

TEKMUN'25

Study Guide



UNGA ESS

Agenda: Recognition of New Breakaway States and the Future of Territorial Integrity

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1. Letter from the Secretary General

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

It is with great honor and excitement that I welcome you all to second edition of TEKMUN. As the Secretary General, I am truly proud to witness the gathering of bright, passionate and globally minded individuals who are ready to discuss, debate and shape solutions to the pressing issues of our time.

TEKMUN was founded with a vision and to create a platform where ideas meet diplomacy, and where every delegate finds their voice. This year we aim to uphold that vision by providing a conference that not only challenges your intellect but also inspires collaboration, empathy and leadership.

Each committee has been carefully designed to reflect the diversity and complexity of international relations. From humanitarian crises to global security, TEKMUN'25 invites you to think critically, speak confidently and act diplomatically.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our dedicated Secretariat, Organizing Team and our Academic Team for their endless efforts in bringing this conference to life. To our delegates, I wish you fruitful debates, new friendships and unforgettable experiences. May TEKMUN'25 be a milestone in your MUN journey and a reminder that your voice matters.

Warm regards,

Sıla Bayram

Secretary General of TEKMUN'25

2. Letter from the Under Secretary General

Dear Delegates,

It is my absolute pleasure to welcome you to the United Nations General Assembly – Emergency Special Session of TEKMUN 2025, where we will be addressing one of the most complex and thought-provoking issues in international relations — *“Recognition of New Breakaway States and the Future of Territorial Integrity.”*

This agenda has been selected to challenge your understanding of sovereignty, international law, and diplomacy, while also allowing you to explore the thin line between a people's right to self-determination and a nation's right to preserve its territorial unity. Through the examination of two significant case studies — Palestine and Catalonia — you will engage with historical, legal, and political dimensions that continue to shape our world today. The discussion in this committee will not only revolve around the recognition of states but also question the legitimacy, morality, and consequences of such recognition. You are encouraged to think critically, remain respectful of differing opinions, and always support your arguments with reason and evidence. Remember, diplomacy is not only about defending your country's stance but also about finding common ground that leads to practical and realistic solutions.

This committee is designed to be beginner-friendly, but that should not limit your ambition. Dive deep into your research, understand your nation's policies, and express your ideas confidently during debate.

I wish you all the best throughout the conference. May your discussions be fruitful and your experience at this committee both enjoyable and inspiring.

With sincere regards,

Osama Almousli

Under-Secretary-General

3. Introduction to the committee

The United Nations General Assembly Emergency Special Session (UNGA ESS) is one of the most exceptional committees within the United Nations system. Unlike a regular General Assembly (GA) committee which follow a fixed schedule, the Emergency Special Session (ESS) may be convened under the “Uniting for Peace” resolution (UNGA Resolution 377 A, 1950) which states that if the Security Council, because of lack of agreement of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility which is to ensure international peace and security in cases that appears to be a threat to the peace, or act of aggression, the General Assembly shall consider the matter immediately with an aim to making appropriate recommendations to Members, to maintain or restore international peace and security. If not in session at the time, the General Assembly may meet in emergency special session within twenty-four hours of the request, therefore.



The ESS is designed to allow the General Assembly to assume a more effective role in responding to urgent global crises. These sessions have historically been used to address conflicts and humanitarian crises where the Security Council couldn't agree on a solution due to the disagreements and the veto power of its permanent members. The General Assembly is composed of 25 UN member states, each having one vote, regardless of the size or influence of the country. In this simulation, 25 carefully selected states will represent diverse perspectives, ranging from major powers with vested strategic interests to regional actors directly affected by the outcomes, to states that emphasize principles such as self-determination, territorial integrity, and sovereignty.

4. Introduction to the agenda item

The agenda of this committee, “Recognition of New Breakaway States and the Future of Territorial Integrity,” deals with one of the most pressing and controversial questions in international relations: Should the international community recognize territories that declare independence, or should the principle of territorial integrity always prevail?

Throughout modern history, the world has seen numerous independence movements and declarations of secession. Such as South Sudan which has achieved recognition and membership in the United Nations. Others like Kosovo and Somaliland remain partially recognized or entirely unrecognized.

This committee focuses on two specific and ongoing cases, which are;

Palestine: A long-standing struggle where recognition is deeply tied to issues of conflict, occupation, and peace in the Middle East. While over 130 UN member states already recognize Palestine as a state, key global actors, such as the United States and several European countries, do not. The situation escalated further following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel and the subsequent war in Gaza, reshaping international discussions on Palestinian recognition.

Catalonia: A European example of secessionist movements. The Catalan independence referendum of 2017, which was declared illegal by Spain, sparked tensions within the European Union. Unlike Palestine, Catalonia’s case is not linked to occupation or armed conflict, but rather to issues of constitutional law, democracy, independence, and the right to self-determination within a developed European state.

As participants, delegates will be tasked with examining the political, legal, and humanitarian implications of recognizing or denying recognition to these states. Delegates must also balance legal principles with realities. They should consider how recognition or non-recognition affects international law, regional stability, and the illustration it sets for other independence movements worldwide. The main challenge will be to navigate competing interests and ideologies while drafting resolutions that reflect both practicality and the UN’s founding principles.

