

CATALONIA BACKGROUND INFORMATION [SERIES E / 2013 / 8.1 / EN]

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CATALONIA WAS A NATION-STATE UNTIL 1714

The historian Pierre Vilar wrote that between 1250 and 1325 Catalonia was the European country that most accurately could be described as a nation state. The nation – the human community, with bonds of solidarity, as well as common cultural and linguistic characteristics – had developed, and the State was soon consolidated through its Mediterranean expansion. And that was all done within the broad framework of the Crown of Aragon. Vilar said: “Language, territory, economic life, mindset, a common culture: the fundamental conditions of a nation were already fully assembled in Catalonia by the thirteenth century.”

It is true that after the kingdoms of Aragon (which consisted largely of Catalonia) and Castile were united in 1479 there was a state of “imperfect sovereignty”, as both regions shared one monarch, the king of Spain, but each had its own legal and political order within this monarchy. Catalonia maintained its statehood until 1714. It was based on its own Parliament and Constitutions, its own taxation system, with public debt and its own currency, and the *Diputació del General* (government) had represented the whole country since 1365.

To understand why Catalonia opted to oppose the Bourbons in the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) one must take into account the economic and social characteristics of society at that time. Around 1700 a specialized economy oriented towards production and trade began to emerge. This laid the foundations for development over the next centuries, accompanied by a dynamic society that had access to political representation in existing institutions. The Catalan leaders of the time saw this new international conflict as an opportunity to make a firm commitment to their own constitutional model while also fostering free trade and local production. Catalonia, therefore, opted to align with the Maritime Powers (Britain and the United Provinces) in favour of the Hapsburg Archduke Charles III and against the Bourbon Philip V of Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV. This was formalized by the Pact of Genoa on 20 June 1705, signed by Mitford Crow, Queen Anne's plenipotentiary, and representative leaders of Catalonia. The Catalans agreed to fight for Archduke Charles III while the British guaranteed economic and military support and assumed responsibility for enforcing the Constitutions.

In 1711, unknown to Catalonia, Britain undertook secret negotiations with France to end the war. Although Queen Anne of England had insisted that Catalonia's freedom should be maintained, during the negotiations preceding the 1713 Peace of Utrecht, the Britain's ambassador in Madrid, Lexington, met with radical opposition and reached an agreement to place Philip V on the Spanish throne. The treaty for the evacuation of Allied troops negotiated in January 1713 by Marshal Starhemberg and the British Lexington anticipated an amnesty for those who had supported Charles III as well as protecting the laws of Catalonia. But these two points were ultimately left out of the peace agreements. Queen Anne initially defended the conservation of "all privileges" but later, to please Philip V, she proposed the term "ancient privileges" (an ambiguous formula because it was not specified whether it referred to the Constitutions in the time of Charles II or those approved by the Parliament in 1702 or 1706), while leaving the interpretation of these privileges totally in the hands of the King Philip V. The new king, however, flatly opposed even minimum recognition of Catalonia's rights and, at the last moment, the British Secretary of State Bolingbroke accepted the formula suggested to him by the plenipotentiary Marquess of Monteleón, which is contained in Article XIII of the Peace and Friendship Treaty between Spain and Great Britain (27 March 1713). The text states, cynically, that the Catalans were granted "all the privileges which the inhabitants of both Castiles [...] have and enjoy," which was tantamount to saying that it suppressed the freedom of Catalonia. The Count of La Corzana, representing the emperor Charles VI, denounced the abandonment of the Catalans in exchange for the "Opium from Peru and Potosí that has currently put the English ministry to sleep".

It was of little use that the Catalan ambassador Pau Ignaci de Dalmases, accompanied by the Earl of Peterborough, was received by Queen Anne on 28 June 1713, and sought her support, reminding her that the Catalans had become involved in the war at the request of the British and that "because this country is so free and loves freedom it should protect another country that in view of its prerogatives could be called free [because] the laws, privileges and freedoms are in all things similar and almost equal to those enjoyed in England". On 3 April 1714 a group of 24 Whigs from the British House of Lords petitioned the queen to allow Catalonia to keep its "freedoms, which are so valuable to them and thus continue to enjoy their just and ancient privileges". When Queen Anne died, both the members of the regency and the new King George I, who on 18 September 1714 received the Catalan Ambassador Felip Ferran de Sacirera in The Hague, made a commitment to protect Barcelona and find a negotiated solution to the "Case of the Catalans".

Furthermore, in 1715 a commission of inquiry of the British House of Commons, led by Robert Walpole, considered the members of the Tory government guilty of treason for abandoning the Allies, in particular the Catalans, to their fate "contrary to faith and honour" and criticised Bolingbroke for having called Catalans a "turbulent people". All of these efforts were to no avail.

In the end, the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which recognized Philip V as King of Spain, represented the British refusal to defend Catalonia's rights. The winner

of the war appealed to the “just right of conquest” to destroy the existing legal and political order. This marked the end of the Catalan state and the composed monarchy. A hierarchical, homogenizing and militarized *Nova Planta* (New Plan) replaced the ancient pacts and the system of political representation that had been in force until then.

However, in Britain, the Whigs criticized the Conservative government and expressed its feeling of guilt over the abandonment of the Catalans, leaving a mark on historiography between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, including works by prominent authors such as George M. Trevelyan and Winston Churchill (who wrote: “They were delivered with very polite diplomatic phrases to the revenge of the winning side”). Two books published in 1714 are the best reflection of this. First, *The Case of the Catalans Considered* stated: “It is ridiculous to think that our ministers are such inept guardians of the honour of our nation; we had in our hands the power to impose any conditions that we wished. Shall we abandon a faithful people, whose only crime is to have joined us? [...] Must this people be sacrificed to the wrath of he who is now their king? Would not their blood be an eternal monument to our cruelty? [...] This touches the heart of every generous British citizen when he considers the case of the Catalans [...]. Will not the word “Catalans” be synonymous with our shame?”. Second, *The Deplorable History of the Catalans* stated with admiration: “the world now has a new example of the influence that freedom can have on generous minds. We need examples of this kind to preserve the love of that precious jewel among men, thus protecting them against the evil intentions of a kind of people who always seek the way to enslave humanity”.

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