

## Spain: One Country, Many Nations – by David Scott

Spain is one of Europe's most fascinating countries and Spanish culture is known and admired throughout the world. The Spanish language is one of the world's major languages and is spoken by hundreds of millions of people across the globe. It is the official language of over 20 countries in Central America, the Caribbean, South America and even Africa (in Equatorial Guinea).

What may surprise a lot of people, however, is that in Spain itself there is a mixture of different nations with their own culture and languages. The 3 main 'minority' nationalities in Spain are the Catalans, the Basques and the Galicians. Each of these nations has its own different language (not dialects!), cuisine, history and culture and all 3 try hard to **maintain** and increase their cultural and, at times, political independence from Madrid, the capital of the Spanish state.

### Catalonia

Catalonia is an autonomous region in the north-eastern corner of Spain. The capital of Catalonia is the world famous city of Barcelona and the region includes the tourist resorts of the Costa Brava, the ancient Roman city of Tarragona, the vineyards which produce the famous *cava* sparkling wine, and the beautiful Pyrenees mountains. The Catalan language is a Romance language like Spanish, French and Italian and is often described as a mix between Spanish and French.

Catalans are very proud of their history. For hundreds of years before the **unification** of Spain (1469) Catalonia had its own empire in the Mediterranean, controlling the Balearic Islands, Sardinia and Sicily. Catalonia was the centre of the Industrial Revolution in Spain and became the economic capital the entire country, while political power was based in Madrid. Because of their national pride and economic wealth, the Catalans have an often uneasy relationship with the central government and the majority of people in the region want more autonomy or even full independence. This relationship can best be seen in the famous *clasico*, when Barcelona FC play against Real Madrid in the Spanish football league.

During the dictatorship of Franco (1938-78) Catalan language and culture was severely **oppressed**. Teaching, and even speaking, Catalan was illegal but this only transformed the language into a political tool and it survived underground. Today the Catalan language is taught in all schools in the region and even immigrants from other parts of Spain, Latin America and Africa speak it. There are Catalan language TV and radio stations, newspapers and magazines and many authors write novels, plays and poetry in the language. Apart from the region of Catalonia, the language and its dialects are also spoken in Valencia, the Balearic Islands, Andorra and the North-west of Sardinia. It is the most widely-spoken 'minority' language in Spain and the number of speakers is actually growing.

### The Basque Country (*Euskadi*)

The Basque Country is an autonomous region in north-central Spain. The capital is Vitoria but the most famous cities are San Sebastian, a famous resort city near the French border, and Bilbao, the largest Basque city and one of Spain's most important industrial centres. The Basque Country looks very different from most people's idea of Spain; the landscape is very hilly and green and the coast in many places is rocky. It is more similar to countries like Scotland and Ireland than it is to the rest of Spain. The coast is also famous for having the best surfing conditions in Europe.

The Basque culture and language are completely unique. The language (*Euskera*) is not related to any other existing language in the world. No-one knows where the Basques originated from. One theory is that they are the original **inhabitants** of Europe, pre-dating the

Celts and other **tribes**. The Basques are traditionally a sea-faring people and fishing was, and still is, a very important part of the Basque culture and economy.

For hundreds of years the Basque Country was happy to be a semi-autonomous part of the Spanish state and many Basques became famous as explorers and *conquistadores* in the New World. During the Industrial Revolution the Basque country, especially Bilbao, became a region of heavy industry—coal mining, shipbuilding etc.—and this new wealth led many to believe that they could become independent from Madrid. Any dreams of independence were brutally crushed by Franco in the Spanish Civil War. It was Franco who ordered the German airforce to bomb the town of Guernica (*Gernika*) leading to the deaths of hundreds of **civilians**. This dreadful incident was the inspiration for Picasso's famous painting of the same name.

During the dictatorship Basque language and culture, like Catalan, was oppressed. This oppression led to the creation of the organisation which, sadly, is what most people associate with the Basque Country: ETA. This terrorist organisation was founded in the 1960's and became the most effective terror organisation in Europe. ETA stands for ' *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* ' ('Basque Homeland and Freedom') Its aim is to win independence for the Basque country through political and military action. ETA has killed more than 900 people in car bombs and shootings. The majority of Basques, including most people who want full independence, disagree with ETA's violent methods and this **decline** in popularity, along with hundreds of arrests by Spanish and French police, has weakened the organisation. ETA is currently observing a **ceasefire** and is negotiating with the Spanish government. People in the Basque Country and all over Spain are hoping that the end of ETA is near.

## Galicia

Galicia is an autonomous region in the north-western corner of Spain. The main cities are the ports of Vigo and La Coruna and the capital is Santiago de Compostela, the end of the famous *Camino de Santiago* which has been a pilgrimage route for over a thousand years. The Galicians are a Celtic race, related to the Irish, the Scots and the Welsh. The landscape is very similar to these countries—green hills and a rocky coast—and the climate is similar too; Galicia is famous in Spain for its windy and rainy weather. Many aspects of Galician culture such as dance and music are very similar to Irish and Scottish culture ( there is even a Galician version of the famous Scottish bagpipes, the *gaita*) but the Galician language is a Romance language, descended from Latin. Galician, or *Gallego*, is almost identical to Portuguese and some people regard it as a Portuguese dialect rather than a separate language.

Throughout history Galicia has been one of the poorest parts of Spain. Galicians were one of the biggest groups of people to emigrate to the New World, especially Argentina. In fact, so many Galicians emigrated to Buenos Aires that today all people of Spanish descent in the city are called *Gallegos*. In more recent times there has also been a lot of emigration to France, Switzerland and Britain. Today Galicia still has a reputation for unemployment and drug smuggling. The infamous *narcos* are organised crime families which bring drugs from Latin America into Europe via the Galician coast. Although there are political parties demanding more autonomy or full independence from Spain, this movement is much smaller than in Catalonia or the Basque Country.

## Language

<u>Spanish (<i>Castellano</i>)</u>	Buenos dias!	Hola!	Adios!	Por favor	Gracias
<u>Catalan (<i>Catala</i>)</u>	Bon dia!	Hola!	Adeu!	Sisplau	Gracies
<u>Basque(<i>Euskera</i>)</u>	Egun on!	Kaixo!	Agur!	Mesedez	Eskerrik asko
<u>Galician (<i>Gallego</i>)</u>	Bom dia!	Hola!	Adeus!	Por favor	Grazas
<u>Po polsku</u>	Dzień dobry!	Cześć!	Cześć!	Proszę	Dziękuję

## Vocabulary

**maintain** – utrzymać, zachować

**unification** - zjednoczenie

**oppressed** - prześladowany

**inhabitants** - mieszkańcy

**tribes** – szczerp, plemię

**civilians** - obywatel

**decline** - spadek

**ceasefire** – zawieszenie broni