5. Case I: The recognition of Palestine

5.1. Historical Background

The Palestinian question emerged in the late 19th century with the rise of Zionism and the growing sense of Arab nationalism in the region. In 1897, Theodore Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian journalist, led the First Zionist Congress, advocating for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine due to rising anti-Semitism in Europe. During the same period, Palestinian Arabs maintained deep ties to their land, culture, and society under Ottoman rule. The influx of Jewish immigrants gradually shifted demographics, creating tension over land ownership and political control. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration expressed British support for a Jewish national home while pledging that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities.” This statement was interpreted differently: Zionists viewed it as international endorsement, while Palestinians saw it as a denial of their right to self-determination.

Following World War I, the League of Nations assigned Britain the Mandate over Palestine, placing the territory under British administration. Jewish migration increased, particularly in the 1930s as Jews fled Nazi persecution. This led to the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt, where Palestinian Arabs protested British rule and the growing Jewish settlements. British forces responded with military action, while Jewish militias such as the Haganah, Irgun, and Stern Gang also carried out operations, sometimes targeting both Palestinians and British forces. Palestinians view these years as a period of dispossession and resistance, while Zionists argue that migration was necessary for survival and state-building.

In 1947, the United Nations proposed Resolution 181, recommending the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states, with Jerusalem under international administration. Jewish leaders accepted the plan, while Palestinians and neighboring Arab states rejected it, arguing the allocation was unfair and violated majority rights.

On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence, immediately triggering the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. During the conflict, approximately 750,000 Palestinians were displaced, in an event Palestinians call the Nakba (“Catastrophe”). Hundreds of villages were depopulated, and thousands of homes destroyed. Refugees fled to Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, creating long-lasting humanitarian challenges. The war resulted in both territorial gains for Israel

and the loss of Palestinian land, exacerbating tensions and cementing the refugee crisis. This period also highlighted early international divisions: while some states recognized Israel immediately, global powers differed on how to approach Palestinian rights and refugee resettlement.



Subsequent conflicts, including the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1967 Six-Day War, further shaped territorial disputes. In 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights. UN Resolution 242 called for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories and recognition of all states in the region.

These years intensified the Palestinian refugee crisis, as many families lost not only homes but also access to education, healthcare, and employment. Economic development in the occupied territories was restricted, while Israel increased settlements, heightening tensions. Palestinians experienced daily challenges related to movement, land access, and political representation. Palestinians emphasize occupation and displacement as major obstacles to recognition. Israel focuses on security threats, arguing that territorial control is necessary to prevent attacks from militant groups. Delegates should consider these competing security and humanitarian narratives when drafting resolutions.

Several international initiatives attempted to resolve the conflict:

- Camp David Accords (1978): Peace treaty between Egypt and Israel; excluded Palestinians from meaningful participation.
- Oslo Accords (1993–1995): Established limited Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza; aimed at mutual recognition and a framework for future negotiations.
- Roadmap for Peace (2003): Proposed staged steps toward a two-state solution; stalled due to continued violence and settlement expansion.

Despite these efforts, political divisions and recurring violence, including the First Intifada (1987–1993) and the Second Intifada (2000–2005), undermined progress. Both sides experienced casualties and destruction, further entrenching mistrust.

Israel disengaged from Gaza in 2005, but blockades, border controls, and recurrent military operations have severely restricted civilian life. The rise of Hamas in 2007 complicated governance, as the organization is designated a terrorist group by several states, while retaining political legitimacy for many Palestinians. Multiple conflicts between 2008–2021 caused thousands of civilian deaths and widespread infrastructure destruction. These operations created long-term humanitarian challenges, including shortages of food, water, electricity, and medical supplies.

The political division between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza has fragmented Palestinian governance, weakening international recognition efforts.

The United Nations has been central to recognition debates. In 2012, the UN General Assembly granted Palestine non-member observer state status, signaling partial international recognition. Over 130 countries recognize Palestine, but key powers, including the United States, Israel, and some European states, do not, citing security concerns and the need for negotiated settlements. UN resolutions, such as 242, 338, and 2334, condemned settlements, called for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, and reaffirmed Palestinian rights. However, the Security Council remains divided, demonstrating the political complexity and global divergence of opinion regarding Palestinian statehood.

5.2. Perspective on Statehood

Palestinian Perspective

For Palestinians, statehood represents self-determination, sovereignty, and the fulfillment of a long-denied right. They argue that the Palestinian people have lived in the region for centuries and maintain a distinct national identity, culture, and governance structures.

Decades of occupation, displacement, and conflict have created a moral and legal imperative for international recognition. Recognition is essential to end the humanitarian crisis, allow economic development, and provide political legitimacy to both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and representative institutions in Gaza. Legal frameworks, such as UN General Assembly Resolution 181 (Partition Plan, 1947) and Resolution 194 (Right of Return, 1948), support Palestinian claims to statehood and territorial rights.

