

Catalogne and Spanish State: Responses to Madrid measures to strip Catalonia of its self-rule - 450,000 people protest in Barcelona

Sunday 22 October 2017, by [BATHGATE Rachel](#), [Catalan News](#), [JORDAN Guifré](#), [NEWTON Creede](#), [Spain Report](#) (Date first published: 21 October 2017).

'Spain has pressed the nuclear button'

The dissolution of a democratically elected parliament. Taking control of the police, as well as public media. This is Rajoy's answer to the political situation in Catalonia, where leaders have been repeatedly asking for dialogue, and repeatedly been denied. It's a coup d'état, according to the main Catalan parties. A suspension of democracy in the whole of Spain, in the view of Podemos. The Spanish government says it is not suspending self-government, but even mayors in Catalonia from the Socialist party, that in Madrid is giving full support to the decision, warned here that the measures are totally unacceptable. Meanwhile, once again hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets in a huge outcry of indignation at these latest developments, protesting the defence of fundamental rights. Here at Catalan News, we have all the details of this tense and eventful Saturday.

Catalan News [\[1\]](#)

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450,000 people gather in protest in the heart of Barcelona

Protesters denounced the incarceration of civil society leaders as well as the Spanish government's new measures to strip Catalonia of its self-rule.

The chants and rallying cries were deafening today in the heart of Barcelona, with 450,000 people protesting in the streets. The two motives for such a massive mobilization were to demand the

immediate release of the two civil society leaders incarcerated without bail awaiting charges for sedition, and the Spanish government's announcement just hours earlier that Article 155 will be activated, seizing Catalonia's self-government.

"Freedom for political prisoners"

While the demonstration itself had indeed been planned for some days now, the turnout for attendance was not. Hundreds of thousands turned up in what was originally planned as a march to demand the immediate release of the two civil society leaders of grassroots pro-independence organizations, incarcerated in Madrid without bail. Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, the presidents of the pro-independence grassroots organizations Òmnium Cultural and the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) are currently imprisoned awaiting charges for sedition tied to peaceful demonstrations and the October 1 referendum vote. This was indeed a focus of the protest, with the slogans "freedom for political prisoners" written on various signs and demonstrators wearing a yellow ribbon in solidarity with the two men.

The "nuclear option"

By the early evening, many more demonstrators were still arriving, flooding the public transit systems and the blocks surrounding the original intersection set for the demonstration. This mobilization happened following Spanish president Mariano Rajoy's announcement at midday, a mere 5 hours before the march, that the government of Spain will activate Article 155 of the country's constitution. Indeed, the Spanish government had called this extraordinary cabinet meeting to do just that.

Article 155, sometimes referred to as a "nuclear option," is a legislation that will effectively strip Catalonia of its self-rule. This means that the current Catalan government will be dismissed, and the central Spanish government will seize control of the Catalan parliament, as well as public entities, media, finances, and the Catalan police. The legislation must be ratified by the Senate before being activated. Yet, Mariano Rajoy's People's Party holds the majority, so it is almost certain that the legislation will be approved.

An unexpected attendance

The developments also drew major Catalan politicians to the march. Catalan president Carles Puigdemont was not originally set to appear, but plans changed. Indeed, he participated in the demonstration, holding signs asking for the release of Cuixart and Sànchez, alongside his vice president Oriol Junqueras, mayor of Barcelona Ada Colau, and president of parliament Carme Forcadell.

Rachel Bathgate

* Catalan News, 21 October 2017 09:18 PM. ACN | Barcelona:

<http://catalannews.com/society-science/item/450000-people-gather-in-protest-in-the-heart-of-barcelona>

Q&A: To what extent is Catalonia's self-rule suspended?

The dramatic measures affect the Catalan government, parliament, public media and other public companies, all staff of the administration, police and finances.

Rumors about what the extent of Catalonia's self-rule suspension would be have been diverse. However, the real scope of triggering Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution is among the harshest versions of media speculation. On Saturday morning, the Spanish government cabinet passed a 19-page document with all the measures explained in-depth.

Who will be dismissed?

At least, the Catalan president, vice president and all the Catalan ministers. However, the measures stipulate that any "administration official or public servant of the Catalan administration" and its public enterprises can also be dismissed or temporarily replaced.

