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The case for Catalonia's independence

Independence could enrich Catalonia, but it should be wary of turning into a Cuba or North Korea of the Mediterranean

Jordi Galí
 guardian.co.uk, Monday 19 November 2012 19.00 GMT
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A demonstration calling for independence during the Catalonia's National Day on September 11, 2012 in Barcelona. Photograph: David Ramos/Getty Images

Up until now, the debate about the economic impact of Catalanian independence has centred almost exclusively on two issues: the dividend that an end to the fiscal deficit with Spain would provide, and the cost of a possible boycott of Catalan products. These are, without a doubt, two important factors when evaluating the economic profitability of independence. But the emphasis on these two issues reflects an attitude similar to that of a passive stockholder, who focuses solely on how their shares might increase or decrease after a business has changed hands. This attitude would contrast with that of the investor who is actively involved in a company.

In the case of an independent Catalonia, we are dealing with the unique opportunity to design the institutions and regulations of a new state from scratch. A wide array of economic policy instruments that are currently under the exclusive control of the Spanish government and parliament would suddenly be at the Catalonians' disposal. It would allow us to define our own policies and a new regulatory framework for the labour, fiscal and financial sectors, as well as public administration – with no more additional restrictions than those coming from European regulations. It would thus be a good idea to enrich the current debate with proposals that answered the following question: independence, to do what?

I should clarify that I don't feel unconditionally attracted to the prospect of a Catalonia-state. If independence turned Catalonia into a new Cuba or

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North Korea in the Mediterranean, I think that we should just forget about the whole thing. If I am attracted to the pro-sovereignty option it is because of the opportunity that it offers, especially in the field of economics.

Among the basic objectives of a new state would be the achievement of maximum sustainable growth. The report [Doing Business](#), published annually by the World Bank, offers us a way of measuring our potential in this sense. The latest edition [ranks Spain](#) 44th (out of 183 countries) in a global league based on the "ease of doing business" (behind Puerto Rico and Colombia, followed by Rwanda and Tunisia). In some of the sub-indicators the situation is appalling (for example, Spain is 133rd for ease of starting a new business). This report and other similar ones, such as the [Global Competitiveness Report](#), only confirm what is evident for any business manager: the Spanish institutional framework is far from being ideal for the generation of wealth based on productivity.

The economic attractiveness of an independent Catalonia would be further increased if the following principles were taken into account in the building of this new state:

1 The need for a new public administration model based on the principles of fiscal prudence, efficiency and quality service to citizens. To satisfy this need would require, in my opinion, the introduction of business management criteria into the way we run our public administration, with strict accountability and incentives based on individual productivity. The anti-economic figure of the civil servant, like that of the feudal knight, should become a thing of the past. The management system for the Catalan government's research centres, based on management autonomy, accountability and incentives linked to the excellence of results offers a widely recognised model of success that could make up the core of the future Catalan administration.

2 The supreme importance of simple, fast and efficient administrative and legal procedures that maximise a person's legal protection and fully guarantee their rights. Any resources that could be invested in this field would see an immense social return.

3 The need for a flexible labour framework that is restricted to guaranteeing respect for established procedures and for a lack of discrimination.

4 A taxation system for companies and workers that favours foreign investment and attracting talent. The end to the fiscal deficit and a prioritisation of the battle against fraud should offer enough leeway for this new tax regime.

5 The adoption of English as a third official language, emphasising its role as a language that connects us to the world, including the connection between international companies and professionals and the administration. This would be a key element in the internationalisation of Catalan companies and the reduction of their excessive dependency on the Spanish market.

6 A quality welfare state that is generous to the underprivileged, but with few distortions and disincentives, and that relentlessly fights fraud.

To summarise: I believe it is important to recognise that the independence of Catalonia, in and of itself, could make us richer (because we would end the fiscal deficit), but not necessarily more productive. This second aspect would require us to make good use, the day after the celebrations are over, of the unique opportunity and the enormous possibilities offered by the building of a new state. Whether we are prepared for this challenge or not will depend exclusively on us Catalonians, and we will no longer be able to lay the blame on others. In the end, maybe that would be the best gift that independence could bring us.

