The Western Mediterranean Islands and the Diverse Uses of Independentism

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Abstract: Since they promote separation from national frameworks, independentist parties are easily labelled as anti-system parties. This contribution shows how a study of party dynamics in three Western Mediterranean island jurisdictions (Sardinia, Balearic Islands, and Corsica) leads to a rather different conceptualisation of their nature and influence. Political parties favouring independence are still likely to influence other political parties and the political system as a whole. They do so mainly by adopting an accommodative strategy, which is often ambiguous and involves use of various resources. This strategy relates to their great difficulty to attain and/or maintain a significant party status and electoral presence. Above all, the independentists' influence is highly variable, is especially significant on their closest rivals, and can only be evaluated correctly by taking into consideration external factors, such as state organisation. Thus, one needs to pay more attention to the independentist parties' political interactions and impacts on policies, than just to their teleological dimension and ideological positioning.

Introduction

The political situations of Sardinia, the Balearic Islands and Corsica confirm two major conclusions of the literature relating to island territories. On one hand, insularity is a feature that is especially conducive to original legal and political arrangements (Watts, 2000). These three regions all have their own institutions, which makes them noticeably different from other territories of the same level. On the other hand, cultural uniqueness is a powerful predictor of the autonomy of insular territories (Olausson, 2007: 136–140). Indeed, these three regions retain one or more vehicular languages that are specific to them, understood by the majority of the population and very present in education and the media. However, while the territorial authority of Corsica (CTC) has only special administrative competencies, the two other territories enjoy a broad range of regional legislative powers.

This does not mean that the region-state relationship is unanimously challenged. For example, no ethno-nationalist party has attained the dominant party status that the Basque Nationalist Party and the South Tyrolean People's Party hold or could have held. Yet, nationalist mobilisation is an unavoidable feature of these political systems. Since the first regional elections held in today's constitutional frameworks,[1] nationalists have rallied between 3.1 and

17 percent of the vote in Sardinia, between 8.4 and 21.5 percent in the Balearic Islands, and between 9 and 35.7 percent in Corsica. Moreover, in Sardinia and the Balearic Islands, nationalist parties are regularly members of regional governments.

These nationalist mobilisations are structured by three major types of internal cleavages. These can be, first, ideological. If we consider the two major nationalist parties in the Balearic Islands, the *Partit Socialista de Mallorca-Entesa Nacionalista* (PSM-EN) leans strongly to the left, while *Unió Mallorquina* claims to be centrist and to promote liberal economic policies.[2] Next, the lines can be drawn along means employed. In Corsica, some parties, such as *Corsica Libera*, support the use of political violence, while others, such as the *Partitu di a Nazione Corsa*, are opposed to it. Finally, distinctions can be made according to institutional purposes. The three regions have parties militating in favour of strong autonomy, but also parties advocating independence. Here, we will focus on the latter, and limit our discussion to organisations that can be considered representative, which we understand to mean that they meet three conditions: (1) they have a stable organisation, (2) they have candidates in elections across all of the regional territory, and (3) they have elected representatives in a number of local communities.

In the case of Sardinia, we will focus on the *Partito Sardo d'Azione* (Psd'Az), which appeared in 1921. The other Sardinian independentist organisations (*Lega Sarda*, *Sardigna Natzione Indipendentzia* (SNI), *Indipendentzia Repubrica de Sardinia* (IRS), etc.) have never become representative. Beyond its long history, the Psd'Az is the only organisation studied here that has changed its political identity by abandoning the autonomy on which it was founded. In 1981, its statutes were amended to make its objective to "lead Sardinia to independence."

With respect to the Balearic Islands, we will look at the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC). It is a multiregional party which appeared in 1931 in Catalonia, but which changed its political platform between 1989 and 1992, reorienting itself towards "the independence of Catalan countries." This involved setting up structures and operations in each of the three Catalan-speaking autonomous communities (CCAA) – Catalonia, Valencian Community and Balearic Islands – as well as in the French area of "Northern Catalonia." In the Balearic Islands, voters were first able to choose the ERC in the 1993 national elections.

With regards to Corsica, we will look at the *Cunsulta di i Cumitati Naziunalisti* (CCN), which was formed in 1980, and the six parties that directly succeeded it up to *Corsica Libera* (2008). The high number of changes was due to two dissolutions by the Council of Ministers and a number of splits and mergers. However, despite the organisational heritage, the political identity has remained similar. On one hand, all of these parties have conveyed the discourse and legitimized the violence of the clandestine *Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale di a Corsica* (FLNC). On the other hand, despite fluctuations in discourse, their goal has always been to achieve independence.

