

Spanish government dispatches police reinforcements to Catalonia

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The Spanish Interior Minister, Juan Ignacio Zoido, has announced that National Police and Civil Guard reinforcements are being dispatched to Catalonia in advance of the October 1 independence referendum.

In a letter addressed to his Catalan regional counterpart, Joaquín Forn, Zoido declared extra officers were needed “to support” the Catalan regional police force, Mossos d’Esquadra, to “maintain public order” following the “tumultuous mobilizations” that erupted after the arrest on Wednesday of Catalan officials and businessmen involved in the preparation of the referendum. The arrestees face possible sentences of 15 years for “sedition.”

Three ships are docked in the ports of Barcelona and Tarragona to provide accommodation for the forces, although dockworkers have refused to supply them.

Behind Zoido’s announcement, however, are fears that the Mossos d’Esquadra are unreliable and that it is necessary to match their number—some 16,000 officers.

The chief of the Mossos d’Esquadra, Josep Lluís Trapero, has been accused of relaying orders from Madrid to his subordinates with insufficient enthusiasm or clarity. On Thursday the force was accused of “passivity” by PP officials when demonstrators prevented Civil Guards from provocatively taking over, without a warrant, the headquarters of the pseudo-left CUP party and besieged those searching the Catalan Economy ministry.

An *El País* editorial criticized the Mossos d’Esquadra for not acting against those “in the commission of crimes.” Other newspapers warned that the government could put the Catalan police force under the direct control of the Interior Ministry or disband it altogether.

The PP government, according to *El Espanol* has decided to “park although not discard” the process of invoking Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution

allowing it to suspend autonomy and take over the functions of the Catalan government. The newspaper criticized the decision complaining bitterly that, “If [PP Prime Minister Mariano] Rajoy continues to act as a mere observer, the state will continue towards the coup”—the term used by Madrid to describe the referendum.

For their part, Rajoy and the PP are counting on the ability of police operations to prevent the referendum. Ballot papers, posters and polling booths have been seized and officials arrested and threatened with fines of up to 16,000 euros a day if they continue preparing for the vote. Catalan government finances have also been taken over by Madrid.

The Public Prosecutor's Office of the National Court has filed sedition charges against the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Omnium Cultural for the protest that took place in Barcelona and other towns on Wednesday. It accuses the two main separatist organizations of promoting violence, when in fact ANC leader Jordi Sánchez, is on the record for calling for peaceful demonstrations.

The PP is stoking up claims of violence to justify their drafting in of more police and further repression. They are pinpointing the CUP “a movement of an anarchist origin, with a very radical and violent nature” that “is very far from the reality of Catalan society.” These sorts of statements only assist the CUP, which dresses itself up in pseudo-socialist colors while acting as the foot-soldiers of the main Catalan bourgeois parties, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT).

The PP is seeking to split the secessionists by declaring that as soon as they renounce the referendum of October 1, they will begin negotiations on political and economic reforms. There are suggestions of the PP

supporting the proposal of the Socialist Party (PSOE), already put before Congress, to convene a “commission on the territorial model” in Spain.

Economy Minister, Luis De Guindos, told the *Financial Times*, “As soon as they abandon the independence plans, we can talk...Catalonia already has a great autonomy, but we could talk about a reform of the financing system and other issues.”

While welcoming PP support for negotiations, PSOE president, Cristina Narbona, has said that the government should not wait for October 2 to begin but start immediately. The PSOE, however, has refused to join an initiative launched by Podemos involving, “European parliamentarians, state and autonomous community representatives, as well as councils and councillors of all political formations, except PP and Citizens.” In addition, the PSOE president of the Provincial Council of Zaragoza has banned a conference this Sunday of these organizations and individuals, although organizers are seeking to hold it elsewhere.

Meanwhile Catalan President Carles Puigdemont has announced that referendum will take place and that the Catalan government has “contingency plans”. A map of polling stations has been published and some 55,000 people needed to man them are being notified. A call for “permanent protest” has been made by the secessionist umbrella organizations, the Catalan National Assembly and Òmnium Cultural.

The events in Catalonia have also had repercussions in other autonomous regions. The Basque Country President Iñigo Urkullu, declared Thursday for an “exit to the territorial political labyrinth” of Spain, “a redistribution of the sovereignty of the State” and discussions about the idea of a confederal “shared sovereignty”. The Congress deputies belonging to Urkullu’s Basque National Party, upon whom the minority PP government relies for its survival, have refused to vote for the Budget, forcing its postponement.

Few European Union leaders have spoken out openly on the Catalonia crisis for fear of worsening the existential crisis in the bloc, beset by Brexit and the rise of nationalism and separatism. This week, Scottish National Party Nicola Sturgeon made common cause with the Catalan separatists and called for the referendum to go ahead. In Italy two “advisory”

referendums promoted by the Northern League, with the support of Forza Italia, will be held on October 22 on greater autonomy for the two richest regions of the country, Lombardy and Veneto.

A spokesperson for German Chancellor Angela Merkel summed up the official EU line that the Catalonia issue was an “internal Spanish matter” but that she had often told Rajoy that the German government had “great interest in the maintenance of stability in Spain”. The German co-leader of the Greens in the European Parliament, Ska Keller, was more forthright, declaring, “Rajoy has put a lot of oil on the fire, fuelling the independentist debate. He has made a huge mistake” and called for other PP leaders to put pressure on him to “calm things down”.

European Commission (EC) President Jean-Claude Juncker criticized Catalan politicians for using his remarks last week that Catalonia could join the EU after independence to imply he supported secession. He said a newly independent state would only be allowed to join if it had done so in accordance with the constitutional law of the member state it had left.

An editorial in the UK’s *Guardian* called for a “step back from the brink.” It said that “All the Spanish prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, has achieved by being so oblivious to public sentiment in Catalonia is to harden opinion in the region and draw thousands onto the streets.

“If nothing is done to work towards a compromise, a political train wreck threatens in the EU’s largest southern member state” it warned.

The *Economist* declared, “If the rule of law is to mean anything, the constitution should be upheld. Mr. Puigdemont should thus step back from his reckless referendum...Mr. Rajoy should be less defensive: he should now seek to negotiate a new settlement with Catalonia, while also offering to rewrite the constitution to allow referendums on secession, but only with a clear majority on a high turnout.”



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