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Krishnamoorthi
19 November 2012 7:09PM

What is wrong with N.Korea or Cuba?

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RooftopRejoicer
19 November 2012 7:10PM

What about getting rid of the widespread corruption in the political world? You can't create a brave new world with the existing politicians - most of them are on the take. With some it's a few hundred euros, with others it's millions. The political classes have no interest in seeing your changes and improvements, Jordi, as then they'd lose their grip on the hosepipe that channels public funds.

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AlunEvans57
19 November 2012 7:22PM

" A taxation system for companies and workers that favours foreign investment and attracting talent."

So then, the poor get taxed to the hilt while the rich avoid tax like mad.

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Raniat
19 November 2012 7:22PM

Okay, so money is the motive for Catalonia's independence? If so, can Catalonia pay back the debts it owes to the rest of Spain and Latin America? Can the native Indians of the Americas sue Catalonia for the genocide the conquistadors inflicted on the continent, killing off millions of its inhabitants? Will Catalonia pay its share of reparations for the millions of Africans who were shipped off to slavery to Spanish colonies in the Americas?

Perhaps, wiping the slate with the past might be the best way for reducing the fiscal deficit in an independent Catalonia.

In the case of an independent Catalonia, we are dealing with the unique opportunity to design the institutions and regulations of a new state from scratch.

Does this mean that Catalonia at present does not have institutions and regulations in place already to deal with issues????

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rvaucbns
19 November 2012 7:25PM

7. Introduction of a sovereign currency.

This would be reason enough to split from the rest of Spain given their determination to remain in the euro at the cost it seems of complete social breakdown. (I hope your idea of 'fiscal prudence' isn't the same as ine)

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jimbo246
19 November 2012 7:38PM

You seem eminently sensible- it's nice to see someone weighing up the pros and cons whatever side you come down on.

Alex Salmond could learn something here.

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facsimile

19 November 2012 7:39PM

No reason why Catalonia shouldn't be independent. It's population, something over 7.5 million, is larger than that of 11 of the existing EU member states, so it should be a perfectly viable nation. And it shouldn't take long to design its institutions and regulations, seeing the vast number of existing models that are available; unless you work on the "not invented here" principle, you don't need to do it from scratch.

The only problem is the hostility of the rest of Spain – predominantly, I take it, the Castilian centre – which might do stupid and self-defeating things like a boycott, or a veto on EU membership for Catalonia. But that problem would be overcome in the end..

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nocauseitoadopt

19 November 2012 7:44PM

I would be inclined to agree with the striking young lady in the accompanying photo.

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BreathlessEnthusiasm

19 November 2012 7:46PM

Independence could enrich Catalonia, but it should be wary of turning into a Cuba or North Korea of the Mediterranean

What tendentious nonsense!

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BreathlessEnthusiasm

19 November 2012 7:48PM

Catalonia is ruled by an oligarchy made up of about 36 interlocking powerful families. Independence for Catalonia would, in part, simply mean giving this oligarchy greater control over their own little fiefdom.

But if that's what the Catalans want...

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facsimile

19 November 2012 7:49PM

Response to [nocauseitoadopt](#), 19 November 2012 7:44PM

Yeah, good PR on the part of the demo organisers – if they didn't have striking young ladies in the front row, no (male) photographer would bother and no (male) Grauniad sub-ed would bother either. Eat your hearts out, ugly old men.

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RooftopRejoicer

19 November 2012 7:53PM

Response to [BreathlessEnthusiasm](#), 19 November 2012 7:48PM

Les 400 families, as Felix Millet put it.

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BreathlessEnthusiasm

19 November 2012 8:02PM

I think one of the low political moments of my life was to go and see the replacement for the Red Army choir in Catalonia.

The Russian Army choir, at the end of their very cheesy low key performance (only about 30 singers and gymnasts in slips performing acrobatics in front) in the Palau de la Música Catalana, struck up the national hymn and the whole audience got up and applauded loudly for one minute before grabbing their coats.

