



# МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ ОПЫТ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ


## INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

DOI: 10.22363/2312-8313-2022-9-3-295-301

Научная статья / Research article

### Transnationalism as a Key Trend of Regional Self-government in the Basque Country

Yulia N. Frolova  

The Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,  
48 Moyka Embankment, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation, 191186  
 frolovayuliya@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** The paper is dedicated to the issues of transnationalism and development of nationalism in Basque self-government. In 2021, the Basque Country resumed the debate on updating the Statute of Guernica (the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country, 1979). These debates are backed by the Parliament of the Basque Country. Some key points of this discussion and current Basque regional initiatives in the European Union attract attention and may indicate the development of nationalism in the context of transnational trends and the forming of new regional identity. Methodology of the article is based on the transnationalism theory and the concept of coexistence of postnational and national as simultaneous or competing forms. Transnationalism is not a brand-new idea to Basques: some traces of transnational identity may be found in previous history. In most cases one talks about Basque nationalism (not transnationalism) referring to the period of ETA terrorist group activity which lasted till the beginning of 2010th. Since the end of the terrorist era the need for new terms and definitions for Basques nationalist movement is recognized. Despite the current high level of opponents of independence, the society is still not satisfied with the level of self-government. As a result, the problem of nationalism is greatly modified in Basque society: this is no longer a demand for the creation of an independent state, but a request for a new level of relations between the Basque Country and Spain, the Basque Country and European Union, the Basque Country and other regions; this is the demand for forming and recognition of new European regional identity. The study provides the evidence for defining this new stage in Basque self-determination movement as a nationalist and transnationalist one at the same time. In terms of this definition the concept of “Europe of the regions” is becoming relevant again and the whole situation may provide the basis for nationalist development in other European regions with similar issues.

**Keywords:** transnationalism, nationalism, separatism, Basque Country, self-government

**Conflicts of interest:** The author declared no conflicts of interest.

© Frolova Yu.N., 2022



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

**Article history:**

The article was submitted on 05.05.2022. The article was accepted on 30.07.2022.

**For citation:**

Frolova Yu.N. Transnationalism as a Key Trend of Regional Self-government in the Basque Country. *RUDN Journal of Public Administration*. 2022;9(3):295–301. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2022-9-3-295-301>

In 2021, the Basque Country resumed the debate on updating the Statute of Guernica (the Statute of Autonomy of the Basque Country of 1979). This topic itself is not a unique phenomenon: dissatisfaction with the degree of autonomy is evident in sociological surveys and is a frequent topic of the political agenda. However, the author emphasizes a number of new aspects of the problem. The president of the BNP (the Basque Nationalist Party), which holds the majority of seats in the parliament of the region, Andoni Ortuzar, declared that work on updating the Statute of Autonomy should be based on three key principles: recognition of the Basque nation, equal bilateral relations with the state and a system of conflict resolution through dialogue [1]. Considering the rhetoric of this debate, the author of the article suggests studying this stage of discussions about the Basque Statute as an example of Basque nationalism reevaluating, as well as the development of transnational trends in the governance of the region, which, however, are also previously known in this case.

The article is based on the theory of transnationalism, the concept of the coexistence of national and post-national, supported by a number of modern authors. Within the framework of this concept, post-national and national are not considered as development stages that replace each other, but as jointly existing and/or competing forms. The theory of transnationalism emerged in the 1990s [2. P. 71] as a new theoretical paradigm for rethinking the processes of migration and the formation of diasporas. A migrant and a representative of the diaspora in this theoretical scheme transfers several identities [3] that might be quite blurred. However, over time, the theory of transnationalism ceased being limited to considering only the above processes and commenced to cover broader theoretical areas: for example, it is understood as any «process that transcends international borders» [4. P. 13], and in the context of this study, the author refers primarily to this understanding of the term. The understanding of the transnational as a phenomenon that transcends borders brings it closer to the post-national, namely as S. Sassen understood it [5]: as the formation of a post-national/transnational European identity, which develops within the framework of the EU integration process initially as the implementation of formal European citizenship, and then goes beyond this status and becomes a cultural perception of European identity.

