

General Assembly Fourth Committee: SPECPOL

CIMUN

Topic 3: Ensuring universal respect for referendums in regard to the
autonomous status of territories.

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Introduction:

Worldwide, people live in territories without sufficient self-determination regarding the autonomous status of their territory. There are two ways in which people can gain regional or national self-determination: democratically or by force. In most democratic situations, referendums are held so that the will of the people can be carried out in a peaceful manner. However, in many cases these people are unable to gain autonomy or independence due to these referendums not being respected.

In many cases, such as that of Catalonia or Venice and Mestre, the will of the people is ignored or disrespected. This is sometimes due to referendums not being respected, which can occur for a variety of reasons that will be looked at in the following report. One of these reasons is that the original state's government has clear motivation to ignore referendums against it. Therefore, guidelines and steps must be established in order to ensure every person's right to self-determination.

Key Terms:

Referendum, according to Lexico¹:

A vote by the people of a certain country, area, etc. regarding a single political question that has been directed to them for a decision. Generally, there is an option of 'yes' or 'no' on referendums unlike polls or other elections.

Autonomous Territory, according to Collins Dictionary²:

¹"Referendum: Definition of Referendum by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.com Also Meaning of Referendum." *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, www.lexico.com/en/definition/referendum.

² "Autonomous Region Definition and Meaning: Collins English Dictionary." *Autonomous Region Definition and Meaning | Collins English Dictionary*, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/autonomous-region.

An autonomous area is an area that governs itself instead of being governed by others. Autonomous territories belong to another country but have varying degrees of autonomy and self-determination.

Guerilla war, according to Lexico³:

A war in which a smaller group of soldiers, not belonging to any established army, fight against a larger and generally more organized force.

Respecting Referendum:

To respect a referendum is to make sure that it is a fair vote and that its results are carried out. There are many examples of when referendums have not been respected which will be looked at in the following report.

Commonwealth (USA):

With regard to United States Territories, the title ‘Commonwealth’ displays a greater level of autonomy, as opposed to other US territories such as Guam or American Samoa. Four US states possess the title ‘Commonwealth’ in a meaning more similar to that of the Commonwealth of Nations.

MEDC:

More economically developed countries

LEDC:

Less economically developed countries

National Self-Determination:

Independence or freedom of choice for a country. Essentially self-determination specifically within a certain nation.

³ “Guerrilla War: Definition of Guerrilla War by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.com Also Meaning of Guerrilla War.” *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, www.lexico.com/definition/guerrilla_war.

Background Information:

The beginning of referendums regarding the autonomous status of territories actually began with colonization itself. If not for the colonization of territories in the first place there would not be nearly as many territories that are fighting for autonomy. As MEDCs realized the value in having territories in strategic locations or with financial benefit, having colonies and territories became more popular. Territories were often used as military bases, tourist destinations, for resources, for slavery or for other profitable uses. Nevertheless, during the early 20th century, there was a rise in nationalists campaigning for independent nations, which came to its height during both World Wars; during which many nationalist partisan groups were formed. Thus, post-Second World War colonial powers were under increasing pressure by forces internal and external - leading to the beginning of decolonisation. This was not favourable for the colonizing power(s) to which the territory belonged. Thus, the issue of not respecting referendums regarding the autonomous status of territories was created. There are many other reasons as to why this issue came to be that will be looked at further in the following report.

Referendums for a change in regional political status have been used in many different cases. However, these referendums have not always been respected. The following are examples of when referendums regarding autonomy have been utilized. Each of these cases have had a different outcome for various reasons which will be mentioned.⁴

Western Sahara is a territory on the northwest coast of Africa which is bordered by Morocco, Mauritania and Algeria.⁵ In 1976 the Algerian-backed Polisario Front created the

⁴ Qvortrup, Matt. "Voting on Independence and National Issues: A Historical and Comparative Analysis." *Revue Française De Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies*, CRECIB, 10 July 2015, journals.openedition.org/rfcb/366.

