J.L.R. Zapatero, who declared the initiation of measures to restore the original version of the document (*Barcelona: Adéu, Espanya!*, 2010). However, the announcement of the Prime Minister was more declarative in nature and did not contribute much to the resolution of the dispute, especially since at this stage the socialists had to deal with serious economic, political and social crises that have engulfed the entire country.

In view of the above, it can also be concluded that an important accelerator of the radicalization of Catalan independentism was the world economic crisis⁷, which in Spain fell between 2008 and 2014. All the macroeconomic indicators, which are crucial for the construction of the country’s economy, decreased. Catalonia was one of those regions where the crisis was particularly severe. First of all, the employment rate decreased drastically and the unemployment rate increased (between 2010 and 2015 it exceeded 20%). In addition, the region’s budget deficit increased significantly, while its own income (e.g. from tourism) decreased, making Catalonia one of the most indebted autonomous communities in Spain. In the case of the Catalans, the economic aspect is of additional importance – identity – so the state of the economy is one of the most important determinants of the aspirations for independence. According to the independentists, the economic prosperity of the region would guarantee the independence of the community, which is confirmed, among other things, by the efforts of Catalan decision-makers to successively expand fiscal autonomy and by the increased tension between the region and the political interior during the negotiations on the new fiscal pact in 2012, whose fiasco ended with the early elections in Catalonia, announced the independence plebiscite⁸. This was ultimately intended to illustrate the situation: “who is for and who is against self-determination” (Líndez Borràs, 2013: 104), which was summarized by the President of the Generalitat Artur Mas in the following words: „Special times require special decisions. The voice of the street must be reflected on the ballots.

⁶ Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC) i.e. The Catalan National Assembly – an association of citizens created for the independence of Catalonia, and today one of the largest independency organizations in Europe.

⁷ Amongst the stimulators and exogenous conditions that foster the process of radicalization of Catalan independentism, it is also worth mentioning the issue of the declaration of unilateral independence of Kosovo and the strong independence tendencies in Scotland, which after the declaration of Brexit, gain a new dimension and raise questions about the future and unity of the state. The casus of Kosovo after the declaration of Catalonia’s unilateral independence in October 2017 was particularly popular (see López, Perea, 2018).

⁸ Social demonstrations on the occasion of La Diada celebrations played a significant role in this aspect. The organized March of Freedom under the motto: “Catalonia – the new state in Europe” was then the most spectacular undertaking of independence circles, especially ANC. Its route led for nearly 160 km. According to various estimates, between 600,000 and 1.5 million people participated in the event.

If we are to start this extremely complex process of self-determination, support in the elections will be necessary” (Olas, 2012). The rejection by the ruling Partido Popular (PP) with Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy at the forefront of the new funding rules for Catalonia along the lines of the Basque Country or Navarre was interpreted by many as a lack of willingness to help the region “particularly economically disadvantaged” (*Mas enterra el pacte fiscal...*, 2012)⁹ in times of crisis, which further increased the already high level of frustration among the region’s inhabitants.

The economic crisis was accompanied by a social and political crisis, which emanated from the social mobilization in Spain, for example: the activities of the Movement of the Outraged, the growth of political participation of citizens, as well as the emergence of new social movements and initiatives as a way of expressing the dissatisfaction of Spaniards with the actions carried out by politicians and the way of implementing current policies, especially in the field of work and employment, community issues and education. This was closely related to the growing phenomenon of corruption at the central and regional levels, covering almost all spheres of life and stimulating the need for systemic change. Thus, after 2008, the level of confidence of citizens in the state institutions, including the Spanish monarchy, which until now had enjoyed great popularity and affection among Spaniards, including some Catalans, clearly decreased. This led to questions about the future of the state not only as a monarchy, but also about preserving its unity. In this discourse, the narrative of the Catalan independentism occupies an important place, especially since the weakening position of the monarchy (including the other state institutions) puts their argumentation in a different light, which makes them think about individual residents, for example, about the question of maintaining the unity of the state, whose most important institutions do not fulfill their basic functions¹⁰, and the authority of individual politicians falls due to omnipresent corruption, participation in moral scandals, and the consequent loss of public trust. The difficult situation in which the Spanish monarchy has found itself is also a reason for the proliferation of populist slogans.

The king guarding the unity of the state

After the death and fall of General Franco’s regime, according to the will of Caudillo, his successor and heir to the legacy of Francism was Juan Carlos I de Borbon¹¹. Already two days after the death of the dictator, during a speech in the General Cortes, the king

⁹ Many Catalans considered the adoption of the pact (which was approved by the Catalan Parliament in July) as the last opportunity for agreement between the region and the central government.