Beyond the three cases which will be studied, the purpose of this contribution is to investigate the nature and influence of independentist parties. These ones are easily assimilated with anti-system parties. Since it denies that a community and territory belong to a national whole, an independentist party "does not share the values of the political order within which it operates"

(Sartori, 1976: 133). The least that can be said is that independentist parties, owing to their radical nature, would strongly increase the polarisation of the political system.

Through the cases of Sardinia, the Balearic Islands and Corsica, we want to show how this point of view is partial, even simplistic. Depending on the resources that they can and choose to mobilize, independentist parties have very different forms of influence, and the conditions in which their influence is exercised are even more diverse. Trying to analyse it by looking only at states' institutional policies seems to be insufficient (Lynch, 2003), and here we will make it our priority to look at regional political systems.

We will begin by presenting the genesis of these parties. Then we will examine their impacts on other state-wide and nationalist parties. Finally, we will try to propose a more interactional approach to their influence on political systems.

So different and yet so much the same

The origin of these independentist movements flows from very special situations, and the organisations that we are analysing have very different features. Nonetheless, several elements of convergence can be identified.

Parties that cannot be compared?

Beyond the use of political violence, which is a feature only of the Corsican movement, the differences separating the parties studied here are many and striking. First, let us look at the historical context in which these independentist organisations were born. The cases of Sardinia and Corsica are relatively easy to compare. On one hand, these two regions are relatively depressed in economic terms: they arose from the failures of modernisation attempts that were initiated in the 1950s. In Sardinia, the *Piano di Rinascita* ("Rebirth Plan") was far from able to help the island catch up with the northern and central areas of the Italian mainland (Soddu, 1992). In Corsica, the agricultural and tourism development policies did not result in the desired changes, but generated much frustration by favouring groups of people and companies foreign to the island (Dottelonde, 1987). On the other hand, these cases are similar in that independentist feelings resulted from processes of radicalisation within autonomist organisations. In 1976, nearly all of the founders of the FLNC were members of the pro-autonomy party, the *Azzione per a Rinascita di a Corsica* (ARC). The ARC leaders' refusal to embrace more radical demands and means caused a split. In contrast, in the Psd'Az, the evolution was internal. An independentist and pro-Third World tendency developed in the 1960s (Ortu, 1998). It was unable to take over the party, but independentism continued to grow until the change in statutes in 1981.

The ERC's emergence in the Balearic Islands has a more external cause since it is an offshoot of a multiregional organisation created in Catalonia. The region in which it emerged is also very different, since it is one of the most prosperous in the state. However, the emergence of independentist feelings can also be related to forms of development. The tourism industry combines the creation of strong added value (41 percent of the GDP) with high social and

environmental costs, and this combination generates antagonistic political representations (Amer, 2009).

Second, these independentist parties appeared in three very different institutional contexts. France remained a state with no real regional authorities, in which a senior civil servant held executive power in the department and checked local decisions *a priori*. Sardinia had been enjoying autonomous status since 1948, which gave the Region very broad legislative powers. However, the regional political class was very subordinate to the state, which had substantially limited the exercise of autonomy. On one hand, only a very small share of competencies and resources were transferred. On the other hand, the Constitutional Court greatly constrained the scope of regional powers (Guarino, 1973). Finally, the Balearic Islands has enjoyed effective legislative autonomy since 1983, but belonged to the CCAA with the fewest competencies. For example, until 1996, they were the only CCAA with an official regional language that received no transfers for education.

Third, with respect to ideology, the ERC is the only one that has always strongly identified itself with a pole, namely, the left-wing one. Until the fall of the communist block, Corsican independentists could also be placed on the left, through their ideal of "original socialism." However, this never motivated electoral alliances, and did not mask a wide array of opinions, which led to the rejection of any firm position.

More unstable, the Psd'Az has undergone a number of identity changes. Originally, it sought "a future in which production belongs to the workers" (Sotgiu, 1977). After World War II, it underwent a split concerning its historical left-leaning values, and its new moderation allowed it to become associated with a number of regional Executives headed by the Christian Democratic Party. When the independentist change occurred, it repositioned itself on the left, which made it possible for its leader to preside over three regional Executives in the 1980s. Nonetheless, a new shift began in 2001, when the Psd'Az moved away from the left, which was considered too statist. This accelerated after the 2006 legislative elections, when its leader entered a personal alliance with *Lega Nord*, a radical right-wing party. This initiative gave rise to major conflict, but it was validated. Since the 2009 legislative elections, the Psd'Az has been integrated into the centre-right pole, which allows it to once again be part of the regional Executive.