Simultaneously, understanding diaspora processes from the perspective of transnationalism is also purposeful for studying the Basque situation. The interpretation of the diaspora phenomenon in modern science is particularly problematic due to the variety of approaches. The foreign academic literature of the XX century offered a variety of diaspora typologies: Brubaker's "victim diasporas", Schaefer's typology of diasporas and others. In Russian academic literature of this

period, the diaspora was understood as a predominantly ethnic phenomenon [6]. The development of migration processes and integration in the EU have brought their own changes to the understanding of the diaspora phenomenon, as new diaspora groups began to assume various shapes and structures.

While considering the diaspora phenomenon, a significant part of the sources refers to diasporas' relations with nation-states [4. P. 23], thus the diaspora is a community that lobbies for a certain position on the issue of political conflicts in the territory of their historical homeland in the host state. The term "historical homeland" is often used for defining diasporas and is a problem for interpretation due to the fact that it may not be clearly defined [7]. However, in this study, the Basque historical homeland is understood as the territories of modern Basque Autonomous Community in Spain and the provinces in Pyrénées-Atlantiques department (French Basque Country). Taking into account the diversity of approaches to the phenomenon of the diaspora, the author identifies the most significant concepts for defining the Basque diaspora. Firstly, the Basque diaspora is an ethnic population that lives outside the "historical homeland", possessing a number of characteristics, including the presence of a collective myth and a memory of the "historical homeland", the presence of an emotional connection (often idealizing) with the "historical homeland", in addition to a sense of solidarity with the diasporal communities in other countries [8. P. 29]. Secondly, the definition linking the diaspora to the transnational approach, in which the diaspora is considered as a transnational advocacy network [4. P. 15] is significant for understanding the Basque diaspora. To understand the applicability of the approach in this case, it is required to refer to historical aspects of Basque diasporas development.

The first President of the Basque Country, J.A. Aguirre, indicated the idea of liberty as the basis of nationalism. However, due to the fact that in his perception the idea of liberty was based on universality, such an approach indeed brought the ideas of nationalism closer to transnationalism: the principle of liberty was applied to all nations, every nation has the right to freedom, "liberty is a universal patrimony" [9. P. 236]. There is a difference between nationality based on ethnicity and nationality based on citizenship. The former can be sacrificed for the sake of the latter, and the latter, in turn, is universally applicable. Basque nationality, according to J.A. Aguirre [9], is based precisely on the principle of universality, and not on exclusive particularism. Consequently, it can be argued that Basque transnationalism is not a new trend of the modern Basque government, since it has a period of historical development associated primarily with the middle of the XX century and the Basque government in exile during the Spanish Civil War and the First World War. J.A. Aguirre's political views combined classical nationalist concepts (deepening self-government) and transnational ones (stable, regular cross-border interaction between people and institutions across the borders of nation-states [9. P. 160]). The existing paradox between the traditionalism of Basque nationalism (it developed as a protest against industrial and capitalist modernity, rejecting any external influence on Basque society due to the destructive impact on local values and customs

[9. P. 162]) and transnational practices (both the extensive experience of the Basques occupying significant positions during the colonization of the New World, and the transnational interaction of diasporas and the work of the Basque government in exile in the XX century) reveals the formation of a special form of Basque transnational nationalism.