¹⁰ Accusations against the king for financial embezzlement, corruption, etc. do not build a good message or image of Spain, and the most important tasks of the monarch are representative functions.

¹¹ The king, under the General’s care, received a thorough education, among others, he graduated from law and economics studies, as well as military schools. He knows several languages, including Catalan, which King Philip VI is also fluent in.

emphasized: “the idea of Europe would be incomplete without reference to the Spanish presence and without taking into account the actions of many of my predecessors. Europe should count on Spain, and we Spaniards are Europeans. Let both parties understand this and let us all draw conclusions from it. This is the necessity of the moment” (Górski, 2010: 55). This indicated that despite Juan Carlos’ original (during his lifetime) declaration of loyalty to the regime’s legacy and his perception of the future king as a weak person, unable to make independent decisions, he would adopt a democratic political line for his country. The state of uncertainty and lack of faith in the monarch’s powers partly reflects the nickname initially given to him by the Spaniards – John Carlos the Transitional (Rybarczyk, 2014).

Even before the death of Franco, political background was dominated by three possible projects for the development of Spain’s continuation of the system (*continuismo*), the gradual reform of existing institutions (*reformismo*) or a democratic breakthrough (*ruptura*) that would break with the Franco legacy and introduce an “adjective-free democracy” (Mróz, 1991: 2). At the end of the General’s life, the divisions in his immediate surroundings became more and more apparent, and the chosen path of transformation was influenced not only by formal institutions, but also by the *poderes fácticos* (so-called real forces), i.e., the Catholic Church, the military, the financier. Two camps were formed among these entities, *búnker* (i.e., the political concrete, a group supporting the continuation of the idea of Francism without the implementation of change) and a group of reformers, including technocrats from Opus Dei (Kasińska-Metryka, 2015b: 40). The voices of radical Frankish circles became widespread, and a *de facto* general’s pupil will be a real follower of the course taken by the regime. As the future showed, fears proved justified. Finally, the fourth hybrid option was chosen – *ruptura pactada*, i.e. the negotiated breakthrough. It is worth noting that the position and role of the monarch was not so clear from the beginning of taking power because the king, for example, approved as Prime Minister the conservative, moderate reform supporter Carlos Arias Navarro, appointed by the Generalissimo himself before his death, which sowed uncertainty and fear among the reformers. Over time, however, King Juan Carlos I became one of the most popular politicians in Spain, Europe and Ibero-America, identified with the bloodless transition to a democratic system, the so-called *la transición española* (Spanish transformation). Hence, the monarch was described as the architect of democracy.

Adopted in 1978, the Constitution defined the form of the Spanish state as a constitutional monarchy. Thus, the Basic Law gave democratic legitimacy to the monarchy, which was supported by dynastic powers (Cotarelo, 1991: 4). According to it, Juan Carlos I de Burbon is “the heir of the historical dynasty”, which in fact means that he initiated the current dynastic line of the Spanish kings. Paradoxically, this article, according to some legitimists, denies the right to the crown not only to Juan Carlos I, but also to his son and successor to the throne, Philippe VI de Bourbon, recognizing Sixtus Henry as the rightful monarch (Kasińska-Metryka, 2015a: 283-284).

The powers given to the king by the Constitution, in fact, make him a neutral authority and do not allow him to directly determine the current direction of the state policy. However, his role is significant in terms of influencing the political reality through his authority, becoming an arbitrator and political moderator. Moreover, Juan Carlos himself has repeatedly proved to be a skillful diplomat and spokesperson of his own country, for example, thanks to his efforts, many foreign investments have been made by Spanish companies, including the construction of the road from Mecca to Medina (Kasińska-Metryka, 2015b: 150). He has also become the personification of the Spanish brand. As an effective lobbyist of Spanish interests during the fuel crisis, he asked the King of Saudi Arabia, Fahda ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Su'ud, for oil supplies, which were almost immediately implemented, ensuring energy security for the state. He maintained good relations with both the Arab world and Israel. He spoke in the American Congress, in the British Parliament, in front of the Russian Duma, the Israeli Knesset, in the UN General Assembly, or was ambassador for Spanish affairs in Brussels (Zubiński, 2014: 172). Furthermore, the king was given a major role in easing tensions between the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the administration of George W. Bush.