Palestinians emphasize that recognition is not just symbolic, but a practical tool for negotiating peace, ensuring accountability, and securing international aid. Many view the October 7, 2023 events as further evidence of the vulnerability of their population and the need for stronger international support

Israeli Perspective

Israel's perspective is shaped primarily by security concerns, historical claims, and regional politics. Israel emphasizes the need for security guarantees due to repeated attacks by militant groups, including Hamas. Some argue that immediate recognition of a Palestinian state could threaten Israel's security, especially without strong guarantees that militant factions will disarm. Israel stresses its historical and religious ties to the land, viewing the territory as essential for national identity and self-preservation. The Israeli government often highlights that negotiations, not unilateral recognition, are the proper path toward resolving sovereignty disputes.

From this viewpoint, recognition of Palestine without comprehensive peace agreements may undermine ongoing diplomatic efforts, create precedents for other contested regions, and destabilize Israel's borders.

International Perspective

The global community is divided on the recognition of Palestine, reflecting broader geopolitical interests and alliances; Supporting states (e.g., much of the Global South, Arab League countries) argue that recognition is a moral and legal obligation to uphold international law and human rights. They view Palestine as a legitimate state deserving UN membership and sovereignty. Opposing states (e.g., the United States, Israel, some EU countries) contend that recognition should follow negotiated peace agreements between Israel and Palestinians, emphasizing security and stability concerns.

The United Nations plays a unique role: granting Palestine non-member observer status (2012) allows it to participate in debates and join international treaties, but it does not equate to full UN membership.

5.3. Peace Efforts and Their Failures

-Camp David Accords (1978)

The objective was to ensure peace between Egypt and Israel (a framework for Palestinian autonomy). Unfortunately the Accords did not address key Palestinian demands for sovereignty, refugees, or territorial rights. Many Palestinians viewed the agreement as a diplomatic bypass, leaving their grievances unresolved. As an outcome Egypt became the first Arab country to recognize Israel; Palestinians were largely excluded from negotiations.

-Oslo Accords (1993–1995)

The objective was to establish Palestinian self-rule in parts of the West Bank and Gaza; mutual recognition; roadmap for final status negotiations. Even after long negotiations key issues like borders, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem remained unresolved. Violence continued, including terrorist attacks and military responses, undermining trust. Political divisions within both Israeli and Palestinian leaderships hindered implementation. As a result there was limited autonomy for the Palestinian Authority in other words: recognition of Israel by the PLO

-Annapolis Conference (2007)

The aim was to resume final-status negotiations and achieve a two-state solution within one year. Unfortunately talks ended without resolution; violence in Gaza escalated concurrently

5.4. 7th of October 2023 Incident

On October 7, 2023, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict reached a dramatic escalation when Hamas launched a coordinated assault against Israel. This unprecedented attack involved thousands of rockets fired into Israeli territory, as well as cross-border infiltrations by militants targeting civilian and military areas. The violence resulted in significant casualties, with hundreds of Israelis killed and thousands injured in a matter of hours. Israel responded with a large-scale military campaign in the Gaza Strip, targeting Hamas leadership, military infrastructure, and suspected militant locations. The response, while framed by Israel as a necessary act of self-defense, resulted in massive civilian casualties, destruction of homes, schools, hospitals, and essential infrastructure, and exacerbated an already severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The incident intensified displacement, leaving tens of thousands of Palestinians without shelter, food, or medical care. Hospitals became overwhelmed, and essential services were disrupted, leaving the population in Gaza highly vulnerable. The events of that day drew immediate international attention. The United States and many European nations emphasized Israel's right to defend itself while expressing concern over civilian casualties and urging restraint. Conversely, the Arab League, many Global South countries, and human rights organizations strongly condemned the scale of the Israeli military response, highlighting the disproportionate impact on Palestinian civilians and calling for immediate humanitarian access.

The October 7 attack also reshaped the ongoing debates about Palestinian recognition. Some countries reaffirmed their support for Palestinian statehood, arguing that the attack underscored the urgency of providing Palestinians with international legitimacy and protections. Others expressed hesitation, citing the continuing violence and the need for a negotiated settlement before formal recognition could be considered. The event demonstrated how rapid escalations in conflict can influence international perspectives, complicate diplomatic efforts, and intensify humanitarian concerns. It also highlighted the delicate balance between security, sovereignty, and human rights, making it a critical reference point for delegates considering resolutions related to recognition, humanitarian aid, and conflict mitigation.

The October 7 incident is therefore not only a tragic escalation of violence but also a pivotal moment in the broader struggle over Palestinian statehood, international recognition, and territorial integrity, illustrating the complexity of resolving the conflict and the urgency of sustainable diplomatic solutions.

5.5. Current Status

As of now, the situation in Palestine remains highly complex, both politically and humanitarianly. Palestine has been recognized as a non-member observer state by the United Nations since 2012, and over 130 UN member states formally recognize its sovereignty. Despite this, key global actors, including the United States, Israel, and several European countries, continue to withhold recognition, citing concerns over security, governance, and the need for a negotiated peace with Israel. This division has resulted in a fragmented international stance, where support for Palestine's recognition is strong in some regions and cautious or opposed in others.

Politically, Palestine remains divided between two main governing entities. The Palestinian Authority (PA) administers parts of the West Bank and engages in formal diplomatic relations with the international community, while Hamas, following its electoral victory in 2006 and subsequent takeover of Gaza in 2007, controls the Gaza Strip. This internal division complicates governance, coordination of services, and the ability to negotiate a unified position in international forums. The split also affects perceptions of legitimacy: while some states engage primarily with the PA, others question whether recognition can be effective without a cohesive governing authority representing all Palestinians.

