



Making an impact on international relations: A Galician perspective

Description



Galicia could be a node for maritime communication lines between the American Continent and Europe and those that link the Atlantic ports of Europe with the Mediterranean routes, or those of West Africa and even Asia. (Photo: Ship carries containers Maersk Sealand leaving the port of Vigo. ©Fernando Pol).

First of all, let me thank the organizers of this Conference for giving me the opportunity of finding myself today in such distinguished company, and also for their warm hospitality.

The subject of this first day is very close to my interests and, if I may say so, devotion, and also to those of a good part of my generation and those of the IGADI, the Galician Institute of International Documentation and Analysis, in the Advisory Council of which I have the privilege to serve.

I would like to do two different things here. First, I shall describe, as briefly as possible, the historical background and the legal and constitutional basis of Galician foreign relations, and give a summary account of what is now being done in that field of action. And then I would like to make a couple of personal remarks, as a word of caution against misplaced optimism, particularly in relation to the European Union.

The affirmation of a Galician distinctive personality, which, always present through history, was refined into a set of cultural and linguistic propositions by modern nationalist doctrine, carried at all times the firm conviction that such personality could only be achieved by being present in the largest world. As it happens in the personal dimension, one cannot possibly be oneself except in relations with others, recognized by and recognizing others. In political terms this means being a subject of international relations.

Nationalisms in the Spanish context are perhaps better understood as expressions of deep-felt disagreement with the shape the Spanish State took in the course of the formation of the modern State in the 15th and 16 centuries. Nationalisms in Spain carry with themselves, as a consequence, a calling to an alternative approach to political life. Born of dissatisfaction with the past, they claim an opportunity to make an alternative contribution to the future. In the case of Galicia, there is a tradition of a greater affinity with the world outside, as a reaction against what was felt as Spanish proud isolation from the currents of modern thought.

The constitutional framework

The Spanish State, in its current shape, is a constitutional monarchy resulting from the process known as the Transition,

from the death of the previous Head of State, General Franco, in November 1975 to the adoption of the Constitution in December 1978. An immense amount of historical questions gravitated upon the constitutional process, and all, or almost all, of them were addressed, with different degrees of success, in the text of the Constitution. Not the least of those questions was the status of the territorial componentes of the State. With different levels of political awareness and different histories of national affirmation behind them, Catalunya, Euskadi and Galicia were in the first line of consideration for a new dispensation that would recognize their claims as differentiated political entities. Both Catalunya and Euskadi had enjoyed autonomy under the Second Republic. Galicia had voted for autonomy in a referendum in 1936, shortly before the start of the Civil War, and its Estatute or regional constitution was approved by the Republican Cortes in 1938, that is during the civil war and when Galicia had been already part of the Francoist territory for one and a half years.

The Constitution adopted in 1978 and now in force is not a federal one, but adopts an intermediate formula, not very well-defined, between the two classical forms of federation, on the one hand, and on the other, unitary State. The emphasis falls on unity, probably in response to the traditional concerns of the Right (in general terms). Article 2 begins by saying that “This Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and unbreakable fatherland of all Spaniards” and immediately after says: “it recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions that integrate it (Spain) and also the solidarity among all of them”. And Article 8 confers to the Armed Forces, composed of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force “the mission of ensuring the sovereignty and independence of Spain, defending its territorial integrity and the constitutional order”. Nevertheless, there are not less than sixteen Articles, from 143 to 158, inclusive, devoted to the Comunidades Autónomas. These Communities are not enumerated or described; general conditions of a historical, economic and cultural nature can entitle some territories to apply for this status. A law of Parliament would approve in each case an “Estatuto”, that would become the highest regional law. These instruments can be, and are, different from community to community. There is a list, quite generous, of competences that can be transferred to the Communities, and a longer one of matters that are of the “exclusive competence” of the central State. The third of those, and the more important one for our subject here and today appears as number three in that list: “International relations”.

That is perfectly normal. Reserving international relations to the central authority is almost automatic even in fully federal states like, say, the German Federal Republic. It can be said that this is the orthodoxy of International Law.

Having said that this is normal, I would like to add that it is also rapidly becoming old-fashioned.

Paradiplomacy

Nowadays one hears a new term in the theory of international relations: paradiplomacy. For the last thirty years or so, what has been called globalization has eroded the primacy of states in favour of supranational or multinational entities, but, at the same time, allowed the liberation of subnational authorities from some constraints regarding their activity abroad. There seems to exist an academic consensus, or something approaching consensus, on this. It goes with the acceptance that there is a process afoot by which international relations have been replaced “as an academic subject, and also as a reality” by what is sometimes called “global politics”.

Many considerations favour this trend. One of the most significant is, probably, that it offers more flexibility to deal with a globalized market. Regions till now within states could be ideal structures to build efficient networks for economic growth. This is the perspective adopted by Manuel Castells, for instance. And I have heard Scotland quoted in this context, I don’t know with how much fundament.

