

FRI-ONLINE-1-ESIS-04

EXPLANATORY MODEL OF SEPARATISM IN EU MEMBER STATES³⁰⁵

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***Abstract:** The paper introduces an explanatory model of separatism by identifying factors which catalyze/suppress separatist phenomena. The model discloses the impact of 13 factors in 3 EU member states. The analysis is based on the approach of social constructivism and on the application of methods such as theoretical analysis, desk research, comparative analysis, diachronic analysis, PEST analysis, and case study analysis. In addition, the methodology is applied at the three levels of the paradigm of multilevel governance in the EU.*

***Keywords:** separatism, secession, political self-determination, EU multi-level governance*

***JEL Codes:** F50, F22, Z10*

INTRODUCTION

Separatism is one of the most complex phenomena in political science and also **one of the least studied**. At the same time, the practice of separatism has becoming even more topical for research. The number of emerging states, and of communities seeking for political self-determination has been growing. According to some researchers the frequency of secessionist claims has more than doubled during the last century (Fazal, 2018). Sambanis et al. (2017) point out, that the number of self-determination groups in 120 states in the period 1945-2012 is 464 – two times more than the data of their previous research. According to Perez, separatist movements nowadays exist in almost all liberal democracies (Perez, 2014). One of the reasons for the limited research of the phenomenon is that its first salient manifestations are related to the 1970s. Since then most of theories of separatism have appeared. They are basically focusing on two questions: 1) when secession of a territory (as a goal of separatism) is legitimate from the point of view of international law and 2) when secession of a territory (as a goal of separatism) is justified from moral point of view, and considering the potential of the newly created state to survive.

Separatism in EU member states is a particularly relevant phenomenon for research because of two basic reasons. Firstly, the EU takes a leading position in social-and-economic development. Seven out of ten cities with best quality of life in the world are located in Europe. EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and other conventions have been signed to guarantee the protection of human rights.³⁰⁶ Cultural diversity in Europe is being widely encouraged, if we refer to the motto of the European Union ‘United in Diversity’. A basic goal of the EU is to reduce the gap between its rich and poor regions by its Cohesion policy. These values have their practical implementation. Nevertheless, the paradox is that in regions of EU member states separatist claims are being voiced. Therefore, the goal of the current paper is to identify factors of separatism in France, Belgium and Italy, states, which had laid the foundation of European integration. The study refers to the above-mentioned paradox, and elaborates on the question which factors cause the upheaval/decline of separatism. It investigates three basic groups of factors – **political, economic and socio-cultural**, at

³⁰⁵ Докладът е представен в секция Европеистика и международна сигурност на 29 октомври 2021 с оригинално заглавие на български език: ОБЯСНИТЕЛЕН МОДЕЛ НА СЕПАРАТИЗЪМ В ДЪРЖАВИ-ЧЛЕНКИ НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ.

³⁰⁶ Such documents are: the **European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**, 1987 г.; the **European Convention on Human Rights**, 1950; the **European Social Charter**, 1961 (revised in 1996)

the three governance levels of the EU: **subnational, national and supranational**. The findings will be based on comparative analysis.

Separatism and related concepts

Separatism can be defined as *an ideology of a group of people with a common identity within a country, aiming at different levels of political self-determination*. According to the classification of Alexis Heraclides cited by T. Goumenos (Goumenos, 2015) there are three types of separatist movements:

- ✓ **secessionist movements**, aiming at independent statehood;
- ✓ **autonomy-seeking** separatist movements—aiming at a degree of territorial self-rule sort of statehood (from limited autonomy to federal status);
- ✓ **irredentist movements** (“secessionist-merger” movements)-seeking not to create an independent state but to join a (neighboring) existing state.

Many authors try to distinguish arguments, or introduce a variety of criteria which would make secession legitimate from the point of view of international law, on the one hand, and practically plausible – on the other. Existing theories of separatism, though, set many barriers to secession, as again on the foreground comes the attempt by all means to keep territorial integrity of the existing state, and to allow secession only if no other measures turn effective. As most legitimate from the point of view of international law are considered secessions based on violation of human rights of the population of the seceding unit, or those caused by illegally taken territory in the past. Claims for secession based on other criteria are considered more or less problematic – or there are other limitations which they would satisfy in order to be considered legal. More contemporary theories consider acceptable secession of territories which would be politically and economically viable as independent states. And still, secession is admitted somewhat as “means of last resort” – only when all other options have been exhausted. Federalization is one of the means which is commonly accepted as effective to prevent from secession.

The first researcher, who proposes a large-scale classification of theories on separatism is Alen Buchanan. He states that the theories on secession should give us answers which correspond to international law and to other practical considerations. He divides the theories in two basic types: *primary right theories* and *remedial right only theories* (Buchanan, *Theories of Secession*, 1997). Other authors call the primary right theories *direct territorial claims* and the remedial right only theories are also called *just-cause theories*. According to primary right theories a minority group can secede from the parent-state even without any injustice is exercised upon the group – provided that secession responds to certain criteria (Buchanan calls them “*minimal realism principle*”). The leading criterion among these is **acceptability by the international community**. The just-cause theories limit the right to secession to the cases when the group has experienced repeated historical grievances – like systematic violations of their human rights (here he gives an example with the Kurds in Iraq) or when they have been forcefully deprived of their territory. The just-cause theories Buchanan considers more legitimate in the face of international law. According to these theories, secession is considered “a remedy of last resort”, when no other measures at national level turn out to be effective in keeping the state territory intact. Lea Brilmayer put further limitations to the just-cause theories: according to her, the claimed historical grievance/unjustly taken territory could be preceded by other grievances; in this case, advantage should be given to unjust actions, done in the nearer past (previous injustices should be neglected) (Brilmayer, *Secession and Self-determination: A Territorial Interpretation*, 1991). Again, she gives priority to the principle of territorial integrity, to keeping the status quo.

Further, the primary right theories can be divided into **national, attributive, associationist and plebiscitarian**. **National Primary Right Theories** argue that “*the right to self-determination does not attach to individuals... but is held collectively, by nations. Its justification does not rely on*

liberal arguments of individual rights, but on the groups themselves, and the role that national membership has for individuals” (Buchanan, *Theories of Secession*, 1997). **Attributive Primary Right Theories** again claim on the collective right to secede – but the accent is on the **common attributes** these peoples share - historic, geographic, ethnic, economic, linguistic, or religious bonds. The right must be exercised for the right reasons, i.e. to secure conditions necessary for the prosperity and self-respect of the group (Margalit, 1990).

Associationist theories provide for a looser interpretation of the right to secede – they allow it not only for nations but also for other collectives which are not necessarily nations. Such theories are presented by Christopher Wellman (Wellman 2005a), Andrew Altman and Wellman (Altman and Wellman 2009), David Copp (Copp 1997; Copp, 1998) and Daniel Philpott (Philpott 1995; Philpott 1998). Here can be referred also the **plebiscitarian theories**, for which a plebiscite or referendum is a condition enough for the group to justify secession. Alen Patten is trying to introduce a middle course between the democratic plebiscitarian theory and the remedial right to secession. According to him, the ordinary plebiscitarian theory is rather tolerant to separatists – meaning it is “*too permissive*”. In his hybrid theory he sets 5 additional criteria, apart from the plebiscite, which the group has to satisfy in order to be eligible for secession – the first criterion is that citizens of the secessionist unit should have “*a valid claim*” on the territory of the unit (Patten, 2002).