Fourth, the rallying cry of independence cannot hide a broad range of institutional purposes. Today, *Corsica Libera* is the only one party advocating classical secession and acquisition of all the attributes of sovereignty. The ERC also argues for complete rupture with the state, but in the framework of unification of Catalan-speaking countries. It is thus an irredentist platform.

Surprisingly, the Psd'Az portrays independence as compatible with maintenance of structural links with Italy. Its conversion has flowed much more from the failure of the regional autonomy than from a clear aspiration to full sovereignty (Accardo, 1998: 103). Initially, this aspiration was symbolic and part of the perspective of a Europe of regions (Hepburn, 2009). However, in the mid-2000s, disillusion and competition with SNI and IRS strengthened the independentist position, which would become truly concrete through a confederal pact with

Italy. Such a pact is assimilated with independence in that it would be based on the sovereign will of the Sardinian people expressed by a specially elected constituent assembly, and would recognize Sardinia as a nation and state.[3]

Decisive convergence

To begin with, what is in question is three territories where integration into the nation-state was based on connivance among local elites, the nation's political class and operators of the state apparatus. Elites were brokers and purveyors of public goods that gave them virtually unchallenged political control, but also guaranteed that local populations would be loyal to the central government. This connivance made strong discrimination impossible, and emigration movements were revealing less of its failure than of its capacity to deliver resources. The forms that this kind of political practice takes (pork barrel politics, violence, arbitrariness, etc.) have been described in some detail in the cases of Sardinia (Birocchi, 1998), the Balearic Islands (Peñarubbia, 1991) and Corsica (Lenclud, 1986).

Such connivance systems have been much more efficient than segregational ones when it comes to building national loyalty. No insular territory placed in the former situation has achieved independence, in contrast to many territories in the latter (Malta, Jamaica, Mauritius, etc.). Within the European Union, 22 island regions have been governed through connivance (Fazi, 2010), but only the three considered in this contribution have representative independentist organisations.

Next, independentist parties have generally been formed long after autonomist ones, which appeared in 1917 in Majorca, in 1921 in Sardinia and in 1922 in Corsica. It was not until the early 1980s that representative independentist parties emerged in Corsica and Sardinia. In the Balearic Islands, the ERC for long periods won less than 1 percent of votes cast, and it did not become representative until 2007.[4]

Representative independentist parties came late both to territories more prosperous than the national average (Balearic Islands) and to disadvantaged territories (Sardinia and Corsica), which relates to the impact of economic factors on nationalist movements. In these cases, the independentist turn seems to flow much more from the weaknesses and contradictions of autonomist parties.

Finally, the parties in question all endorse progressive strategies, which makes them "accommodating anti-system parties" (Capoccia, 2002: 28). On one hand, this reveals that the populations in question are disinclined to adopt extreme solutions. On the other hand, this favours integration of these parties into their respective political systems, even when they support the use of violence. In the end, this flows from the nature of the party system, especially from the level of fragmentation. Before these parties ran their first candidates, the level of party fragmentation was high in the Balearic Islands, very high in Sardinia and extreme in Corsica.[5] This was conducive to the emergence of these parties, but also conditioned their choice of strategies.

First, this was the case with respect to alliances. We are not dealing with isolated organisations. Autonomist parties have been the Corsican independentist parties' only official

allies. This occurs in nearly half the regional elections (1986, 1987, 1992 and 2004) and more than half of the legislative elections (1986, 1993 and 2007). Their support for clandestine violence has prevented any other possible alliance.[6] In contrast, in 2007, the ERC was an integral part of the centre-left pole that came to power, even though few of its candidates were elected.[7] Finally, both before and after its independentist turn, the Psd'Az has often been a central player in the Sardinian coalition-making game. It has participated in many regional Executives (20 on 47), and even chaired three of them.

This was also the case with respect to institutional positions. On one hand, all of the parties studied here temper their positions regularly, as if their political aims could be declined in a number of ways depending on the circumstances. For example, in an institutional debate in the Corsican Assembly in March 2000, independentists supported a motion to grant only few territorial legislative powers. Here, we again find the necessary "need for ambiguity" because clarity and constancy would be more risky (Rudolph & Thompson, 1985: 308–309). On the other hand, none of these parties advocates immediate secession. They demand above all, for the benefit of the groups they represent, recognition of the sovereign right to decide. The Psd'Az even rejects any confusion between independentism and secessionism.

Independentist parties and their rivals

By adopting extreme centre/periphery positions, independentist parties undermine the legitimacy of membership in the national community, introduce new stakes into the political arena and increase the level of partisan competition. Consequently, they tend to enhance the polarisation and denationalisation of their party systems. Thus, the presence of regional parties in governments significantly increases instability (Brancati, 2005). In this section, we will analyse the principal impacts of independentist parties on other parties at the regional level and from a one-dimensional perspective.