Coming back to the constitutional field and the Galician case, it has to be said that the real situation has departed considerably from the clear-cut position of the Constitution. This has happened through a process of constitutional development by the Estatutos themselves and also by the jurisprudence of the constitutional court. The creation of a number of “faits accomplis” has also been utilized to further this process, more in Catalonia, I would say, than in Galicia. Pushing at the edge of what is strictly legal has created situations on which no going back has occurred.

The Spanish Constitutional Court, in a Ruling of July 1989, declared null and void an agreement concluded between the Department of the Environment of the Galician government and the Environmental Protection Agency of the Government of Denmark. The Ruling carried the dissenting vote of four of the twelve members of the Court, and was amended, if only by implication, in a Ruling of May 1994, which declared that “in order for the functions that have been allocated to it to be properly carried out, an Autonomous Community must carry on certain activities, not just beyond its own territorial borders but also beyond the territorial limits of Spain”. This has become the “locus classicus” for

the discussion of the subject of legality of international activities carried out by the Autonomous Communities.

Another aspect of the linkage of sub-state authorities to the world of treaties is the adoption of measures for the implementation of international conventions and agreements. While the Statute of Autonomy of Galicia does not specifically mention such competence, in contrast with the Statutes of many other Communities in Spain, it does not seem to forbid it. A similar situation occurs in respect of the right to receive information on international agreements, absent in the Galician Statute and present in some other.

The practice of being represented as part of the Spanish delegation in international negotiations affecting Galician interests has also being recognized, although it can still create frictions in particular instances.

It would be perhaps in order now for me to make a brief description of the main lines of Galician presence in foreign relations. Allow me to refer to the White Paper on the Foreign Action of Galicia published by the Xunta (the Galician Government) in December 2004 and drafted by a team in which I had the honour to participate. The Government of Galicia was at that time of a very different political composition, but the White Paper was designed to be non-partisan and of potential utility for any future administration. In it can be found much information which I cannot possibly cover here. An English version of the White Paper is available at the Igadi website (www.igadi.org).

Geopolitics

In geo-political terms, Galicia is, along with Portugal and South-Western Andalusia, part of the Atlantic face of the Iberian Peninsula. Its ties with the Spanish state determined that the strategic possibilities of such position were developed in line with Spanish foreign relations and the alliances and conflicts that Spain maintained with other countries. The strategic value of the Galician coasts reached its peak during the long period of imperial rivalry between Spain and England.

In the circumstances of the modern world, the Galician coast is no longer a focus of strategic conflict. The South Atlantic is now more problematic than the North. This is recognized in the new territorial deployment of the Spanish armed forces and particularly in the new deployment of the Navy.

A certain disparity between the coast and the inland areas appears to have been corrected by the improvement of communications with the rest of the Peninsula. This should contribute towards the expansion of a supplying hinterland for the vanguard of the Atlantic bulkhead of the Galician ports. This could reduce the relative marginalization of Galicia.

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From another point of view, the demographic one, the Galician community displays more negative economic indicators than Spain as a whole. It has the greatest number of the elderly, and its birth-rate is one of the lowest in Europe. The population shows a high degree of dispersion, with over 30.000 population centres and seven centres of more than 70.000 inhabitants. Given the drive for economic development, it seems that Galicia could be open to an immigrant population, which might be, to a large extent, of Galician origin, i.e. coming from the Galician Diaspora.

Geographical priority areas

European Union

In this area, it is the task of the Galician Government to promote, coordinate and maintain Galician interests in the European sphere and, more specifically, in the European Union.

The Galician Government is committed to the European regional movement and participates in the Committee of the Regions. It participates also directly in several Committees of the European Commission and is a member of the "Atlantic Arch". Coordination with the authorities of the central government at this level is established through the Conference of Affairs Related to the European Communities and the sectorial conferences Internal Partnership Arrangement.

Northern Portugal

This is a theoretical and practical priority in the field of Euro-regional infrastructures (roads, railways, utilities, telecommunications, etc.). These projects are administered through the Galicia-North of Portugal Working Community. The

Euroregion has been one of the most successful within the INTERREG programme, and also one of the main users of structural funds. Its future seems to be dependent, to an extent we cannot yet determine with any precision, on the future of such funds in the enlarged Union and on the fact that the INTERREG Programme itself is being phased out.

Latin America

The importance of some Latin American countries as places of settlement of the Galician diaspora for over a century, and the emotional and intellectual close relations with those countries, give Latin America a very special place in any Galician vision of the world.

The action undertaken by Galicia in Latin America, and more specifically in the Mercosur zone, is quite extensive. Galicia became a link between Mercosur and the EU through the mandate received by the then President of the Galician Government from the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions of Europe in 1997. As a signatory to the Memorandum on Cooperation of the Latin American Integration Association, and also a member of the Multilateral Accord among a set of Southern Brazilian States and Argentine provinces in the North-Western borders (CODESUL-CRECENEA), a dense network of political will to cooperate has been established.