Who will rule in Catalonia instead?

"Authorities and bodies created by the Spanish government in order to do so," reads the 19-page document. The Catalan administration, including its institutions and enterprises, will not disappear, but will instead be ruled by Madrid officials. It is not likely that a new president will be appointed. Indeed, the authority to call a Catalan snap election, currently belonging solely to Carles Puigdemont, will also be seized. Consequently, Mariano Rajoy will be the only person who can call citizens to polling stations.

Will the Catalan parliament be able to appoint a new president as usual?

No. The Catalan parliament president will no longer be able to propose a new president when the current president steps down, as stipulated. The chamber cannot hold an investiture debate to appoint a new president, either.

Will Catalan lawmakers be able to pass parliamentary initiatives?

Yes, but Spain will have the powers to veto any of them before they are passed. The measures provide that any resolution which lawmakers want to vote on will have to be approved by an authority "designated by the Spanish government." That is, Madrid will have veto power for any initiative coming from the Catalan chamber. What's more, the motions to be passed will not be able to impulse any action from the "authorities" replacing the Catalan executive.

When will the direct rule of Catalonia finish?

When a new Catalan president is elected after snap elections, which have to be called "within a maximum time period of six months." This means that direct rule could last until next spring. However, the Spanish government can ask the Senate to make "modifications or updates" in the future to any of the plans approved today. Mariano Rajoy said he aims to call the elections "as soon as possible."

Will the Catalan public media also be taken over?

Yes. The Spanish president, Mariano Rajoy, said that the Catalan media will be managed by the appointed authorities replacing the Catalan government. The document stipulating the measures says that the new authorities will "guarantee accurate, objective and balanced information". Spain will also take control of Catalan telecommunications and digital services, as well as all the Catalan

government's information technology services.

What about Catalan police?

The Catalan police will also be affected, although in a different way than the government. The police forces will be directly controlled by "an authority created or designated" by the Spanish executive. It will give "direct instructions to the members of the Catalan police which will be compulsory." What's more, officers might be "replaced" by Spanish police officers "if necessary."

Will the Catalan administration continue collecting taxes?

Yes, but the Spanish government will strengthen its measures to control how the money is spent, as it has already been doing, since the run-up of the October 1 referendum. What is clear is that they will intend to avoid any money spent on "activities linked to the secessionist roadmap."

When will the measures be enforced?

As soon as the Spanish Senate ratifies them in its plenary session, which is set for October 27. Spain's ruling party, the People's Party, has majority in the Senate, so there are no doubts that these series of measures will be approved. In fact, Mariano Rajoy said that at this stage, the Senate is the only one which can stop Article 155 from being triggered. That was his response, when asked whether a call for an election by Puigdemont would change Madrid's plans.

Guifré Jordan

* 21 October 2017 07:37 PM:

<http://catalannews.com/politics/item/q-a-to-what-extent-is-catalonia-s-self-rule-suspended>

Catalan president calls Parliament meeting to discuss Catalonia's future

Carles Puigdemont deemed that the activation of Article 155, which will seize Catalonia's self-government, was "the worst attack" on Catalan people and institutions since the Franco dictatorship

The Catalan president, Carles Puigdemont, has given a televised speech in response to Spanish President Mariano Rajoy's actions. In the discourse, he condemned the Spanish government's actions and called for a Catalan Parliament plenary meeting to discuss a response to the measures taken by Madrid.

The Catalan parliament plenary is scheduled to take place within a week. In the session, the main issue to be addressed will be what actions Catalonia will take after Mariano Rajoy officially announced on Saturday October 21 the activation of Article 155, the so-called "nuclear option" in the Spanish constitution. Article 155 stipulates that the Spanish government will effectively seize Catalonia's self-government, and it will go into effect following ratification by the Senate, scheduled for Friday October 27. One of the options on the table for the Catalan Parliament will be a unilateral declaration of independence for Catalonia.

Puigdemont's televised speech began at 9 pm. In it, he began by introducing the current situation,

saying that any attempt at dialogue with the Spanish government from Catalonia “has had the same answer – silence of repression” from Madrid. This, while he explained that he “reiterated the need for dialogue” in correspondence to the Spanish government.