Since the period of systemic transformation, King Juan Carlos has become a symbol of the permanence and unity of the state (*Constitución Española de 27 de diciembre de 1978*, 1978), while the allegorical dimension of unity also refers to the territorial aspect, interpreted as a pact between the various components of the crown (Żmigrodzki, Żmigrodzki, 2013: 516-517). Almost since taking the throne, he enjoyed great public trust, mainly because of his contribution to the reconciliation of the Spanish people after the civil war and the Franco's regime. His commitment, often behind the scenes (Klonowski, 2014: 176-199), to reach an agreement between political forces at a time of democratic change, and to re-establish cooperation with other countries, is also emphasized. The royal couple made numerous official visits after the death of the dictator, e.g. to Latin American, European, African, Asian countries and to the USA, and held confidential talks with leaders of regimes such as Nicolae Ceaușescu in Romania, which in effect allowed to establish official political contacts between the two countries, followed by the legalization of the Partido Comunista de España in Spain (Zubiński, 2014: 159-160), despite the accompanying political and social tensions.

Undoubtedly, the authority of the king was strengthened by his attitude in the face of the failed *coup d'état* carried out by the Spanish military commanders on February 23, 1981 in Cortes, the so-called 23-F (Cercas, 2015; Bravo Navarro, 2006). Through television, the king, dressed in a military uniform, made a message to the people in which he strongly condemned the coup and its inspirators, and then focused on gaining support among the military commanders to continue the democratic path chosen by the Spanish people. With these spectacular actions, he won over not only citizens but also leaders, the world media and international public opinion. It is worth noting that an important act of support for the monarchy and the system itself was the radio appearance

on Radio Nacional and Radio Exterior of the President of the Generalitat Jordi Pujola¹² addressed to the Spaniards with an appeal to stay calm and confirm the validity of the chosen path of reforms.

The image of Juan Carlos as a charismatic monarch could also be influenced by some of his public statements, including the cult sentence addressed to Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías at the 17th Ibero-American Summit in 2007, when the controversial President of Venezuela insulted the former Spanish Prime Minister José Maria Aznar during the speech of his successor, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The monarch unhesitatingly asked him the question: “¿Por qué no te callas?”, which can be translated as follows: “Why don’t you shut up?” (Bernatowicz, 2017: 263-264). The phrase not included in the diplomatic protocol gained great popularity and won over not only young people from Spanish-speaking circles, but also from all over the world. After returning to Spain, he was welcomed like a hero. For nearly three decades, Juan Carlos enjoyed such a high level of respect and acceptance that many compatriots considered themselves more Juan Carlists or supporters of the king himself than supporters of the monarchy as such, which also shows the phenomenon of his popularity.

Traditionally, in Catalonia, the King’s popularity and support for the monarchy was lower than in other regions, and with the progressive economic, social, and political crisis and the parallel radicalization of Catalan independentism, it fell significantly. This was particularly evident in organized demonstrations against the monarchy and the king, as well as in acts of vandalism, such as burning the image of the king, the Spanish flag, or publicly demonstrated reluctance (through whistles, insults, street and roadblocks) towards the person of Juan Carlos I and then his son Philip VI during official visits to the region. Although such behaviour has been and is present in meetings with residents in other Autonomous Communities as well, in Catalonia and also in the Basque Country, it has a particularly negative impact, especially because of the identification of the institutions of the monarchy with the oppressor of the communities of the regions and the enemy of their independence aspirations. During his time on the throne, Juan Carlos I tried to neutralize endogenous tendencies in order to maintain the unity of the state. On many occasions he was critical of independence movements such as those in Catalonia and the Basque Country (especially ETA), thus demonstrating his disapproval of any manifestation of separatism.

The crisis of the Spanish monarchy and Catalan independentism

The deep economic crisis, followed by the social and political crisis, had far-reaching consequences in the form of a drop in public confidence in state institutions, which had enjoyed relatively high support since the fall of the military dictatorship. The Spanish monarchy was not spared by this trend. While this phenomenon was present through-

¹² At that time, the CiU leader enjoyed very high authority, not only among Catalan nationalists.

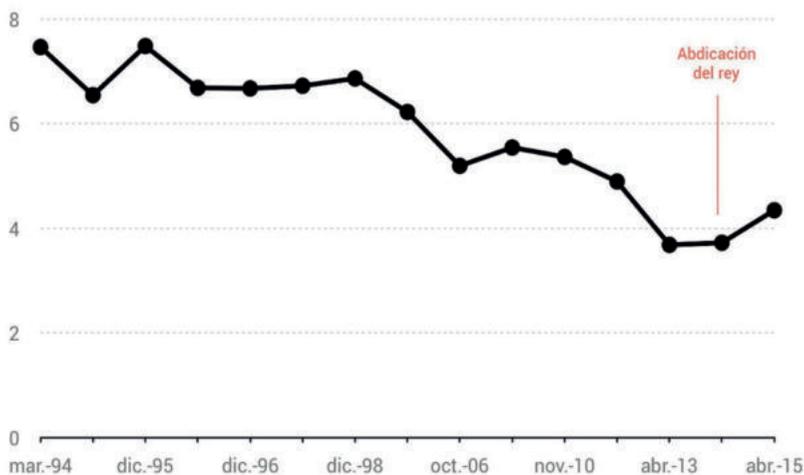


Figure 1. Level of Spanish confidence in the monarchy between 1994 and 2015

Source: (Romero, 2016).