Humanitarian conditions remain dire. The ongoing blockade of Gaza by Israel, combined with repeated military escalations, has left the population facing shortages of food, water, medical supplies, and electricity. The aftermath of the October 7, 2023 attacks further exacerbated these challenges, displacing tens of thousands of Palestinians and leaving critical infrastructure severely damaged. International aid has been crucial but is often hampered by security risks, political obstacles, and restrictions on access.

Territorial disputes continue to define the landscape. Israeli settlements in the West Bank have expanded, undermining the prospects of a contiguous Palestinian state, while East Jerusalem remains a particularly contested area. These territorial realities, combined with historical grievances, ongoing violence, and political divisions, make negotiations over borders, governance, and recognition exceptionally difficult.

International diplomacy continues to play a central role. Regional powers such as Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar engage in mediation and humanitarian support, while the United Nations, European Union, and United States attempt to balance pressures for peace, security, and humanitarian relief. Recognition debates are therefore not merely symbolic; they are tied directly to the prospects for effective governance, security guarantees, and long-term conflict resolution.

In this context, Palestine's current status is defined by a paradox: it is widely recognized in principle but remains constrained in practice, politically divided, and subject to ongoing conflict and humanitarian crises. Delegates must understand that any consideration of recognition, aid, or resolutions will need to navigate these intertwined political, security, and humanitarian factors.

5.6. Debate on Recognition and Territorial Integrity

Part 1: Legal Challenges

Delegates must consider whether a group's right to self-determination (Palestinians) outweighs the territorial integrity of an existing state (Israel). Legal frameworks like the UN Charter support both principles, creating inherent tension.

Precedent Setting: Recognition of Palestine may influence other secessionist movements (e.g., Catalonia, Kosovo, Taiwan). Delegates must evaluate the global legal and political implications.

Part 2: Political Challenges

International Division: Some countries recognize Palestine, while others do not, creating unequal political leverage and conflicting diplomatic pressures.

Internal Palestinian Division: The split between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas complicates representation, governance, and legitimacy in international negotiations.

Part 3: Security Challenges

Conflict Escalation: Recognition without security guarantees may exacerbate tensions, leading to violence or retaliatory attacks.

Regional Stability: Middle Eastern states, neighboring countries, and international actors all have vested interests in preventing broader instability.

Part 4: Humanitarian Challenges

Civilian Protection: Military escalations, blockades, and displacement highlight the need to consider human rights and aid access.

Sustainable Governance: Recognition without functional governance structures may fail to improve the humanitarian situation.

5.7. Possible Paths and General Solutions

Path 1: Two-State Solution

Revive negotiations for an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. Requires agreement on borders, security arrangements, and refugee rights. It respects self-determination while maintaining Israel's territorial integrity. The main concerning challenges are: Trust, ongoing settlement expansion, and leadership divisions.

Path 2: One-State Framework

Establish a single state with equal citizenship for Palestinians and Israelis. It eliminates territorial disputes and may provide shared governance, but the main impediments are: Deep mistrust, political feasibility, and potential demographic and cultural conflicts.

THESE PATHS (SOLUTIONS) ARE ONLY FEW OF THE SOLUTIONS THAT WILL BE SPOKEN ABOUT IN THE COMMITTEE, THE DELEGATES ARE EXPECTED TO BE READY TO DEBATE OVER THESE SOLUTIONS AND TO PRESENT THEIR OWN SOLUTIONS



6. Case II: The independence of Catalonia

6.1. Historical background

Catalonia is an autonomous community in northeastern Spain, home to a distinct language, culture, and long-standing regional identity. Its historical roots can be traced back to the medieval period under the Crown of Aragon, where Catalonia had its own institutions and legal frameworks, laying the foundation for a strong sense of self-governance. This identity was further shaped by centuries of evolving political and economic structures, distinguishing Catalans from the broader Spanish population.

During the 20th century, Catalonia experienced both repression and resurgence. Under Francisco Franco's dictatorship (1939–1975), regional autonomy was severely curtailed, Catalan language and culture were suppressed, and political activism was criminalized. Following Spain's transition to democracy, Catalonia regained significant self-government under the 1978 Constitution, establishing a parliamentary system, control over education, culture, policing, and economic management. Despite these gains, Catalan leaders and citizens continued to assert that their region maintained the right to self-determination, citing both historical identity and economic contributions as justification.



Catalonia's modern independence movement gained momentum in the early 21st century. The Catalan government and pro-independence parties argued that the region contributed disproportionately to Spain's economy while lacking adequate fiscal autonomy. They also framed independence as a democratic choice for Catalan citizens, emphasizing the principle of self-determination. From the Spanish government's perspective, however, the territorial integrity of Spain is enshrined in the Constitution, which does not allow unilateral secession. Spanish authorities also highlighted the potential risks of setting a precedent for other separatist movements in Europe.

