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## Catalonia should remain part of Spain

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I suspect that news about secessionist movements within a part of a country far smaller than the United States might sound strange in a time of globalization and open economies.

However, Spain, as other European nations, was originally formed from many different kingdoms and territories, a process that began more than 500 years ago and evolved for centuries.

Catalonia is one of those territories, but, unlike most Spanish territories, it has its own language — Catalan — as well as its own civil law and cultural traditions. However, our identity traits as Catalans have always co-existed with those of Spain.

There have been periods throughout our history where these particular identity traits of Catalonia were seriously threatened, and its culture harassed and oppressed, as happened during the 40-year dictatorship of Gen. Francisco Franco.

Under democracy, however, particularly after the adoption of our current constitution in 1978, people from Catalonia have been

able to develop their own identity while enjoying a degree of self-government similar to any state or province of any federal country, like the United States or Canada.

Catalonia is also a territory, an autonomous community of Spain, wealthier than the rest of the country. Its developed economy and industrial sector are above the Spanish average. If the population in Catalonia stands at about 7 million (approximately 14 percent of the total population of Spain), then its GDP represents the 20 percent of the GDP in Spain.

In recent years, there have been tensions between the central government of Spain and the regional government of Catalonia regarding issues such as the distribution of power

and money; the degree of self-government that Catalonia maintains or what contribution to the budget should be considered fair.

At the end of 2013, the government of Catalonia decided to hold a referendum of secession from the rest of Spain. This announcement included two questions that will be put before Catalans on the Nov. 9, 2014: "Do you want Catalonia become a state? If so, do you want that state to be independent?"

The proposed initiative opposes the constitution that, as in the United States, is the supreme law throughout the Spanish territory. A unilateral referendum of secession is also completely outside of international law.

The core of the matter, however, is not the legal issue. A hypothetical secession of Catalonia from the rest of Spain would negatively affect the economy and prosperity not only for Catalan and Spanish society but also for the European Union.

Unfortunately, this effect may already be set in motion just by holding the discussion on such an eventuality. Investors avoid uncertainty, and this political move is already pushing Catalonia into uncharted waters. Investors are aware that secession will automatically exclude the region from the European Union, which has provisions determining that when a territory leaves a member country, it will automatically be left out. .

The most delicate and dangerous issue is the damage that this secessionist campaign is already imposing on the fabric of Catalan society, which runs the risk of fracturing. According to Catalan government surveys, seven out of 10 citizens in Catalonia says they are also Spaniards.

The Spanish central government has declared that a referendum to allow Catalonia to exist as an independent state within Spain cannot take place because it goes against the constitution. That's correct, but it doesn't settle the matter. This simple answer does not address such a complex problem.

Our territorial laws must be reviewed and updated. Spain must consider becoming a genuine federal union not unlike the United States and Canada. The country will need to create a new legal framework to enable and foster the diversity within the Spanish union. It also needs to provide a clear set of modern rules in sync with the developments taking place in the rest of Europe, where the trend is toward higher forms of integration, and reduce occurrences of cultural isolation.

Beyond the establishment of such a new legal framework, Spain will also need to foster a deliberate policy of reciprocal affection, of shared emotions between Catalans and the rest of the country.

It is the only constructive and most effective path to neutralize the radical rhetoric of the Catalan separatist sector and those who long for inauthentic solutions for the centralization and abolition of a plural Catalonia.

We need to forge a coalition that defends the right of all of us to support the only reasonable and most promising option: to live and prosper together in harmony and peace.

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