



Federalism and Multiculturalism

Shattering Myths and Affirming Facts:
Summary of Conference Proceedings

*Simeon Agustin Ilago,
Raphael N. Montes, Jr.
and the CLRG Documentation Team*

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Proponents and opponents have put forward their arguments for and against federalism as the Charter Change initiatives grind through the Philippine political system. Advocates paint a rosy picture for the Philippines once it adopts federalism while critics forecast disunity, separation and disintegration of the Philippine state. However, an objective look at federalism could only be derived through the careful examination of the experiences of federal countries existing today. The advantage of a country considering federalism today is the wealth of experience that 25 other federal countries around the world possess. Comparing federal systems is a great way to learn lessons that could be replicated as well as avoided.

The International Conference on Federalism and Multiculturalism aimed to shed light on the two sides of the debate over federalism for the Philippines. The Conference focused on four themes that correspond to recurrent issues on federalism in the Philippine context. These themes are: conflict management, economic and regional development, constitution making, and the transition period. The first two themes are the main reasons advocates are calling for federalism in the Philippines. The latter two are the processes to be undertaken before federalism could be realized.

Does Federalism Solve Conflict?

The Philippines is composed of citizens from very diverse backgrounds. Diversity in the country can be viewed in two categories: religious and ethno-linguistic. These diversities also have a territorial implication given the separate and somewhat isolated development of cultures in an archipelagic Philippines. The Spanish colonial policy of “divide and conquer” did not help promote a mono-cultural society in spite of 300 years of centralized government. The Americans were too busy promoting their own culture and western democracy to even foster a lasting national unity.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, the Philippines is home to two of the world's longest running conflicts—the Moro secessionist movements in Mindanao and a nationwide communist insurgency. There was also a secessionist Igorot movement in the Cordillera region of Luzon that disbanded after the Marcos regime. Two of these conflicts are based on legitimate grievances from cultural groups seeking recognition and parity with the dominant Christian populations of the Philippines. Even the more recent terrorist threat emanating from Muslim Mindanao uses these legitimate grievances to further the cause for Moro independence.

However, the two main actors in the Moro secessionist movement—the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—have opened the channels for dialogue with the Philippine government regarding the accommodation of Moro autonomy under the republic. The MNLF had actually signed a peace accord in 1996 and helped set up the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao while the MILF has signaled its willingness to consider a federal arrangement for Muslim Mindanao.

Furthermore, there is another level of conflict that is not armed but still constitutes significant conflict between ethno-linguistic groups. Many regional communities have complained of the Tagalog-dominated cultural, political and economic policies of national government. The location of the national capital at the heartland of the Tagalog regions in Central and Southern Luzon concentrated development only in those regions. The disparity of economic development seemed to enhance the cultural divide among the Philippines' Christian population.

So, what promise does federalism hold for conflict resolution in the Philippines? Will it finally bring the Moros of Mindanao to the fold of mainstream Philippine society? Will it be able to foster national unity when conflict, armed and otherwise, are finally addressed?

To Dr. Johanne Poirier of the Free University of Brussels, Belgium, federalism offers peaceful mechanisms for the co-existence of different cultures whose destiny is to share a certain territory. But she notes that federalism does not offer a solution to conflict but provides a constitutional way to manage it. Conflict management through federalism has proven to be useful to a small country like Belgium, which is populated by 10 million people from three language groups—Dutch Flemish, Francophone (French), and German. The Flemish compose about 60% of the population, Francophones 35%, Germans 1%.

Poirier adds that the Belgian system is characterized by power sharing among these language groups to solve conflicts between them. Belgium's

modern constitution—enacted only in 1993—recognizes the multicultural realities of the country's diverse groups and the differing loyalties they exhibit. All Belgians have a sense of belongingness because the constitution recognizes that the Dutch-speaking citizens consider themselves Flemish first and Belgians second, while the Francophones hold to their Belgian citizenship first over their cultural identity. This phenomenon could be explained with the different strengths of these communities—the Flemish have economic power, while the French have political power.