Carles Puigdemont deemed that the activation of Article 155 is “the worst attack on the institutions and the people of Catalonia since the decrees of the military dictator Francisco Franco.” He insists that the action from Spain shows a disregard for the will of the Catalan people “expressed clearly and massively on September 27 2015,” referring to the Catalan elections. This, because Catalan elected officials will be replaced by Spanish ones following the foreseen implementation of Article 155.

The Catalan president also explained that this wasn’t the first time that “Catalan institutions” received a “blow” from the Spanish government in order to “cut them down, re-direct them or directly to eliminate them.” Despite all of this, though, Puigdemont then reminded his audience of how each time, the Catalan people have come back “stronger” and more “determined.” Indeed, he noted that the “hegemonic ideas” of Catalonia “have always been the same” throughout the centuries.

While having given most of the speech in Catalan and in Spanish, Puigdemont ended his discourse in English. He addressed Europe – its political leaders, he said, but “especially European citizens.”

If European “values are at risk in Catalonia,” he said, “they will also be at risk in Europe.” He further noted that “democratically deciding the future of a nation is not a crime,” and that considering it as such and actions on October 21 and before go “against foundations that unite EU citizens through their diversity.”

He insisted, in his speech, that Catalonia is “at its core” European “in its values.” “We do what we do,” he explained, “because we believe in a democratic and peaceful Europe,” one that he expressed “should protect each and every one of us.” He ended by stating that what his viewers from all over Europe were “fighting for at home,” is also being fought for in Catalonia. “And we will continue to do so,” he concluded.

Catalan News

*21 October 2017 11:58 PM byACN | Barcelona:

<http://catalannews.com/politics/item/catalan-president-calls-parliament-meeting-to-discuss-catalonia-s-future>

Puigdemont Does Not Declare Independence Of Catalonia, Announces Debate On “Liquidation Of Our Self-Government”

Oct 21 2017—NEWS—“We cannot accept this attack.”

Mr. Puigdemont makes his statement on Saturday evening.

The First Minister of Catalonia did not declare the independence of Catalonia immediately on Saturday night, after the Spanish Prime Minister announced he would seek Senate approval to sack

the entire regional government earlier in the day.

Carles Puigdemont announced he would ask the regional parliament to hold a debate on “the liquidation of our self-government”.

“The [central] government has launched the worst attack on the institutions of Catalonia since the military dictator Francisco Franco”, said Mr. Puigdemont.

He said Mr. Rajoy’s response over the past few weeks had been “silence or repression”.

The Article 155 announcement on Saturday represented the “liquidation of our self-government and the cancellation of the democratic will of Catalans”.

“What we decide at the ballot box, they eliminate in their offices.”

The Catalan government was not born with the current Spanish Constitution, switching into English at the end of his statement to appeal to European viewers: “Catalonia is an ancient European nation”.

“We cannot accept this attack. It is incompatible with a democratic attitude and the rule of law.”

Spain Report

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<https://www.thespainreport.com/articles/1228-171021211932-puigdemont-does-not-declare-independence-of-catalonia-announces-debate-on-liquidation-of-our-self-government>

Speaker Of Catalan Parliament Blasts Rajoy’s “Flagrant Unconstitutionality” And Vows To Defend Chamber

**Oct 21 2017—NEWS—Carme Forcadell says separatists will not retreat.
Forcadell 155**

The Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, Carme Forcadell, said in a “solemn” statement shortly before 8 p.m. on Saturday evening that separatists would not take “one step backwards” after Mariano Rajoy announced earlier in the day that he would use constitutional powers to sack the entire Catalan government and restrict the powers of the regional chamber.

She accused the Prime Minister of responding to an offer of dialogue earlier in the month by jailing Jordi Cuixart (Ominium Cultural) and Jordi Sánchez (ANC), whom she described as “political prisoners”.

Mr. Rajoy, said Mrs. Forcadell, had “announced the execution of a de facto coup” in the region and meant to “censor the Catalan Parliament”.

“He wants to withdraw the rights of 135 regional MPs”, and was “attacking citizens of this country”, in reference to Catalonia.

“Article 155 does not allow them to do what they mean to do and they know it”, she added, accusing the Prime Minister of “the most flagrant unconstitutionality”.

“We are committed to defending the sovereignty of the Catalan Parliament.”