Independentist parties and state-wide parties

While state-wide parties (SWP) remain dominant everywhere, the emergence of independentist parties influences them at various levels. First, they can have interest in adopting some independentist themes, which can be powerful political resources both when competing with other SWP and when trying to reduce the impact of independentists. Thus, the *Partit Socialista de les Illes Balears* (PSIB) made clear gains between 1995 and 2008, as it made its positions on institutions and identity more radical.

More generally, some independentists' special themes are broadly shared in the three regions. The official program of today's Sardinian President, Ugo Cappellacci, an ally of Silvio Berlusconi, called Sardinia a "nation with its own territory, history, language, traditions, identity and aspirations, all distinct from those of the Italian nation" (Cappellacci, 2009: 51). Corsica is an even more surprising case since the dominant parties were opposed to the very idea of special status. In 1983, one year after the first regional elections, the Corsican Assembly unanimously demanded compulsory teaching of the Corsican language. In 1988, it

affirmed the existence of the Corsican people, and demanded framework legislation to promote its rights.

Second, SWP can adopt dismissive, accommodative or adversarial strategies; in other words, they can ignore independentists, they can adopt independentists' most widely accepted ideas in order to marginalize them, but they can also criticize them strongly in order to capture the voters who are most opposed (Meguid, 2005). They can thus reduce or increase the polarisation of the party system.

The latter occurred only in Corsica, between 1983 and 1988, when clandestine violence and state repression had greatly increased. In contrast, the presence of independentist parties very often generates tensions within SWP, between advocates of accommodation and those in favour of adversity. These internal tensions are conducive to fragmentation, and to the creation of new territorial parties. The Balearic Islands have not been affected by this phenomenon, while Sardinia has been to some extent since the 1990s.

Table 1: the territorialisation of the Sardinian party system. Regional elections 1984–2009

		1984	**1989**	**1994**	**1999**	**2004**	**2009**
State-wide parties		85.6%	87%	86.9%	80.1%	71.5%	78.5%
Territorial parties	Total	14.4%	13%	13.1%	19.9%	28.5%	21.5%
	PsdAz	13.8%	12.4%	5.2%	4.5%	3.8%	4.3%

On the contrary, Corsica has been strongly marked by this since regionalisation. In regional elections, the number of divisions within SWP is impressive,[8] and the political arena is highly territorialised.

Table 2: the fragmentation of state-wide parties in Corsica 1982–2010

	1982	**1984**	**1986**	**1992**	**1998**	**1999**	**2004**	**2010**
Total number of lists	17	10	12	13	15	12	19	11
Lists arising from divisions of state-wide parties	6	1	4	5	3	4	9	2

Table 3: the territorialisation of the Corsican political system 1984–2010[9]

			1984	**1986**	**1992**	**1998**	**1999**	**2004**	**2010**
State-wide parties			78.1%	73.8%	58.7%	64.6%	47.7%	42%	65.1%
Territorial Parties	Total		21.9%	26.2%	41.3%	35.4%	52.3%	58%	34.9%
	Nationalists	Total	11.4%	9%	21.1%	17.3%	23.4%	14.9%	27.8%
		Independentists	5.2%	-	-	5.2%	9.8%	-	9.4%

Yet, the creation of territorial parties can result simply from elected officials who are dissatisfied with their positions, or who see an opportunity to free themselves from the party framework so as to compete in elections more efficiently. For example, in 2004, the deputy Paul Giacobbi, unable to unite the Radical Party of the Left (PRG), created *La Corse en marche*. These splits, often fleeting, are easier to legitimize on the basis of territorial issues than on the basis of the personal ambitions of those involved.

Independentist parties and other nationalist parties

Independentist parties are especially likely to influence more moderate nationalist parties. According to Rabushka and Shepsle, when the ethnic factor is "salient," radicalisation appears unavoidable (1972: 86). Thus, nationalist parties are a sub-system in which the polarisation is naturally lower than at the level of the whole, at least with respect to identity and institutional issues. Nonetheless, on these political "scales" (in Downs' (1957) sense), there are also centripetal and centrifugal pressures. An autonomist party may see interest in becoming more radical in order to win over some independentist voters, or in distancing itself from independentism so as to target broader support.

In the three regions that we are studying, the increase of polarisation is rare at the level of institutional demands. However, relations are often strained in these party sub-systems.