For federalism to be effective the government should encourage the participation of minorities by addressing ethno-linguistic issues. These issues often have implications in almost every policy in the federation. That is why Belgium has crafted a complicated, highly asymmetrical yet effective federal structure that facilitates the participation of each linguistic community in policymaking.

Belgium has overlapping federated entities that take care of territorial and cultural concerns. Belgium is divided into two orders: 3 regions (territorial units) and 3 communities (cultural units). The three regions are the Wallonia (south, French-speaking); Flanders (north, Dutch-speaking); and the bilingual Brussels Capital Region. This level is responsible for economy and administrative control over local government. On the other hand, there are three Communities: Flemish (in the north and in Brussels); French-speaking (in the south and in Brussels); and German-speaking (in the east). This level is responsible for education, culture, media and social services. These communities do not have actual locational or territorial boundaries. The main rationale for this double stratification is the interventions of both French and Flemish in Brussels. Both run institutions in the capital.

Even at the federal level, institutions have built-in power sharing or parity arrangements between the French and Dutch communities. Belgium's bicameral parliament is divided along the lines of the language groups. With the Flemish holding a slight majority, the Francophones have devised an Alarm Bell System, which is a protest mechanism against biased actions by the Flemish group, although it has rarely been used. The lower house has 150 directly elected members while the senate's 20 members are designated by communities. The federal executive offices have a 50-50 French-Flemish composition. There are also concertation committees in resolving political issues.

It is very evident that under federalism, like the Belgian system, the federal design may be crafted to encourage consensus building, negotiations and compromises between various linguistic communities. Power sharing—instituted formally or informally—is a vital part of multi-cultural federations, specifically equal or proportional representation in federal government and

an alternating system of filling positions or appointments to federal offices. In the Belgian experience, conflict resolution is democratic and peaceful. Dialogue is built into the system.

However, there are certain drawbacks to such a system based on consensus. It could sometimes become an incomprehensible maze characterized by a constant need to compromise to keep the peace between the communities. This system can polarize parties along language lines. In addition, other minorities (such as immigrants) are not included in the dialogue as only the traditional communities are represented in government. Too much definition along linguistic lines may also diminish cohesion and solidarity of the country as a whole.

Social conflict and cultural conflict must be treated separately and addressed differently. Prof. Ferran Requejo contends that the resolution of social conflict is meant to equalize whereas the solution to cultural conflict is to be managed "unequally." Cultural concerns are inherent to the communities and may be easier to identify. Social conflicts in many ways may force parties to retreat to linguistic lines when the disparities could be correlated to cultural lines.

The calculated pace at which Belgium has undertaken federalization should be a lesson to all unitary countries contemplating a shift to federalism. According to Prof. Poirier, it is important to introduce gradual changes. It took Belgium 35 years and 5 phases to achieve its consociational federal system that has been admired for its creativity and effectiveness. However, she emphasized that federalism is only a means to an end—a tool box—that is not sufficient in itself. Federalism must always be complemented with a commitment to democracy. Simple institutional change will not bring about peace.

This view was seconded by Mindanao State University Chancellor Macapado Muslim. According to him, there must be a movement to transform the Philippines from being "multicultural" to becoming "multiculturalist." He stressed that the Philippines can learn from Belgium how to recognize and cherish cultural diversity. There should be a change from the status quo of toleration of minorities to the parity of cultural groups in the country. This multiculturalist system can be achieved through the institution of an all-inclusive political system through autonomy; an all-inclusive economy; and cultural and legal autonomy.

Resolving conflict could then be achieved through three tracks. First, institutional reform through a shift to federalism would provide the context under which various cultural groups could negotiate and compromise for

the greater good of all citizens. Second, the social conflicts like huge economic disparities should be resolved separately to avoid the escalation of culture-based cleavages. And third, a change of mindset of the general population must be achieved in order to value each cultural group as a vital player in governing a nation-state.

Will Federalism Bring About Regional Development?