⁵ CIA. "The World Factbook: Western Sahara." *Central Intelligence Agency*, Central Intelligence Agency, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_wi.html.

Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic to claim authority over the Western Sahara after the departure of Spanish colonizers. The same year, Morocco annexed two-thirds of the territory and in 1979, they had control of the entire territory. A guerilla war took place and ended in a cease-fire in 1991. Morocco and the Polisario Front underwent negotiations as to what would become of Western Sahara. Morocco wanted the territory to become autonomous inside its international borders while the Polisario Front wished to resume a previously stalled UN process which would lead to self-determination for Western Sahara. In efforts to establish a peaceful compromise, the UN offered the people of Western Sahara a choice to become an autonomous territory. This seemed like a good middle-ground in between annexation and independence. However, there was still the issue as to who would vote in this referendum for autonomy. The majority of people in Western Sahara would prefer national self-determination which would make it impossible for Morocco to have them achieve autonomy. In 1997, James Baker came up with the first Baker Plan which proposed autonomy with defense backed by Morocco. However, Polisario and Algeria would not accept any plan that did not involve independence. They also argued that only the people of Western Sahara before 1975 should vote and those who had immigrated from Morocco should not. The second Baker plan involved a referendum following five years of autonomy. Although this was accepted initially by Morocco, they then refused it. In 2006 Morocco came up with their own proposal for autonomy in the territory. Their plan modeled autonomy after the autonomous territories in Spain. However just a day before they submitted their plan, Polisario submitted their plan calling for independence. The legal status of Western Sahara is currently unresolved and it is now a ‘non-self-governing territory’.⁶

The desire for Catalan independence can be traced back to the mid-19th century with a cultural renaissance. Between the 1850s and 1910s, more and more organisations and parties demanded independence for Catalonia. The first such party was Estat Català (Catalan Estate). Following the overthrow of dictator Primo de Rivera in 1930, Catalan Estate joined with the Catalan Republican Party and elected Macia to be their leader. In April of 1931,

⁶ Pack, Jason, et al. “How Autonomous Is Autonomy? The Western Sahara Dispute in a Bind.” *Middle East Institute*, 25 Mar. 2020, www.mei.edu/publications/how-autonomous-autonomy-western-sahara-dispute-bind.

Macia declared that Catalonia was a republic. However, after negotiations with the provisional government, he had to settle for autonomy. As Catalonia was very economically valuable to Spain, the Spanish government was hesitant to give the area a great deal of autonomy. This autonomy which had been granted was abolished in 1938 by General Franco after the Spanish Civil War. After Franco's death in 1975, Spain moved towards democracy and adopted a new constitution in 1978.⁷ Not everyone was in favor of this new constitution despite it acknowledging the autonomy of the nationalities and regions within Spain.

Independence parties argued that the new constitution didn't align with their wishes for Catalan self-determination. Nevertheless, 88% of Spanish voters approved the constitution in a referendum and 90% of Catalan voters approved it as well. Therefore, as of December 18, 1979, Catalonia was an autonomous territory. The adoption of this constitution led to the general disappearance of independence parties. Over the next years and there were several more calls for Catalan independence. In 2013, mass demonstrations took place calling for the right to vote and for Catalan independence. However, when the time came to vote in an independence referendum in 2014, although 81% approved, only 42% showed up. The government took this to mean that those who had not voted were not in approval. In 2017, they held yet another referendum for independence. This referendum was to be held on October 1 but as this date approached, Spanish authorities attempted to delay the vote. Ten million ballot forms were seized, pro-independence officials were arrested and protests increased dramatically. The day of the vote was a violent one as riot police fired rubber bullets into the crowds and used batons and fists to prevent people from entering voting areas. There was a 42% turnout rate and of this, 90% voted in support of independence. However, when it was hinted that Catalonia would be declared independent, the prime minister of Spain threatened to revoke Catalan autonomy. He then put Article 155 into effect when the Catalan parliament voted to become independent from Spain. This entailed the central government taking control of Catalonia's police, finance and public media. The Catalan parliament was dismissed and new elections were to be held. Over half of the seats of this new parliament