The situation reached a critical point in October 2017, when the Catalan government organized an independence referendum. Despite being declared illegal by the Spanish Constitutional Court, the vote went ahead, resulting in a majority in favor of independence with a turnout of approximately 43%. The Spanish government responded by sending police to halt the vote, which led to violent clashes, dozens of injuries, and the arrest of key Catalan leaders. Subsequently, the Spanish government invoked direct rule under Article 155 of the Constitution, dissolving the regional parliament and calling for new elections.

Internationally, the referendum and ensuing crisis were met with widespread non-recognition. The European Union and most major powers, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, supported Spain's position, emphasizing respect for domestic law and territorial integrity. A few other regions with secessionist ambitions closely observed the developments but largely refrained from recognizing Catalonia as an independent state. This contrasted with cases such as Kosovo, where partial recognition has been granted, highlighting the complex interplay between legality, politics, and international precedent.

From a cultural and social standpoint, Catalonia maintains a robust identity that fuels political activism. The Catalan language, education system, media, and civil society organizations reinforce a shared sense of nationhood. Public opinion remains divided: while a significant portion of the population supports independence, many Catalans prefer greater autonomy within Spain rather than full secession. Grassroots movements, protests, and political campaigns continue to influence the debate, demonstrating the enduring strength of regional identity.

Legally, the dispute centers on conflicting principles. Catalan leaders invoke the right to self-determination, arguing that citizens should be able to democratically decide their political future. Spain relies on constitutional law, asserting that unilateral secession violates national sovereignty. The European Union and international law largely uphold Spain's position, emphasizing negotiated solutions rather than unilateral declarations.

6.2. Political and Economic Context

Catalonia is one of Spain's most economically dynamic regions, accounting for roughly 30% of Spain's GDP despite having only about 16% of the national population. Its economy is diverse, with strong manufacturing, tourism, technology, and service sectors, and it contributes significantly to national exports. Catalan leaders have long argued that the region pays more in taxes to Madrid than it receives in public spending, creating a sense of economic grievance and fueling independence sentiments. From the Spanish government's perspective, Catalonia's fiscal contributions are essential for the country as a whole, and any unilateral claim to independence would undermine the national economy and fiscal stability.

Politically, Catalonia has its own parliament and regional government (Generalitat de Catalunya), which oversees education, health, culture, and policing. Over the past two decades, several pro-independence parties, including Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) and Junts per Catalunya (JxCat), have gained influence. They argue that independence is the logical outcome of decades of democratic expression, including protests, petitions, and unofficial referendums. Conversely, unionist parties such as Ciutadans (Citizens) and the Partit Popular (PP) support remaining part of Spain, emphasizing legal and constitutional frameworks that prohibit unilateral secession.

Public sentiment in Catalonia is deeply divided. Polls indicate that roughly 40–50% of Catalans support full independence, while a similar proportion favors remaining within Spain with enhanced autonomy. This polarization has significant implications for policymakers and international observers. Large-scale protests and civic campaigns often accompany these debates, demonstrating the strong civic engagement in Catalonia.

6.3. Cultural and Social Factors

Catalonia's distinct cultural identity has played a central role in shaping its independence movement. The Catalan language is a cornerstone of regional identity, used in education, media, and government. The promotion and preservation of Catalan over centuries have reinforced a sense of national distinctiveness from the rest of Spain. Alongside language, Catalonia has unique traditions, festivals, and historical narratives that contribute to a strong regional consciousness.

Socially, Catalonia has long maintained a vibrant civil society. Organizations, cultural associations, and grassroots movements have historically mobilized to promote autonomy, social cohesion, and political engagement. Events such as La Diada (Catalonia's National Day) have become focal points for expressing political aspirations, particularly for independence supporters. These gatherings, along with campaigns, rallies, and public demonstrations, reflect the deep emotional and civic attachment many Catalans feel toward self-determination.

The social divide in Catalonia is notable. While a substantial portion of the population advocates for independence, another significant segment supports the remaining part of Spain but seeks

greater autonomy or reforms within the existing constitutional framework. This polarization is mirrored in voting patterns, public opinion surveys, and civic activism, contributing to recurring tensions between the regional and national governments.

Spain's response to cultural and social mobilization has historically combined recognition of Catalonia's autonomy with firm enforcement of constitutional limits. The Spanish state emphasizes that while cultural expression is protected, political actions that contravene the Constitution—such as unilateral declarations of independence—are illegal. This has created a persistent tension between cultural identity and legal frameworks, which remains central to the ongoing debate over Catalonia's status.



6.4. 2017 Independence Referendum & Spain's response

The Catalan independence referendum of October 1, 2017, was organized by the regional government under President Carles Puigdemont and the pro-independence parliamentary majority. The vote followed years of political tension, with Catalan leaders citing fiscal grievances, historic identity, and the principle of self-determination as justification. In the lead-up to the referendum, the Catalan government passed legislation allowing the vote, despite repeated warnings from the Spanish Constitutional Court that any unilateral referendum would be illegal under Spain's 1978 Constitution, which guarantees the country's territorial integrity. The Catalan government framed the referendum as a democratic right, claiming it would provide an opportunity for citizens to express their political will. Preparations included organizing polling stations, voter rolls, and ballots, with significant support from local municipalities. Pro-independence organizations and civil society groups heavily promoted participation, emphasizing the symbolic importance of the vote as a peaceful expression of democratic will.