It was the spectacle of seeing what had become of the former Soviet Union and what had become of Catalan nationalism; a spectacle that would have made most of the Catalans and Russians living as adults in the first half of the 20th century sick to

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the pit of their stomachs.

I tried not to get up and applaud, but I did anyway. How embarrassing!



BreathlessEnthusiasm

19 November 2012 8:14PM

The views of right wing Catalan economist on Catalonian independence are interesting. I wonder which side he would have been on in the Spanish Civil War?

The fact that a right wing monetarist gives his blessing to Catalonian independence and that the Guardian gives him extreme uncton here speaks volumes about just how 'progressive' and helpful this independence would be to the people of Catalonia, many many of whom are immigrants from other parts of Spain, like Andalucia, and who are denied equal privileges to the 'autochthonous' Catalans - in fact always a cosmopolitan Mediterranean mixing.

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NotWithoutMyMonkey

19 November 2012 8:16PM

Catalonia should revisit anarcho-syndicalism.

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Exodus20

19 November 2012 8:22PM

It will become another tax haven and none-tax-paying elite's private retreat, like Switzerland.

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falkirk

19 November 2012 8:29PM

"The need for a new public administration model based on the principles of fiscal prudence, efficiency and quality service to citizens. To satisfy this need would require, in my opinion, the introduction of business management criteria into the way we run our public administration, with strict accountability and incentives based on individual productivity. The anti-economic figure of the civil servant, like that of the feudal knight, should become a thing of the past. The management system for the Catalan government's research centres, based on management autonomy, accountability and incentives linked to the excellence of results offers a widely recognised model of success that could make up the core of the future Catalan administration."

And do you really see that happening? The bitter pill which Catalans, and Spain as a whole, don't want to even look at never mind swallow is how backward, inefficient and deeply rooted to tradition whole swathes of the infrastructure and institutions actually are. Independence is being cited as a cure all magic bullet, but I'd love to see the looks on their faces when, as a modern, European institution, they'll role out 9-6 schedules, just 1 hour for lunch, and have to actually work when they are at their desks. Or allow young, fresh ideas to germinate and bright minds to be promoted. Or drag the previously Nationalised behemoths, who still act like monopolies (Telefonica for one) into the 21st Century and make them deal with competition.

Wasn't it the Catalans who insisted on the presence of translators in the National parliament recently, so they could speak their native language on the floor, despite decades on managing in Spanish? All of which was costing the taxpayer a reputed €10,000 a day for translation and interpreting services. Yup, good luck on the streamlining - never gonna happen.

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ShuffleCarrot

19 November 2012 8:30PM

'with no more additional restrictions than those coming from European regulations'

Which still leaves you with a great number of restricts.

Meanwhile what about the Spanish national debt is there some 'hope' that Catalonia can just leave that ALL behind. And its far from clear how the rest of Spain or France will view an independent. Why should they treat any *new independent Catalonia* has they do the area now?

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So you make the place attractive to industry by taxes , fine and what then when others do the same what is it that Catalonia has that puts them above other areas ?

Its easy to call for independence its a lot harder to make it work .



Fulton

19 November 2012 8:37PM

This sounds like the usual wishlist that usually accompanies any independence movement, some how or other independence will magically lead to the implementation of all the individual's preferred policies. Unless there's some kind of violent oppression being resisted, I don't really see the point in any of it, Catalanian, Scottish, Flemish, whatever, the bond market will still be in charge.

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OpenSeas

19 November 2012 8:48PM

The past year - particularly in the cases of Greece and Spain - has shown that European economies will only flourish as part of a federal economic and monetary union.

Small enclaves that seek to go it alone have no chance.

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Drewv

19 November 2012 8:55PM

Yes. He also forgets to mention that the primary motivation for independence is to avoid having to give money to the poorer regions of Spain. This is a rich city-state trying to skip out on solidarity, its rulers being enamoured of neo-liberalism, same as Flanders. If this type of logic is carried to its extreme, you would have to subsequently split Catalonia into a rich part and a poor part, because obviously the poorer Catalonians are still mooching off the richer ones...

