
Switzerland has long been one of the most interesting cases of federation. Its interest is arguably even greater now as the country was the first of the three ‘traditional’ European federations to recently adopt a comprehensive reform of its federal system. Germany is now following suit while Austria has so far been unable to reach an agreement on such a reform. The Swiss experience is thus of interest not only in itself but also from a comparative perspective. The volume reviewed here is the first attempt to explore the nature of the reform—now in its implementation phase—and to assess the condition of Swiss federalism today. This book constitutes the French translation of the work originally published in German by Verlag Neue Zürcher Zeitung in 2005.

After a short preface introducing the French edition, the book is divided into six chapters, addressing the reform from several disciplinary angles. The first chapter, by the economist René Frey, describes the reform, with particular attention to changes in the system of fiscal equalization. The second chapter, by the historian Georg Kreis, places the reform in the context of the long-term evolution of Swiss federalism since the creation of the modern federal state in 1848. Chapter 3 adopts the lens of the constitutional lawyer René Rhinow, who offers an assessment of the changes brought about by the reform in the light of key juridical principles. The following chapter approaches the topic from a political angle, through the perspective of Gian-Reto Plattner, a former member of the Council of States and currently Deputy Rector of the University of Basle. Chapter 5, by René Frey, evaluates the reform from an economist’s point of view while the last chapter, also by Frey, offers an overall assessment of Swiss federalism, notably identifying a number of limitations of the recent reforms and speculating on the possible direction future reforms will take.

The successful combination of different disciplinary approaches is one of several strengths of the book. The various contributions complement each other very well and provide the reader with a fascinating picture of the difficulties and the challenges inherent in an attempt to reform a complex federal polity. Moreover, they have the merit of showing that there is much more to the process than a mere reform of the system through which fiscal resources are (re)distributed, and that many features of the reform raise delicate legal and political issues. Chiefly among them is the overall question of horizontal co-operation among cantons as an alternative to further centralization of policy-making competences at the federal level. This, in the eyes of many, amounts to the creation of a ‘fourth level’ of federalism, with the potential to profoundly change the nature of the system. In this light, it is instructive to observe...
how assessment of the reform varies depending on which disciplinary lens one adopts. Particularly striking is the contrast between Frey’s broadly positive judgment, mainly focused on the changes in the fiscal equalization system, and the strongly critical conclusions reached by Rhinow, notably with regard to the greater role given to horizontal cantonal co-operation. From his historical perspective, Kreis, however, points out that this reform is not a true watershed but is best understood in the context of the long-term evolution of Swiss federalism with its twin features of increasing centralization on the one hand and a dogged defence of the cantons on the other. Plattner is also rather pessimistic about the ability of the Swiss system, based as it is on the archaic cantons, to adapt itself successfully to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

In the spirit of the *Le savoir suisse* collection in which it is published, the book does not aim to be an academic work with full scholarly apparatus and engagement with the scientific literature, but rather a user-friendly overview of the topic for the educated lay reader. In doing this, the book must be judged very positively. Given the limitations of scope and space, the editor and the contributing authors fully succeed in providing a succinct yet rigorous and engaging analysis of this major reform of Swiss federalism. This book will make rewarding reading, not only for those with an interest in Swiss federalism but to most readers of this journal, given the lessons Switzerland potentially holds for many other federal political systems. It will also be of use in advanced teaching on European politics and comparative federalism.

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This book presents the analyses and findings of research carried out on (and in) the Basque country. The author has dealt in his previous work with the study of compound national states in which minority nations exist. He is by no means a ‘newcomer’ to the analysis of ethnoterritorial accommodation in advanced democracies and has, for instance, undertaken detailed studies in Catalonia, Flanders, Quebec and Scotland. André Lecours is a francophone-born Canadian academic who teaches at Concordia University, a largely anglophone institution in Montreal. This biographical information is by no means irrelevant for the purposes of this review. In the book’s preface, Lecours himself makes a clarifying statement: “It is difficult to write about [nationalism] without being categorized as either a ‘sympathizer’ or a ‘critic’...”. Indeed, being an ‘outsider’, or explicitly declaring equidistance towards the object—and subjects—of study, is a challenging position to take. Lecours’ research to date largely validates his claim of having no emotional attachment to ‘one side’ or ‘the other’, i.e. Basque (stateless) nationalism and the Spanish state (nationalism).
The main thrust of the author’s analytical approach draws from the ‘historical institutionalism’ school of thought. In 2005, Lecours edited a most useful book on *New Institutionalism. Theory and Analysis* (University of Toronto Press). In the introductory chapter of this work on the Basque Country and Spain, Lecours underlines that the ‘institutionalist’ approach provides a historical quality to political analysis, together with the theoretical importance given to political institutions. As a result, the focus is on the temporal articulation of state forms and its effects on agency, preferences, strategies, identities and the overall organization of politics. Despite the fact that this book conducts a single case study of nationalism, Lecours maintains that it could well prove the usefulness of historical institutionalism for shedding light on substate (or stateless) nationalism.