CMFP's Rey Magno Teves captured the sentiments of Christian and Muslim Mindanao towards the economic imbalance between Mindanao and other regions in the Philippines when he described Mindanao as "the cash cow that eats dog food." According to him, resource-rich Mindanao does not get its corresponding share in revenues vis-à-vis the level of exploitation of resources within its territory. He believes that federalism will solve this problem for six of the 10 poorest regions in the Philippines that are in Mindanao.

Some of the world's most economically developed countries are federal: Australia, Canada, Switzerland and the United States among others. In Southeast Asia, the only federal country in the region—Malaysia—is one of its leading economies. Filipino federalists claim that decentralization, with its final form in federalism, fosters economic prosperity. This theory has been one of the most highlighted selling points of the federalist movement in the Philippines, capitalizing on the lingering issue of concentrated development in Manila and its environs in Luzon Island. So does federalism enhance economic development for regions and the country as a whole?

Examining the cases of Switzerland and Malaysia, the direct relationship between federalism and economic development could not be empirically established. According to Peter Mischler of the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, there may be indirect influences of federalism on economic development. He explained that it is unimaginable that Switzerland could have achieved its current economic status without its multicultural federal model. Mischler cited claims that decentralization leads to economic efficiency because the system takes into account the peculiarities of an economic area. However, he contends that such an assumption has not been tested yet.

What has been tested is the relationship between federalism and regional development. He underscored that competition among the cantons in Switzerland may have helped in attracting external investment. This competition is achieved through reduced tax packages for investors, which could not be unilaterally done by regions under a unitary system. The competitive nature of economic policies of various sub-national governments provides for a menu of incentives from which investors could choose.

However, the more developed cantons have preferred agglomerations or cooperation to an exogenous economic policy. In this case sub-national governments/cantons focus on setting up the general business conditions that could foster both external and local investment. Although policy does not have a direct effect on economic growth, nonetheless, it helps in promoting vital infrastructure development that is necessary for economic development.

Cooperation can also be achieved with fiscal equalization through inter-regional transfers. Even in economically developed Switzerland, growth disparities do occur among cantons. The federal government is then obliged to level the competition playing field through grants and redistributive schemes. Although the richer cantons resent fiscal equalization, they understand that equalization has a higher purpose of continuing social cohesion between Switzerland's multicultural society. Investors would not come to a country saddled with conflict and disagreement. According to Dr. Thomas Fleiner, Chair of the Institute of Federalism-Fribourg, Switzerland, progress in Switzerland would not be achieved without federalism that has fostered domestic tranquility.

The Malaysian experience differs with the Swiss case in the sense that central/federal government, particularly Parliament, has played an important part in fostering economic development. Nevertheless, the Malaysian economic planning structure accentuates the role of its 11 states, together with Parliament, and the need for all members of the that structure to approve economic plans.

Unfortunately, Dr. Saiful Rosly of the Malaysian Institute for Economic Research says that the Malaysian states have grown too dependent on federal government for funding economic plans. Because of limited taxing powers (which depends on assignments from federal government) and a narrow tax base, there is a fiscal gap among states. State governments are however, not bothered by the gap because the federal government usually assumes responsibility over the needed amount for financing. Among the funds that federal government distributes to the states are revenue sharing grants, road building assistance, and competition grants.

The federal government has also developed a way that helps it decide on the amount of assistance to be given to particular states. The 11 states were classified into More Developed States (MDS) and the Less Developed States (LDS). MDS receive higher budgets and more projects compared to the LDS. This shows that poverty incidence and state tax allocation do not define the appropriations and fiscal transfers to the states.

Malaysia presents an even more ambiguous link between federalism and regional development. The dominance of the federal government in

economic planning and policy making and states' dependence on central government for grants shows that federalism does not prevent re-centralization nor guarantee fiscal autonomy of sub-national units. However, fiscal equalization also serves to foster national unity and harmony, peace and security.