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Drewv

19 November 2012 8:56PM

Response to [Drewv, 19 November 2012 8:55PM](#)

The above meant to be in reply to BreathlessEnthusiasm.

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Insouciant1

19 November 2012 9:18PM

Response to [Krishnamoorthi, 19 November 2012 7:09PM](#)

Am I missing some clever irony here?

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naive2

19 November 2012 9:18PM

I can't see the UK government agreeing to Catalonia becoming the 29th member of the EU anymore than I can see the Spanish government agreeing to Scotland becoming the 30th.

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schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 9:19PM

Response to [QUIXOTELOVELESS, 19 November 2012 7:37PM](#)

Nationalism and factionalism in Europe .We all know how well that has played out over the century's.

yeah, those horrid britnat trolls and eu separatists in the ruk. we need to ditch them asap

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vote yes

since the vast majority of the ruk want to split with europe, why would you care what the catalans do?



schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 9:21PM

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Response to [naive2](#), 19 November 2012 9:18PM

I can't see the UK government agreeing to Catalonia becoming the 29th member of the EU

since it is quite clear that the ruk will split with the eu, luckily, it has bugged all to do with you



exiledlondoner

19 November 2012 9:29PM

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Be careful what you wish for.

While I have no doubt that Catalonia could survive very well economically as a nation, I do wonder to what extent Catalan unity depends on having a common Spanish enemy.

In many ways Catalonia seems much less homogenous as a nation than Scotland. The language is by no means spoken by everyone, there has been much immigration over the last 50 years, and its borders are somewhat arbitrary. Catalan history is also largely entwined with the history of neighbouring Aragon, rather than as an independent nation state.

Catalan nationalism ebbs and flows with Spanish nationalism - the more nationalistic the government in Madrid is, the more nationalistic Catalonia becomes. Those who are most adamant that Spain must be maintained as a single state are the ones who do most to split it apart.

If the Catalans want to have their own state, good luck to them. but I'm not convinced it will turn out quite as harmoniously as they hope. There are a lot of Catalans who would see nationhood as a way of removing the old order, including many of the Catalan "aristocracy" who currently control much of the economy.



schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 9:29PM

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Response to [OpenSeas](#), 19 November 2012 8:48PM

Small enclaves that seek to go it alone have no chance.

except scotland who has 65% of all eu oil reserves, 30% of renewable wind and wave power in the EU, most of the fish that are left and loads of fresh water.

if scotland goes, the ruk will be lucky to be able to sleep standing up in 10 years old man



walser

19 November 2012 9:30PM

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please..... help us !! We need independence.....please !!



schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 9:35PM

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Response to [AlunEvans57](#), 19 November 2012 7:22PM

So then, the poor get taxed to the hilt while the rich avoid tax like mad.

you mean like westminster

dont worry, after scotland offski's in 2014 the ruk will crumble into dust and wales will get a chance to write its own constitution

no need to thank us

vote yes



schrodingerskat
19 November 2012 9:37PM

Response to [walser](#), 19 November 2012 9:30PM

scotland to the rescue walser

you get it by default

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Dreikaiserbund
19 November 2012 9:56PM

I kind of like Spain as it is: imperfect. However, when I hear/read some of the stuff said about the Catalan in the Spanish nationalist media (ABC, La Razón, El Mundo, La Gaceta, Libertad (sic) Digital, I can understand why Catalans would want to break away. But even this is tempered by the total bollocks spouted by the hardline Catalan nationalists, including preposterous claims that it was a freedom-loving independent state that was bloodily conquered by Spain in 1714. As someone who studied modern European history to masters level and who was going to do a doctorate on a similar topic (Ireland and its unionist problem), I have to say it is just rubbish. This need to invent a past that didn't exist tempers my sympathies for the Catalan 'cause' - and in theory, I'm the sort of demographic who should be lapping them up: a Barca-supporting Scot. Also, my Facebook timeline is being increasingly taken up with inane, inaccurate and increasingly xenophobic posts by Spanish nationalists demanding a 'boycott' of Catalan goods (grow up) and by Catalans claiming Spanish 'scabs' (in the literal sense of the word) are fleecing them. It's all really rather sad. I blame nationalism per se and nationalist shit stirrers.

