

# Catalan regional government proceeds with alternative referendum despite new suspension

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7 November 2014

Tensions are growing between the Spanish and the Catalan regional governments over the “participatory process” being held by the region after an original Catalan independence referendum was suspended by the Constitutional Court.

At the beginning of October, Catalan President Artur Mas of the Convergence and Union party (CiU) government cancelled the referendum planned for November 9. This was after the Constitutional Court (CC) suspended it following representations from a vehemently opposed right-wing Popular Party (PP) government led by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. All referendum campaigning was stopped, pending the court’s decision.

Mas then decided not to defy Spain’s Constitutional Court. Instead he called for a “participative process” for the same date the original referendum was scheduled.

The new attempt by the CiU to disguise their political project with popular legitimacy is to make it look more like a survey on independence than a referendum. The Catalan parliament and civil servants will not be involved. The ballot papers will be printed by the voters themselves. There will be no official census of voters, but only a voluntary registration process. Organization will fall to the 40,000 volunteers mobilized by the pro-separatist Catalan National Assembly (ANC), who are in charge of setting the ballot boxes and counting the votes.

After weeks of promising there would be ballot boxes, Catalan officials are now stating that even this cannot be guaranteed.

The unofficial referendum has been once again taken to the Constitutional Court and suspended. On the same

day the Catalan government filed a complaint to the same court requesting the rejection of the Spanish Executive’s appeal against the alternative referendum.

The Catalan government has emphasised that the participatory process is still in place, since it is different to the original consultation vote. Spokesman Francesc Homs declared, “We are maintaining our participatory process. We couldn’t say this any clearer. And we’re doing so regardless of the consequences.”

The PP government has responded to this as a new threat. Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Saenz de Santamaria called the new plan a “legal fraud” and “a perversion” of democracy.

Madrid has sent 500 anti-riot police of the infamous *Unidades de Intervención Policial* (police intervention units) and around 800 *Grupos de Intervención* (intervention units) of the militarized police, the Civil Guards, to Catalonia.

The spokesperson of the United Police Trade Union (*Sindicato Unificado de Policia*), Javier Estévez, declared on Catalan public television, “There will have to be legal actions against those responsible for continuing to promote, incite the citizens or not doing anything ... to not hold it [the participative process] in an illegal way. If there are no measures taken, on N-9, we will be obliged—due to the political irresponsibility of some and the judicial and governmental ineffectiveness of others—to an undesirous confrontation between the citizens and the state security forces.”

The Spanish government has sent its own national police force units to Catalonia because there doubts that the Catalan regional police under the authority of the regional government, the *Mossos d’Esquadre*, will

carry out the orders of the State General Prosecutor, Eduardo Torres-Dulce. It will be Torres-Dulce who will decide to press charges for disobedience against those who do not accept the Constitutional Court's suspension of the "participative process".

Ramón Espadaler, Interior Councillor (equivalent to the minister of interior), sent a letter to the Mossos reminding them that they had to remain "neutral". Finally, on Thursday morning Espadaler stated that the "Mossos will obey the judge and the state prosecutor." He said he would not give the order to disobey.

Madrid's show of strength and inflexibility towards the referendum, supported by the main opposition party, the Socialist Party (PSOE), and the centralist Union, People and Democracy, has created divisions in the Catalan government.

Catalan deputy premier, Joana Ortega of *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*—a faction within CiU—said on Sunday that the regional government could not guarantee "with 100-percent certainty" that polling stations would be open and ballot boxes in place on November 9.

The Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), which is in a parliamentary alliance with the CiU and polls suggest would beat the CiU in early regional elections, has accused Mas of cowing down to Madrid. Whilst supporting the "participative process" this Sunday, its leader Oriol Junqueras has stated that the only solution now is to hold snap elections in order to "build a new parliamentary majority to carry out a Declaration of Independence" and initiate a constituent process of a Catalan republic.

The Stalinist and Green party, the Initiative for Catalan Greens (ICV), and the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidates (CUP) accused Mas of having betrayed the unity of the pro-independence forces by backing down from the original referendum, but are now supporting Mas's alternative plan.

The supporters of Mas, ICV and the ERC have portrayed this process as an exercise in democracy. But this is used to cover up the brutal austerity measures imposed by CiU totalling €6 billion, having imposed austerity themselves in the previous misnamed "Coalition of Progress" government in 2010 that carried out €1.6 billion of cuts. The CUP—which was elected in 2012 Catalan Parliamentary elections, gaining three deputies in a protest vote against the pro-

austerity and establishment forces—has become one of the main partners along with the ICV and ERC in the independence process.

The pseudo left forces of *Izquierda Anticapitalista* and *En Lucha* have acted as cohorts of the Catalan bourgeoisie in its struggle with its Spanish counterpart in Madrid. They have provided the referendum with a leftist fig leaf by branding the breakup of Spain as progressive and the confrontation with Madrid as an opportunity that could spark a rebellion. They also advised the CiU and ERC to add more "social content" to their arguments on independence in order to market separatism more effectively.

IA states that if the CC finally bans the alternative referendum, "hundreds of thousands of people will anyway go to the polls to vote ... they will remain there peacefully and try to show the world through photos, videos, messages and all types of media that the Spanish state represses freedom and democracy; the mobilization will be massive because the ban will increase the indignation (not only against the government but also against the CC and those who endorse the ban, including PSOE)." *En Lucha* stated that "even if N-9 cannot be understood as a referendum with all the democratic guarantees ... *En Lucha* calls on all the people to fill the ballots and see N-9 as a day of mass civil disobedience ... We call for people to vote Yes and Yes [to independence] with the objective to advance toward a democratic break and the opening up of a constituent process."

In fact, the "participatory process" like the previous suspended referendum is designed by sections of the regional bourgeoisie to give legitimacy to the creation of a Catalan mini-state. This would function as a low-tax, cheap-labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations, whilst simultaneously diverting the explosive social tensions in Catalonia resulting from the imposition of brutal austerity along reactionary nationalist channels.



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