out Europe and caused a heated discussion about the legitimacy of funding from the state budgets of royal families, in the case of Spain, the trend in the decline of the monarchy's prestige was gradual, as shown in the graph above.

The decline of confidence in the monarchy and in the person of Juan Carlos I himself was closely related to a wave of scandals accompanying the royal family, which gained a new meaning during the recession. In 2011, the situation in the country was very difficult both economically, socially and politically. It did not change significantly, even as a result of the power's alternation: contrary to some people's expectations, the election of the right-wing PP was not an immediate antidote to the disappointment of the socialist governments (PSOE). As a result, the king could have become a natural stabilizer of the growing social moods. However, the increasing number of accusations of waste of public funds, corruption and embezzlement, and the lack of transparency of income and accounts of the Bourbon family took place especially after 2010, when most Spaniards struggled with record high unemployment, especially among young people, living on the brink of poverty, growing debt and inability to repay, the so-called bad credit, which in extreme cases led to loss of homes and homelessness. In this case, citizens' expectations of the king and state institutions were clashing with the prevailing reality. In addition, the monarch had been known for years for his love of luxury, the hero of numerous moral scandals, and his marriage to Queen Sofía was considered a facade¹³.

¹³ Despite an informal ban on the media presenting the king's private life, the boulevard press often reported on the monarch's extravagant outings or subsequent romances. Some media claim that the king's romances can be estimated not in hundreds but in thousands.

These factors increased social frustration, and the spell of bitterness was sparked by the disclosure in 2012 by the media of information and photographs of the expensive elephant hunt in Botswana and the accident that the ruler suffered at the time. The Spaniards were appalled that in times of crisis, the king celebrated his profligacy and wasted public finances (*Król Juan Gorszyciel*, 2012; Kasińska-Metryka, 2014: 301-302). The indignation of the Spaniards was compounded by the fact that during this time, the royal couple should celebrate their 50th anniversary of marriage. Meanwhile, the monarch participated in a hunt with German princess Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein from Denmark. In addition, the media reported, first of all, that the affair between the two had been going on for more than eight years (Bernatowicz, 2017: 266), and secondly, that Juan Carlos was involved in the beastly ritual of killing elephants while also serving as honorary chairman of the Spanish branch of the World Wildlife Fund (Kubin, Lorencka, Myśliwiec, 2017: 146). Although the king officially apologized to the citizens for his inappropriate behavior (it was undoubtedly a precedent) and revealed the income of the royal family, the overstretched authority of Juan Carlos and the accompanying aversion to the monarchy in an institutional sense did not disappear, on the contrary, especially as already a year earlier, the Spanish media had received information about the king's great inheritance, which he was to inherit from his father. At that time, questions arose about his legalization and taxation.

Other family members were also involved in scandals and embezzlement of financial resources. In 2007, the information about the separation of the king's eldest daughter, Infanta Elena, was officially confirmed, while in 2009 a divorce took place. Since 2011, there have been increasing signals of financial irregularities at the Nóos Institute, led by Juan Carlos' son-in-law, Duke of Palma de Mallorca, Inakim Undargarin. Infanta Cristina and her husband formed a financial society called Aizoon (their shares were 50% each). They were accused of illegal financial operations considered by the court to be fraudulent to the detriment of public finances (Manresa, 2013), and the investigation revealed that they had the monarch's own support in winning lucrative contracts, which definitely undermined the credibility and position of the Spanish monarchy. The statement by King Philip VI that "public offices cannot be used to get rich" (*Król Hiszpanii mówi o walce...*, 2014) was, therefore, of little importance, since in the eyes of many Spaniards, it has become more declarative rather than concrete solutions, especially since reality has made some of them aware of the seriousness of the scale of corruption in the state, which even reaches the royal family. The final compromise for the court was the sentence of six years in prison for the king's son-in-law and the deprivation of Infanta Cristina of the title of Princess Palma de Mallorca and the renunciation of succession rights. It is worth mentioning that she did not take part in the coronation ceremony of her brother, and King Philip VI himself did not show up for a long time in the company of his father to save the image of the family and institutions.

