

Spain's Constitutional Court suspends Catalan secession resolution

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On Wednesday, Spain's Constitutional Court (CC) voted unanimously to accept the Spanish government's appeal to suspend the resolution passed by the Catalan Parliament to secede from Spain.

The CC also sent a personal notification of the decision to 21 members of the Catalan government and parliament, warning them: "You are advised of your duty to prevent or halt any initiative that entails ignoring or bypassing the suspension, and warned about the responsibilities, including penal ones, that you could be held liable for."

Should the Catalan government or parliament take any action towards secession within the next five months—the duration of the suspension, pending proceedings on the government's appeal—these 21 individuals would be exposed to fines.

The Court declined, however, to invoke its new powers under a law just rushed through the Spanish Parliament by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's government, specifically tailored to the Catalan secession crisis. This law enabled the court to notify individuals that they could be suspended from their posts if they are found to be disobeying the Court's decisions.

The Rajoy government had requested just such a notification.

Minutes after the issuance of the court decision, the Acting Vice-President of the Catalan government, Neus Munté called a press conference to reject the decision, criticizing "government's use of the legal system to seek to stifle Catalan citizens' yearning for freedom and democracy".

"We are fulfilling a mandate of the legally constituted Parliament, with a debate and vote by an outright majority of the deputies in favour of a resolution that initiates the process towards the creation of our own

state," she continued.

Nonetheless, after having voted a secession resolution, the Catalan parliament is struggling to even form a government to carry it through. On Thursday, the Catalan Parliament again rejected for a second time Artur Mas as president of the Catalan government.

The CUP—the pseudo-left pro-secession party whose vote is needed by Mas' larger Together for Yes coalition to form an outright majority, elect a president, and move ahead on the secessionist agenda—rejected Mas for the second time. Mas even attempted to offer a watered down presidency with strong vice-presidents and to submit himself to a no-confidence vote after 10 months.

For the moment, the CUP is continuing its policy of not supporting Mas, a politician who is widely despised for overseeing four years of savage austerity measures in Catalonia. The CUP continues to defend Together for Yes, a pro-austerity party, but wants to dispense with Mas as a cynical strategy to hide the reactionary, pro-austerity character of its political orientation.

The CUP also gave signs, however, that it might make an agreement with Mas. During Thursday's vote, it substantially lowered the force of its calls for a vote against Mas. CUP leader Antonio Baños declared from the parliamentary rostrum, "We are casting a tranquil no vote that closes off nothing, but rather opens the door."

Baños considered Mas' offer to be "positive" and insisted that his party was aware that discord was the "main problem in the national struggle". He insisted that the vote against Mas should not be read as a split in the ranks of the separatist forces, claiming, "We will not fall into the trap of becoming divided, because we have a shared goal," which, he added, was "very close."

An assembly of CUP members to decide the party's position will be held on November 29. A failure to reach an agreement between both parties before January 10 would mean fresh regional elections, three months after the previous ones.

A crisis is escalating inside the political establishments in Madrid and Barcelona, from which the working class has largely remained disengaged. Discredited pro-austerity politicians in both cities are maneuvering for political advantage amid escalating uncertainty as to what the implications and final outcome of these maneuvers will be.

The Catalan pro-secession parties are still signaling that they could move forward with secession regardless of the obstacles and, more significantly, regardless of the fact that they only won 48 percent of the votes in the recent Catalan elections and have no popular mandate for secession.

For the moment, they have not carried out measures implying a break from Spain, however, such as unilaterally declaring independence, seeking the loyalty of the regional police, calling on the population to stop paying taxes to Madrid, or mobilizing pro-independence protests.

The Spanish political establishment is signaling that it could make concessions to the regional Catalan bourgeoisie, while harsh legal sanctions are also an option.

By refusing to invoke its new powers under the law, the Constitutional Court is forcing the Spanish government to turn to it yet again and ask for the suspension of individuals deemed to be disobeying Court decisions. This move to slow the Spanish government's procedures against the Catalan separatists seems calculated to allow negotiations between Madrid and Barcelona to continue and take their course.

Socialist Party leader Pedro Sanchez said that conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and himself were ready to "put anything on the table after the general elections of December 20," in Spain, a sign to Mas to go back to negotiations.

The statement is a part of the ongoing coordination between the Rajoy government and the largest opposition party, the Socialists, in responding to the crisis in Catalonia and seeking to marshal as much political weight as possible against the independence

drive.

While they explore the legal arsenal at their disposal in Catalonia, some Rajoy government officials are also escalating harsher threats. They talk openly of taking control of the region's police force, cutting credit to the Catalan government, or even taking the drastic step of suspending Catalonia's regional autonomy, putting it under direct control of Madrid.



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