The Spanish government, led by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, immediately challenged the referendum in court, asserting that it violated multiple constitutional provisions. The Constitutional Court of Spain suspended the Catalan referendum law, declaring any vote or actions related to independence illegal. The Spanish government argued that unilateral secession would contravene the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, and warned that any attempt to proceed would be met with legal and administrative measures. Despite these rulings, the Catalan parliament proceeded with the vote, escalating tensions between the regional and national governments. The standoff represented a confrontation between constitutional legality and claims of democratic self-determination, which became the central legal and political issue of the crisis.

On October 1, 2017, voting took place amid heavy police presence aimed at preventing illegal voting. Spanish national police and Civil Guard units attempted to close polling stations and seize ballot materials, leading to violent clashes with voters and local officials. Reports indicated hundreds of injuries, ranging from protesters and voters to police officers, highlighting the intensity of the confrontation. The Catalan government reported a 43% turnout of eligible voters, with approximately 90% in favor of independence. Opposition groups boycotted the referendum, and critics questioned the legitimacy of the results due to irregularities in voter registration and counting. Nonetheless, the Catalan government treated the outcome as a mandate to pursue independence.

Afterwards, the Spanish government invoked Article 155 of the Constitution, a rarely used mechanism that allows the central government to assume direct control over an autonomous region when its actions threaten national unity. The Catalan parliament was dissolved, regional elections were called, and several pro-independence leaders were suspended, arrested, or later fled.

to other countries to avoid prosecution. The Spanish government emphasized that any unilateral attempt to secede would not be tolerated, framing the referendum as a constitutional crisis rather than a legitimate democratic exercise. Law enforcement and judicial actions continued for months, including prosecutions for rebellion, sedition, and misuse of public funds.

The referendum and its suppression led to massive demonstrations across Catalonia, with both pro-independence and unionist groups organizing protests. Social divisions deepened, with families, workplaces, and communities often split along political lines. Political parties used the crisis to consolidate support, campaign for regional elections, and negotiate positions regarding autonomy and potential paths toward independence.



Internationally, most states and organizations refused to recognize the referendum or any unilateral declaration of independence. The European Union, along with the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France, emphasized Spain's constitutional order and territorial integrity. A few entities sympathetic to separatist movements observed the vote but did not offer formal recognition, reflecting concerns over setting a precedent that could destabilize other nations.

6.5. International reactions

The 2017 Catalan independence referendum generated significant attention worldwide, highlighting the challenge of balancing democratic expression with national sovereignty.

The EU firmly supported Spain's stance that Catalonia is an integral part of the country and that any unilateral declaration of independence would not be recognized. The EU emphasized that

disputes of this kind should be resolved within the constitutional and legal frameworks of member states, warning that recognition of secession could encourage separatist movements in other regions, such as Flanders (Belgium), Scotland (UK), or the Basque Country (Spain).

The US aligned with Spain, stressing that the referendum violated the Spanish Constitution. Washington underscored that recognition of a breakaway region requires adherence to domestic law and international norms, noting that ignoring these principles could set a dangerous precedent for global stability.

Countries such as Canada, Japan, and Australia also refrained from recognition, citing non-interference in internal state affairs. Some international organizations and political commentators expressed symbolic support for Catalonia's right to vote, but no formal diplomatic recognition was granted. This distinction illustrates the difference between moral or democratic support and legal recognition of a new state.

6.6. Legal and Constitutional Debate

The Catalonia situation sparked an intense legal debate centered on two competing principles: self-determination and territorial integrity. Pro-independence advocates argue that Catalonia has the right to determine its political status, referencing international human rights law. They claim that democratic expression, historical grievances, economic factors, and cultural identity justify a legal and moral pathway toward secession. Supporters maintain that peaceful referendums are legitimate exercises of political freedom.

Spain and the majority of the international community maintain that unilateral secession violates the Spanish Constitution and international norms on state sovereignty. The Spanish Constitutional Court consistently ruled the referendum illegal, emphasizing that independence requires constitutional approval, not unilateral action. From this perspective, adherence to legal frameworks is paramount to maintain domestic and international order. The Catalonia case underscores a tension common to many secessionist movements worldwide. Unlike cases involving armed conflict or colonial disputes, Catalonia represents a stable democracy attempting to reconcile civic mobilization with constitutional law. The debate highlights the limits of self-determination when it conflicts with the principle of territorial integrity, showing the legal and diplomatic complexities involved in recognizing new states.

7. Status and policies of each country

1. United States

Palestine: The US does not formally recognize Palestine as a sovereign state. Washington maintains Israel as a key ally and supports negotiations through a two-state solution framework, emphasizing security for Israel and cautious recognition of Palestinian governance. The US frequently vetoes (goes against) UN resolutions seen as anti-Israel.

Catalonia: The US recognizes Spain's territorial integrity and does not support Catalan independence. Official statements emphasize resolving disputes within Spain's constitutional framework.

2. Russia

Palestine: Russia recognizes Palestine as a state and supports Palestinian self-determination. Moscow often critiques Israel's occupation policies and advocates for renewed peace negotiations under UN guidance.

