

Catalonia plans referendum on independence from Spain

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On Thursday, the Catalan regional parliament passed a resolution to hold a referendum on self-determination.

The motion was passed by 85 of 135 deputies of the ruling regional party *Convèrgència i Unió* (CiU), the Greens and former Stalinists of *Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds- Esquerra Unida i Alternativa* (Green Initiative for Catalonia- United Left and Alternative ICV-EUiA), *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Republican Left of Catalonia), and *Solidaritat per la Independència* (Solidarity for Independence- SI).

It also got a vote apiece from the single-seat *Democràcia Catalana* (Catalan Democracy) party of the former president of FC Barcelona, Joan Laporta, and a renegade Socialist deputy.

The right-wing Popular Party (PP), which controls Spain's central government in Madrid, and *Ciutadans* (Citizens) contributed 21 votes against the measure. The Catalan section of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), with 25 votes, abstained.

The resolution states: "The Catalan parliament affirms the necessity of the Catalan people to decide freely and democratically their collective future and calls on the [regional] government to hold a consultation first and foremost within the next legislature."

It adds, "The attempts by Catalonia to fit in the Spanish state and its repeated responses are now a dead end Catalonia must initiate a new stage towards the right to decide."

The referendum would likely be held in 2014, according to the three main signatories: CiU, ERC and ICV-EUIA.

This comes after one and a half million Catalans—a quarter of the population—marched last week in a demonstration organized by the National Assembly of Catalonia (ANC), a platform founded last March to

lobby political parties to move towards independence.

The Catalan regional government also announced snap elections on November 25 after the PP government rejected a fiscal pact that would have entailed greater Catalan control over taxes.

Despite its bitter conflict with the PP government in Madrid, the Catalan government also aims to make the working class pay for the economic crisis. For 21 months, it has imposed huge cuts in education (12 percent), health care (11 percent), wages of civil servants (15 percent) in addition to other social cuts. In the central parliament, CiU repeatedly voted for the Popular Party's cuts, labour reforms and tax increases.

The region has been used as a laboratory for cuts. Measures imposed in Catalonia were later adopted by other regions to cut budget deficits to the 1.5 percent target imposed by the central government.

At the same time, an inheritance tax was eliminated, reducing revenues by €150 million.

Now the Catalan government claims that the bankruptcy Catalonia faces, which has forced it to seek €5 billion in aid from the central government, is due to the fiscal setup. In pressing for independence, however, it is not seeking to roll back social cuts, but to unload its fiscal crisis on other, poorer regions—by limiting the amount of money it sends to Madrid.

CiU is expected to be re-elected to the regional government, benefiting from the whipping up of Catalan nationalism. Its main electoral pledge will be to hold a referendum on independence.

Amid growing social tensions caused by austerity programmes, the Catalan nationalist parties are using nationalism to divide the working class. Amid an escalating economic collapse, they fear rising militancy in the working class, as shown by last week's mass protests in Madrid.

The ruling Popular Party has denounced Catalonia's moves towards secession. Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría warned that the government would do everything in its power to prevent a referendum: "Not only are there legal and judicial instruments to stop it, there is also a government, this government, that is ready to use them."

She said that if a referendum took place, the government would appeal to the Constitutional Court.

The vice president of the European Parliament, leading PP member Aleix Vidal Quadras, called for the government to suppress the regional autonomy of Catalonia and its institutions and prepare the Guardia Civil—the Spanish gendarmerie—to intervene if the Catalan government continues with its referendum.

He said the Spanish government should prepare for "the legitimate, proportionate and sensible use of coercion."

In an unusual public statement, the head of state, King Juan Carlos, intervened to oppose the eventual holding of a referendum, declaring: "In these circumstances, the worst thing we can do is divide our forces, encourage dissent, chase chimeras and deepen wounds."

The Asociación de Militares Españoles (Association of Spanish Soldiers), an organization of retired soldiers, also intervened. In a statement on their web site, they stated that those who collaborate or permit the "fracturing" of Spain will be "answered with the utmost severity" before the military courts, under "the serious charge of high treason."

This comes after Spanish Army Colonel Francisco Alamán stated that Catalonia would be independent only "over my dead body and that of many other soldiers", arguing that the Spanish army has sworn to defend "the non-negotiable principle of Spain's unity."

The PSOE has dusted off its federal proposal as a solution to the crisis. This has been part of its programme since the 1970s, but not until now has the PSOE proposed a constitutional amendment to introduce a fully-fledged federal system.

PSOE leader Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba accused Catalan President Artur Mas of an "extraordinary exercise of irresponsibility."

The Catalan government has stated that they will not

back down. Catalan government spokesman Francesc Homs declared that Catalan nationalists will go on "our own way."

The Spanish government is trying to reassure global investors of the stability of the Spanish economy. Last Thursday, they unveiled the state budget for 2013. The budget was drawn up on the optimistic expectation that the economy will contract only 0.5 percent next year, when last July the IMF predicted output would shrink by 1.2 percent.

On Friday, an independent audit by consultant Oliver Wyman estimated that Spanish banks would need up to €53.745 billion to shore up their balance sheets, which are hit with toxic debt from Spain's real estate bubble.



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