Some lines of action

1. Interregional cooperation

At the bilateral level, in addition to the arrangements relating to Portugal, there is Galician cooperation with diverse regions of France, Italy and Poland. In the multilateral sphere, Galicia participates in the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, and in particular in its Atlantic Arch Commission, in the Assembly of European Regions, the Association of European Border Regions, and the Conference of European Local and Regional Authorities, a subordinate body of the Council of Europe.

2. Support for the internationalisation of Galician companies

In a context of market globalisation and the progressive opening up of the Galician market, it is important to increase the number of export companies, diversify the markets and consolidate the international presence of the sector. Public and private players arrange consultancy and training activities in subjects related to foreign trade and explore possibilities for obtaining aid, whether local or international, for the commercial promotion or direct establishment in third countries.

3. Cooperation to development.

The adoption by the Galician Parliament in 2003 of the Cooperation for Development Act was an important step in the consolidation of the decentralised form of helping development in the world. It was preceded by the appearance of associative forms such as the Galician Fund for Cooperation and Solidarity. The Fund gets its resources from budgetary assignments of the Galician councils and other local administrations, and finances, in all or in part, aid programmes in many countries, most of them in Latin America, but also in Portuguese-speaking African countries, such as Cabo Verde.

Relevant Galician institutions

In the Galician Executive, the responsibility for external relations is attributed to a General Secretary, who reports directly to the President. His Department is not one of the ministries or *Consellerías*, but is organically included in the Presidency. It has also a General Direction of Cooperation and Development. The former Ministry of Emigration has become another of the Secretaries of the Presidency.

In the Galician Parliament a non-legislative Standing Committee for European Affairs has been created.

In the administrative organigram of the Galician autonomous community, it is also necessary to highlight the overseas role of the following entities:

Galician Institute of Economic Promotion (IGAPE), with representative offices abroad. Orientated towards attracting foreign investment and providing support for business opportunities, logistics aid and physical support in order to assist the overseas expansion of Galician firms.

Galician Exports (FOEXGA), and organization of fairs and exhibitions (Expo-Galicia). General Board of Tourism. Ge

Concluding remarks

I would like now to make some concluding remarks, with a view to the future.

The first prospectus of this Conference includes in this first session a reference to the possibilities that international institutions, and in particular the European Union, may offer to our countries.

Well, let me tell you that I believe that there has been much misguided enthusiasm about the project of European federalism among historical nationalities without state. Nobody doubts that we, Scots and Galicians, are Europeans. What else could we be? But European culture is something very different from the political project initiated after the Second World War with the encouragement of the United States (and this has to be said, because is very often ignored).

The traditional states look as they were to be still for a long time the main players in Europe, and in practice we have now a double dependence, from Madrid and Brussels, in our case. And it is worth noticing that the political class is the same in both centres of power. As are the same the ways of access to power and the party systems. The distance from the centre of decision, another of the main pillars of the nationalist discourse, has not diminished. The subsidiarity principle is infringed every day in the communitary practice. The EU is still politics as usual and not the Kingdom of Heaven.

The defence of a cultural identity has been an essential part of nationalism, and I feel it could be lost or severely damaged in the promotion, well planned and well funded, of an European common culture, necessitated, as they say, by the single market. A word of caution is in order here, I think.

On the other hand, we have to be realistic. The European Union is what we have, and we have to work with it and try to use it in our best interests. The economic benefits of the Union have been obvious in our infrastructures, but should not be uncritically accepted as manah, and are not going to last for ever.

Let us go back to the concept of paradiplomacy that I referred to earlier. The fact that there might be more players in the international field does not mean that things are going to be easier for any of them. On the contrary, the game is going to be more difficult and complex. That our nations without state are going to be heard does not mean that they will, always and all of them, win. There are serious conflicts of interest between regions, and in those conflict there will be winners and losers. To cite two examples, let us remember fisheries and the dairy industry.

We have to be prepared to work in this new field with realism . Diplomacy will still be needed in paradiplomacy. And, as someone has said, European paradiplomacy is a heavy cocktail.

Galicia, the Galicia that Galician nationalists proclaim, has always wanted to be a nation in the world. And the EU can interpose between Galicia and the world, imposing regional protectionism in the economic field and cultural imperialism. A Scot in the waiting room of 10 Downing Street has expressed this recently in not uncertain terms, speaking about poverty in Africa.

The other, not unrelated aspect, I want to touch upon is that of the Diaspora. As a result of massive emigration of Galicians in the past, there is now a Galician Diaspora, largely but not exclusively in Latin America. Diasporic Galicians, who are still called sometimes emigrants, although most of them have been living in their countries of settlement for two or more generations, are called to play an important part in the external projection of Galicia. And more than that, I dare to say that they could be a significant element in the shaping of a future world, more realistic and more promising than that of regional blocs territorially defined. I am talking about a multi-layered global system than can still open a horizon of hope to our distressful world. And my best wishes go to Scotland and Galicia playing a rewarding role in that global system.

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