Catalonia: Softly supportive of Catalonia

3. China

Palestine: China recognizes Palestine and supports UN-led negotiations. Beijing emphasizes the two-state solution, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Catalonia: Neutral / slightly sympathetic, can switch anytime and support the Catalan independence

4. United Kingdom

Palestine: The UK recognizes Palestine as a non-member observer state at the UN and supports a negotiated two-state solution. London also stresses humanitarian aid and conflict resolution initiatives.

Catalonia: The UK supports Spain's constitutional unity and opposes unilateral independence efforts. The government emphasizes dialogue within the legal framework.

5. France

Palestine: France recognizes Palestine as a state and promotes a two-state solution. Paris has historically supported EU efforts to facilitate Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

Catalonia: Neutral (it's up to the delegate to decide whether to support The Catalonian independence or not)

6. Spain

Palestine: Spain recognizes Palestine as a sovereign state and is active in diplomatic support within the EU and UN.

Catalonia: Spain firmly opposes Catalan independence, invoking the 1978 Constitution and using Article 155 to suspend regional autonomy temporarily after the 2017 referendum. Madrid emphasizes legal, peaceful resolution through elections and judicial channels.

7. Israel

Palestine: Israel does not recognize Palestine as an independent state. Israeli policy prioritizes security, control over borders, settlements, and Jerusalem. Israel engages in selective negotiations but continues settlement expansion in the West Bank.

Catalonia: Israel officially recognizes Spain's sovereignty and supports territorial integrity, avoiding comments on European separatist movements.

8. Türkiye

Palestine: Türkiye recognizes Palestine as a state and provides strong diplomatic, financial, and humanitarian support. Ankara often criticizes Israeli occupation policies and supports Palestinian self-determination in international forums.

Catalonia: Türkiye supports Spain's unity and does not endorse unilateral secession, emphasizing stability in Europe and international law.

9. Germany

Palestine: Germany recognizes Palestine as a non-member observer state and advocates for a negotiated two-state solution. Berlin emphasizes humanitarian aid, security cooperation, and

EU-led peace initiatives.

Catalonia: Neutral (its up to the delegate to decide whether to support The Catalonian independence or not)

10. Italy

Palestine: Italy recognizes Palestine as a state and promotes a two-state solution within UN and EU frameworks. Rome encourages negotiations and supports humanitarian programs.

Catalonia: Italy supports Spain's territorial integrity and opposes unilateral independence, aligning with EU principles.

11. India

Palestine: India recognizes Palestine as a state and maintains strong historical diplomatic and humanitarian ties. New Delhi supports UN resolutions affirming Palestinian rights.

Catalonia: Cautiously supportive of the Catalan independence

12. Brazil

Palestine: Brazil recognizes Palestine as a state and emphasizes diplomacy and humanitarian support. Brasília aligns with global south perspectives advocating for self-determination.

Catalonia: Supportive of Catalan independence (aligns with Global South principle of self-determination)

13. South Africa

Palestine: South Africa recognizes Palestine and is vocal in criticizing Israeli occupation policies. Pretoria actively supports UN resolutions promoting Palestinian statehood.

Catalonia: Neutral / mildly supportive of Catalonia

14. Saudi Arabia

Palestine: Saudi Arabia recognizes Palestine and plays a prominent role in Arab League support, diplomatic efforts, and humanitarian aid. Riyadh emphasizes Palestinian sovereignty and rights

under international law.

Catalonia: Saudi Arabia supports Spain's territorial integrity and refrains from endorsing European secessionist movements.

15. Egypt

Palestine: Egypt recognizes Palestine and mediates in Israel-Palestine conflicts, notably in Gaza ceasefires. Cairo emphasizes peace negotiations and regional stability.

Catalonia: Egypt supports Spain's sovereignty and opposes unilateral independence.

16. Iran

Palestine: Iran recognizes Palestine and is a vocal critic of Israel, supporting Palestinian political groups and opposing occupation policies.

Catalonia: Iran publicly supports Spain's unity and discourages separatist movements, framing Catalonia as a domestic matter.

17. Pakistan

Palestine: Pakistan recognizes Palestine and provides political support in the UN and OIC, emphasizing self-determination.

Catalonia: Pakistan supports Spain's sovereignty and opposes Catalan independence, highlighting territorial integrity principles.

18. Syria

Palestine: Syria recognizes Palestine and has historically supported Palestinian liberation movements.

Catalonia: Supportive of Catalan independence (aligns with Global South principle of self-determination)

19. Jordan

Palestine: Jordan recognizes Palestine and maintains close diplomatic and humanitarian ties, especially concerning Palestinian refugees.

Catalonia: Neutral (it's up to the delegate to decide whether to support The Catalonian independence or not)

20. Qatar

Palestine: Qatar recognizes Palestine and provides financial and political support, particularly to Gaza-based authorities.

Catalonia: Strongly supportive of Catalonian independence

21. Canada

Palestine: Canada recognizes Palestine as a non-member observer state, advocating a two-state solution and peace negotiations.

Catalonia: Canada supports Spain's constitutional framework and opposes unilateral secession.

22. Netherlands

Palestine: The Netherlands recognizes Palestine as a non-member observer state and supports UN-led negotiations.