⁷ Herr, Richard. "An Historical Essay on Modern Spain : Herr, Richard : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." *Internet Archive*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 1 Jan. 1974, archive.org/details/historicalessayo0000herr/page/41/mode/2up.

were held by pro-independence party members. Catalonia is currently an autonomous territory of Spain though many people still work towards independence.⁸

The two municipalities of Venice and Mestre are connected by a causeway and have shared both a mayor and a council since 1926. Venice had attempted to break away and become an autonomous territory five times in 40 years. The last referendum was held in 2003 but failed when there was a less than 50% turnout. Despite both municipalities favouring autonomy, the government and council of said municipalities discouraged the separation. Therefore, the referendum was not given the opportunity to be respected although it would be beneficial to the majority of people involved. Venice wishes to become an autonomous territory due to the effects of climate change and yet the lack of funding and attention. Venice has been seen more as a tourist destination than an actual living community. Many blame the destruction due to flooding on the lack of a dedicated administration. This was not even a one-time event as a similar event occurred in 1966 when the government began to build flood gates but never even got past the testing phase. Autonomous status would allow the Venetian government to attract and retain local businesses and residents. The municipality of Mestre is in favor of separation as well. They suffer from a high garbage tax to the pollution and garbage from tourists visiting Venice. The municipalities' council and mayor are against such a separation. When they were unable to block the referendum from happening altogether, they began calling for people to abstain so as to have an invalid turnout again. The council argues that one cannot solve two big problems with two small councils. It would also halt development plans such as the building of a football stadium. Nevertheless, there is some agreement that it is time for a change. However as of the moment, Venice and Mestre are not autonomous and they still share a council and a mayor.⁹

⁸ Rodriguez, Vicente. "Catalonia." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 23 Jan. 2020, www.britannica.com/place/Catalonia.

⁹ Roberts, Hannah. "After Floods, Venice Eyes Autonomy." *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 30 Nov. 2019, www.politico.eu/article/venice-floods-autonomy-referendum/.

Different territories have different reasons for wanting greater autonomy. In most cases it is because they are being oppressed by their current government or the needs of their people are not being met. As previously mentioned, the region of Catalonia is fighting for full independence from Spain due to the contrast between their thriving economy and the rest of Spain. Their journey towards greater autonomy has been a violent one in which many people have been oppressed. Meanwhile, Venice is not yet an autonomous territory despite their claims that the needs of their land and people are not being cared for. Western Sahara's legal situation is currently unresolved and the people there have felt oppression due to the lack of autonomy as well. These are just three examples as to why referendums regarding the autonomy of territories are held as well as the outcomes of said referendums.

Referendums only began to be commonly used in the 1990s after WWII because many countries were still trying to hold onto their power after the war ended. However as time passed referendums became increasingly popular as it was a more fair way of acting upon the people's needs, opinions and concerns. They were especially popular during times of political uncertainty. Politicians wanted to know where people stood on various issues before election day. Recently, there has been an increase in referendums as tools to gain independence or greater autonomy. In order to hold a legitimate referendum for autonomy, there must be at least a 50% turnout. This is a key issue as to why many referendums fail. The decision made by the majority of people is the one carried out. As long as there is a high enough turnout, the result of a referendum can be decided by a fraction of a percentage as was the case in Quebec, which will be elaborated on later in the report.¹⁰

Autonomy referendums are generally not respected for several reasons. The first is that too few people show up so there is not a big enough turnout. This was the case in Catalonia when although 90% supported independence, there was only a 42% turnout. One of the main reasons that very few people vote is that the government does not support the referendum and does not want it to pass. The government sometimes threatens people which

¹⁰ Henley, Jon, et al. "Referendums: Who Holds Them, Why, and Are They Always a Dog's Brexit?" *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 11 Mar. 2019, www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/11/referendums-who-holds-them-why-and-are-they-always-a-dogs-brexit.

sometimes turns to violence. In these cases, the actions of the government persuade people to boycott referendums just to ensure their own safety. Governments also try to use their presence in the media to convince people to abstain. In some cases, such as that of the Western Sahara, the government will not even let the referendum take place. This means that the people don't even get a choice. Another way that the result of autonomy referendums are influenced is by who votes. People who were not originally involved vote, such as the Moroccan immigrants in Western Sahara. This changes the result and disrespects the referendum because the outcome does not coincide with the actual wishes of the people involved.