Mischler also warns of other perils that economic planning and policy-making autonomy may result in. In Switzerland, there is a tendency among regions to simply imitate or "mimic" the experiences of the successful regions, which hinders innovation and customization of economic policies. Tax incentives, on the other hand, may also defeat the purpose of reducing taxes in the first place, as this lessens the amount of taxes collected that are, in turn, used to fund public services like infrastructure.

Judging from the experiences of Switzerland and Malaysia, it is not easy to boldly claim that federalism directly fosters economic development. However, the indirect connections of the two concepts can still be reason enough to explore the possibilities that federalism offers—many of which are not found in a unitary system. According to Prof. Johanne Poirier, the OECD says that federal systems tend to encourage better economic performance but also tend to foster disparity of income among states; hence the need for redistribution. She cited the example of Canada whose western provinces are rich with resources whereas the eastern provinces are mostly poor. Yet, generally, Canada is considered economically developed. Katy LeRoy of the University of Melbourne, Australia says that fiscal imbalance maybe inevitable in federal systems. Furthermore, federations have to carefully tread between interests of constituent units since richer states naturally resent redistributive mechanisms. Fiscal equalization must have a higher purpose like preserving internal tranquility that eventually attracts investments and provides for the secure conditions for economic activity.

Local government officials in the Philippines seem to be convinced of the promises of federalism. But, according to Misamis Occidental Governor Loreto Leo Ocampos there are some issues that trouble them. Given the current regime of fiscal transfers to local governments under the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), he asks whether federalism will increase his province's IRA. Would it be redefined or its formula changed? How much of tax proceeds would states remit to the national government? Who will bear the costs of more devolved functions? Who pays for the foreign debt? The most important question of all is "How much will another government layer (the state or region) cost?"

Southern Leyte Governor Rosette Lerias echoes the sentiment of the people in the Philippine countryside who often feel left out with the economic policies that "Imperial Manila" adopts. She contends that federalism is an

expression of felt need. Currently, she sees some pattern of common economic interests in the Regional Development Councils (RDC) in the Visayas. However, RDCs are merely consultative planning bodies that lack powers to implement their plans by themselves. She argues that it is imperative to strengthen local autonomy, even if the provinces and the governors would be consequently abolished to give way to states.

Amidst the great noise of charter change proponents, no one has actually explained to the local officials the “economics of federalism” despite of it being the most contentious issue. Ocampos adds that with the conclusions derived from the experiences of Switzerland and Malaysia, it is hard to prevent second thoughts from arising over the true promises of federalism.

How Does a Country Go About Constitution Making?

Composing a federal constitution is a complicated process that needs to consider both the process and content at the same time. Even the choice of the appropriate process for amendment or revision of the 1987 Constitution has been very contentious in the Philippines. Different proponents have proposed amendments through all three available modes: constituent assembly (Congress enacts amendments), constitutional convention, and people’s initiatives. The choice of content will even be more contentious.

The Institute of Federalism’s Thomas Fleiner says that in any constitution classical democratic principles must still prevail. A new constitution should be an enhancement of the previous one and adapted to the peculiar situation of a country. A federal constitution must then contain the following basic principles of legitimacy, rule of law, shared rule, self-rule and democracy. For the Philippines in its efforts to adopt federalism as a solution to conflicts attributed to its multicultural society, cultural diversity should also be one of the most important factors in drafting a federal constitution. In doing this, constitutional framers must strike a balance between the protection of individual rights of citizens and collective rights of minorities.

This is why citizen participation (especially of the minority nations) in constitution making is essential for the legitimacy, efficacy, and stability of the constitution. Katy Le Roy of the University of Melbourne argues that to maximize citizen participation and legitimacy, among the options for amending the 1987 Constitution, constitutional convention is preferred. However, the constitution-making process should try to transcend hindrances to effective inclusion of people such as illiteracy, political apathy, the complexity of constitutional issues and logistical challenges.