Similar to Aguirre's idea of reforming the territorial structure of Europe is the concept of "Europe of the Regions". The genesis of the EU has created new political and economic opportunities for the regions: "as the differing national legislations of the member states are replaced by "European law", the regions of individual European countries commence to function in an increasingly similar and homogeneous legal field" [10. P. 200]. Basque nationalists regularly refer to this idea in one form or another to legitimize their demands, especially in relation to the desire to reform the Statute of the Basque Country. While resuming the debate on updating the Statute in 2021, the Government of the Basque Country submitted to the European Commission a proposal to strengthen the role of the regions in legislative powers and initiatives at the pan-European level [11]. A similar idea was a part of an earlier plan for reforming the Statute — the Ibarretxe plan. This plan advocated the consideration of the Basque Country not as a Spanish region, but as a European region existing on the rights of free association with Spain [12], since, according to the same plan, the Basques represent a European nation, not a Spanish one. In the recent debate on the reforms of the Statute of the Basque Country, the leaders of the autonomy insist on equal relations with another European nation — Spain: the basis is the demand for recognition of the Basques as a nation that can conduct an equal dialogue with the Spaniards. As a consequence, there is no longer a discussion about separatism, which is based on a nationalist desire to form a sovereign state, but about a post-national or transnational form of coexistence with other nations.

The Basque nationalist narrative is adaptable and influenced by practice. The reactionary nationalism of the supporters of Sabino Arana (the founder of BNP) and subsequently ETA arose as a result of autonomous rights restriction by the Spanish state, its main goal was the return of these historic rights. Such rhetoric, generally, is still evident in the left-wing EH Bildu party, which poses the concept of the "right to decide" (*el derecho a decidir*) at the center of the new Statute discussion. Basque nationalists have repeatedly referred to this statement: for example, it was used in the declaration supporting the referendum in Catalonia in 2014 [13]. However, from a legal point of view [14], there is no such legal wording. Moreover, the interpretation of the term is not limited: both the right to be heard and the right to separate. Such wording is considered as a challenge to the Constitution [14]. The ruling Basque Nationalist Party rejects such harsh rhetoric and broadcasts the ideas of transnationalism, where two directions can be distinguished. The former, historically typical for Basque leaders, is the emphasis on cooperation and interaction with Basque diasporas abroad. This trend has become particularly relevant since the existence of the Basque government in exile in the 40s of the XX century. The latter is the promotion

of the idea of equal regional cooperation in Europe within the framework of the concept of “Europe of the Regions”, which is actively supported by the Basque Government in the debate on the new Statute. According to one of the founders of nationalism studies, A.D. Smith, [16] nationalism may manifest itself in a variety of groups — be it a nation-state, a supranational entity or an ethnic group. This is a consequence of the lack of clear understanding of the term «nation». All nationalists strive for some kind of “normality” [16. P. 186]: a recognition, a voice in the UN, a historical, linguistic base and identity. Nationalism as a phenomenon develops during the existence of nation-states, but as a result of the processes of globalization and the emergence of regional blocs this trend leads to the development of internationalism as recognition of the nationalism of other national units. However, in such a paradigm, there is a clash of nation-states and subnational units, such as ethnic groups within sovereign territories. Consequently, nation-states face either the problem of Balkanization (splitting into smaller national units), or involvement in larger national and supranational units. Another consequence of globalization is the development of supranationalism as cosmopolitan tendency. This form tends to reduce the number of “nationalisms” within one territory, but leads to the emergence of supranational units [16. P. 194]. Subsequently, not a decrease in the number of problems, but the opposite trend can be observed: an increase in competing types of nationalism and a general increase in nationalist movements, which leads to excessive tension.

The expansion of self-government of autonomous communities shall probably require a revision of the state model as a whole. The Basque request for the creation of a “federation of nations” [17. P. 207] has a historical character, as a democratic territorial model opposed to the unification that occurred under the Franco regime. The federalization of the state was proposed by the PSOE as one of the ways to solve the issue of nationalism. The ideas of federalism endure to be the points of the election campaign of the Socialists, but the wording changes moderately: federalism (*federalismo*) in 2015 [18], federal principles (*principios federales*) in early 2019 [19] and the state of autonomies (*estado de las autonomías*) in the latest election program with a tendency to strengthen self-government [20]. As for the foundations of self-government, the PSOE electoral programs refer to the Barcelona Declaration of 2017 (*Declaración de Barcelona*) and the Granada Declaration of 2013 (*Declaración de Granada*), which outlines the reasons for the need to reconsider the level of self-government for autonomous communities [21]: at the time of 1978, there was no European Union in its current form, there was no euro, no global economy, the global financial crisis, the current level of migration, etc. This leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to review and amend the Statutes of Autonomies. Thus, the current request from the Basque Country generally fits into the ideas of the program of the ruling Spanish party, but the question remains open: what is the future of self-government of autonomous communities? How will this affect the entire state as a whole? Is it possible to reform the territorial structure of Spain