Daniel Philpott says that “*out of the colonial context, self-determination is not a right, but is considered by most specialists in international law as subject to the principle for territorial integrity*” (Philpott, 1998).

In defence of territorial integrity, Harry Beran in his *Liberal Theory of Secession* points out that the right to secession should not be given to a group which occupies an area which is “*culturally, economically or militarily essential to the existing state*” or an area which has “*a disproportionately high share of the economic resources of the existing state*” (Beran, 1984).

In the more contemporary theories there is the reverse tendency: secession is practically plausible if the newly created state would be **politically and economically viable** (Brilmayer, *Secession and the Two Types of Territorial Claims*, 2015). Valentina Gentile also justifies the right to secession solely to the politically viable groups within the territory of the state плебисцит (Gentile, 2014).

Among the non-permissible conditions Beran points out another argument in defense of the territorial integrity of the parent state: he considers secession should be allowed only when the seceding territory “*occupies an area not on the borders of the existing state so that secession would create an enclave*” “ (Beran, 1984).

Modern theoreticians also support this: M. Seymour calls such minority groups “*contiguous diasporas*” and differentiates between “*national minorities*” and “*minority nations*” (Seymour, 2007). Matthew J. Webb considers the right to secession from a liberal state a contradiction (*Is There a Liberal Right to Secede from a Liberal State?*) by pointing out several arguments in defence of his thesis (Webb, 2006).

As most effective means to prevent from secession and keep the territory of the existing state intact some authors propose federalization. Alen Buchanan (*Buchanan, Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec*, 1993), as well as Neera Chandhoke (Chandhoke, 2012), propose the borders of the ethnic groups to turn into borders between federal units within the existing state. Margaret Moore opposes the referendum against federalism as means for opposing the separatist movements. She considers federalism a realistic means which could in reality prevent attempts for secession. According to her, “*there are a lot of measures for internal autonomy or federal measures, which allow for various degrees for collective self-determination,*

and in most cases, in which the group is seeking higher degree of self-determination from relatively just states, these are exactly the measures, sought by the group” (Moore, 2020). Raliza Jekova summarizes that almost all successful federations are liberal democracies (for example – Canada and Switzerland), while the federations which have dissolved, have, as a rule, functioned within an authoritarian political system (as an example she gives the USSR and former Yugoslavia) (Жекова, 2011). In the last case a federation favours secession, instead of keeping the state away from dissolution.

To summarize, the **normative approach to secession** attempts to set criteria for the cases where secession is considered *legitimate* and / or *moral*. Attempts to extract empirical evidence so far are related to: proving a *legitimate* (as defined by international law) right to self-determination of the group wishing to secede; demonstration of *historical injustice* related to systematic violation of the group's human rights or illegal occupation of territory (in decolonization context of); proving the validity / invalidity of the *plebiscite* as a means of political legitimacy of the seceding group; proving the *viability* of the potential state; *decentralization measures* as suppressing attempts for secession - including an appropriate form of federalism (Kornazheva, 2019).

In general, these theories seek to legitimize the right to secession; they are looking for a way to make this right internationally recognized, rather than trying to explain the reasons for the emergence of separatist movements. This is exactly what we are trying to achieve - to explain the factors which catalyze/suppress separatism in European Union member states.

The research focuses on **three EU Member States with** linguocultural communities having separatist claims. As the research involves **the three levels of EU multi-level governance** – subnational, national and supranational, only founding member states have been selected. This has been done in order to focus on the fact that even in countries-initiators of the integration process, the integrity of the state can be put into question.

Other criteria for selection are, as follows:

1) **geographic location:** one Northern country (Belgium), one Southern country (Italy) and one from the mainland core of the continent (France);

2) **size:** two of the countries have a large territory (France and Italy) and the third - Belgium – is a small one;

3) **form of government:** parliamentary republic (Italy), semi-presidential republic (France) and constitutional monarchy (Belgium), as well as system of **government** - Belgium is a federation, France is a unitary state, Italy is a combination of unitarity and federalism (there are 5 self-governing regions with special statute);

4) **political goals of the separatists:** the separatists in the selected countries pursue diverse political goals: mainly (cultural) autonomy (France), secession and autonomy (Italy), secession and irredentism (Belgium).

Based on the analysis of 3 groups of factors which catalyze/suppress separatism – economic, socio-cultural and political at the three levels of multi-level governance, the research offers an explanatory model of separatism.

Factors Impacting Separatism in the EU: Explanatory Model

1) Economic factors

1.1. Factor *Economic imbalances between the regions at subnational level*

In different historical periods, separatist phenomena can be observed **in both economically developed and in less developed regions.**

Industrial revolution on the continent began in Belgian regions. However, the economic boom only **exacerbated regional inequalities**, with **Wallonia profiting most** (as well as Ghent and Antwerp), while West Flanders experienced deindustrialisation as a result of the irreversible decline of traditional linen industry.

After the Second World War, **Flanders made up** for lagging behind in its industrial development, and **in the 1960s became the richest and most dynamic province**, while Wallonia lagged behind due to the outdated coal industry inherited from the 19th century. In the period 1949 - 1958, **Flanders had practically monopolized all the production.** The process ended around **1960 with a change in the economic balance between the two regions.** With its modern production, the Ghent-Antwerp-Brussels triangle was about to displace the Sambre-Meuse line with their declining heavy industry (Бич, 2008).

Currently Flanders provides for 60.12% of Belgium's gross domestic product (GDP) (Eurostat, 2020). In 2018, the Flemish GDP per capita in purchasing power parity is equal to 119% of the EU average (for comparison, for Belgium the percentages are 117%).

Eurostat data on the level of gross domestic product for 2019 for the **French regions** with separatist phenomena show a lower level compared to the regions in the rest of mainland France. (Eurostat, 2020): For comparison, the northern regions of France without separatism - all with over 32,000 euros of GDP (Eurostat, 2020).

Minder compares separatism in Spanish Catalonia to Northern Catalonia in France. While Catalonia is the richest part of Spain, *Pyrénées-Orientales* (Northern Catalonia) remain among the poorest departments in France and, according to him, the reasons for the separatist movements here are mainly cultural (Minder, 2016).

Stefano Piperno notes **that although they possess their own resources, the Italian Special statute regions are continuously misusing them in sectors, common with the regions with ordinary statute** - thus leaving the central government to perform the functions which have been granted by means of the special statute of the regions (Piperno, 2000).