However, aside from the basic principles of democracy and multiculturalism there is a host of constitutional choices if the Philippines were to federalize. The choice of the federal structure could still be tricky since the constitution ought to reflect the constitutional design that is most suited to the Philippines. There are some basic features that a federal constitution must define such as division of powers, financial arrangements, state boundaries, design of federal and state institutions, and intergovernmental relations. These choices are discussed in more detail in the table below:

Table 5. Basic constitutional considerations

| Basic constitutional considerations | Choices to make |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Distribution of powers | Division of powers between federal and state governments (at times, local governments) |
| | Distribution/division of executive and legislative powers |
| | Degree of centralization or decentralization |
| | Flexibility of transfer of powers |
| | Level of symmetry or asymmetry of powers and functions of constituent units |
| State boundaries | Creation of new states or merger of states |
| | Basis for forming states: ethno-linguistic or ethno-religious |
| | Determination of optimum number of states |
| Design of state institutions | How much autonomy will states have in defining their structure? |
| | Bicameral or unicameral state legislatures |
| | Constitutional recognition of local government autonomy |
| Representation in the federation | How will states and minorities be represented in the federal legislature? |
| | Representativeness of federal bureaucracy |

Table 5. Basic constitutional considerations...continued

| Basic constitutional considerations | Choices to make |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Financial arrangements | Division of taxation powers |
| | Revenue raising capacity |
| | Sharing of resources (between federal and state levels; between states) |
| | Equalization scheme |
| Intergovernmental relations | Should there be constitutional mechanisms or should these evolve naturally? |
| Judicial reform | Establishment of a Constitutional Court apart from the Supreme court |
| | Manner of selection of judges |
| | Representativeness of judges |
| Resolution of conflict | Between states governments |
| | Between states and the federal government |
| Ways of amending the constitution | Should amendments be approved by the states? |
| | Would super-majorities be required? (e.g. 2/3 of entire population or 2/3 of population of each state)? |

Ms. Le Roy adds that there are some contentious issues that need resolution during the constitution-making process. These include the choice between a presidential or a parliamentary system of government; limitations on executive power and other checks and balances; and the reform of the electoral system.

Some very important lessons can be learned from the constitutions of Australia, Canada and Switzerland. Their respective constitutions provide a wide spectrum of models, which could be useful in making choices in relation to the basic constitutional considerations identified above.

Dr. Fleiner emphasized that the formation of the Swiss Confederation was defined by its multicultural nature. The equal recognition of the founding cultures is reflected in the multiple official languages of Switzerland: German, French, Italian and Romansch. Switzerland also recognizes multiple loyalties, which may be loyalty to a local/cantonal culture or a larger linguistic grouping (i.e. German or French literary tradition). The Swiss constitution considered the various aspects of such multicultural character and institutionalized legal mechanisms for these different cultures to peacefully co-exist. Switzerland's balance between self-rule and shared rule has transformed Switzerland into a consensus-driven democracy.

Dr. Johanne Poirier cites the Canadian constitution as a worthy example for power sharing but offers some reservations because it has not been updated with regard to modern developments, like new immigrant minorities and the indigenous peoples. Nonetheless, she points out the example of Canada's diminishing Francophone minority who are still accommodated in power sharing mechanisms in the Canadian constitution. Canada is officially bilingual with English and French as official languages of the federation. The federal bureaucracy is often shared between English and French-speaking employees. Francophone parents have a right to send their children to a French educational institution. Some aspects of Canada's constitution are unwritten such as the alternating arrangement between English and French speaking prime ministers.

In addition, Dr. Johanne Poirier pointed out one way to ensure the representation of minorities in the federal legislature—bicameralism. A bicameral legislature will be able to equally or proportionally represent minorities in one of its chambers or houses. The membership of a second chamber is not based on representation of congressional or parliamentary districts, which is usually ruled by majority voting. If sub-national units are constituted to reflect different cultural divides in a country, then they will be given equal voice or parity at the second chamber. This is seconded by Dr. Fleiner who pointed out that the bicameral structure is the best option for federations. Among modern federations, only two countries have unicameral legislatures.