The moral scandals also include issues of internal conflicts within the royal family, which are reported in the Spanish media, especially between Queen-Mother Sofia and Letizia, the current Queen of Spain, wife of Philip VI. The tensions between them were widely commented on when they were engaged and married to the current king because of the misalliance that accompanied it: Letizia did not come from an aristocratic family, had been a journalist before, and a few years before marrying Philip, she divorced her first husband. In addition, the media report relatively regularly about further tensions between the two aristocrats, such as the situation in 2018 when Letizia was making it difficult to take pictures of her daughters with her grandmother, Queen Sofia, in front of the cathedral in Palma de Mallorca (Galaz, 2018).

These poor relations of the retired royal couple can be proved by Spanish media reports that Queen Sofia will not accompany her husband to the United Arab Emirates. However, in recent times (August 2020), there has been increasing talk of casting Philip VI's parents into the shadows, in order to protect the image of the monarch and his successor, the daughter Leonora, from any suspicion of involvement in scandals and embezzlement Juan Carlos was accused of, which the latter would leave Spain for. In this connection, there is speculation that Queen Sofia would move to her native Greece (the media also speculate about Paris and London). It is worth noting that the Queen Mother is one of the most valued members of the royal family, just after Philip VI (Font, 2020).

In a situation where support for the monarchy drastically decreased and the image of the royal family weakened after 2012, questions arose about the legitimacy of this form of government. The demands for its overthrow and replacement with a republican form, which has traditionally had great support in Catalonia (see Figure 2), were revived. Moreover, the weakening position of the institution has been particularly conducive to independentists in Catalonia or the Basque Country. In particular, the former were keen to use this argument in their narrative, pointing to the erosion of the monarchy and, at the same time, anticipating the collapse of the Spanish state as a multinational entity. In the rhetoric of the proponents of independence, the slogans of better care for the interests of the region by the authorities closer to the citizens, and not in Madrid or behind the walls of the lavish royal residences, became famous.

The abdication of Juan Carlos I in June 2014 who ruled continuously for nearly four decades for his son, Prince Philip, was to become a remedy. Initially, as the polls indicated, it proved to be quite an effective measure, since public sentiment calmed down considerably and Spanish confidence in the monarchy increased, as shown in Figure 1. While foreign public opinion might have been surprised by the abdication of Juan Carlos I, the citizens accepted it as a response to the numerous scandals and welcomed it. In 2019, Juan Carlos officially withdrew from public life, which he announced during the fifth anniversary of his abdication.

The Catalans, among others, had high hopes for change on the Spanish throne because of the possibility of active involvement and greater engagement of the king in the polit-

**PREFERENCIA POR MODELO DE ESTADO
SEGÚN COMUNIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE RESIDENCIA**

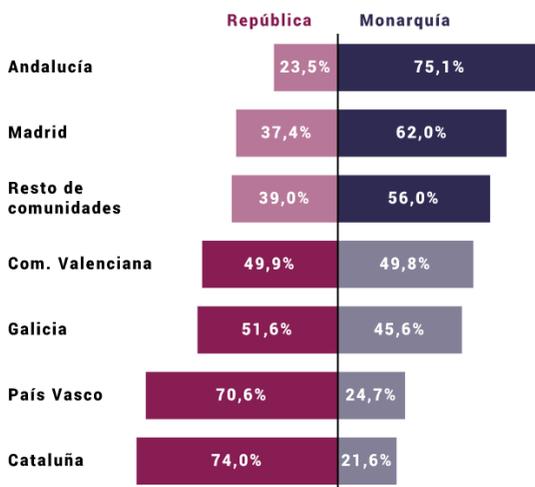


Figure 2. Preferences of the inhabitants of selected regions of Spain as to the form of the state in June 2019

Source: (Gay, 2019).

ical dialogue between the region and the centre. Both supporters and opponents of the idea of independence in the region hoped for a new quality, greater openness, a breath of ‘fresh perspective’ that the young monarch could bring to the dispute, and perhaps a mediator who could convince the reluctant Catalans. These expectations were linked to the fact that, under the Basic Law, the King has the competence to arbitrate and moderate the functioning of state institutions. Therefore, according to many, he could order public consultations on the independence of Catalonia and also become the main mediator in the conflict, as he is predestined to do by institutional independence.

