

## Book Review

Eva Maria Belser, Alexandra Fang-Bär, Nina Massüger and Rekha Oleschak Pillai (Eds.): *States Falling Apart? Secessionist and Autonomy Movements in Europe*, Publications of the Institute of Federalism Fribourg University Switzerland, Vol. 10, Stämpfi Verlag: Bern 2015, 399 pages, CHF: 76.00

In recent years, there has been an increase in publications examining the impact of territorial autonomy and secessionist movements not only in federal political systems, but also in decentralised and more homogenous nation-states. The book by Eva Maria Belser and her colleagues is therefore a welcome contribution to our understanding of the link between autonomy and secession.

The book itself consists of 19 contextual chapters (plus the foreword by the editors), which are organised in four sections.

The first section is titled “Introduction” and includes the foreword and notes by Ambassador Valentin Zellweger on territorial stability and the role of the international community.

In the second part, aptly labelled “Autonomy and Secession – What is at Stake?” a number of leading authors discuss the theoretical links between territorial autonomy and secession. Michael Burgess focuses for example on the role of autonomy and secession in federations, while Eva Maria Belser and Alexandra Fang-Bär discuss the role of international law in cases of secession. Altogether it can be argued that this part of the book provides some very useful theoretical debates and frameworks in the discussion on territorial autonomy and secession. The quality and experience of the authors in this section, and their different backgrounds (as political scientists and lawyers) furthermore contribute to a useful multifaceted discussion.

The third part of the book is titled “Secessionist and Autonomy Movements – Europe Quo Vadis?” The case studies discussed in this part of the book include Scotland (Eve Hepurn), Catalonia (Pere Simon Castellano), The Basque Country (Joxerramon Bengoetxea), Flanders (Patricia Popelier), Cyprus (Nicos Trimikliniotis), South Tyrol (Elisabeth Alber), The Aland Islands (Gulnar Mammadova), Greenland (Maria Ackren), Switzerland / Canton Jura (Maurizio Magetti-Waser and Alexandra Fang-Bär) and Kosovo (Vjosa Muslu). This diversity of cases enriches the book and provides insightful analysis into numerous issues pertinent to the case studies. It is also interesting that not all authors follow the same pattern of argument in their discussion, often a weakness of edited books. However, in this case the different nuances discussed and issues raised by the authors provide the reader with a good overview of different, yet interrelated, debates in multinational states. At the same time, all chapters highlight how forms of territorial (and cultural) autonomy have been used in order to accommodate diversity and provide incentives for minority nations to participate in the wider political life of the polity that they are a part of. What is also interesting is the discussion on the success of these instruments, as many authors point out that tools in diversity management that were

successful some years ago are not enough anymore. This relates to the debate opened by Will Kymlicka and others, namely to what extent territorial autonomy and forms of federalism provide minority nations with the tools they need to push for their ultimate goal of territorial independence. This debate, while touched-upon, could have been raised in more detail. For instance, given the recent developments in Spain the two papers on Catalonia and the Basque Country could have provided a more critical discussion on the 1978 constitutional moment and the consequent territorial development of Spain and ask the question whether the move towards autonomy and self-governance for the autonomous communities laid the foundations for the demands of those Catalan and Basque nationalists that want to see their region as an independent state.

The final part of the book, "Looking beyond Europe" consists of one chapter by John Kincaid, a distinguished scholar with a wealth of experience on US federalism. While Kincaid raises a number of issues relevant to all chapters, and posits several thought-provoking questions, his chapter does not fully serve as a conclusion. It is therefore a pity that the editors themselves did not add a concluding chapter to summarise the findings from the empirical and theoretical parts. An additional weakness is that most case studies focus on Western and Northern Europe. With the exception of Kosovo, there are no debates on similar developments in Eastern Europe. Here, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, the debates surrounding the break-up of Yugoslavia, or ongoing discussions about cultural and territorial autonomy in many countries of Eastern and Southeastern Europe could have been included to provide a more comprehensive analysis of all parts of the European continent.

Having said all of this, it can nevertheless be argued that this volume makes an important contribution to our understanding of territorial autonomy and secession. The use of multi-disciplinary approaches and the variety of theoretical and empirical perspectives make this book a very valuable source of reference. It will be interesting not only for academics working on issues related to territorial autonomy and secession, but also for undergraduate and post-graduate students, as all chapters are easy to read and relatively accessible. Furthermore, some of the issues raised in the theoretical part on the legitimacy of secession, the possibilities and limits of territorial autonomy in managing diversity, and the role of international politics in secessionist conflicts will also be of interest for policy-makers. What becomes clear when reading this volume is that we live in an ever-more complex world. Minority nations demand recognition and sometimes even full self-rule through independence. The challenges this poses for our understanding of what a state is, what is meant by sovereignty and how both politicians and lawyers should react to these developments will certainly remain of key interest in the near future. This book has provided an important contribution to the above discussions.

Soeren Keil and Paul Anderson, Canterbury Christ Church University, UK.