Aboriginal rights should also be a concern in constitution making, especially if indigenous peoples may not have the significant numbers to compel the consideration of their interests. She said that Canada is a bit late in addressing the rights of the First Nations. However, a lesson that may be derived from the Canadian experience is the clash of economic priorities of sub-national units with aboriginal rights. Indigenous people often consider unsettled land as part of their dominion; however, territorial governments may have other plans for some resource rich unsettled land.

Another pitfall that a constitution-making body should avoid is creating a “minority within a minority” when states are drawn according to ethno-linguistic lines. The Philippines must be open to granting some sort of personal federalism to these types of minorities. Canada has confined federalism to territories while Switzerland created cantons that do not have contiguous territories in order for particular enclaves to be incorporated into territories where their cultural group forms the majority.

Fleiner, Poirier and Le Roy agree that democracy ultimately binds a federation. Democratic institutions like the courts, dialogue mechanisms, and respect for the rule of law are very important factors that will be able to keep multiple cultures together under federalism. Dr. Fleiner underscores compromise as a value not as an alternative. Democracy and compromise are important tools in conflict resolution. On the other hand, Dr. Poirier says that the role of courts in peacemaking in multicultural federal systems is undeniable. Courts are the institutions that objectively decide on unresolved or unforeseen constitutional issues and controversies as well as disputes between constituent units.

The process and details of constitution making is indeed complicated. Steps toward enacting a federal constitution in the Philippines should be conscious of the different considerations mentioned above. The wealth of experiences from 25 federations would be enough for the Philippines to learn the do’ and don’ts of constitution making.

What Should Be Considered in the Transition to a Federal System?

The transition to a federal system does not necessarily occur after the enactment of a federal constitution. Many countries that have chosen to federalize through devolution underwent transition periods that lasted for more than ten years. Belgium officially became federal after 35 years while Spain underwent federalization for 15 years. Prof. Ferran Requejo, of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, Spain claims that Spain is not officially a federation. However, it could be considered as something between regionalism and federalism.

Prof. Requejo says that democracy is already a sophisticated system. Federalism, on the other hand, is a “sophistication within a sophistication.” In a sense, federalism is advanced democracy when properly implemented. It is because of this sophistication that steps toward federalization should be clearly mapped out.

Requejo adds that the transition to a federal system is a long period. Transitions are purposely made to be long to provide for some room for

adjustment even if the transition has already started. Because of the complicated nature of federalism and the many factors that affect some aspects of the federalization plan, any setbacks encountered can be properly addressed when transition steps are taken gradually.

The Spanish case of political transition is very relevant to the situation of the Philippines in several levels. There are three parallelisms in the experience of the two countries. First, both had to get past a transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy. Spain emerged from the end of the Franco dictatorship while democracy was restored in the Philippines after the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos. Second, both Spain and Philippines wanted to decentralize the highly centralized government left by the authoritarian state. For Spain, decentralization was achieved through federalism while the Philippines underwent a transfer of more powers to local governments through the Local Government Code of 1991. Finally, both are also trying to address problems generated by the multicultural nature of their societies. Spain is saddled by Basque separatism as well as by political and cultural resistance in Catalan language region. At the onset of post-Marcos republic, the Philippines was battling two separatist movements in Mindanao and the Cordillera.

However, Spain and the Philippines also differ because the former chose to federalize while the latter chose decentralization but maintained its unitary structure. Nonetheless, both countries employed asymmetric mechanisms in addressing the challenges mentioned above. Spain's *Estado de Autonomias* exhibits various asymmetries customized to the different situations in its regions. On the other hand, the Philippines is asymmetrical only in relation to the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Powers of the provinces remain symmetric.

According to Requejo, federal governments are relevant to multicultural societies with territorial implications. The location of concentration(s) of minorities in certain areas provides for granting self-government in those territories. It is also through federalism that consociational mechanisms or personal federalism can be exercised.

There are some very easily comprehensible lessons that the Philippines can learn from the Spanish model. These lessons could be viewed under two groups: (1) constitutional features and (2) process.

