

Spanish police raid Catalan government buildings, arrest officials

Paul Mitchell

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Spain's Civil Guard Wednesday arrested 14 senior public officials in the Catalan regional government and local Catalan businessmen, as the Popular Party (PP) government steps up its efforts to halt the independence referendum planned for October 1.

The Civil Guard seized voting cards, referendum posters, pamphlets and printing plates. They also raided the offices of the pseudo-left separatist party Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), which has no executive positions in the Catalan state, and Fundació puntCAT, which oversees “.cat” regional internet sites. The government has launched an investigation into more than 700 local mayors who have backed the referendum and has ordered them to appear in court.

Spain's Finance Ministry confirmed that the central government has taken over the Catalan government financing system, preventing it from borrowing money, and taking control of politicians' and officials' credit cards.

In response, large opposition demonstrations broke out in the regional capital Barcelona and other Catalan cities. A sympathy demonstration also took place in Madrid's Puerta del Sol against the Spanish government's police raids.

Catalonia Prime Minister Carles Puigdemont has called an emergency meeting of the regional government. Reports suggest it has made provisions in secret for voting on the day and lined up international observers led by Dutch diplomat Daan Everts and Helena Catt, who was chairman of the New Zealand electoral commission—although more prestigious observers have so far refused.

The Mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, spokesperson of Catalunya in Comú, a coalition involving Podemos, United Left and the Greens, who recently handed over some of Barcelona's institutions to the regional government to allow voting to take place, called on her

members and supporters to “defend Catalan institutions.”

“It is a democratic scandal that institutions are being searched and public officials arrested for political motives,” Colau declared.

The chairman of the umbrella separatist organisation, the Catalan National Assembly, Jordi Sánchez, said “The moment has arrived. Let's resist peacefully. Let's go out and defend our institutions in a non-violent manner.”

Catalan government spokesman Jordi Turull described the situation as “a police state of siege.”

In Madrid, Republican Catalan Left (ERC) MPs walked out of Congress, with one MP, Gabriel Rufián, telling the Popular Party (PP) Prime Minister, Mariano Rajoy, “I ask and demand that you take your dirty hands off Catalan institutions”.

Rajoy replied that “what is happening in Catalonia is an attempt to liquidate the Constitution and the [Catalan] Statute, and now there are people breaking the law, so logically the state has to react. They were warned. I ask Puigdemont to comply with the law.”

Reports suggest that on Friday the PP government will begin the formal process of activating Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to suspend home rule in Catalonia, “until the situation of risk for the general interest in the autonomous community of Catalonia disappears.”

The PP has been spurred on by the bourgeois media, with many editorials criticising it for being too weak. Most revealing, the ostensible liberal pro-Socialist Party (PSOE) newspaper, *El País*, declared, “The democracy and constitutional order with which Spaniards bestowed themselves in 1978 following a long dictatorship are currently at a critical juncture. The challenge laid down by the Catalan government, and by the parliamentary majority behind it, is threatening to destroy our unity and social harmony.

“By acting irresponsibly... separatists have embarked on an unprecedented challenge against Spain. The central

government, like all other institutions, has an obligation to act firmly and use all legal means to defend the Constitution, democracy and the rights and freedoms of all Spaniards.”

El País condemned the Catalan police force, the Mossos d'Esquadra, for “standing by while crimes are being committed against the Constitution and the Statute.”

It told Rajoy “he has the responsibility and the obligation to act in order to prevent Spain from becoming a state that is unable to enforce the law or uphold its own Constitution.”

It called on the prime minister to drive a wedge between the “true independistas” and the federalists that they have attracted over recent years by offering reforms, even though it “would very probably generate a great hostility in the rest of the autonomous communities.”

The right-wing newspaper, *El Espanol*, declared, “Rajoy’s lack of determination and clarity at the moment of stopping the independence coup weakens the counteroffensive of the state while at the same time emboldens the most hostile parties to the constitutional regime...”

“Rajoy and [Deputy Prime Minister] Sáenz de Santamaría have allowed the secessionist bloc to always go one step ahead for their fear of activating 155, which allows for autonomy to be suspended... This strategy not only generates unnecessary tensions... but also compromises the unity of the constitutionalist parties in the face of the challenge. The bewilderment is very visible in the PSOE, which has gone from opposing to not wanting to pronounce on a hypothetical application of 155.”

The PSOE is in crisis over Rajoy’s actions, with a leaked internal party document declaring, “The train crash in Catalonia is already irreversible.”

The party’s officials make contradictory statements. The PSOE is opposed to Catalan independence, but has objected to the invocation of article 155, saying, for fear of arousing popular outrage, that it is “a disproportionate measure”. While PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez more recently has stopped ruling out the invocation of article 155 in public, the party’s spokesman Óscar Puente this week declared, “It wouldn’t be desirable... We don’t know what will happen, [so] taking any categorical stance would be imprudent”.

The crisis became more acute in Congress on Tuesday when the right-wing Citizens party leader Albert Rivera introduced a motion of confidence in Rajoy's handling of the situation. Rivera said he wanted the Chamber to

express “its support for the Government, the Constitutional Court, the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the other representatives of the Judiciary and Public Authorities, in defense of democratic legality in Catalonia and, in particular, in all those measures that are necessary and proportionally adopted to prevent the organization of the referendum on secession of Catalonia, convened by the Generalitat and declared unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court.”

However, when the PSOE proposed an amendment to open “a space for dialogue to seek an agreed and legal way to banish the divisions and strengthen the coexistence of all the sensibilities of our country,” Rivera refused.

As a result, the PSOE voted against the motion instead of abstaining as expected. It was defeated by 166 votes against and 158 in favour.

El Espanol complained, “The proposal could have served to show the unity of the constitutionalist forces against the referendum of Carles Puigdemont, but it has become a trap for the Executive after the PSOE disarmed and voted against. Although it has also divided the Socialists themselves, as four members of the group have abstained.”

Pressure is mounting on the Catalan separatists from the international ruling elite. European Parliament President Antonio Tajani and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said that the law and constitution of member states must be respected. If Catalonia became independent it would not only be considered a third country, but would only be allowed to use the euro in a limited way, as in Kosovo.

In a *Financial Times* editorial published on September 17, the newspaper said the Constitutional Court was “the ultimate authority on these issues” and arbiter on the “indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation.” Any declaration of independence would be “an empty rhetorical gesture.”



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