Conclusion: *separatism in developed and in less developed regions vary in the ultimate goals of separatists: in more developed regions they seek for secession or irredentism, while in the less developed regions they are seeking for more autonomy. Separatist phenomena are the result of considering the issue of fiscal autonomy as resolving an injustice. From the point of view of the richest regions, it is unfair for them to sustain the poor (who, they believe, do not work hard enough); from the perspective of the poor, the unfair situation is the general economic inequality.*

1.2. Factor *Economic turbulences and business cycles at national level:*

The years 1992-1993 are most often viewed as the worst recession in the **Belgian economy** since the Second World War. In 1991 the Flemish parties withdraw from government, thus announcing the so-called at that time "*alert signal*"³⁰⁷ (Бич, 2008). In 2011, the country emerges from the crisis. In the period 2011 -2013 separatism in Belgium declines. After the Second World War, **mainland France** recovered quickly, unlike the peripheral regions. The Corsican problem emerged in the 1960s, and Breton parties blocked streets and railways. Agriculture was affected by the same fever of adaptation and change as was industry. It had to meet the requirements of the Common Market. Large-scale industrial agriculture was not in difficulty; but poor agriculture - that

³⁰⁷ According to the Constitutional amendment from December 1970, whenever one of Belgian Communities considers that its interests are threatened by a bill, it can request the suspension of the bill. The procedure is known as an alert signal. In this particular situation in 1991, the Flemish ruling parties are showing their discontent by withdrawing from the government.

of Southern, Central, Western France - has found it very hard to adapt to the new market conditions. Barren fields were abandoned because they were no longer profiting their owners. The state took the initiative to consolidate agricultural production, which was met with hostility in Brittany (Микел, 1999). In contrast to the post-war period, France handled the global economic crisis from 2008 better than other countries. The period of the global crisis is characterized by decline of separatism.

In 1984 **Italy** becomes the leader of the countries within the European Common Market, but at the same time it had to deal with a huge public debt (93% of GDP in 1987). It is in the 1980s when the majority of Italian regional separatist parties were created. In the early 1990s Italy is already on the verge of bankruptcy. In 1990-92 the most influential separatist party - the Northern League - was established by unification of several regional parties³⁰⁸. In 1992, the budget deficit and government debt reached 10.2% and 108% of GDP, respectively; the pound has to leave the European monetary system (Мицза, 2007)

Conclusion: *in periods of economic growth, separatist phenomena decline. In periods of recession, separatist phenomena increase (as well as in periods of growth, when growth does not affect separatist regions). Recession is viewed by separatists as inability of the national government to deal with economic problems. Thus, separatism is a claim for secession as means to resolve these problems.*

1.3. Factor *Economic policies of the European Union at supranational level:*

In **Italy**, the creation of a common market is perceived as a negative factor by regional economic subjects. The progressive reduction of barriers to international trade has exposed Italian companies to fierce competition, which has affected in particular those regions in the Italian Northeast and Center that have relied strongly on others in traditional manufacturing sectors. Conversely, the Northwest and the South have found a way out of the situation by turning to more flexible production, further specialization, and the search for higher quality (Krieger-Boden, Christiane (Ed.), 2003).

In **Flanders**, on the other hand, the creation of the **EU Common Market (1992)** was perceived positively (mainly due to the fact that Flanders because of its geographic location has managed to attract foreign investors and develop international trade), and during this period separatist phenomena declined. The creation of the Customs Union (1968) and the removal of trade barriers also led to decline of separatism in Belgium.

In **France**, the decisive factor for catalysing separatist movements is **EU regional policy**, which is strongly mediated by the national level of governance which favours central regions at the expense of peripheral regions.

In the case of an old country such as France, the europeanisation of regional policy runs counter to existing national traditions - in this case in the form of nationally controlled territorial planning. Here it clearly represents the tension between strong national traditions and the evolving Europeanisation of EU regional policy (Cole A. R., 2012). Compared to other EU members, the French state has tried to maintain strict guidelines for regional-European interactions, for example by the activities of its Central Planning Agency, DATAR (in French - *Direction à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'régionale*³⁰⁹). This state agency keeps control over key policy instruments. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the central administration has opposed the development of

³⁰⁸ The Northern League was created as a federation of six regional parties from Northern and North-central Italy, including Liga Veneta, Lega Lombarda, Piemont Autonomista, Uniu Ligure, Lega Emiliano-Romagnola and Alleanza Toscana. They became the founding national sections.

³⁰⁹ Directorate for territorial planning and regional actions (author's translation)

a European regional policy, which was perceived as a potential competitor to the national territorial management policy.

In **Italy** redirecting EU **structural funds** to the new member states after the Southern enlargement in 1986 created conditions for proliferation of separatism. In terms of impact of investment, the Community's contribution to the four largest beneficiaries - Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal - was significant, equivalent to an average of 8% of capital formation, ranging from 5% in Spain, 13.5% in Portugal, 16% in Greece to 17% in Ireland (Dall'Erba, 2003). After the accession of these countries to the EU, European funding started shifting to them, as a result of which Italy remained in the background. These changes strengthened the anti-European rhetoric of the separatist parties in Northern Italy, resulting in their unification into the Northern League in 1990-1992.

The Maastricht Treaty led to the creation of the *Cohesion Fund* as a new source of funding regions at European level. In a similar manner, the main objective of the *Cohesion Fund* was (again) to help the four poorer EU countries (Greece, Spain, Ireland and Portugal) to overcome the difficulties they faced in transitioning to a monetary union (Dall'Erba, 2003).

In the 1990s the implementation of the *Common Agricultural Policy* created preconditions for conflict between Northern and Southern Italy because mismanagement of projects and violating EU quotas in agricultural production led to financial sanctions, which were applied to the whole country. The Northern League claimed that the central government has paid EU fines for the southern producers, and thus the North is compensating for the South for their inefficiency and inability to comply with the rules of Common Agricultural Policy (Giordano, 2004). In other words, the economic factor at the supranational level leads either to decline or to upheaval of separatist phenomena.

Conclusion: *If the regions inhabited by linguocultural communities relevant to this study are financially neglected in the context of certain common EU policies, then separatist phenomena are getting more intensive.*

2) Socio-cultural factors

2.1. Factor *Communities with specific linguocultural identity at subnational level:*

This factor can be divided in two components: (1) recognition/lack of recognition by the other linguocultural communities within the parent state (or by the majority of the population) and (2) demographic growth / decline of the community.

As far as **the demographic growth / decline** of a community is concerned with separatism, the demographic trends themselves depend on internal and external influences. For the purposes of this study, we consider it as a factor influencing separatism, in view of the empirical data collected.

In Belgium there has been a major shift of population balance with two basic waves of increase of population in Flanders. The first wave took place in the 1880s (the establishment of universal suffrage in the 1880s with more than one vote for some categories of voters increased the electoral weight of densely populated Flanders). The second wave came after the Second World War **when there was a decline in the coal industry in Wallonia, which gradually caused aging population of Wallonia.** The rapid economic recovery after the Second World War and the modernized Flemish industry and foreign investments led to a **displacement of the population in Flanders** and in the post-war period more than half of the kingdom's population already lived there (50.2% in 1947, 51.2% in 1961), while Wallonia already has a third of the population (34.5% in 1947, 33% in 1961), with the remaining 15% being residents of Brussels. The natural growth of the Walloon population is already one of the lowest in the world, due to the high mortality rate

associated with aging and despite the influx of foreigners (277,000 in 1961) with a high birth rate (Minority Rights Group International, 2020) .

