

Spanish government, state attorney move to halt Catalan independence drive

By James Lerner
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The Spanish central government and the state attorney have acted swiftly yesterday to head off the pro-independence process undertaken by the Catalan parliament on Monday.

The Council of State, a government advisory body, has now given the go-ahead for an appeal against a resolution passed by the Catalan parliament launching the secession process, to be submitted to the Constitutional Court (CC) today. This court is expected to rule on whether it will admit the appeal on Wednesday, or Thursday at the latest.

Mere admittance for consideration of the appeal by the Court—which is widely assumed to be inevitable—would automatically suspend the resolution, and make it illegal for the Catalan parliament to take any further steps pursuant to the pro-independence resolution.

It also emerged on Tuesday that the state attorney's office in Madrid has ordered all public security and legal entities in Catalonia to report on acts of "sedition", that is, any attempts to "illegally change the organization of the State" and "separate a part of the same and break the principle of unity of the Spanish nation."

Any further decisions or laws after suspension of the secession resolution, says the order by state attorney, or, "conspiracy, intent, and provocation", or to actions to enforce suspended decisions or laws, or to "impede the normal functioning of the institutions" could constitute sedition, rebellion, usurpation of functions or improper use of public funds. The crime of rebellion carries a prison sentence of 25 to 30 years, and that of sedition 10 to 15 years.

In his appearance on Monday, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy clearly indicated that the target of such moves are the top officials in the Catalan regional

government. "We are also going to request, if our appeal for suspension is upheld, that the speaker of the Catalan parliament be expressly notified," he said.

In Catalonia, the Together for Yes candidate for president, current acting President Artur Mas, accused the central government in Madrid of expending "secret funds" to support anti-independence campaigning and propaganda.

Even more drastic measures are being considered, however. These include a seizure of the Catalan treasury by the central government, and/or a cut-off of funding by the central government that would prevent the Catalan government from paying its own civil servants and police. The central government could even invoke Article 155 of the Spanish constitution, suspending the autonomy of Catalonia, to seize its regional police force and impose direct rule of the Catalonia region from Madrid.

As broad masses of working people across Spain look on, an apparently insoluble crisis is developing inside the Spanish state between two reactionary, pro-austerity governments in Madrid and the Catalan regional capital, Barcelona.

The pro-independence forces—led by Catalan bourgeois coalition Together for Yes and its presidential candidate Mas, in partnership with the smaller, pseudo-left CUP (Candidacy for Popular Unity)—have vowed time and again that they will not back down from secession. The resolution they passed calls for the drafting and passage of laws taking concrete steps towards secession within 30 days.

Just as firmly, the Madrid central government, mainly backed by Spain's Socialist Party and the Citizens Party, have insisted that the pro-secession moves are illegal and the full weight of the law brought to bear to put a halt to the process.

Rajoy again met with Socialist Party leader Pedro Sanchez on Tuesday in a show of political unity, and to coordinate their steps and messages in dealing with the secessionist challenge.

Sanchez also met Tuesday with Socialist leaders at the head of seven regional governments “in defence of the Constitution in the face of the independence challenge of Catalonia”.

The pro-secession forces face a problem of their own making, however: they are unable to agree on a candidate for president of the Catalan government. It appears that the petty-bourgeois CUP, though the most aggressively pro-secession of the Catalan nationalist parties, may ultimately succeed in blocking implementation of the Catalan secession resolution, by preventing the installation of a Catalan government.

The Together for Yes candidate, Mas, is rejected by the CUP, which has sought to give a progressive fig leaf to its support for the reactionary Together for Yes coalition by blaming Mas personally for his party’s austerity policies and corruption scandals. Together for Yes does not by itself have enough votes in the Catalan parliament to install Mas as president without CUP support, however.

Explaining his vote yesterday against Mas, CUP leader Antonio Baños said: “Artur Mas did not do yesterday what the country was asking for: to lift the carpet covering up corruption. ... I vote no because a man must sacrifice himself for the people.”

The CUP has instead proposed Raul Romeva, the top of the Together for Yes ticket, as candidate for president. Romeva, formerly a member of the green ICV in Catalonia, which he left claiming it was insufficiently separatist, publicly supported the assault on Libya by the US and European powers.

The debate in the Catalan parliament on electing a president will continue. But if the pro-secession forces fail to agree on a president by January 9, new elections would have to be called, and Monday’s pro-secession resolution could be a dead letter.

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