## REFERENCES


1. Entrevista a Andoni Ortuzar. *El Diario Vasco*. URL: <https://www.eaj-pnv.eus/es/documentos/18277/entrevista-a-andoni-ortuzar-en-el-diario-vasco>. Accessed: 20.08.2021.
2. Kostenko V.V. Migration Theories: From Assimilation to Transnationalism. *The Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*. 2014;17(3):62–76 (In Russ.).
3. Bauböck R. Towards a Political Theory of Migrant Transnationalism. *The International Migration Review*. 2003;37(3):700–723.
4. Bauböck R., Faist T., eds. *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam University Press; 2010.
5. Sassen S. Towards Post-National and Denationalized Citizenship. *Handbook of Citizenship Studies*. Isin E.F. & Turner B.S. (eds). SAGE Publications Ltd.; 2002.
6. Avdashkin A.A. Diaspora: The Methodological Basis of the Research of the Phenomenon. *Bulletin of Chelyabinsk State University*. 2015;2(357) (In Russ.).
7. Tishkov V.A. Istoricheskii fenomen diaspori [Historical Phenomenon of Diaspora]. *Ethnopanorama*. 2000; 2: 2–12 (In Russ.).
8. Toticaguena G. Basque Diaspora: Migration and Transnational Identity. *Center for Basque Studies*. University of Nevada, Reno; 2005.
9. Irujo X., Olaziregi M.J. The International Legacy of Lehendakari Jose A. Agirre's Government. *Center for Basque Studies*. University of Nevada, Reno; 2017.
10. Landabaso Angulo A., Konovalov A.M. Terrorism and Ethnopolitical Conflicts. *Terrorism Today*. Moscow; 2004 (In Russ.).
11. *Europapress*, “Urkullu quiere un pacto con el Estado para que el País Vasco tenga un nuevo ‘estatus’”. URL: <https://www.europapress.es/nacional/noticia-urkullu-quiere-pacto-estado-pais-vasco-tenga-nuevo-estatus-20210714161800.html>. Accessed: 08.08.2021 (In Span.).
12. *Propuesta de Estatuto Político de la Comunidad de Euskadi*. URL: [https://web.archive.org/web/20061209224804/http://www.nuevoestatutodeeuskadi.net/docs/estatutovasco\\_cas.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20061209224804/http://www.nuevoestatutodeeuskadi.net/docs/estatutovasco_cas.pdf). Accessed: 03.02.2022 (In Span.).
13. *Catalunya tiene derecho a decidir su futuro*. URL: <https://english.eaj-pnv.eus/es/adjuntos-documentos/16977/pdf/declaracion-catalunya>. Accessed: 07.07.2021 (In Span.).
14. Perea Unceta J.A. El scenismo catalane en el contexto del derecho internacional. *Foro, Nueva época*. 2014;17(2) (In Span.).
15. Barceló i Serramalera M. El derecho a decidir como instrumento constitucional para la canalización de problemas territoriales. *Fundamentos: Cuadernos monográficos de teoría del estado, derecho público e historia constitucional*. 2016; 9 (In Span.).
16. Smith A.D. *Nationalism in the 20th Century*. Canberra: Australian National University Press; 1979.
17. Mota Zurdo D. *Un sueño americano. El Gobierno vasco en el exilio y los Estados Unidos (1937–1979)*. Tesis doctoral. Universidad del País Vasco-Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV-EHU); 2015 (In Span.).
18. *PSOE, Programa electoral — Elecciones generales 2015*. URL: [https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2015/12/PSOE\\_Programa\\_Electoral\\_2015.pdf](https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2015/12/PSOE_Programa_Electoral_2015.pdf). Accessed: 25.09.2021 (In Span.).
19. *PSOE, Programa electoral — Elecciones generales abril 2019*. URL: <https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2019/04/PSOE-programa-electoral-elecciones-generales-28-de-abril-de-2019.pdf>. Accessed: 25.09.2021 (In Span.).
20. *PSOE, Programa electoral — Elecciones generales noviembre 2019*. URL: <https://www.psoe.es/media-content/2019/10/Ahora-progreso-programa-PSOE-10N-31102019.pdf>. Accessed: 25.09.2021 (In Span.).
21. *PSOE, Un nuevo pacto territorial*. URL: <http://web.psoe.es/source-media/000000562000/000000562233.pdf>. Accessed: 25.09.2021 (In Span.).