In Sardinia, the Psd'Az suffers from its position as a highly institutionalised party with fluctuating ideological and institutional positions. On one hand, the IRS has always been based on a deep rejection of the Psd'Az, which it judges too moderate. On the other hand, the Psd'Az has undergone two major internal splits owing to socio-economic issues. In 1999, Efisio Serrenti, who had been elected President of the Regional Council thanks to votes from the right, was excluded from the Psd'Az, and created the *Sardistas* Party. In 2009, following the Psd'Az's decision to ally itself with the centre-right, a large minority of party members created the *Rossomori* Party.[10]

However, the strong influence of the Psd'Az on the other nationalist parties is by default. It is unavoidable, but in no way claims to unify Sardinian nationalists. Its objective is at a higher level, as can be seen from its membership today in the regional majority.

In the Balearic Islands, left-right bipolarisation is more salient, and we have to consider the sub-system of parties with ideology leaning furthest to the left: all of the parties concerned support programs based on self-determination, ecology and identity. This sub-system is changing in a centripetal manner at the level of positioning, but it is strongly subject to fragmentation. The ERC plays a major role at these two levels.

At the level of positioning, the ERC seems to have clearly influenced the other parties through its central themes: catalanism and independentism. Thus, the Secretary General of the PSM-EN claims to be personally in favour of independence and a confederation of "Catalan countries,"[11] and *Esquerra Unida* (EU) and its successors have been giving more and more support to the right to self-determination over the last ten years.

At the level of fragmentation, after long playing an insignificant role, the ERC equalled its nearest competitors in the 2004 European elections. So it became an unavoidable player in the construction of a left-wing alternative to the PSIB. Nonetheless, this alternative left has suffered a succession of splits and mergers[12], and five parties now present similar political platforms. This has led the ERC to develop great ambitions: it initially demanded representation parity with a view to the 2007 regional elections.[13] Its relationship with the PSM-EN is particularly strained, which prevented electoral alliances in 2009 and 2011.

Table 4: the alternative left of the Balearic Islands. Regional elections 1983–2011[14]

	1983	**1987**	**1991**	**1995**	**1999**	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**
ERC	-	-	-	0.6%	0.3%	0.4%	-	1.3%
PSM-EN	6.8%	6.3%	8.5%	12.4%	11.9%	8.1%	-	-
EU (EU-*Els Verds* since 1999)	2.5%	2.6%	2.3%	6.6%	5.4%	5.5%	0.4%	-
Els Verds			2.1%	3.1%	-	-	-	-
Left coalition for Ibiza (EU-*Els Verds*, PSM-EN, PSIB, ERC)	-	-	-	-	4.5%	3.6%	4.7%	-
Bloc per Mallorca (PSM-EN, EU-*Els Verds*, ERC)	-	-	-	-	-	-	9.2%	-
Coalition PSM-EN, *Iniciativa-Verds*, *Entesa per Mallorca*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8.9%
Total alternative left	9.3%	8.9%	12.9%	22.1%	19.3%	15.3%	10.9%	10.2%

Given their support for violence, Corsican independentists raise different issues. However, autonomists have never really broken off relations with them, despite two notable attempts to distance themselves, in 1984 and 1998. The closeness is easy to explain: (1) political violence in Corsica is relatively moderate, and the first attacks were generally perpetrated by autonomist militants (Crettiez, 1999); (2) autonomists demand a model in which the state's presence would be residual; (3) both autonomists and independentists refuse to endorse any firm socio-economic position; (4) autonomists have never allied themselves with other parties at the regional level.

In the Corsican nationalist sub-system, the dynamic is thus normally centripetal. Despite their support for violence, independentists want to be integrated into decision-making. This is how their most progressive proposals can be interpreted: right to self-determination (1980s), overseas territory status (1994), devolution plan (2003), etc. The autonomists' moderation has historically caused them to lose many activists to independentists, and they seem to fear new losses.

The difficult quest for influence

In this section, we will try to develop a more interactional approach to the independentist parties' influence. First, we will show that their resources with the most obvious impact are electoral representation. Next, we will reassess their capacity for influence by looking at the choices of state-wide actors.

Electoral representation: a condition sine qua non*?*

Considering that their platform addresses fundamentally only one part of the population, the part that belongs to a specific cultural community, independentist parties can motivate the creation of parties based on the interests of the rest of the population. In the three regions studied, nothing of the sort can be envisaged because national integration has not created a strong enough cleavage between groups. Thus, socio-economic cleavages remain dominant. Since the establishment of regional institutions, the centre-periphery cleavage has come to the forefront only in the three debates on the reform of institutions in Corsica.

In fact, all of the parties studied here exert influence on the regional political system, but their influence takes very diverse forms. The clearest feature is the correlation between electoral representation (tables 1, 3 and 4) and the overall level of influence.