These are just a few reasons but they are not necessarily the only ones. Many individual cases have specific reasons of their own.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

There are over 100 different countries and regions involved as there are currently 121 autonomous regions in 40 countries. Three cases were previously mentioned. Although there are many, the following are some main examples.¹¹

The Falkland Islands (Argentina, UK)

In 2013 a referendum was held to decide whether the Falkland Islands would remain an overseas territory of the UK or whether it would join with Argentina. Of the 92% turnout, 99% said that they would prefer to remain an overseas territory of the UK. Only three people disagreed. The reason that Argentina had fought for the Falkland Islands in the first place is because they had inherited them from the Spanish crown. Only in 1820 when the newly independent Argentina decided to make claims on the islands did the British get involved. This disagreement escalated dramatically when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in 1982. It resulted in the Argentine surrender and the islands were returned to the administration of the UK. The people of the Falkland Islands had made it known that they

¹¹ Gilani, Iftikhar. "121 Autonomous Regions in 40 Countries." *Anadolu Ajansi*, 24 Aug. 2019, www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/121-autonomous-regions-in-40-countries/1563764.

wished to become British citizens which was achieved in 1983. As of now, they are not an autonomous territory but an overseas territory of the UK. They have many of the same rights as autonomous territories but the UK has the responsibility of looking after their defense and foreign affairs.¹²

Quebec (Canada)

Although Quebec is a province, not a territory, it has a great deal of autonomy and has fought for full independence in the past. In 1995, a referendum was held to decide if Quebec would separate from Canada. In the beginning, the polls showed that the opposition to such a decision was much stronger than those who supported it. However, as the referendum drew closer those who approved of separation gained more power and it looked as if the referendum would be respected and would succeed. When the time came, the opposition won with 50.58%.¹³

China

The seven autonomous territories in China are Hong Kong, Macau, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang and Tibet. Macau became an autonomous region when it was given back to China in an agreement between China and Portugal. It was given a high degree of autonomy, similar to Hong Kong.¹⁴ Guangxi became autonomous in order to help foster the culture of the Zhuang people who are the largest minority in the region.¹⁵ In the 19th century, the rise of

¹²Cameron, E. "Library Blog." *Peace Palace Library Falkland Islands Desire the Right of SelfAutonomy Comments*, 15 Mar. 2013, www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/2013/03/falkland-islands-desire-the-right-of-self-autonomy/.

¹³ Gall, Gerald L., and Maude-Emmanuelle Lambert. "Quebec Referendum of 1995." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Sept. 2016, www.britannica.com/topic/Quebec-referendum-of-1995.

¹⁴ Yang, Sean. "Is Macau Part of China: The Airmule Travel Blog." *Airmule*, 18 Nov. 2017, www.airmule.com/macau-part-china/.

¹⁵ Falkenheim, Victor C., and Ping-chia Kuo. "Economy." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 27 June 2014, www.britannica.com/place/Guangxi/Economy.

population in Mongolia led to increased pressure for Outer Mongolia to gain independence and Inner Mongolia to gain autonomy. The autonomy was achieved in 1947.¹⁶

Hong Kong

Hong Kong gained much of its autonomy when it was given back to China in 1997. The UK held Hong Kong island and Kowloon but they had only been lease the ‘New Territories’ until 1997 and they had to return them to China. However, the UK had integrated the New Territories, Hong Kong island and Kowloon so much so that when the time came to give back the New Territories, they could not realistically keep the rest of what is now Hong Kong. When Hong Kong was given back to China it was given a high degree of autonomy.¹⁷ Currently, Hong Kong’s autonomy is being threatened due to the weakening of the ‘two systems, one country’ ideology. As the people of Hong Kong attempt at splitting from China, mass protests, demonstrations and violence have taken place. There has been a strong international reaction as the US recently passed a bill sanctioning Mainland China and Hong Kong officials. The UK, Australia, Canada and the EU among others have also stated their grave concern at the actions of the Chinese government in Hong Kong’s situation.¹⁸

These are just some of the reasons as to why there are autonomous regions in China but overall, the reason there are so many is because China is very big and it is more effective to allow some regions to make decisions themselves. This is better for the individual minorities living in each autonomous territory.