These changes in the population balance reflected in the attitudes of Wallonians towards the Flemings, and vice versa. With the unification of Wallonia and Flanders in a single Belgian state in 1830 the Flemings were a minority. At the same time, Wallonians were trying to impose the French language over the whole country. Since the Flemish language (which is a local version of Dutch) was not standardized at that time, the Wallonians regarded the Flemings as inferior and their language – as a dialect. With the 1963 constitutional reform, Dutch, French and German were already the official languages in Belgium. However, the problem of ethnic discrimination has not been easily resolved (Billiet et al, 2006 cited by Toharudin, 2010) . In addition, the Flemings believe that their rights have been violated in Brussels itself, especially due to the shortage of Dutch-language schools³¹⁰ (Toharudin, 2010).

For linguocultural communities in centralized **France** (Bretons, Catalans, Corsicans, Basques) is typical that their identity coexists on equal grounds with French national identity. Thus the Corsican identity is probably the most interesting as it has gradually shifted from Italian to French and after that- to "super-French" - with a sense of superiority over the population of mainland France. In the XVIII century when Corsica was annexed to France after being part of the Republic of Genoa, France was better off than Genoa. So, the Corsicans easily adopted French identity. After the First and especially – after the Second World War, however, the Corsicans were disappointed that the French state had ignored the island in terms of its needs for economic recovery. These events, according to Loughlin, gave strengthened being somewhat different and special, without thoroughly rejecting their French identity. Thus, they started feeling „**super French**“ (Loughlin, 1987).

The Directorate-General for French and Other Languages in France (DGLFLF) presents a 1999 study on the use of regional languages in France:

Table 1. Usage of regional languages in France.

Regional language	Number of people who use it regularly	Number of people who use it casually
Catalan	170 000	80 000
Corsu	170 000	70 000
Basque	80 000	50 000

A small-scale study from 2011 shows a continuing downward trend in the use of languages by linguistic and cultural communities in France. According to the survey, 93% of French citizens speak exclusively French; 82% of them grew up speaking French; only 0.6% speak their regional language or a foreign language; 75% grew up speaking a regional language at home; 42% currently speak only French, and 33% use their regional language from time to time.

Another study shows that, in terms of Basque, only 21.4% are bilingual and speak both French and Basque (the survey notes that the younger people are, the more likely it is that they are did not grow up speaking Basque at home). The results are similar for the Catalan language (Zulato, 2020).

The declining use of regional languages can be explained by **demographic trends**. Manuel Wolff explains that urban depopulation in France is underestimated and therefore - understudied phenomenon. According to Paulus, many of the country's small towns have trouble keeping their population (Paulus, 2004). According to a 1999 census, compared to 1990, one third of small towns

³¹⁰ Flemings are a minority in the Brussels region, which is geographically a Flemish enclave

are affected by this phenomenon (Julien, 2000). This is why urban shrinkage in France appears to be a “quiet process” that is rarely commented at national level and poorly analyzed (Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2009). In contrast to national analysis, regional reports show declining population in some French regions (INSEE³¹¹ Champagne-Ardenne, 2005; INSEE, 2010).

These demographic trends are not new, and give rise to certain attitudes from the French state to depopulating regions. On the one hand, they are systematically being neglected in terms of economic development. On the other hand, with time certain attitudes have developed from the majority of the population of mainland France to the population of the peripheral regions. The region of Brittany is a case in point. After the French revolution, the peninsula gained a bad reputation of a place of poverty and superstitions, of alcoholics and backward people. Till the first half of the XX century in newspapers and sometimes – even in official speeches, the French mention „the Breton savages“ or a colonized people who has to be „enlightened“ by the French civilization (Микел, 1999).

The demographic tendencies in **Italy** are similar today, as an ISTAT³¹² survey shows. According to the survey, the number of Italian citizens residing in the country decreased by 677,000 from 2014 till 2018. Another study of the National Agency indicates that this trend continues in 2019. According to the survey, 2018 ended by decrease in the local population by -1,5 per thousand people. Only **5 regions, all of them in Northern Italy, show a demographic recovery**, led by Bolzano (6.4 per thousand inhabitants), followed by Emilia Romagna and Lombardy (2.4 and 2.1 respectively) and finally Veneto and Trento with less than 2 per thousand inhabitants. The decline in Southern Italy – mainly Molise and the Basilica, as well as in Sardinia and Sicily - is particularly concerning. The situation in Liguria and Piedmont, the two Northern regions where the decline in population is the strongest, is also evident. Emilia Romagna, the most attractive region in terms of migration flows, stands out along with **Bolzano, Liguria, Friuli Venezia Giulia and Lombardy for the highest overall migration balance in Italy** (Neri, 2019)

Demographic factors at the national level are basically related to the periods of mass migration from South to North. The first such period was after the Second World War, when the accelerated modernization of the economy led to radical changes in the Italian society. In less than twenty years, millions of farmers from the South abandoned their land in order to move to the cities in the North or go abroad. Southerners were met in the North as foreigners bringing the worst vices with themselves. Thus, with after the Second World War, if it was common to point out the qualities of the Italian worker, originating from the provinces of the North (they were considered hardworking, modest etc.), the worker from the South was less valued from his Northern counterparts.

The next mass migration from South to North took place in the 1980s, when the population of the South quickly abandoned their jobs - mainly in agriculture, in search of a permanent and well-paid job in Lombardy, Veneto or Emilia-Romagna. In 1995 these regions hosted 35% of the immigrants. These changes at national level once again catalyzed the North-South divide, which led to the gradual development of negative attitudes of the citizens of the North towards the citizens of the South (the latter often called by the abusive word *terroni*, which were often discriminated in employment and other social spheres).

Conclusion: *The factor linguocultural communities with specific identity influences separatism in two ways: firstly, conflicts between communities with a specific linguocultural identity are due to the lack of recognition of the equality of these communities. Some linguocultural communities face discrimination from others. Separatism takes*

³¹¹ National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies – France (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques)

³¹² International Institute of Statistics (Italy)

place in both the discriminating and the discriminated. But separatist phenomena are more common in communities with a sense of cultural superiority. This is due to a desire on the part of these communities to stand out from others, which they consider „less civilized “. Secondly, separatism is increasing with the demographic growth of the respective communities. Separatism in growing communities is a claim for secession or merging with a neighboring country to which the cultural community belongs, under the influence of irredentist ideas. Separatism in dwindling communities has humble claims – such as claims for preserving the linguistic rights of the community or preserving their cultural autonomy by keeping a distinct name of the region/locality.

2.2. Factor Nations with linguocultural identities at national level:

Here two types of national identity can be distinguished, depending on the duration of the construction of the national identity: long-term and short-term identity. Depending on the duration of construction of this identity, it is differently perceived by the linguocultural communities and contributes in a different way to the pursuit of constructing their regional identity.

French history has had an exceptional impact on the cultural and political development of Europe. Jeanne d'Arc was the leader of the first powerful national movement. In France the absolute monarchy obtained its most extreme form, and the French Revolution marked the beginning of the attempts to restructure the world.