At the scale of the party system, notwithstanding the scope of the violence, Corsican independentists are the only ones whose structural impact is significant. Every SWP is affected by the polarisation related to the centre-periphery cleavage. The most strongly concerned is the PRG, which is divided into two factions, a regionalist one and a conservative one, that ran separately in the last two regional elections.

The Psd'Az has a widespread impact only in certain circumstances: during institutional debates and when the majority in the Regional Council is uncertain. Its ideological versatility makes it possible for it to swing the vote, as in 1999. Thus, its "coalition potential" and "blackmail potential" (Sartori, 1976: 122–123) gives it considerable influence.

Finally, the ERC has a strong influence only over the alternative left. Moreover, the impact of this pole on the two dominant parties seems to have been declining over the last 15 years. When we look at the elections, the evolution is clear; especially since the radicalisation of the PSIB in 1995, this party has largely appropriated the themes, and votes, of the alternative left.

Table 5: the balance PSIB/alternative left in the Balearic Islands. Regional elections 1983–2011

	1983	**1987**	**1991**	**1995**	**1999**	**2003**	**2007**	**2011**
PSIB	79.1%	79.2%	69.8%	51.6%	53.9%	63.8%	73.4%	69.2%
Alternative left	20.9%	20.8%	30.2%	48.4%	46.1%	36.2%	26.6%	30.8%

The influence of Corsican independentists is also higher at the level of the regional political agenda. Independentist parties are based on the defence of the interests of a community and the region that the community inhabits (Türsan, 1998: 5), and that this concerns principally: (1) the level of regional autonomy, (2) the regional language, 3) the status of members of the community through differentiated citizenship, (4) economic interests, which we will view through preferential tax schemes, and (5) the territory. In the case of Corsica, we also have to add the situation of activists imprisoned for resorting to political violence.

In Corsica, these six themes dominate most political debate. The only themes that compete with them are transportation, energy and agricultural policy.[15] An interesting example of their central importance is given by the shift in the regional majority since March 2010. It is correlated with a new agenda, and belongs to a context in which the two nationalist lists of candidates received 35.7 percent of the votes. Consequently, we can see that the measures adopted and proposed by the new left-wing majority consider the independentist issues more strongly than its manifesto did.

Table 6: the new Regional majority in Corsica and the independentist issues

	Manifesto	**Measures adopted**	**Measures proposed**
Institutions	Use the power to experiment and to propose normative adaptations	Legislative and regulatory powers Committee	Constitutional reform
Language	Plan for a « minimal practice » of the Corsican language ; quota on Corsican-speaking programmes in the public media	Regional department of Corsican language; charter of Corsican language with the territorial public service; « roadmap for Corsican language 2011–2014 »	"Territorial status of officiality" of the Corsican language
Citizenship	Real estate capital gains tax on non-residents' resales	Expertise related to a mechanism restricting real estate and land acquiring to the main residents	
Tax system	Increase in the regional share paid back from the domestic tax on petroleum products		Specific estate taxation; specific taxation for lands reclassified as urbanisation areas
Territory	Public ownership of 50% of the coastline ; denunciation of speculation ; regional land agency ; taxation of transactions exceeding 300 000 € in coastal areas	General states of land; observatory of land and property markets; urban and sustainable planning agency	Taxes on motor homes and moorings; addendum to the urbanism code establishing anti-speculative measures
Prisoners		Motion requesting the transfer of Corsican prisoners in the island	

In the other regions, independentists' special themes are much less often on the agenda, even though independentists participated in the coalitions that came to power in 2007 and 2009. In the Balearic Islands, the only independentist priorities taken into consideration by the PSIB

have been language and territory. However, they are specific to all the rest of the alternative left, and the policies that have been adopted far from satisfy them.[16] As a consequence, the ERC left the majority in December 2009. In Sardinia, President Cappellacci made strong commitments with respect to institutions, taxation and language. However, after 30 months, the Executive had still submitted no regional bill on these themes, and the new three-year plan on the Sardinian language was very disappointing to the Psd'Az.

At the level of decision-making, independentist parties' influence is thus even weaker, even in Corsica. The issue of institutions shows this clearly. Despite long-standing, strong consensus on deeper autonomy, Sardinia's status has not been reformed. In the Balearic Islands, the last reform of the status (2007) excluded the alternative left's fundamental demands: the obligation to know the regional language and a more advantageous tax system. Finally, the French Constitution continues to prevent recognition of the Corsican people, official status for the Corsican language, granting of legislative powers and institution of Corsican citizenship.