The abdication and the generational change that followed was also important for another reason, namely the difficult internal situation in the country: the high fragmentation of the central political scene, the successive political deadlocks in the formation of the government, or the impossibility of reaching a common position, first of all with regard to the holding of a referendum and independence itself, which in fact did not allow an unequivocal response from the political interference to the radicalization of Catalan independentism.

Philip VI showed great interest and concern in the context of the Catalan-Spanish tensions, but from his first days as head of state he clearly underlined his priorities: preserving Spain’s unity and restoring citizens’ confidence in the monarchy. At the same time, he appealed to the people of Catalonia to abandon the independence process (Campbell, 2014). He, thus, rejected the possibility of secession of the region. The disappointment with Philip VI’s stance and the resulting drop in support for the monarchy in the

region occurred especially after the speech to the Spanish people made after the illegal independence referendum in Catalonia in 2017. During his televised speech, the King strongly supported the unity of the state, accusing the regional authorities of disloyalty, irresponsibility and anti-democratic actions (*Catalunha vai declarar a independència ...*, 2017). However, the Catalan people took a particularly negative view of the monarch's lack of reaction to the violent actions of the police and army during the bloody riots on voting day. Not only did he not condemn the actions of the Spanish services, but he completely disregarded this issue during his speech, and thus exposed himself to ostracism from the majority of the community's inhabitants, even those who were against independence. His attitude, on the other hand, was more positive in the other Spanish autonomies (apart from the Basque Country) that are not in favour of the separation of Catalonia.

The improvement of the monarch's relations with the region was also not supported by imprisonment, a trial and then many years' sentences for separatists who were sentenced for organizing the said referendum and inciting rebellion. Many frustrated Catalans gave vent to their emotions during successive visits by the royal couple to Catalonia, for example, in February 2019 (*Protest przeciw królowi w Barcelonie...*, 2019), in November of the same year, accompanied by slogans: "Catalonia has no king" (*Hałaśliwy protest przeciwko wizycie...*, 2019), or in July 2020 (*Hiszpania: Protesty przeciwko wizycie...*, 2020). Even during the last mentioned visit, in the era of the spreading coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), when the royal family repeatedly took actions to improve its image, e.g. visiting places particularly affected by the pandemic, the sick in hospitals, giving gestures of solidarity and thanks to the services involved in the fight against the virus, as well as reuniting in pain with the relatives of the deceased and paying homage to them (Stasiński, 2020a) and carrying out actions to rebuild the image of the country after the pandemic, including the involvement of world politicians (Javier Solana), famous athletes (Rafael Nadal, Fernando Alonso) or actors (Antonio Banderas) (*Nadal, Banderas, Alonso...*, 2020) in the promotional campaign, this did not significantly improve the position of the monarchy either in Catalonia or in other regions.

It is worth noting that after the abdication of Juan Carlos I, his exclusion from public life, the monarchy and King Philip VI gradually regained the trust of the citizens, despite the tense internal situation (lack of political agreements, governmental crises, separatist tendencies in the regions, etc.). Relatively high support for the young king took place in 2017-2019, i.e., before and after the referendum and after the verdict against the separatists holding the referendum (Figure 3). It reached a particularly high level in 2018, similar to that of 1994, when the monarch received a score of 7.5 out of 10 possible points. From 2019 onwards, the level of support has been gradually falling, and from the beginning of 2020, the level of support has been falling significantly, which may be related to the perception of state institutions by Spaniards as ineffective in the fight against the pandemic. These trends are specific to the entire area of the Spanish state, but the

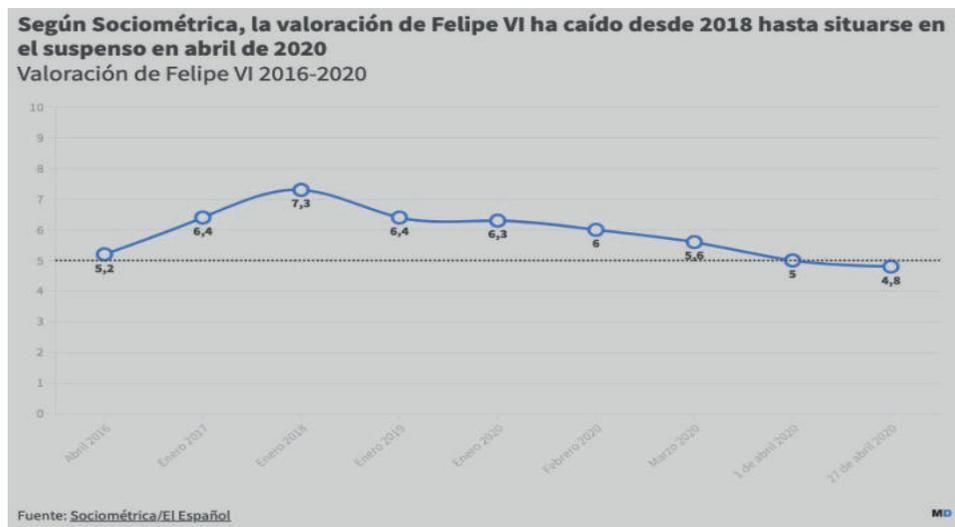


Figure 3. Support for Philip VI between 2016 and 2020 on a scale of 0-10 (average of all Spanish autonomous communities)