Catalonia: Netherlands supports Spain's territorial integrity and legal processes, opposing unilateral independence.

23. Greece

Palestine: Greece recognizes Palestine and promotes diplomatic engagement and humanitarian aid.

Catalonia: Greece supports Spain's unity and emphasizes that independence disputes should be resolved constitutionally.

24. Japan

Palestine: Japan recognizes Palestine as a non-member observer state, encouraging a two-state solution and humanitarian support.

Catalonia: Japan supports Spain's sovereignty and opposes unilateral Catalan secession.

25. Serbia

Palestine: Serbia recognizes Palestine but maintains nuanced relations with Israel and the international community.

Catalonia: Supportive of Catalonia (sympathetic to self-determination in context of Kosovo, though still cautious diplomatically)

8. Key issues for debate

Self-Determination vs. Territorial Integrity

At the heart of both cases is the tension between the principle of self-determination and the concept of territorial integrity. Palestine's claim for statehood rests on historical grievances, prolonged occupation, and the right of its people to govern themselves independently. Conversely, Israel emphasizes security concerns and territorial sovereignty. In Catalonia, the regional government asserts its right to independence based on democratic expression and historical identity, while Spain underscores the legal and constitutional prohibitions against unilateral secession. The debate must explore how these competing principles are recognized in international law and how exceptions or interpretations may influence state behavior globally.

Recognition and Legitimacy

Recognition by other states is critical to establishing legitimacy for any breakaway entity. Palestine enjoys recognition from a majority of UN member states, yet key global actors, including the United States and several EU countries, withhold full recognition, citing security, political, and legal considerations. Catalonia, in contrast, remains largely unrecognized internationally, though the debate centers on the legitimacy of the 2017 referendum and whether international actors should consider the principles of self-determination in democratic societies.

Delegates must analyze how recognition impacts political, economic, and diplomatic relationships both regionally and globally.

Humanitarian and Civil Implications

Humanitarian considerations form a significant dimension of the Palestinian case, where decades of conflict, blockades, and recurring military operations have resulted in large-scale casualties, displacement, and restricted access to essential services. For Catalonia, while there is no armed conflict, the repercussions of unilateral independence movements affect civil liberties, political participation, and social cohesion. Delegates should examine how human rights and the protection of civilians intersect with state sovereignty and the pursuit of independence, assessing both immediate and long-term consequences.

Regional and Global Security

The recognition of new states carries substantial implications for regional and global security. In the Middle East, Palestinian statehood influences Israeli-Arab relations, regional alliances, and the dynamics of international mediation efforts. In Europe, Catalan independence could set a precedent for other secessionist movements and challenge the cohesion of the European Union. Delegates must evaluate how state recognition or refusal may impact stability, influence alliances, and potentially trigger political or security crises.

The Role of International Organizations

International organizations are crucial in shaping the discourse on secession and recognition. UN resolutions, such as Resolutions 242, 338, and 2334, alongside observer status and peacekeeping mechanisms, define the parameters of the Palestinian debate. The European Union, on the other hand, has emphasized Spain's constitutional framework while advocating dialogue in the Catalonia case. The committee must consider how multilateral institutions can mediate disputes, facilitate dialogue, or influence recognition without undermining their own credibility or international law.

9. Questions to be answered

- How do the principles of self-determination and territorial integrity apply to Palestine and Catalonia?
- What are the key humanitarian issues in Palestine, and how have decades of conflict affected civilians, and how can they be solved?
- While Catalonia does not face armed conflict, what social or political tensions arise from its independence movement, and how can these tensions be solved?
- How would full recognition of Palestine affect regional dynamics in the Middle East, including relations with Israel, neighboring Arab states, and major powers?
- How could Catalonia's independence influence separatist movements elsewhere in Europe and the world?
- For Palestine, what are the possible paths toward increased recognition, peace, and self-determination?
- How can international actors encourage peaceful solutions that respect both self-determination and territorial integrity?
- Could recognition help resolve humanitarian challenges or worsen divisions in either case?
- In Catalonia's case, can political repression (such as imprisonment of leaders) be considered a human rights issue on the international stage?
- Should humanitarian crises play a role in determining whether a state deserves recognition?

10. Further research

This Agenda item combines international law, sovereignty, and diplomacy. It is not about simply supporting or opposing independence; rather, it is about examining why certain states are recognized while others are not, and how this affects global stability.

- Remember that recognition is a political decision as much as a legal one.
- Both the Palestine and Catalonia cases raise the same fundamental question: When does self-determination justify independence?

Before the conference, you should have a clear grasp of your country's position on:

State Recognition (Which breakaway states your country has recognized or rejected in the past).

Legal Principles; familiarize yourself with terms like sovereignty, self-determination, and territorial integrity.

Regional Interest; understand why your country's stance benefits or protects its interests.

Alliances and Blocs; know how your country aligns within organizations such as the EU, NATO, or the OIC.

You can watch these videos for further research and explanation

https://youtu.be/m19F4IHTVGc?si=hgoYPwNQd_Oz97HU

<https://youtu.be/46T24kESeek?si=kghF9LO42yTS07jz>

<https://youtu.be/2KX0C1IdrE0?si=WibMZMNdCV59nAM>

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