France

¹⁶ Falkenheim, Victor C., and Chu-yuan Cheng. “History.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 20 Nov. 2019, www.britannica.com/place/Inner-Mongolia/History.

¹⁷ Wang, Yanan. “The Long Road: Hong Kong Autonomy Has Been Tested since 1997.” *AP NEWS*, Associated Press, 13 June 2019, apnews.com/dad0f4b9619a4dce98921b08836f4523.

¹⁸ Cohen, Jerome A. “Is Hong Kong Still Autonomous? What to Know About China’s New Laws.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, 29 May 2020, www.cfr.org/in-brief/hong-kong-still-autonomous-what-know-about-chinas-new-laws.

France's 11 autonomous regions are New Caledonia, Saint Martin, Saint Barthelemy, Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Wallis and Futuna, French Polynesia, Mayotte, French Guiana, Martinique, Corsica, Alsace. There are several reasons as to why France has so many autonomous territories. Throughout history France has engaged in colonialism and despite the major decolonization after WWII, France has still been able to hold on to several of its colonies. These colonies are self-governing but the people living there are French citizens, can vote for president and can send representatives to the French National Assembly and Senate.¹⁹ New Caledonia is particularly autonomous and has even held a referendum for independence. In 2018, independence was rejected as those opposed to independence won the majority with 57% to 43%. Almost all those voting for independence were the indigenous Kanak people. Due to the Noumea Accord of 1998, three referendums for independence for New Caledonia can be held before 2022. As the first failed, the second is to be held on October 4th, 2020.²⁰

New Zealand

The three autonomous territories of New Zealand are Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau. Although the Cook Islands were initially independent, New Zealand wished to annex them. Due to an agreement with the UK, they could not be annexed unless they petitioned for it themselves. With some persuasion they eventually complied and became an autonomous territory of New Zealand in 1965.²¹

¹⁹ (www.dw.com), Deutsche Welle. "Europe's Overseas Territories: What You Need to Know: DW: 03.11.2018." *DW.COM*, 3 Nov. 2018, www.dw.com/en/europees-overseas-territories-what-you-need-to-know/a-46145298.

²⁰ Fisher, Denise. "New Caledonia Decides the Timing of Its Second Independence Referendum." *The Interpreter*, 16 Oct. 2019, www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/new-caledonia-decides-timing-its-second-independence-referendum.

²¹ Crocombe, Marjorie Tuainekore, and Sophie Foster. "History." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 26 Jan. 2018, www.britannica.com/place/Cook-Islands/History.

Niue was offered autonomy at the same time as the Cook Islands but decided to wait to accept for another decade. After this time had passed they too accepted to be an autonomous territory of New Zealand.²²

Tokelau became an autonomous territory of New Zealand in 1925. They have less autonomy than the other autonomous territories simply because they lack the means to be more self-governing. New Zealand provides for 80% of their funding.²³

Russia

Russia has 26 autonomous territories which makes them the country with the most autonomous territories in the world. The reason as to why there are so many autonomous territories is similar as to China's reason. With a country so big, it is difficult to properly care and govern for the needs of everyone. However, each territory has its own particular reason for being autonomous.