Spain Report

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<https://www.thespainreport.com/articles/1227-171021195858-speaker-of-catalan-parliament-blasts-rajoy-s-flagrant-unconstitutionality-and-vows-to-defend-chamber>

Spanish Politics Split Between Defence Of Constitution & Coup Against Catalonia After Article 155 Announced

Oct 21 2017—REACTIONS—PSOE and Ciudadanos support Rajoy; Podemos, Catalan separatists and Basque nationalists protest Article 155 measures.

Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) said the Spanish Socialist Party had chosen to “defend the Constitution”: “Who is going to pay for this break up that separatism is causing in Catalonia? It is certainly not going to be the secessionist aristocracy that is currently in charge of Catalan institutions”.

Iñigo Urkullu, Basque First Minister (PNV): “The measure is extreme and disproportionate. It blows up bridges. The Catalan government has our support to search for a constructive future”.

Aitor Estéban (Basque Nationalist Party, PNV) said Mr. Rajoy’s interpretation of Article 155 was “lax and abusive” and “sets a dangerous precedent”: “How can Rajoy say home rule is not being suspended when they are going to govern the region from the government in Madrid directly?”.

The PNV published a statement on its Facebook page that said the announcement was “of dubious constitutionality” and that their response was a “sound ‘no’ to the measure”. Basque nationalists also said it was “political stupidity that goes in just the wrong direction to the one Catalonia needs and is asking for”.

Josep Lluís Cleries, Senate spokesman for **PDeCat** (Carles Puigdemont’s party): “This is absolutely a suspension of democracy. An authentic coup against the people of Catalonia. We have gone back to 1975”.

Marta Rovira (Esquerra, ERC): “We have a legal, democratic mandate that covers everything we have done in the Parliament and regional government since September 2015. The Spanish government is carrying out a coup against a legal, democratic majority”.

Gabriel Rufián (Esquerra, ERC): “This generation now has its 23-F [the coup attempt in 1981]. Faced with the coup attempt from the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos, comply with the mandate of October 1 and a national unity government”.

Marta Pascal (PDeCat): “They say they don’t want independence but they have declared independence from the people of Catalonia with the worst attack in centuries”.

Pablo Echenique (Podemos): “The most corrupt party in Europe has 8.5% of the votes in Catalonia and will now govern there. A terrible day for any democrat”.

Pablo Iglesias (Podemos): “The monarchist block thinks it is demonstrating authority, but it is only revealing its inability to offer solutions and is pushing Catalonia even further away from Spain”.

Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos) said the government had “a duty” to activate Article 15: “The Constitution must be applied to restore democracy and give a voice back to all Catalans”.

Inés Arrimadas (Ciudadanos in Catalonia): “The irresponsible Catalan government has finished off the Catalan Statute, closed the Catalan Parliament, fractured coexistence and affected the economy. Reestablishing the law and calling elections will allow us to get back Catalan common sense and democracy in Catalonia”.

Spain Report

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<https://www.thespainreport.com/articles/1226-171021184836-spanish-politics-split-between-defence-of-constitution-coup-against-catalonia-after-article-155-announced>

Meet the activists fighting for Catalan ‘independence’

Barcelona - Moments after Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced that Spain would assume control of Catalonia’s government, the streets of Catalonia’s capital were once again filled with noise.

An estimated 450,000 people on Saturday gathered in Barcelona’s centre to protest against Madrid’s move to impose direct rule over them, a move regional officials described as a “coup”.

Carrying the Estelada, the single-starred flag that symbolises an independent Catalonia, separatist supporters filled the city’s streets and squares, while Spanish police helicopters buzzed overhead.

“We Catalans have no fear,” protester Octavi Marti said, in response to Rajoy’s decision to trigger Article 155 and dissolve the Catalan government.

“We will outlast them,” the 39-year-old added.

‘Young movement’

Catalonia voted in a disputed independence referendum on October 1 that met a heavy police crackdown from the Spanish national police and civil guard, a military force tasked with domestic law enforcement.

The Catalan government said 90 percent voted in favour of secession, but turnout was less than 50 percent.

Since then, protests have become an almost daily occurrence in Barcelona - and Saturday was no different.

Residents across the city of 1.6 million were banging pots and pans outside their windows to announce their displeasure following Rajoy's announcement.