Requejo recommends that there must not be ambiguity in the division of powers, between the federal, state and local government orders. Ambiguity works for the more powerful, which in many cases is the central government. If this were so, such ambiguity in the division of powers would not be helpful

to greater decentralization. The constitution must identify all possible powers and allocate it to the components of the federation to avoid future conflicts over powers and functions. With this, fiscal federalism must also be very clear. The German and Indian constitutions may be models of this clear-cut definition of powers.

On the distribution of powers among sub-national units, central government must not be afraid to introduce asymmetrical measures. Requejo says that asymmetry may be an end but also a means to an end. A federation may use asymmetry while in transition but it could ultimately be symmetrical. Asymmetry is particularly relevant for countries accommodating the calls for self-government of minorities.

Since multiculturalism is one of the reasons why the Philippines should opt for federalism, respect for cultural minorities and clear cultural and self-government rights should be reflected in the constitution. That right of self-government should reflect the collective freedom of cultural groups.

In as much as federalism offers division of competencies, there should also be cooperative/participative mechanisms for minorities in decision-making. This would make them feel included in the federal polity, at par with the majority. Related to this the reform of the electoral system through the introduction of proportional systems would be good for pluri-national or multicultural societies like the Philippines. In Spain, this is only implemented in the regions. It would be ideal if cultural minorities could also be properly represented at the federal level.

With regard to the process of federalization, the flaw of Spanish system, which could be avoided in the Philippines, is the strategy to tackle two separate issues at the same time: decentralization and accommodation of minority nationalities. This strategy sometimes muddles subjects that should be considered separately. For the Philippines, however, it could be observed that it has considered decentralization first. The decentralized unitary state has been in operation since 1992 and has been considered as one of Asia's most effective decentralization strategies. However, Requejo's advice is still relevant with regard to the singularity of issue on constitutional reform. There seems to be no effort to dissociate federalism from the parliamentary form of government. Whereas, parliamentarism may not have direct effects on local governments in the Philippines as it merely deals with the merger of executive and legislative powers in a parliament. Federalism, on the other hand, deals with the pleas of local governments for more powers to better address local problems. UP-NCPAG Dean Alex Brillantes, Jr. says that there is a need to un-bundle the debate on federalism and the parliamentary form so as not to put either at a disadvantage. If such unbundling is not done severe opposition to one of the two may spell the demise for both.

Lastly, the reform of the Spanish Constitution was a product of consensus between political parties and minority nations. This underscores the necessity that constitutional reform towards federalism must be acceptable across almost every political color as well as cultural grouping. The participation of all cultural groups must be maximized. This may have certain implications on the options for amending the current Philippine Constitution. The option on having a constitutional convention with some modifications to accommodate greater cultural minority representation could be explored.

Final Note

To quote Brillantes again, we should not romanticize federalism. It does have its advantages especially with regard to greater autonomy and multiculturalism. However, discussions with the international experts yielded some disadvantages as well as precautions that a country like the Philippines should take into account before considering the federal option. Probably the most important contribution of the International Conference on Federalism and Multiculturalism is to pose the tough questions and ask the federalism experts to answer them as candidly as possible. The experts have shown that federalism is a complicated form of democracy that seeks to achieve consensus more than the simple rule of the majority. If any action or strategy should be demanded for a complicated issue like federalism, it is careful scrutiny of its merits and pitfalls even if it takes more time to study. Nevertheless, it is a sure way to secure a sounder constitution that reflects the true wishes of all citizens and cultural groups.

** This article was prepared with the assistance of the CLRG Documentation Team composed of Elyzabeth Cureg, John Ermin Francisco, Raphael Montes, Jr., Donna Lou Moscare, Jennifer Matunding, Agnes Nonog, and Gwendolyn Valdez.*

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SIMEON AGUSTIN ILAGO is an Associate Professor at the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG), University of the Philippines (UP), and Director of the Center for Local and Regional Governance.