Crimea

Crimea has been disputed over throughout history and has been colonized by the Greeks, Persians, Ottoman Empire, Cimmerians and many other nomadic tribes and empires. After the Russo-Turkish war, Crimea was annexed by Russia in 1783.²⁴ It became an autonomous republic in the USSR in 1917. However during WWII the native population, made up of Crimean Tatars, was deported to Central Asia and Crimea lost its autonomous status essentially becoming a province of Russia. In 1954, Crimea was transferred to Ukraine where it regained its autonomous republic status in 1991. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the Tatars that had survived were able to return to Crimea where they faced high unemployment rates and poor living conditions. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea again and held a referendum which was viewed illegal under the constitutions of both Ukraine and Crimea.

²² Foster, Sophie. "Niue." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 26 Jan. 2018, www.britannica.com/place/Niue.

²³ BBC. "Regions and Territories: Tokelau." *BBC News*, BBC, 30 Dec. 2011, news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/4712096.stm.

²⁴ BBC. "Crimea Profile." *BBC News*, BBC, 17 Jan. 2018, www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-18287223.

However because all those in favor of staying with Ukraine boycotted the referendum, the official results showed that the majority wished to reunite with Russia. Most Western countries viewed this referendum as illegitimate due to Russian intervention and currently seen by most countries that Crimea is still a part of Ukraine.²⁵

Spain

One example of Spain's autonomous regions has been mentioned above (Catalonia) but Spain has over 16 autonomous communities. The autonomous regions have their own elected parliament and control over a range of services including medical and education. Two regions collect their own taxes as well.²⁶

USA

The USA has five inhabited autonomous territories. Of these, two are actually commonwealths which entails a closer relationship with the US. The commonwealths are Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands. The other three are Guam, American Samoa and American Virgin Islands. The capitol, Washington, District of Columbia (Washington, D.C.), is an autonomous zone. The Marshall Islands were annexed by the US in 1944 however they chose to become independent in 1986. They still have close ties with the US as they are given financial and military assistance in return for America's unlimited use of their land and waterways.

Puerto Rico

²⁵ Marxsen, Christian. "The Crimea Crisis, An International Law Perspective." *Microsoft Word*, 2014, https://www.zaoerv.de/74_2014/74_2014_2_a_367_392.pdf

²⁶ Specia, Megan, et al. "Spain Is a Collection of Glued Regions. Or Maybe Not So Glued." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 29 Oct. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/10/29/world/europe/spain-autonomy-catalonia.html.

Puerto Rico became a US territory in 1917 but then became a commonwealth in 1951.²⁷ It does not enjoy all the autonomy as states or as autonomous regions such as Hong Kong but does have an elected governor, legislative branch and their own judicial system. Puerto Rico has to abide by federal laws and yet cannot vote in presidential elections. They are also \$74 billion in debt but because they are not included in the US Bankruptcy Code, they are unable to file for bankruptcy.²⁸ This is just one example of the many ways that Puerto Rico is negatively affected by lack of autonomy. In 2017, a referendum was held in the US to decide whether Puerto Rico should become a state. Although the majority favoured statehood, there was only a 23% turnout. This is arguably not respecting a referendum as the entire nation got a say in the vote although most people would not be considerably affected by Puerto Rico gaining statehood.²⁹

Guam

Guam was won from Spain and became a US territory in 1898. Its residents were granted US citizenship in 1950. Since travel restrictions were lifted in 1962, Guam has become a tourist destination as well as a strategic location for the US military. The people of Guam desire more autonomy and to become a commonwealth like Puerto Rico and the Northern Mariana Islands. However, the Pentagon in addition to several federal agencies have attempted to put an end to Guam's demands for further autonomy.³⁰ Despite this opposition, the residents of

²⁷ Rodriguez, Photograph by Erika P. "Why Puerto Rico Has Debated U.S. Statehood since Its Colonization." *National Geographic*, 24 July 2020, www.nationalgeographic.com/history/reference/united-states-history/puerto-rico-debated-statehood-since-colonization/.

²⁸ Wendt, Bradley. "Puerto Rico Fiscal Reform: The End of the Beginning." *Law 360*, June 14, 2017, <http://www.crai.com/sites/default/files/publications/Puerto-Rico-Fiscal-Reform-The-End-Of-The-Beginning.pdf>

²⁹ Mathews, Thomas G., and Olga J. Wagenheim. "The Commonwealth." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 25 July 2020, www.britannica.com/place/Puerto-Rico/The-commonwealth.