Thus, the most influential independentist party is the one with the stronger electoral representation, and it is also the only one that supports the use of violence. Yet the effects of violence are ambiguous: it is a factor that encourages polarisation because it generates both accommodation and adversity, and it has hindered the institutionalisation of the independentist party by preventing it from participating in coalition-making. Finally, Corsican separatism is perhaps above all the one with demands that are furthest from being satisfied. The paradox is only apparent. As Connor indicated (1973), nationalism is fed both by adversity and by concessions. The other condition that is essential for the influence of Corsican independentists would thus be the gap, which is larger than in the two other territories, separating the regional political situation from the independentists' ideals. This gap would tend to increase mobilisation, and would attract the protest vote (De la Calle & Fazi, 2010: 413–414). Consequently, the other players would have every incentive to seek new compromises.

The ascendancy of state-wide actors

The impact of separatism can be analysed appropriately only if we take into account national institutions, SWP strategies and the choices of the central government. First, the decisive nature of the general forms of decentralisation is especially visible in Corsica. Independentists' influence on the polarisation of the political system is stronger, but this flows largely from an external factor: the centre-periphery cleavage is much deeper in Corsica. However, this results from constitutional and political constraints on territorial differentiation.

On one hand, the powers of the CTC are much weaker than those of its counterparts because they remain only administrative. In contrast, since the return to democracy, there was deep consensus on the idea of political autonomy for Sardinia (Cardia, 1992) and the Balearic Islands (IEB, 1998). On the other hand, not only does the French Constitution prohibit making the Corsican language official, but the level of knowledge of the regional language is lower in Corsica. In 1998 in the Balearic Islands, 72 percent of inhabitants said they could speak Catalan (CIS, 1998), which has been official since 1983. In 2007 in Sardinia, 68

percent of inhabitants said they could speak one of the regional languages (Oppo, 2007: 7–14). In 1999 in Corsica, only 43 percent of adults said they "spoke Corsican with those close to them" (Moracchini, 2005).

Second, the decisive role of SWP is particularly clear in the Balearic Islands, where fragmentation is lowest. While the alternative left is making its positions more radical, this is true less of the ERC than of the PSIB, which is the dominant left-wing party. Since 1995, the PSIB has taken great distance from the *Partido Popular* (PP), and has invaded the political space of the PSM-EN and the EU, denouncing corruption and environmental damage, and demanding competencies identical to those of Catalonia and the Basque Country, as well as the obligation to know Catalan, etc. This has been highly profitable in terms of votes (table 4).

Since 2009, this polarisation has accelerated because of the other dominant party, the Balearic PP, which has returned to the defence of the Castilian language. Before its 2011 regional victory, its leader had promised to abrogate norms adopted by PP majorities: the linguistic normalisation act (1986) and the "minima" decree (1997).[17] The expediency of this seems clear: when unemployment rose above 22 percent,[18] Catalan language support policies hindered the integration of immigrants,[19] most of whom speak Castilian.[20]

The increased polarisation among the majority parties tends to marginalize the entire alternative left. Its support remains crucial to the PSIB, but it seems to be losing influence. During the 2007-2011 mandate, its major demands (regional police and an environmental tax to be paid by tourists) were thus rejected or debates on them were adjourned.

Third, the choices made by the central government are of capital importance. In particular, the institutional reforms that occurred in the Balearic Islands (1994, 1999 and 2007) and Corsica (1982, 1991 and 2002) were all initiated at the state level. Note also that the proportional electoral systems which tend to favour independentist parties, but their details modalities have major repercussions on the strategies. In Italy, the presidentialisation of the system in 1999 generated a strong polarisation which limits the freedom of the Psd'Az. Its initial choices, which consisted in establishing a nationalist block (2001) and then running alone (2004), were huge failures. It was thus virtually condemned to join one of the two major poles in 2009.

In the case of Corsica, the 2009 reform increased the thresholds of eligibility and merger, as well as the majority bonus. However, the results have been ambivalent for independentists. On one hand, there has been the elimination of a number of regional parties, whose voters seem to have spoken largely in favour of nationalists in 2010 (table 3). On the other hand, the independentists, like the autonomists, have lost their best potential allies because the SWP still refuse to enter into any form of coalition with them.

Conclusion

This contribution shows the gap between the vision according to which independentist parties are anti-system, and the reality that can be seen in Sardinia, the Balearic Islands and Corsica. In these regions, while independentists influence other parties and the political system as a

whole, it is mainly by adopting an accommodative strategy, which is often ambiguous and involves use of various resources.

Table 7 is an attempt to summarize the findings. It shows the extreme diversity of the parties in question, as well as their limitations. Attaining and/or maintaining significant party status is very difficult for them, especially since their ability to form alliances is often hindered by their support for violence (*Corsica Libera*), by the fact that they have too weak representation (ERC), or by the fact that they are too versatile (PsdAz), which makes them seem unreliable.