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dhugop
19 November 2012 10:01PM

After the Soviet Union broke up, Ukraine forced the Russian Federation to accept all of the country's debt, despite it having only 40% of the population. So there is precedent where the center with the federal capital accepts all of the burdens of the former state. It did not work well at all, and was extremely usurious, but I wouldn't blame Russia if they thought the same hardship should be imposed on states in Western Europe. What goes around comes around.

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schrodingerskat
19 November 2012 10:04PM

Response to [Dreikaiserbund](#), 19 November 2012 9:56PM

This need to invent a past that didn't exist

all history is an invention, what makes poor history, is the idea that ones idea of history is any more correct than anyone elses

i take it then you didnt do your doctorate after all?

you are right though, i find british nationalist the worst

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kristinekochanski
19 November 2012 10:13PM

Response to [jimbo246](#), 19 November 2012 7:38PM

"Alex Salmond could learn something here."

What exactly?

Salmond has secured the UK govts approval for a referendum which is entirely legal. The Catalan position seems a lot less clear cut.

I don't really draw comparisons between the two cases.

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kristinekochanski
19 November 2012 10:18PM

Response to [schrodingerskat](#), 19 November 2012 10:04PM

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God you know your avatar is really freaky, even although I am now used to seeing it I still get a wee gasp.

(No offence)



Dreikaiserbund

19 November 2012 10:19PM

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Response to [schrodingerskat](#), 19 November 2012 10:04PM

Yeah, couldn't get the funding, even from the Irish governments. But I read up in all the similar stateless nations. I don't find any one nationalism worse than the other - Russian nationalism à la Putin is disgusting; Israeli nationalism is pretty nasty, as we are seeing; Irish nationalism as espoused by the IRA is revolting; Serb nationalism is sick and so on.

But I have lived in many parts of Spain (currently a provincial town in Malaga) including, briefly, Catalonia and find that the country's biggest problem is nationalism. There are nationalist parties everywhere, even in places that you would never expect like Asturias and Leon. Some are more vociferous than others (the Catalans as the worst and most annoying) but what they all overlook is just how bad the *Spanish* nationalists are. The Jaime Mayor Orejas, Esperanza Aguirres, Rose Diezes, Txema Aznars, Pedro J Ramirezes, Jimenez Losantoses of this world are so bad that they actually make people like me have sympathy for the Catalan nationalists despite finding them unbearable. In short, it's mindblowing desultory and tiring.



iruka

19 November 2012 10:19PM

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it's a bit unclear, but I'm guessing 'Cuba or North Korea of the Mediterranean' translates as 'anything more pointlessly humane than my wildest neoliberal wet dream'.

Or 'any state that wouldn't be proud to have a picture of Milton Friedman on its version of the 1 euro coin'.

Not sure the CiU-dominated Catalan independence movement does the broader cause of a 'Europe of the regions' much good. But if Catalan independence led to the break-up of Spain, that wouldn't be a bad thing. It would get the ball rolling.

There are close to 300 sub-national regions in Europe, and a state of affairs where 1) regional governments held most of the important practical power, and 2) the EU was a vestigial federation, in charge of e numbers, a properly progressive constitution, and moving money around in the interests of regional development, sounds like a promising alternative to the current situation. A giant Switzerland, but with no referendums.