All the French contribution to European history leads, on the one hand, to the acquisition of prestigious international identity. Due to these facts and due to the lengthy history of the country (difference with Italy and Belgium), the citizens of France are proud to call themselves French, and the **national identity here is normally stronger than the regional one.**

Ever since the French Revolution, France has been "**One and Indivisible**", and the various identities and territories can only be considered folklore peculiarities, but definitely not political entities. A certain exception is the region of Brittany, where recent studies show that regional identity is as strong as the national identity (Cole A. R., 2015). Even the population of Corsica which is considered to possess the most distinct regional identity from all the French regions, has gradually developed an identity which can be defined as "super-French" (Loughlin, 1987). The referenda in New Caledonia – an overseas territory of France – in 2018 and 2020, respectively, are very indicative for the pro-French feelings of the citizens of France. In both referenda the population voted in favor of staying in France. In the second case, a larger turnout was observed (www.mediapool.bg).

According to Luigi Barzini's interpretation, it can be concluded that **Italy** is "*a society of thousand years and a very young state, inspired by foreign models.*" (Barzini, 2001). The motherland of Italians has a short history as a united state and there are opinions that it has not yet reached the expected level of consolidation in economic, administrative-political or socio-political sense. It is worth mentioning that upon the unification of the country only 2.5% of the population spoke standard Italian, and the republic in its current form is inhabited by over sixty million people - mostly Italians, but also Sardinians, Tyroleans, Slovenes, Albanians and French. However, the country's outstanding contribution to world history and cultural heritage leads to the building of a **national identity with international prestige**, which is generally stronger than the regional one. This is where the Renaissance was born, and Rome has long been the center of the European Catholic world, leading to the city's late accession to a united Italy in the XIX century.

As the Italian journalist Ricardo Venturi points out, if the identity of Italian citizens is to be graded, it can be said that the national identity is the strongest, followed by European identity, and regional identity comes last. The latter carries a more intimate dimension of identification within the state itself, and is not so much used by people to present themselves outside the country (Venturi, 2019).

Belgium is a very specific country compared to the other two. It was created as early as 1830 as a buffer state to prevent from the growing French influence. So from its very creation the history of Belgium is the history of its regions. From the very beginning even most of the Great powers of the time were skeptical about its long-term existence. Therefore, it is difficult to define what are the exact components of a “Belgian identity”. The weak national identity gives grounds for separatists to claim their own national identity which, according to them, has the potential to become a counterpart of Belgian identity at the international stage.

Conclusion: *When a nation possesses a long constructed linguocultural identity which enjoys international prestige, such as the French one, separatism is a claim to recognize the specific (regional) linguocultural identity as standing on equal grounds with the national identity. The problem separatism seeks to resolve, is **cultural inequality upon the axis community-nation.***

When a nation possesses short-lived constructed linguocultural identity, which still enjoys international prestige, such as the Italian identity, separatism is not due to a nation-community conflict.

When a nation has a short-lived linguocultural identity that does not have an exclusive image at the international stage, this fact as a problem which separatism is trying to resolve. The separatists seek to secede from the territory of the nation-state, claiming that they can create a state with an identity that can gain international prestige.

2.3. Factor European identity at supranational level:

European identity can be assessed by measuring the degree of self-identification of citizens as Europeans compared to other cultural self-identifications – national identity and identity of the linguocultural community. European identity (associated in particular with the EU) is perceived as desired by linguocultural communities due to the fact that the EU opposes any discrimination on national or linguocultural grounds.

According to a 2016 research, Walloons feel more European than the Flemings. Therefore, Walloon separatism is more cosmopolitan than Flemish. According to Anna Brigevich, who is citing Moreno's study, the relationship between Walloon regional identity and Belgian national identity is less tense, compared to the relationship between Flemish regional and Belgian identity. In Belgium, the ranking of self-identifications is as follows: 43.19% of the Flemish respondents feel as much Flemish as Belgians. Only 6.4% feel only Flemish. 42.5% of Walloons feel as much Walloons as Belgians. Only 3.26% feel only Walloons.

Anna Brigevich defines Walloon identity as an identity of a civic type, based on inclusive values. A civic identity implies less ethnocentric and Eurosceptic attitudes. It weakens the sense of regional identity, as evidenced by the fact that there is no secessionist party in Wallonia which can conquer the popularity of Flemish separatist parties such as Vlaams Belang or the N-VA (New Flemish Alliance). As a result, **Walloon elites and citizens are considered less ethnocentric, more cosmopolitan and forward-thinking and more supportive of European integration** (Brigevich, 2016) For example, the Flemish separatist parties voted against at the referendum on the Maastricht treaty on the EU.

In France, the Breton case is indicative. The Bretons have multiple identities - regional, national and European identities co-exist in relative harmony. In France, only Bretons have a linguocultural identity comparable to national and European identity (the rest of the communities have stronger national and weaker regional identity). Moreover, Bretons identify with a united Europe more than any other linguocultural community in France. Brittany together with Alsace and Lorraine, were the two most supportive regions in France for the Maastricht Treaty as these three regions provided the positive vote at the referendum in 1992. Brittany was also the only

region that voted "yes" at the referendum for a Constitutional Treaty of the EU in 2005 (Cole A. R., 2015). This is the reason that Breton separatism is not so aggressive. Here, too, self-identification with Europe leads to suppression of separatism.

In **Italy**, there is no evidence that the ranking of identities is associated with stronger or weaker separatist phenomena. According to a 2012 research, high levels of identification with Europe occur in some of the rich, highly developed regions of the north, such as Liguria, Tuscany and Piedmont, but also in one of Italy's poorest regions, Calabria (Serrichio, 2012) . A 2009 report by the European Commission states that 68% of Italians say they feel European “ (European Commission's Representation in Italy, 2009). However, since 2012, there has been a progressive decline in identification with the EU for all Italians (due to migratory pressures), which they have long been viewing with great enthusiasm before.

Conclusion: *the weaker the self-identification with Europe, the stronger the separatist phenomena.*

3) Political factors

3.1. Factor Decision-making competences at subnational level In **Belgium**, a country with a federal political system, there is a wide framework of decision-making competencies at subnational level. However, this system in Belgium is very complex – the state consists of Communities, Regions and Language areas, and their boundaries do not coincide (Constitute Project, 2020). According the **3 Communities** are: the Flemish, French and German-speaking community. The **3 Regions** are the Flemish, Walloon, and the Brussels-Capital Region. The **4 Language areas** are as follows: the Dutch-speaking region, the French-speaking region, the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital and the German-speaking region. Apart from the lack of coincidence of the geographical boundaries of the Communities, Regions and Language areas, there is also a discrepancy in the delegation of decision-making competences. For instance, the German-speaking community is deprived of governing powers, while all the other Communities and Regions have their own Parliaments and Governments. On the other hand, the Brussels-Capital Region, a predominantly French-speaking "island" in the Flemish Region, has governing powers. The Constitutional amendment of 1970 introduced **parity of languages** in the Council of Ministers (equal number of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking ministers), regardless of the Prime Minister and State Secretaries (Бич, 2008). Despite the serious governing powers delegated to the Walloon and the Flemish region we can conclude that **the more the competencies, the more the separatist phenomena observed.**

In **France**, a unitary state, the regions inhabited by linguocultural communities have a limited number of decision-making competences at subnational level. After many administrative reforms, France currently consists of 18 continental regions, which include 94 departments. The departments are further divided into municipalities. The specifics here is that the regions do not have hierarchical power over the departments and municipalities. The political competences of the 18 French regions are traditionally limited and they **do not have hierarchical power over the other sub-levels** - the departments and the municipalities. In general, the French regions appear weak on most decentralization criteria: in the French parliament there is no shared lawmaking by a second chamber representing state interests (as in the case of Germany or some other federal states); there are no official enforcement mechanisms for executive control. In addition, French **regions have limited fiscal capacity- they depend on government transfers for more than 90% of their resources** and are severely limited in their ability to impose taxes (Cole A. R., 2015).