**Information about the author:**

Yulia N. Frolova — PhD in Political Science, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Political Science, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (Russian Federation) (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0743-6144) (e-mail: frolovayuliya@yahoo.com).

# Транснационализм как приоритетный тренд регионального самоуправления в Стране Басков

Ю.Н. Фролова  

Российский государственный педагогический университет им. А. И. Герцена,  
191186, Россия, Санкт-Петербург, наб. р. Мойки, 48/20  
 frolovayuliya@yahoo.com

**Аннотация.** Исследование посвящено развитию трендов транснационализма и национализма в баскском самоуправлении. В 2021 году Страна Басков возобновила дебаты по обновлению Статута Герники (Статута автономии Страны Басков 1979 года) по инициативе парламента Страны Басков. Некоторые ключевые моменты этой дискуссии и текущие региональные инициативы басков в Европейском Союзе привлекают внимание и могут указывать на развитие национализма в контексте транснациональных тенденций и формирования новой региональной идентичности. Методология основана на теории транснационализма и концепции сосуществования постнационального и национального как одновременных и/или конкурирующих форм. В ходе развития баскского общества акцент делается именно на национализме (особенно в контексте периода деятельности террористической группировки ЭТА), однако и аспекты транснациональной идентичности можно обнаружить в историческом прошлом. С окончанием террористической эры признается необходимость в новых определениях для баскского националистического движения. Несмотря на нынешний высокий уровень противников независимости, баскское общество по-прежнему не удовлетворено уровнем самоуправления. В результате проблема национализма в баскском обществе сильно видоизменяется: это уже не требование создания независимого государства, а запрос на новый уровень отношений между Страной Басков и Испанией, Страной Басков и Европейским Союзом, Страной Басков и другими регионами; требование формирования и признания новой европейской региональной идентичности. Исследование характеризует новый этап баскского самоуправления как националистический и транснационалистический одновременно. С точки зрения этого определения концепция «Европы регионов» снова становится актуальной и может влиять на развитие национализма в других европейских регионах с аналогичными проблемами.

**Ключевые слова:** транснационализм, национализм, сепаратизм, Страна Басков, самоуправление

**Заявление о конфликте интересов:** Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов

## История статьи:

Статья поступила в редакцию: 05.05.2022. Статья принята к публикации: 30.07.2022.

## Для цитирования:

Frolova Yu.N. Transnationalism as a Key Trend of Regional Self-government in the Basque Country // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Государственное и муниципальное управление. 2022. Т. 9. № 3. С. 295–301. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8313-2022-9-3-295-301>

## Информация об авторе:

Фролова Юлия Николаевна — кандидат политических наук, старший преподаватель кафедры политологии Российского государственного педагогического университета им. А.И. Герцена (ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0743-6144) (e-mail: frolovayuliya@yahoo.com).