Indeed, territorial politics in Spain can be regarded as the expression of a mode of *multiple ethnoterritorial concurrence*, which relates substate mobilization with the interplay between central state institutions and the 17 *Comunidades Autónomas*, and among the latter themselves. The democratic Spanish Constitution of 1978 recognizes the status of three territories as ‘historical nationalities’ or, in other words, minority nations: the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia. The case of the Basque Country is better known outside Spain as it has been subject to political violence since the time of the late Franco’s dictatorship. In its initial phase, ETA’s secessionist armed actions could be regarded as a reaction against Francoist political repression. However, the Basque Country also witnessed a ferocious increase in political terrorism during the 1980s and 1990s, as evidenced by party sectarian assassinations and actions carried out by ETA commandos throughout Spain. This course of action has further encouraged a division between Basque nationalists and non-nationalists regarding proposals to eradicate political violence.

Many Basque nationalists label Spanish nationalists as Basque ‘non-nationalists’, though the latter prefer to consider themselves as ‘autonomists’. This allows them to make the distinction between aspirations for home rule and federal-like arrangements whereby Spain is the political state of reference (along the lines of the 1978 Constitution), and proposals to return to a Spanish hegemonic and centralized state of the kind imposed by Franco’s dictatorship. Basque nationalists, instead, can be referred to as those activists and parties that explicitly declare themselves as such, and which have the ultimate—although in some cases vague—aim of achieving independence for the Basque Country and the secession of *Euskalherria* from Spain and France (that is, the lands where Euskera—the Basque language—is spoken). The main political parties representing the latter category have so far been the PNV (Basque Nationalist Party), EA (Basques’ Reunion) and the illegal *Bastasuna* (ETA’s political arm). The former category, meanwhile, have included the PSE-EE (Basques socialists federated with the Spanish PSOE), the Basque PP (regional organization of the Spanish Popular Party), UA (*Unidad Alavesa*, a local party in Araba which ‘officially’ dissolved in 2005) and Ezker Batua/Izquierda Unida (United Left of communists and radical leftists).

Recently, in 1998 and 2006, ETA unilaterally proclaimed and then later revoked truces concerning its terrorist actions. The last one took place after the completion of this book. However, most of the problems facing both Basque nationalism and the Spanish state remain the same. Lecours provides useful data and interpretations...
not only of the historical context of Basque–Spanish relations, but also of the prospect for future developments. Among these, the statement made before the Basque Parliament on 27 September 2002, by the Lehendakari (President) of the Basque Government is given special attention in Chapter 4. The Lehendakari Ibarretxe had proposed a new Pact for Cohabitation (Pacto para la Convivencia) to be based on the free association and co-sovereignty of the Basque Country and Spain, along similar lines to what was proposed in the 1985 Quebec Referendum. The basis for this claim was Ibarretxe’s view that the citizens of the Basque Country were entitled to self-determination and to decide, in a popular referendum, the future of its political status and shared sovereignty within a plurinational Spain.

In the recent past, consensual practices between nationalist and non-nationalist parties to accommodate the various Spanish idiosyncrasies and identities have had a positive impact on processes of both democratization and decentralization. This course of action also became the principal model for political agreement for most of the last quarter of a century of Basque home rule. It remains to be seen whether this practice can be reactivated in today’s climate, or whether further polarization might occur.

Chapter 1 concentrates on the early Spanish state and its territorial management. The point of departure is the idea that Basque nationalism is rooted in the early territorial articulation of the Iberian Peninsula during the times of the Reconquest (Reconquista) of the lands occupied by the Moors (Arabs) by the Christians, which lasted from 711 to 1492. Chapter 2 argues that the upsurge in Basque nationalism at the end of the nineteenth century was the result of crucial changes in the nature of the Spanish state, most notably the attempt to emulate the model of a Jacobin-centralized polity. Chapter 3 suggests that the Franco dictatorship after the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) represented a critical juncture in the development of Basque nationalism, leading not only to its wide diffusion amongst civil society, but also to the legitimization of ETA’s political violence. Chapter 4 deals mainly with the creation of the federal-like Estado de las Autonomías in Spain.

In the latter chapters, the book makes three further contributions to the study of Basque nationalism. In Chapter 5 the international relations and external activities carried out by the Basque government are examined. The author argues quite convincingly that ‘paradiplomacy’ is the product of Basque nationalism. Chapter 6 analyses Spain’s strategy for managing Basque nationalism in the democratic period following the death of Franco in 1975. Spain, contends Lecours, has favoured the politics of recognition to some extent, together with the devolution of an extensive degree of political autonomy to the Basque Country. Chapter 7 compares Basque nationalism with other nationalist movements in Western liberal democracies, namely Catalonia, Flanders, Quebec and Scotland. Finally, the last chapter offers some ideas for the future of scholarship on nationalism. It is suggested that there is a need to take on board the literature of comparative politics on the state and state–society relations to further theoretical understandings of the subject.

Lecours’s powerful insights are empirically grounded in a detailed and rigorous examination of the case under study. This book is most valuable for all those interested in the broader theme of facilitating political accommodation in deeply divided societies. It is to be read with profit not only by students of conflict negotiation and
resolution, historical institutionalism, identity politics or nationalism, but also by anyone concerned with the wider themes of both the territorial dimension of power and the democratization within and beyond the boundaries of contemporary polities in the developed world.

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