The separatist claims of French linguocultural communities are modest and relate to pure preservation of their linguocultural identity (with the single exception of Corsica). The regions themselves, due to their limited political powers, have no influence on separatist activities.

Italy is a unitary state in which, however, there are **5 regions with special statute**. By constitution, it consists of 20 regions. The special statute regions are as follows: Valle d'Aosta, Sardinia, Sicily, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia. **The special statute regions have certain autonomy in legislation, administration and finance**. But in spite of their fiscal autonomy these regions fail to effectively allocate the financial resources they receive. While in 1980 subnational governments reported for only 6% of total revenues, in 1997 this percentage rose to 11% (Piperno, 2000). It is indicative that most regional separatist parties emerged in the 1980s, and these movements declined after 1997.

The Special statute regions have a large number of decision-making competences than the Ordinary statute regions. Separatist movements are most typical for the Special statute regions - especially in periods when local self-government is not performing well (for example, in terms of distribution of financial resources). For instance, at the island of Sardinia there is an active movement that seeks to join Switzerland, although there are no historical or linguistic arguments to support this claim.

Conclusion: *Separatist phenomena are directly proportional to the amount of decision-making competencies at local level.*

3.2. Factor Drivers of political change aiming at secession/irredentism at subnational level

The Wallonian and Flemish separatist parties which are currently represented in the Belgian parliament, are 12. *Total for Belgium: 12 parties for two separatist regions (active currently)*. In France the registered number of political parties and movements in the 4 regions presented in the current research (Northern Catalonia, Brittany, North Basque Country and Corsica) are 15. *Total for France: 15 parties and movements for 4 regions*. In Italy the number of political parties and movements are as follows: in the Veneto Region - nearly 50; in Lombardy - 4, in South Tyrol - 5. Apart from the typical regionalist parties, separatist parties aiming at secession of Northern or Southern Italy, are: (Northern) League, Southern League, Padanian Union, etc. *Total of separatist parties and movements in Italy: over 70*.

Conclusion: *The number of parties with separatist ideologies is the largest in Italy. In France, the number of separatist parties is modest (on average, less than three parties per region) and there are generally no parties with ideology secession (most of them advocate cultural autonomy). Of the three countries, separatist phenomena have always been most pronounced in Belgium and Italy – the countries which account for the greatest number of separatist parties and movements.*

3.3. Factor State policies towards decentralization / centralization at national level

The type of change in the state structure affects separatist phenomena in various ways. For example, separatist phenomena in Belgium declined after the country officially became a federation in 1993, as well as after granting of additional fiscal autonomy in 2015, through which the regions developed their own strategies for regional development.

Separatism in **France** intensified after the reforms carried out by the state – they were assessed as disadvantageous for the linguocultural communities. For example, in 2016 the two regions Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrenees (Northern Catalonia) were merged by a state administrative reform into a bigger region called Occitania. Shortly after that, in 2017, separatists in Northern Catalonia actively supported the referendum in Spanish Catalonia (mostly by printing ballots) (Pearson, 2017).

In different periods, **Italy** pursues policies for centralization or for decentralization. In 2000, the state began a policy of partial decentralization. After this year, separatism in Italy declined. From 2009 onwards followed policies for fiscal decentralization (Perulli, 2013). As Baldini noted, the combination of **political culture, rather hostile to federalism**, and the almost unchanged political structure and ambiguous attitudes of the governing Northern League added for **limiting the impact of a 20-year reform (1990-2009)**. And although territorial have taken place many times from the unification of Italy, the **unitary architecture has never been changed** (Baldini, 2013). Thus, even after the fiscal decentralization policies of 2009, separatist phenomena were quite intense -mainly in the form of referenda: in 2013 – referendum for autonomy of South Tyrol, 2014 referendum for independence of Veneto Region, 2017 - referenda for more autonomy in Lombardy and Veneto.

At first glance, it seems weird that in Italy, after the implementation of partial decentralization policies, separatism temporarily declined, while shortly after the start of decentralization policies, it saw an upheaval. This is due to the fact that **decentralization policies in the country do not usually have the desired effect**, and therefore not well perceived by regions populated by linguocultural communities.

Conclusion: *National policies for centralization /decentralization have a temporary effect on separatist phenomena.*

3.4. Factor Policies directed towards the regions populated by linguocultural communities at national level

In **Belgium** the communities have the competence to draft their own regional development plans. They possess quite detailed and comprehensive competencies. As a result of five consecutive rounds of constitutional reforms – respectively, in 1970, 1980, 1988-1989, 1993 and 2000-2001, the following **powers were added** in the Constitution to the sphere of competence of the Communities: cultural issues, education (excluding the minimum standards for diplomas, beginning and end of compulsory education) and language use. Federal laws passed by a specialized majority add to the list of Community competences arts, youth policy, tourism, preventive health care and some sections of social assistance policy (Swenden, 2003). The additional fiscal autonomy granted in 2015 caused the decline of separatist phenomena.

In **France** the Regional development plans are drafted by the state without taking into consideration the opinion of local politicians who represent the linguocultural communities. This practice which continues today, was introduced the end of the Second World War, which then aimed at complete reconstruction of the country, but in which the peripheral regions were neglected (this fact affected particularly the island of Corsica where separatist phenomena started at that time). It is indicative that the first regional plans, which were drawn up for all French regions immediately after the Second World War (PAR program), provoked resentment from the regions. Apart from the lack of dialogue with the local authorities, these plans do not consider the regional specifics of the regions. Even the region of Brittany which was the first to obtain such a plan in 1953, also did not receive adequate assistance (Loughlin, 1987). This centralized trend in regional policy continued in the coming decades. In 2000, after prolonged discussions with elected Corsican representatives, the French government proposed a new law giving the island a special status, which would significantly expand its regional powers in areas such as planning, economic development and education. A key feature of the bill was the option of refusal or "derogation"³¹³ of a national law. The Constitutional Council ruled out that the provisions on experimental power to derogate national laws were unconstitutional (Minority Rights Group International, 2020). This led to upheaval in separatist behavior in Corsica: at the referendum, **51% of Corsicans voted against**

³¹³ Partial repeal of law

the French proposal for autonomy in 2003, against 49% who supported it (Voice of America, 2009).