Source: (*Cinco años sin preguntas sobre la monarquía en el CIS*, 2020).

differences between the various communities are significant. As shown by the results of a study carried out in June 2020, after six years of Philip VI's reign, the monarchy is traditionally the least popular in Catalonia and the Basque Country, where it ranges from 2.2-2.8 points in Catalonia to 3.2 points in the Basque province Arabie (on a scale from 0 to 10). The king enjoys the greatest support in the province of Salamanca and Ávila in the region of Castile and Leon (*La monarquía suspende...*, 2020). The weakening position of the monarchy in Spain is, therefore, clearly visible. The reason for this may be symptomatic of the economic, social and political crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the revival of discussions on the legitimacy of maintaining cost-intensive state institutions like the monarchy. The discouragement of citizens would, therefore, have more of an institutional than a personal dimension. Such a nature of attitude towards the monarchy and the person of the king would also confirm the increase in Spanish support for Juan Carlos after his abdication.

The position of the Spanish monarchy was also adversely affected by the Supreme Court's opening of proceedings in June 2020 against Juan Carlos for irregularities related to the contract for the construction of the AVE high-speed railroad in Saudi Arabia (since 2018, the Spanish police have been investigating the case). The case was revealed several years earlier by the British press. Prosecutor's offices in Spain and Switzerland are investigating the case, where Juan Carlos was allegedly being bribed. The Spanish media also reached out to the testimony of the lover of the former king, who revealed that she had obtained bank transfers from the aforementioned bank – transfers

for amounts up to millions of euros. As a result of these accusations, the image of the monarchy suffered so much that Philip VI decided to sever all material relations with his father (among other things, he renounced his inheritance) and deprived him of the royal pension (Stasiński, 2020b; Bielecki, 2020).

In addition, in August 2020, public opinion was shocked by the fact that Juan Carlos, in a letter to his son, informed him of his intention to leave Spain in order to facilitate Philip VI's office, which was interpreted by many citizens and the world public opinion as an escape from the charges against him, especially as he went to the United Arab Emirates (*Hiszpania: Dwór królewski...*, 2020; *Spanish former king...*, 2020). In response, especially the Catalan independentists cited the fact that the UAE does not have an extradition agreement signed with Switzerland¹⁴, which may significantly delay the investigation and possible execution of the judgment in the future (Rodríguez, 2020). The response of the Spanish society and politicians themselves to the departure of Juan Carlos was revealed almost immediately, i.e. the withdrawal by the city authorities of the honorary decorations previously awarded to the former king. The Ayuntamiento de Barcelona took away the gold medal from the king, which was voted on by the independentists in the City Council (*Barcelona aprueba retirar...*, 2020), while the Ayuntamiento de Cádiz changed the name of one of the main streets from Avenida Juan Carlos I to Avenida de la Sanidad Pública.

Conclusions

The conducted analysis shows that the decline of the monarchy was not a direct cause of the radicalization of Catalan independentism as it progressed gradually throughout the country, while in Catalonia the support for the institutions and person of the king has traditionally been much lower than in other regions for years. As in the Basque Country, this leads to the conclusion that in communities with strong centrifugal tendencies, the monarchy as an institution and the king as head of state are not popular. At the same time, the weak position of the monarchy was a significant factor in radicalization, its gas pedal.

The consequences of the above image crisis of the royal family are multidimensional. Naturally, the decline of the monarchy's position is a problem in itself, but more importantly, it has become a gas pedal of internal antagonisms. After the emigration of Juan Carlos, the number of supporters of the republican form of government increased significantly. There were increasing demands from politicians and Spaniards themselves to hold a national referendum on the matter. In addition, the trip significantly lowered social morale, especially among the previous advocates of the royal family. The relationship with the former king divided the central political scene to such an extent that in un-

¹⁴ The relevant agreement was signed between Spain and the UAE in 2009, but it is significant that the proceedings brought against Juan Carlos in Switzerland are much more advanced than in Spain.