Known as a "cassolada" in Catalan, from the word for "pot", these impromptu demonstrations have become increasingly common.

They are led by a new network of self-organising neighbourhood activists, known as the Committees to Defend the Referendum (CDR), with a presence in nearly every district of Barcelona.

"We were born on September 30," Ana Martinez, a CDR member from the working-class neighbourhood of La Verneda i La Pau, told Al Jazeera.

"We're a young movement," she added, surrounded by residents of all ages, including her two children.

Martinez said the group originally started with four or five pro-independence residents of their neighbourhood who organised to support the referendum.

The activists wanted to camp overnight inside a primary school in La Verneda i La Pau to make sure it would be open for voting on October 1.

"This neighbourhood, you have to know, there aren't many pro-independence people," said Martinez. "Because of that, we thought police wouldn't come, but they did."

The Spanish Constitutional Court ruled the referendum illegal and ordered police to stop the vote while respecting the coexistence of the Catalan people.

As it became clear that Spain was sending national police and the civil guard, more residents went to the school overnight.

The next morning, nearly two dozen Spanish police vans showed up at the school.

A video recorded by the activists shows a seated, elderly man being hit by Spanish police on the head with a baton. The man is later seen bleeding from the wound.

Human Rights Watch said the Spanish police used "excessive force" to stop the referendum and called for an investigation into law enforcement's conduct.

According to the Catalan government, 1,066 people were injured by police during the referendum, including 23 people older than 79.

The video footage also shows the aftermath of the raid.

Police allegedly ransacked the school while searching for ballot boxes, destroying classrooms and other facilities.

"The school was my school, and it's my daughter's school and will be my son's school, and it was destroyed by the police," said Martinez.

Nearly three weeks after the referendum, the school has still not been repaired, she added.

The organisation

Martinez said the CDR network has seen a huge uptick in membership since the October 1

referendum.

Many, even those who did not support independence, “wanted to support the right to vote”, she added.

Today, posters from the separate CDRs are seen all over the city, announcing marches and calling for independence.

Each neighbourhood branch has its own Facebook and Twitter profiles, while members use encrypted chat applications to communicate.

“Right now, we have contact with all neighbourhoods, [even] in other cities, and all movements,” said Martinez.

The network’s name echoes that of Cuba’s Committees to Defend the Revolution, who serve as the eyes and ears of the one-party state.

On Saturday, its members organised a joint event with a member of the far-left, anti-EU Popular Candidacy Platform party, a staunch advocate for Catalan independence.

When asked if the CDRs have a political stance, Martinez said the network was open to everyone from the left to right, “but not the extreme right or left ... We just want a free Catalan republic.”

In recent days, the network’s members have joined several large protests calling for the release of two pro-independence figures: Jordi Sanchez, of the Catalan National Assembly, and Jordi Cuixart, of Omnium Cultural, two civil society groups that often stage nonviolent, secessionist demonstrations.

Sanchez and Cuixart are currently imprisoned in Madrid without bail on charges of sedition related to their organising efforts.

Jordi Graupera, a Catalan author and researcher at Princeton university, told Al Jazeera they were “political prisoners” whose detention signifies a “lack of independent judiciary”.

Spain’s Amnesty International (AI) office released a statement calling the sedition charges “excessive” and asking for their release pending appearances in court.

AI spokesperson Ana Gomez said the rights group does not use the term “political prisoners” for lack of an international consensus on its definition. Instead, it opts for “prisoners of conscience.”

Gomez said that AI does not yet consider Sanchez and Cuixart to be prisoners of conscience, as the judicial process is still open. She noted, however, that their imprisonment constitutes “excessive restrictions” on their political expression.

When asked if he feared an increase in protests after announcing the implementation of Article 155, Rajoy responded that his only fear was “not complying” with his obligations as a leader.

Yet, CDR activists in Barcelona said they had no intention of stop demonstrating until they reach their goal.

“No one said it would happen tomorrow,” said Marti. “This is going to take some time.”

Creede Newton

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<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/meet-activists-fighting-catalan-independence-171021162848283.html>

Footnotes

[1] 21 October 2017 11:40 PM byACN | Barcelona:

<http://catalannews.com/news/item/21-oct-17-tv-news-special-edition-spain-has-pressed-the-nuclear-button>