³⁰ Kristof, Nicholas D. "Guam, a Spoil of War, Seeks More Autonomy." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 10 Nov. 1996, www.nytimes.com/1996/11/10/us/guam-a-spoil-of-war-seeks-more-autonomy.html?auth=login-google.

Guam still call for a change whether it be independence, becoming a commonwealth or statehood. While they acknowledge that some of these are impossible at the moment, they are still fighting for further autonomy.³¹

American Samoa

American Samoa is the only U.S territory where its residents are not American citizens. It has been a territory of the US since 1900 however, the 14th Amendment which grants US citizenship to anyone born in America does not apply to the island. This was the decision of the government of American Samoa in an attempt to protect their culture. While this has been effective and American Samoa does retain most of their customs and traditions, not having US citizenship has had more negative impacts on the lives of American Samoans. They are not able to vote in federal elections, get several jobs including policeman, firefighter, F.B.I. agent and military officer among others and they are essentially subject to ‘taxation without representation’. In 2019, a judge ruled that the 14th Amendment did include American Samoa however, he was overruled and they are still considered ‘noncitizen nationals’.³²

Relevant UN Resolutions and Reports

Security Council Adopts Resolution 2468 (2019), Authorizing Six-Month Extension of United Nations Mission for Referendum in Western Sahara, 30 April 2019

This resolution regards the situation in Western Sahara.

[https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2468\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2468(2019))

There are many other reports on specific situations, however, most issues regarding the autonomous status of territories have been dealt with by the countries involved in the past. Therefore, there are few UN documents that directly address autonomy in territories in general.

³¹ Kington, Ani. “U.S. Territories and Commonwealths.” *InterExchange*, 13 Aug. 2012, www.interexchange.org/articles/career-training-usa/2012/08/13/u-s-territories-and-commonwealths/.

³² Levenson, Michael. “American Samoans Should Be Granted U.S. Citizenship, Judge Rules.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 13 Dec. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/12/13/us/american-samoa-us-citizenship.html.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Much has been done by governments worldwide in individual situations where they are involved as mentioned throughout the research report. However, little has been done to ensure that referendums are respected in general. In some instances there have been attempts to solve the issue of not respecting referendums. In the UK, although neither parliament nor the government can be legally bound by the outcome of a referendum, Edward Short made an effort to bind the government to the result of a referendum. Before the European Community referendum in 1975, Short insisted that, “this referendum is wholly consistent with parliamentary sovereignty. The Government will be bound by its result [...] [O]ne would not expect honourable members to go against the wishes of the people”. This suggests that although he could not legally promise to respect the referendum he did attempt to morally obligate the government to do so.³³

Possible Solutions

As previously stated, not much has been done previously to solve this issue and there are not many UN reports or resolutions regarding the respect of referendums as a whole. However some of the key problems which should be addressed in order to find a solution overall are as follows.

Lack of high turnout

As noted several times throughout the report, lack of a high enough turnout has been one main issue in the past as to why referendums are not respected. Increasing the turnout would give little excuse to not respect a referendum and the more people that vote, the clearer the majority is. Ways in which to ensure a high turnout could entail increasing awareness on the issues at hand, making voting itself simple and accessible and ensuring no negative repercussions from voting.

³³ House of Lords. “Referendums in the United Kingdom.” *Publications.Parliament.uk*, 2009-2010, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldconst/99/99.pdf>

Uninvolved people voting

In many cases, people who were not originally involved or people who are not particularly affected by the issue vote on referendums. These people are generally immigrants or residents of other countries and therefore their priorities may not lie with those of the people directly impacted by the result of the referendum. Some possible solutions to this issue could include that voters must be residents for over 365 days, be able to show that they plan on living in the territory for the near future or they must be citizens of the territory in question.

Please note that these are just a few suggestions and are not the best or only solutions. We strongly encourage delegates to research their own ideas in addition to those previously mentioned.

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