Dreikaiserbund

19 November 2012 10:21PM

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By the way, who is Jordi Galí? What are his credentials? Why has he been given a tribune by the Guardian? And *nice* babe! I'd say she dragged quite a few punters to that protest.



schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 10:25PM

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Response to [kristinekochanski](#), 19 November 2012 10:18PM

yeah, im still not sure about it

i think it might be too aggressive kk, there is no volume control in txt etc. i have been posting on the telegraph for ages but within 2 days of loading this avatar, i got banned. i never said anything controversial.....honest

ps, if you do meet up with niclas.....take a spy pen :)

you're right though, it still freaks me out a bit



schrodingerskat

19 November 2012 10:30PM

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[Responses \(1\)](#)

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Response to [Dreikaiserbund](#), 19 November 2012 10:19PM

i thought spanish regional nationalism was reduced to flag waving, same as all eu

nationalism. cant really see the problem with it since any power that the scots, flemings and even irish nationalist think they will get has in fact already been given away to brussels by their respective nation states

although scotland is an issue between brit and scots nats, there is no middle ground now



Dreikaiserbund
19 November 2012 10:37PM

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Response to [schrodingerskat](#), 19 November 2012 10:30PM

There is no middle ground with nationalists. I favoured the EU as it tempered nationalism bu it seems to have succeeded in doing so only with the Germans and Irish. It's done jack-all to dampen Scottish and Catalan nationalism. Norman Tebbit creates a Scottish nationalist every time he opens his mouth, though he'll never admit it, the old codger.



Marendins
19 November 2012 10:38PM

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Response to [Raniat](#), 19 November 2012 7:22PM

Okay, so money is the motive for Catalonia's independence?

This is one of the motives, but not the only one. Please remember CAtalonia has a distinct language and culture, and a long tradition of self-government.

Can the native Indians of the Americas sue Catalonia for the genocide the conquistadors inflicted on the continent, killing off millions of its inhabitants? Will Catalonia pay its share of reparations for the millions of Africans who were shipped off to slavery to Spanish colonies in the Americas?

The exploration, settlement and commerce with the Americas were exclusive to the Crown of Castille, with The Crown of Aragon (Catalans and Aragonese) and the Kingdom of Navarre (Basques) being excluded from it until the XIXth century. This explains why the names of people and places in Latin America are predominantly Spanish (as in Castillian Spanish).



DARTHArturus
19 November 2012 10:40PM

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Response to [Krishnamoorthi](#), 19 November 2012 7:09PM

What is wrong with N.Korea or Cuba?

Nothing. Just, you know, concentration camps, totalitarianism, murdering dissidents, that sort of thing. Small niggles, really.



Marendins
19 November 2012 10:41PM

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[Responses](#) (1)

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Response to [Dreikaiserbund](#), 19 November 2012 10:37PM

...Germans and Irish. It's done jack-all to dampen Scottish and Catalan nationalism.

Because there's so many historical reasons to compare German nationalism with Irish, Scottish and Catalan struggle for self-government. Come on.



Meltingman
19 November 2012 10:42PM

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Doesn't this kind of clash completely with the Guardians "EU Superstate" dogma ? In Guardian world, whats the slightest point of Catalonia or the Basque region going "Seperate" ? They'll be dictated to by Brussels.



schrodingerskat
19 November 2012 10:50PM

[Recommend?](#) (4)

[Responses](#) (0)

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Response to [Dreikaiserbund](#), 19 November 2012 10:37PM

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Norman Tebbit creates a Scottish nationalist every time he opens his mouth

shush.....our secret weapon



Marendins
19 November 2012 10:51PM

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[Responses \(1\)](#)

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Response to [falkirk](#), 19 November 2012 8:29PM

just 1 hour for lunch,

The sole fact that you believe that we have more than 1 hour for lunch shows that you know pretty much nothing about Catalonia or Spain.

Btw, Telefonica is the one of the largest telecommunications groups in the world (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telef%C3%B3nica>) . I doubt you can get there from being a monopoly in Spain alone.



schrodingerskat
19 November 2012 10:55PM

[Recommend? \(1\)](#)

[Responses \(0\)](#)

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Response to [Marendins](#), 19 November 2012 10:41PM

i think you missed driekaiser's point

he was speaking about nationalism in general, not any specific nationalist organisation and that the eu, in the past did offer a way out for some nationalist movements. NI springs to mind



Sluijser
19 November 2012 10:58PM

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[Responses \(2\)](#)

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If Catalonia is so socially minded, what happened to the virtues of redistribution? Sounds more like your typical rich suburb trying to secede from a city to avoid having to pay for the social services of the have-nots.

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