

Catalan secessionist resolution provokes political crisis in Spain

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The secessionist resolution proposed last week in the regional parliament of Catalonia by the main pro-separatist forces, the Together Yes coalition and its key prop, the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), has provoked a political crisis in Spain.

The resolution advanced by Together Yes, which comprises the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), declares “the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic.” It requires the passage of laws within a maximum of 30 days setting in motion a new constituent process and creating a Catalan public tax office and social security system. The parliament would then be tasked with forming a new state within 18 months.

Such policies have no democratic legitimacy, particularly after 52 percent of voters voted for anti-separatist parties in September’s Catalan elections.

The resolution will be voted on Monday after it was illegally passed in the Catalan Parliament Bureau, which is composed of the spokesmen of each parliamentary group. Together Yes and the CUP overrode the Popular Party (PP) Catalan parliamentary bloc’s filibustering tactics. The PP legislators had refused to constitute themselves as a parliamentary group and thus tried to block the Parliament Bureau from approving the text for it to be debated in the Catalan parliament.

The PP’s actions are supported by the anti-separatist Citizens party and the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC). These parties filed a joint appeal before the Constitutional Court to challenge the Bureau’s decision.

Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy, who leads the PP government in Madrid, has so far maintained the stance he has taken since 2012, when the Catalan

parliament voted to hold a referendum on separation. That referendum and an unofficial referendum were suspended by the Constitutional Court. Catalan interim premier Artur Mas is currently being prosecuted for disobeying the court’s orders.

Rajoy has described the resolution as a “provocation,” promised to “use all the judicial and political mechanisms to defend Spanish sovereignty,” and said that even if the motion is finally approved, “it will have no effect.”

He met separately with the main opposition party general secretary, Pedro Sánchez of the Socialist Party (PSOE), and Albert Rivera of the Citizens party. They all agreed on “the defence of Spanish unity” against Catalan separatism using judicial measures. This would include challenging the resolution in the Constitutional Court once it passes the Catalan parliament.

Sánchez agreed with Rajoy on the measures to be taken against the resolution, but has promised to make concessions after the December 20 elections, such as the symbolical recognition of Catalan nationhood or further federalising the Spanish state’s structure.

Rajoy tried to strike a chord of unity within the Spanish political establishment by meeting with Pablo Iglesias, leader of Podemos, and Alberto Garzón, head of the Stalinist-led United Left. Both leaders called for a dialogue with the separatist parties, however, and for changes to the constitution to allow a referendum. This is opposed by the PP, the Citizens party, and the PSOE.

Rajoy’s line has been criticised by sections within the PP who are demanding a more hard-line policy to confront the Catalan separatists.

Former PP prime minister Jose María Aznar, who has alerted the Rajoy government on the need to take bolder actions against Catalan nationalism since 2012, stated that “the government has been incapable of

defending the constitutional forces within Catalonia”. The “secessionists will continue to radicalise and win forces” because, in reference to Rajoy, “you lose all battles that you decide not to fight.”

Foreign Minister José Manuel Margallo discussed the crisis in a television interview. He described the separatist resolution as “a full-fledged uprising” made of two main problems: “firstly that it is being directed by an institution of state, and secondly that it is splitting Catalan society in two.”

He continued, “When one is facing an uprising of these characteristics, the uprising has to be crushed.”

These statements reflect sections within the PP, and other hard-line anti-secessionist parties like Union, Progress and Democracy, who are issuing aggressive calls for bolder actions without explicitly stating what they propose to do. Possibilities include the suspension of Catalonia’s autonomous governance under Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, the arrest of the Catalan premier, or even sending police or troops to the region.

Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz rejected such a line, however, stating, “We are not going to parade the Guardia Civil [militarised police]” in Barcelona. He added, “This is what the secessionists want, but we are not so stupid.”

There is a real possibility that during the campaign in the upcoming December 20 elections, the PP, Citizens and the PSOE will compete to outflank each other on the issue of “Spain’s unity,” whipping up Spanish nationalism to shore its support.

What is emerging in Spain is a crisis of bourgeois rule, sparked by the CDC’s and ERC’s attempt to use Catalan nationalism as a political cover to posture as left while imposing savage austerity policies. These include 20 percent cuts in health care, education and other social services. Now that these forces are beginning to act on their threats to secede from Spain, however, the political situation can spiral out of control, amid threats and counter-threats in Madrid and in Barcelona.

The CDC interim Catalan government, after the party joined with the ERC in a coalition for independence, is in crisis over the growing opposition within its ranks against the resolution.

Last week, an anonymous councilor within the Executive Council, the highest body of the Catalan

government, broke the traditional code of silence of these meetings by leaking the opposition of many members of the Catalan government to the parliament’s resolution.

Economy Councilor Andreu Mas-Colell, declared “But...what is this?” when he received a copy of the resolution. He bluntly stated that the text agreed on was “barbarous,” and that it meant breaking with existing law. Mas-Colell was followed by other councillors, who argued that the Catalan parliament could not just simply disobey Spain’s laws.

Tensions rose to the point in the meeting that interim premier Artur Mas asked, “Then, what are you asking me to do? New elections?”

The rising tensions within the CDC show that the Catalan government does not really know where it’s heading.

The CDC, Catalonia’s main bourgeois party, has traditionally opposed independence while whipping up nationalism in order to extract economic and political concessions from Madrid. It was only in 2010, amid rising unemployment and the mass austerity programme imposed by both Madrid and Barcelona that the CDC embarked on a separatist project with the ERC.

The Together Yes coalition is also under pressure from the pseudo-left CUP, which has emerged as the most aggressive advocate of separatism. Aiming to use its 10 seats to tacitly support a minority Together Yes government committed to austerity policies, the CUP calls for the regional government to take a more confrontational stance against Madrid, disobeying any measures taken by the Rajoy government or the courts.

EH-Bildu in the Basque parliament has proposed a Referendum Law that would allow a referendum on separation from Spain in the Basque Country. The party’s spokesperson, Hasier Arraiz, warned that if stopped by the courts, “we will be in a scenario of political confrontation, and we are ready for it, ready to assume all its consequences”.



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