In Italy, the drafting of regional plans and programs is not aimed at the needs of the regions and therefore is not well received by them. The first major efforts for reform of regional development were implemented by Franco Bassanini - Minister in the government of the then prime-minister Romano Prodi (1996-1998). Bassanini drafted a regional development program that introduced the principle of subsidiarity in the country. The laws that he introduced, known as **Basanini's laws**, provide for bureaucratic simplification and partnership between local actors and stakeholder associations in the management of public services. However, the result achieved, according to Perulli, was a mere reproduction of regional neo-centralism and bureaucratic patronage (with widespread corruption in public-private partnerships) (Perulli, 2013). In parallel with Bassanini's institutional reform, „*Programmazione negoziata*“ (**negotiation programming**) was being developed by the government. This was an Italian invention, where instead of dominance of public policies or public-private partnerships, greater role is given to inter-associative negotiated agreements (Perulli, 2013). The formalization of the „*programmazione negoziata*“ instruments in 1995 was a complex procedure. Its high regulatory complexity can be seen in the fact that a variety of pacts can be distinguished in this period: first generation pacts, second generation pacts (1998-1999), new pacts (2000-2001) with the new procedures fully in force, pacts approved in 2001 in the North central regions of the country affected by floods, hydrogeological instability and earthquakes. However, no systematic evaluation of these complex procedures has been done (Perulli, 2013). So the negotiation programming as a whole was badly received by the regions because it was not harmonized with their needs. To this day, the **key role of the central government in local policies seems to remain the main unresolved issue**. The contribution of the central government actually seems most decisive, and the vision of territorial pacts and negotiated programming as bottom-up policies has proved to be quite restrictive. Italy's regional development strategies lead to upheaval of separatist phenomena, as the implementation of the programs does not meet the needs of the regions. For example, in 1996 the Northern league organized a demonstration aiming at the creation of the independent Republic of Padania.

Conclusion: *In Belgium separatist phenomena decline in periods when the state grants more competences for decision-making to the regions. In France and Italy, the state policies towards the regions are not in line with the needs of the regions and therefore are not well received by them. The periods of such policies in France and Italy are related to an upheaval of separatist phenomena.*

3.5. Factor *Language policy at national level*

In Belgium linguistic autonomy was legitimized before political autonomy, and linguocultural communities were gradually given the power to decide on the use of languages in education, cultural and social life etc. - by the so-called Cultural councils. In 1971, the cultural autonomy of linguocultural communities was officially introduced. Language parity³¹⁴ has also been introduced in the Council of Ministers (Бич, 2008). After that, separatist phenomena decline.

Unlike the local languages of the linguocultural communities in France and Italy, **Flemish language was standardized**, and in 1930 the compulsory use of Flemish in Flanders and French in Wallonia was introducing, as follows: in schools and administration (1932), in the judiciary (1935) and in the army (1938) (Бич, 2008).

Separatism in **France** was catalyzed after coming into force of the Dyson Law, which allowed only for a minimum presence of regional languages in public education, and left only private schools to make their own decisions. The law allows for only one hour per week in Breton

³¹⁴ About parity of languages see Factor 3.1. Decision-making competences at subnational level

language – only in case that local teachers are willing to deliver the class free of charge (Minority Rights Group International , 2019). The law was introduced in 1951 but was not applied till the beginning of the 1960s. in early 1960s separatism was particularly active in Brittany. In 1963 emerged the militant organization Front for the Liberation of Brittany. The "Corsican problem" also arises in the 1960s (Loughlin, 1987).

In Italy, similar effect was produced by a decision of the Constitutional Court, which is considered discriminating against certain regional linguocultural communities. The decision acknowledged the notion of “*recognized linguistic minorities*” (starting with judgment no. 28/1982). This notion resulted in the distinction/discrimination between *recognized linguistic minorities*, coinciding with the three largest minority communities in the Alpin arc (French, German and Slovene), which have been able to count on special guarantees thanks to the provisions of the respective regional statutes and specific international commitments (such as the 1946 De Gasperi-Gruber Agreement and the 1954 London Memorandum), and *unrecognized linguistic minorities* which, although present in many regions, remained without a general law of protection until 1999. *After this decision of the Constitutional Court, the majority of the regional separatist political parties were created (Lega Lombarda – 1984, Lega Nord Liguria – 1989 etc.)*

As well as finally implementing the provision of art. 6 of the Constitution, the approval of the **State law no. 482/1999** led to the demise of the artificial distinction between recognized and unrecognized minorities and heralded, at least from a formal standpoint, a new era in the protection of all autochthonous minority groups and their respective languages which are expressly listed. They are: the Albanian, Catalan, German, Greek, Slovene and Croatian populations as well as the minorities speaking French, Franco-Provençal, Friulian, Ladino, Occitan and Sardinian (art. 2 of the law). The speakers belonging to these minorities (around 2.500.000 people) are granted a catalogue of linguistic rights in different fields (school, public administration, personal names and toponomastics), according to a territorial criterion.

Law no. 482/1999 came to the attention of the Constitutional Court, for the first time, in 2009. The Court took the opportunity to remind the cornerstones of its own case-law concerning the protection of minority issues in the Italian legal system. Nonetheless, some passages of judgment no. 159/2009 demonstrate a restrictive and possibly over-formalistic approach. Upholding almost all the claims proposed by the government against a law of the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region that was aimed to protect the Friulian language (regional law no. 29/2997), the Court stated its inconsistency with art. 6 of the Constitution and the law no. 482/1999. The Court underlined that the protection of linguistic minorities is a fundamental, even supreme, principle of the Italian legal system, alongside pluralism and equality. Nevertheless, only the State – and not the regions, even in the case of regions with a special statute and special autonomy – is competent to identify the linguistic minorities and minority languages, as well as to choose the models for their protection.

The Court’s approach was confirmed in subsequent judgments regarding similar issues (judgments no. 170/2010 and no. 88/2011). In short, according to the Constitutional Court, language is an element of individual and collective identity and **the regions will not be prevented in the promotion of local languages as long as they restrict themselves to cultural interventions and economic support**. The important condition, according to the constitutional case-law, is that **they refrain from officially recognizing linguistic minorities/minority languages** and extending to other languages the protection that the law no. 482 lays down for the languages mentioned above which are expressly listed, because such a recognition belongs to the State legislature only (Piergigli, 2016).

Conclusion: *In Belgium, linguistic autonomy was legitimized before political autonomy. Due to this fact, Flemish language is standardized (contrary to French and Italiana regional languages which are far from such status). The periods in granting linguistic autonomy are characterized by decline of separatist phenomena. In France and Italy, language policy is*

entirely within the competence of the nation-state, which exerts a **restrictive influence** on the identity of the linguocultural communities (languages are not standardized, and even if the teachers are allowed to teach them in schools, the number of the classes are limited and the teachers are not paid for them).

3.6. Factor Policies for institutionalization of the relations EU - Regions at supranational level

The EU provides regions inhabited by linguocultural communities with opportunities for participation at the supranational level of governance. For instance, the Committee of the Regions – an institution representing the interests of local and regional powers in the EU - was created due to the pressure from the Belgian regions and the German provinces (Braun, 2018). After the establishment of this institution in 1993, separatism in Belgium declined. The creation of the **liaison agency Flanders-Europe** in 2005 is also associated with decline of separatism.