certain times of pandemic crisis it could become an important conflict factor and generate divisions. For obvious reasons, some nationalist, independent groups (e.g., ERC, BNG – Bloque Nacionalist Ga-lego, EH Bildu – Euskal Herria) or those skeptical of the monarchy (Unidas Podemos – the name of the coalition of political parties that has been in force since May 2019) began to accuse the socialist government with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of concealing information about the king's whereabouts because it was unknown from August 3 to 17, 2020 (Rodríguez, 2020). Internal disputes are also not conducive to the stability of the central government, while its weak position allows the periphery to grow in strength, especially with separatist tendencies. The division of the political interior is also creating favourable conditions for the building of many Spain's different speeds, which in fact means different visions of the state, with no possibility of reaching a compromise. Undoubtedly, the future and the extent of Spain's borders depends on the development of the situation in Catalonia among others, although at the same time, the future of Catalonia as a possible state depends on the power of influence (also unification) of Spain.

For decades in a democratic Spain, it was the monarch who played a very important role in maintaining the unity of the state. Despite hesitation in supporting the institution, he is one of the most important and recognizable symbols of the country, which is why it is not without reason that the monarch is described as King of all Spaniards. The person of Juan Carlos was also considered for decades as an exemplar of the strength and success of the democratic transition. As a result of scandals and accusations, the authority of the monarch as an architect of democracy, but also as a constructor of modern Spain, has been seriously damaged, if not completely destroyed.

The weakening position of the monarchy, and even more so the increasingly loud slogans about the change of form of government, became a powerful argument in the nationalist and independent narrative. The ubiquitous corruption present even in the royal family and among politicians of the highest levels of power strengthens the slogans of the independentists about the exploitation, robbery and oppression of Catalonia. Strengthened by historical examples, it creates an eloquent message of supporters of the building of the Catalan state, which, according to the independentists, could provide greater transparency and openness in politics. From the perspective of the Catalans, on the other hand, the weakness of the political centre could potentially be associated with greater flexibility, readiness for constructive dialogue and openness to new solutions to the Catalan-Spanish dispute. In this light, the announcement by the current President of the Generalitat Quim Torra in August 2020 to postpone talks on the "independence crisis" is also a significant signal (Real Instituto Elcano, 2019) to the level of the European Union if the political centre in Madrid is not ready to continue discussions on the self-determination of the Catalan people. This dialogue was initiated in February this year and suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic, but since then,

Prime Minister Sánchez has repeatedly denied that the government is interested in an agreement on the independence of Catalonia. Furthermore, during an interview with the Catalan Information Agency, Torra demanded that Spanish decision-makers clarify the conditions for holding an independence referendum and an amnesty for prisoners convicted of holding a referendum in 2017 (*Catalan president to 'negotiate in Brussels'...*, 2020). Whereas at the beginning of 2020, the president of the Generalitat announced early elections¹⁵, but without a specific date, the Catalan-Spanish dispute due to the pandemic has been postponed for several months, while at the same time the central government, the monarchy and the all-Spanish political parties are blamed for their incompetent policies against the expansion of COVID-19, a deepening economic and social crisis. But can the independentists, therefore, count on the authorities in Madrid to be more united? The reality does not seem to be so clear because the number of coronavirus cases in Catalonia is one of the highest in Spain, the economic recession is progressing rapidly, so it seems doubtful that the Catalans will prioritize their actions in order to achieve the independence of the region and manage to mobilize around it. In this case, the lack of unanimity and a common stream of action on the part of the supporters of independence themselves is also important, which significantly weakens the possibilities of Catalan independentism. However, it can be predicted that once the pandemic is over, the conflict will gain an additional dimension (health security) and will strike with increased force.

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¹⁵ In December 2019 Torra was dismissed from the office of President of the Generalitat for not removing the Catalan independence flag hung on a public building. The decision is not legally binding. The Supreme Court will take this case in September 2020. This could have been a factor in the president's decision to hold early elections.

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Abstract: The article deals with the position of the Spanish monarchy in the context of Catalan separatism (independentism). The analysis is focused on the search for potential relationships between the weakening position of the Spanish monarchy and Catalan independentism and the consequences associated with this. To this end, the exploration includes both the monarchy in the institutional sense and focuses on the person of Juan Carlos I de Burbon himself and his son and successor Philip VI de Burbon. Furthermore, an important aspect of the research is the reference of the position of the monarchy to the issue of the independence process in Catalonia and a forecast in this light for the further development of Catalan separatism.

Keywords: Catalan separatism, Catalan independentism, Spanish monarchy, Juan Carlos I de Burbon, Philippe VI de Burbon

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