



INTRODUCTION

Autonomy is a means for diffusion of powers in order to preserve the unity of a state while respecting the diversity of its population; it has been successful in some cases and failed in others.

Because of its growing relevance, the subject deserves close examination and analysis. The object of this study is to analyze the concept of autonomy with special consideration of its possible role as a method of relieving tensions resulting from the heterogeneity of a great number of states. Special emphasis will be given to its potential to address the aspirations of minorities, of indigenous populations, and of peoples striving for self-determination.

With the rise in ethnic consciousness, there is growing interest in the subject of autonomy in many parts of the world. Autonomy is increasingly suggested as a method of resolving certain conflicts, and it is not uncommon for regions to demand it. Thus, some have proposed to solve the Chechnya conflict by granting autonomy to its inhabitants; autonomy may also contribute to the solution of some of the ethnic problems in parts of the former Yugoslavia. In the Middle East, the most famous cases where autonomy is on the agenda are the areas of Iraq inhabited mainly by Kurds and the territories administered by Israel that are inhabited by Palestinian Arabs. In the Far East, autonomy has been proposed for Hong Kong and Macao once they are returned to China. Efforts have also been made in the Philippines to establish autonomy for the Muslims in the island of Mindanao and for the indigenous population in the Cordilleras. In the Western Hemisphere, Puerto Rico enjoys autonomy. Regimes of autonomy for indigenous popula-

tions have also been established or are foreseen in other countries, for example, Nunavut in northeast Canada and Yapti Tasba on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. These examples demonstrate the widespread resort to autonomy and the hopes attached to this notion.

That interest and those hopes probably stem from the fact that autonomy has been successful in some cases, such as in the Åland Islands, South Tyrol/Alto Adige, the Faroe Islands, West Berlin before the reunification of Germany, Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat, the Spanish provinces, Puerto Rico, and certain areas inhabited by indigenous populations. However, in other cases autonomy has failed to solve problems, for example, in Eritrea (where autonomy was followed by full annexation, a long and bloody war, and independence in 1993); in the southern Sudan (where the abolition of autonomy led to a resumption of the civil war); and in the former Soviet Union (where ethnic conflict has intensified and has led to armed hostilities in the wake of the break-up of the state).

The interest of the international community in certain regimes of autonomy depends on the nature of the group that enjoys or requests it. Sometimes an ethnic group has a historical or linguistic affinity to another country: the inhabitants of Åland speak Swedish; the majority of the inhabitants of South Tyrol speak German; a considerable number of citizens of Slovakia speak Hungarian; the Muslims in Xinjian in China have an ethnic link to the inhabitants of eastern Russia; and the Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka have links with the Tamil Nadu in India. Sometimes an ethnic group is dispersed among several countries, such as the Sami in northern Europe or the Kurds, who are dispersed among Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria, and Armenia.

This research was initially begun with the hope that it would lead to a model or some models of autonomy, but the author soon realized that due to the great diversity of the various cases, it would not be feasible to formulate a practical general model. Therefore it appeared to be more useful to highlight the main features of autonomy and to indicate the principal options that are open to those who contemplate the establishment of a regime of autonomy.

The study is based on an examination of opinions of writers, as well as on an analysis of actual cases. In part I, we examine the problems autonomy is intended to solve. Autonomy serves to secure the rights of minorities, of indigenous populations, and of peoples seeking self-determination; it aims to ease ethnic tensions. In addition, it may be

used to solve problems related to other sources of heterogeneity, such as economic diversity.

Part II analyzes the concept of autonomy, with special consideration of the difference between territorial and personal autonomy; the latter is sometimes called cultural autonomy. Similarly, an attempt is made to study the relationship between autonomy and sovereignty. In addition, territorial autonomy is compared with other arrangements for the diffusion of powers: federalism, decentralization, self-government, associate status, and self-administration.

One might expect the analysis of the notion of autonomy to precede the examination of the problems that it is intended to solve. However, the author has decided to change the natural order of the discussion and start with a study of the problems to be solved, because the notion of autonomy is still somewhat vague. A prior understanding of the aims of the system will help in analyzing the concept.

Whereas the first two parts address more theoretical aspects of autonomy, in the third part actual cases are studied, including past and present ones. It was not easy to choose among the many cases of autonomy that the author has studied. The choice was made in accordance with certain considerations, including keeping the book to a reasonable length. It was also thought preferable to examine a small number of cases in depth rather than to summarize many instances without going into details. Finally, the cases should be as varied as possible, from all points of view: geographic location, period of establishment of the regime, cases of success and of failure, differences in the origins of the regime, and the powers and structure of the autonomous authorities as well as their relationship with the center.

After much hesitation, the author decided to limit the discussion of instances of autonomy of indigenous populations—or aboriginals, or “First Nations”—to the case of Greenland/Kalaallit Nunaat (hereafter referred to simply as Greenland). In most other countries, the right to self-government of indigenous peoples and its implementation are still in flux and therefore difficult to evaluate. The basis of the requests for self-government of indigenous peoples is a claim to “original sovereignty”; because the indigenous tribes were independent nations before the occupation by Europeans, they claim to have an “inherent right” to self-government, a right which does not derive from the state. The request for self-government is often linked to claims to property rights, such as title to land, and to rights to hunt, fish, and trap on traditional

lands. In federal states, the claims of aboriginals often clash with the rights and powers of the federal units.

The requests for self-government of indigenous populations and those cases where such autonomy exists in practice certainly deserve a thorough examination, but this would go beyond the modest aims of the present study. However, the general claim of aboriginals for self-government is discussed, as well as the case of Greenland.

Finally, an attempt is made to analyze the typical issues and the possible alternatives that have to be considered when establishing an autonomous regime, as well as factors that may contribute to the success of the regime. Some of these are objective features not controllable by the parties, while others may be more subjective and could be influenced by the relevant actors.

The author hopes that the present study will contribute some new ideas to the literature on autonomy, in particular in three respects: the attempt to understand the concept of autonomy and to compare it with other means of diffusion of powers; awareness of the practical issues to be considered when establishing a regime of autonomy; and the enumeration of elements that may enhance the chances of success.

It is the author's earnest hope that this study may assist policymakers and practitioners in the search for ways to settle disputes and to ease tensions by compromise.