In **France**, incentives at the supranational level operate mainly in Brittany, where culture of cooperation with European Union institutions was gradually established. In Brittany can be also observed the greatest number of regional non-governmental organizations and representations. This region was the first one to create a structure which includes local politicians from all political parties together with representatives of professional and economic interests under the name *CELIB - Comité d'étude et de liaison des intérêts bretons* (Contact Committee for the Breton interests). In **2005**, the regional president Le Drian created the **European Conference** – a political body which unites the four departments and the main cities of Brittany in terms of common positions on European issues. The Breton Representation in Brussels (renamed to "**Breton Embassy**" in **2006**) is essential for the cooperation of the region with the EU (Cole A. R., 2015). Thus, the established culture of cooperation with the EU affects separatism in a positive way, making it relatively moderate. It is significant that during the establishment of the European Conference and the Breton Embassy in Brussels- between 2005 and 2013, separatist phenomena in Brittany, and in France in general, declined.

Law 52 from 1996 allows the **Italian regions** to open their offices in Brussels in order to establish relations with the European institutions. All regions, as well as some provinces, started opening offices in Brussels since then. Most of these offices have established bilateral and multilateral relations with other European regions and associations. Several regions are involved in cross-border projects. All regions are included in networks such as REGLEG. In addition, they are represented in the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and are members of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

The National Association of Italian Municipalities ANCI represents the local interest to the EU institutions and cooperates with other associations of local regional agencies. The CITTALIA research association unites the Union of Italian Provinces UPI (Italian: *Unione Province d'Italia*), which represents all Italian provinces except the autonomous provinces of Trento, Bolzano and Aosta, and ANCI in Brussels supports the Italian delegation at the Committee of the Regions. ANCI focuses on European issues with local impact and collaborates with large European networks of municipalities According to data research from 2018, 7,041 municipalities are members of ANCI, representing 90% of Italian population (European Committee of the Regions, 2010).

Since 1996, separatist phenomena in Italy declined for a period of almost 10 years.

Conclusion: *Institutionalization of the relations between the separatist regions and the EU leads to decline in separatist phenomena.*

3.7. Factor EU policy for regionalization / the NUTS system at supranational level

In 1988 Eurostat, the statistical institute of the European Union, introduced the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics known by the abbreviation NUTS. The NUTS regions are gradually replacing previously existing concepts such as agricultural regions, mining

regions, transport regions and others in the EU. The system introduces 3 types of regions according to their population - NUTS 1 regions with population from 3 to 7 million people (also called ‘major socio-economic regions’), NUTS 2 regions with population from 800 thousand to 3 million (basic regions for the application of regional policies) and NUTS 3 regions with population from 150 thousand to 800 thousand (small regions for specific diagnoses) (Eurostat, 2021)

In **Belgium**, the national political levels of governance are not synchronized with this system. The main regions with claims for secession - Wallonia and Flanders - correspond to the NUTS I level, while socio-economic development policies are most often funded at level II, and less- at level III.

In **France**, the policy for transformation of the regions by the nation state lead to changes in the scope and boundaries of NUTS - as happened in 2016 with the emergence of the enlarged region of Occitania (it now includes the population of the former Midi-Pyrenees - Northern Catalonia). This led to an increase in separatist phenomena, as now the opportunities for the population of Northern Catalonia to make decisions about their socio-economic development have diminished.

There are two problems in **Italy**: the first problem is that, according to the EU criteria, when applied to Italian provinces, the **provinces appear too large: the average demographic size of the provinces is higher than the NUTS-III average** in most European countries (only France and Spain have larger NUTS-III). Thus, in the Italian provinces, excluded from Objective 1, the average population is over 500,000 people with variations from 120,000 people in Aosta to 3,800,000 in Rome. In areas that are so large and in which zoning is based historical and administrative criteria rather than on economic ones, **structural problems that require the intervention of local actors cannot be noticed** because they are masked by the average values.

The second problem is related to the identification of **smaller areas, which are characterized by specific problems, but are located in provinces that cannot classify for NUTS levels**. In this case, it can be said that the choice to identify a problem based on the size of the provinces, misses about 65% of the eligible areas (OECD, 2002).

Table 2. Explanatory model of separatism in EU member states

	political factors	socio-cultural factors	economic factors
supranational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Policies for institutionalization of the relations EU - Regions</i> ✓ <i>EU policy for regionalization / the NUTS system</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>European identity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Economic policies of the European Union</i>
national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>State policies towards decentralization / centralization</i> ✓ <i>Policies directed towards the regions populated by linguocultural communities</i> ✓ <i>Language policy</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Strong/Weak national linguocultural identity</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Economic turbulences and business cycles</i>
subnational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Decision-making competences</i> ✓ <i>Drivers for political change (separatist movements, parties)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Communities with specific linguocultural identities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Economic disbalances between the regions</i>

CONCLUSIONS

In view of limited research findings on drivers of separatism in EU member states, the paper has identified political, socio-cultural and economic factors at subnational, national and supranational (EU) levels. The countries under exploration, i.e. Belgium, France and Italy, are at the

core of EU, they are among the six states of European integration, which founded the first Community in 1952. This is the basis for their similarity, which justifies the relevance of the undertaken comparative study.

In **Belgium**, a federal state since 1993, separatism is more pronounced, more intense and ultimately aiming mainly at **secession or irredentism**. Here the rationale of separatist movements is mostly of **economic and political nature**.

In **France**, a centralized state with a long history of construction of national identity, and a country which has a tradition of mitigating the identity of linguistic and cultural communities, **separatist movements are rather moderate** (with the exception of the island of Corsica), and their ultimate goal is in cultural terms, i.e. **to preserve local cultures and languages**.

Italy is a more complex case. Today's united state is "young", 160 years old, but the century-old legacy of proud city states impacts its unitary character to the extent, that the constitution allows for five federal entities, i.e. the Special Statute Regions with decision-making and fiscal competences. Special statutes were devised to prevent from separatism and to accommodate territories of the Italian periphery which had specific linguistic and cultural differences (Aosta Valley, Trentino-South Tyrol, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Sicily). A further history-based factor of separatism is the economic gap between the rich North and the poor South. European integration and the economic boom in the 1950s smoothed the gap, but the crisis at the end of 1980s fueled separatist movements. Thus, Italian separatism is characterized by the **three types of factors, i.e. political, economic and socio-cultural**.

The research findings disprove two stereotypes regarding separatism. In contrast to a dominant view, that separatism is typical of economically rich regional communities (which do not want to share their richness with poor/lazy communities), the findings of this study prove the thesis, that separatist phenomena occur **in both economically developed regions and in regions that are lagging behind**. Secondly, there exists a thesis, that federalization is a means for preventing or suppressing separatist phenomena. The analysis of this study shows that governmental decentralization has **only a temporary effect** on them. Some of the strongest separatist movements **take place in federal states**, such as Belgium.

The research findings prove, that **factors of rising separatism** vary from chronotope to chronotope. In Europe concrete situations in concrete historical periods of concrete states provide evidence of such factors in political, socio-cultural and economic terms. Regional/local movement leaders use them for political mobilization. The end goal is access to participation in decision making, hence to political power. **EU institutions and their policies provide opportunities** for participation, but **the nation state acts as a gate-keeper** and prevents from being bypassed, having realized, that the practice of EU multilevel governance strengthens regional and local voices.

The proposed **explanatory model can be applied to other EU member states**, as well as to non-EU countries. In the latter case the supranational level can be viewed in a broader sense - as a global dimension, considering the influence of international organizations such as the United Nations.

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