According to our three cases, the level of political party influence is strongly correlated to electoral representation. However, this cannot be evaluated correctly from a simple, one-dimensional perspective. Such contextual factors as state organisation, electoral systems, SWP strategies, public opinion, and social context need to be suitably considered in order to undertake a more thorough and satisfactory analysis. Notably, as the Corsican case suggests and all other things being equal, an independentist party will not have the same impacts in a deeply unitary state and a highly decentralised one. It appears that, in a democratic framework, the larger the gap between the independentist purpose and the political/ideological structures, the larger would be the potential extent of opportunities.

Table 7: nature and impacts of independentist parties

	PsdAz	***Corsica Libera***	***ERC***
Electoral representation	Weak	Medium	Very weak
Ideological positioning	Variable	Indifferent	Strong
Institutional design	Confederalist	Secessionist	Irredentist
Coalition potential	Strong	Weak	Medium
Direct political rivalry	Medium	Very strong	Very strong
Influence on the polarisation of the party system	Weak	Strong	Insignificant
Influence on the polarisation within the ideological pole	Insignificant	Insignificant	Very weak
Influence on the polarisation among nationalist parties	Very strong	Very strong	Very strong
Influence on the regional political agenda	Medium	Strong	Weak
Influence on the policy-making	Weak	Weak	Insignificant

Independentist parties are likely to exert a relevant influence on political systems. An extensive media coverage of independentists' favourite issues may lead to overstate the concrete impacts of their action. In the Western Mediterranean islands, the independentists' influence is frequently partial, even when they are part of the Regional executive. They are much more able to increase polarisation and fragmentation among nationalist parties than to determine policy, let alone achieve complete sovereignty. Thus, our approach suggests that

the teleological dimension of independentist parties is not as significant as their political interactions and their impacts on policies. This course of action may be more fruitful, especially when the supporters of independence only comprise a small percentage of the population.

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[1] The first regional elections took place in 1949 in Sardinia, 1982 in Corsica, and 1983 in the Balearic Islands.
[2] This party dissolved in 2011.
[3] National bill proposal No. 8, Modification of the Constitutional law No. 3 of 26 February 1948 (special status for Sardinia), by the councillor Planetta, 26 August 2010.
[4] No ERC candidates were elected in the 1995 elections. The ERC had two municipal councillors after the 1999 and 2003 elections (*La Veu Republicana*, No. 3, February 2005).
[5] We will speak only about parties which are represented in the regional assembly and/or which obtained 2 percent or more of the votes; we have used Rae's index of fractionalisation (1967). We obtain: 0.67 for the Balearic elections of 1991; 0.77 for the Sardinian elections of 1979; 0.87 for the Corsican elections of 1982.
[6] After being elected to the Corsican Assembly in March 2004, two candidates, who had been victoriously elected thanks to nationalist votes, immediately stepped down.
[7] The ERC won one representative at the Parliament of the Balearic Islands, one at the Council of Majorca, and 11 in the municipalities.
[8] If the leader has already run under the banner of a SWP, we consider that there has been a split.
[9] Corsica uses a run-off system since 1992. Only the first electoral round is considered here.
[10] In the 2009 regional elections, *Rossomori* won 2.5 percent of the votes and one representative.
[11] Interview of Biel Barceló, *Diario de Mallorca*, 13 October 2010.
[12] In 2006 a minority of the PSM-EN founded *Entesa per Mallorca*. In June 2010, EU was renamed *Esquerra Alternativa i Verda* by its majority, while the minority founded *Iniciativa d'Esquerres*. In November 2010, the latter merged with *Els Verds*, founding *IniciativaVerds*.
[13] *Diari de Balears*, 3 July 2006.
[14] The figures in italics are approximate.
[15] In the strict sense, employment does not come within the competence of the Region.
[16] *La Veu Republicana*, No. 14, January 2011.
[17] *Diario de Mallorca*, 8 October 2010. The purpose of the normalization law is to ensure that the use of Catalan is "effective" in all aspects of public life, make it a vehicular language of instruction, and support its use in all areas of communication. The "minima" decree imposes use of Catalan for at least 50 percent of teaching time in public schools. President Bauza's announcement generated major internal criticism. He responded that he was really only targeting the decree, which would lead to teaching being offered uniquely in Catalan in the majority of schools (*El Mundo*, 8 October 2010).
[18] During the first trimester of 2010.
[19] Between 1998 and 2009, the main resident population increased by 37.5 percent.
[20] In 2009, the unemployment rate was 13 percent for native Balearic Islanders, 15 percent for those from other CCAA, and 28 percent for those from other countries. According to the CIS survey (1998), 31 percent of respondents who were not born in the Balearic Islands had language difficulties when they arrived in the islands.