

Catalonia update - Mass protest, political stands: BeC, CUP, deposed Catalan ministers (Belgium), Rajoy, Podemos Catalonia branch of the Terres of Lleida

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Mass protest demands release of ‘political prisoners’

750,000 people march in Barcelona according to local police under the motto ‘Freedom for political prisoners, we are the republic’.

Protesters from all over Catalonia flooded the streets of Barcelona on Saturday afternoon to denounce the incarceration of pro-independence Catalan civil society leaders and deposed government ministers. The march started at 5 pm on Marina Avenue. According to local police, 750,000 people attended the rally.

The rally’s slogan was ‘Llibertat presos polítics, som república’ (Freedom for political prisoners, we are the republic). The family members of eight imprisoned ministers headed the march, as well as family members of deposed ministers who are currently in Belgium, and the relatives of imprisoned civil society leaders.

After heading the march, they went on stage and addressed the crowd to read letters by their jailed relatives. Video messages from deposed Catalan ministers in Belgium were screened too.

In a message from Belgium, deposed president Carles Puigdemont called people to turn the rally into “a united call, loud and clear” in favor of “freedom and democracy”. “We have to once again make ourselves heard so that the world hears these plural voices,” he said.

Dismissed vice president Oriol Junqueras wrote that he has been imprisoned by the “heirs of the Franco regime” with the “shameful support” of the Spanish socialists. “Our dreams are their nightmares,” he wrote, and added that “winter will lead to spring.”

The protest took place on Barcelona’s Marina Avenue, from Pujades Street as far as Icària Avenue, which is close to the Catalan Parliament. The demonstration was organized by the Catalan National

Assembly (ANC) and Òmnium Cultural, pro-independence grassroots organizations whose leaders, Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart respectively, are currently in prison awaiting charges for sedition.

Next demonstration: in Brussels

ANC and Òmnium called for another mass demonstration on December 7. This time, though, the rally will take place in Brussels. The march will be held in the run-up to the December 21 election.

Catalan News

* 1 November 2017 05:35 PM by ACN | Barcelona:

<http://catalannews.com/society-science/item/mass-protest-demands-release-of-political-prisoners>

Ada Colau party breaks coalition with Socialists over Article 155

Barcelona deputy mayor rejects possibility of creating pact with any other party.

The government of Barcelona is going to change very soon, due to a decision taken by the members of the governing Barcelona in Common citizen platform (Barcelona en Comú, or BeC). The coalition, to which Barcelona mayor Ada Colau belongs, and which is currently governing the Catalan capital, has decided to break their municipal pact with the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) today. The decision was taken due to disagreements over the Application of Article 155 by the Spanish government to seize Catalan self-rule.

In the internal vote, 54.18% voted to break the pact, while 45.68% voted against doing so. Moving forward, deputy mayor Gerardo Pisarello denied that BeC would seek to govern the city with any other party. "We will look for all the necessary agreements with all political forces in order to strengthen the lines of government that were consolidated over the span of 2 years," Pisarello guaranteed.

Article 155 was the main reason

This vote comes just over a month before the snap elections on December 21 called by the Spanish government as part of its application of Article 155, and indeed, BeC's decision was largely based on the PSC's stance to the application of this constitutional article. BeC and its larger Catalan counterpart, Catalonia in Common (Catalonia en Comú), has embraced the position of 'Neither unilateral declaration of independence nor 155,' exemplified in Colau's stance in the last month. Conversely, the PSC's attitude towards the Spanish government's application of Article 155 to seize Catalonia's self-rule has been one of support.

BeC and the PSC entered into an agreement after the former won the elections in Barcelona in May 2015 but failed to secure a majority in the City Council.

Consequently, about a year later, the coalition decided to join forces with the PSC, and it is on this agreement that the current Barcelona government is based.

A unionist front would be "political suicide," says Ballart

Yet, some in the PSC itself are not happy with the direction the party is going in, either. Jordi Ballart,

former mayor of the town of Terrassa, situated west of Barcelona, opposed the possibility of the PSC may choosing to join forces with any unionist parties following the December 21 elections. In an interview with the ACN, Ballart stated that this would spell out “political suicide” for the party, adding that he already disagrees how close the Socialists have gotten with the “front” led by the conservative right-wing People’s Party (PP) and unionist Ciutadans (C’s). Both the PP and C’s, according to Ballart, “go against Catalonia.”

Catalan News

12 November 2017 03:08 PM by ACN | Barcelona

CUP decides to run on candidacy that is “as broad as possible” for December 21 elections

64.05% members voted for the winning option, discarding joining a country-wide list.

Far-left CUP party held an extraordinary assembly meeting on Sunday, to decide its role in the upcoming December 21 elections. The pro-independence party was to decide on two main points. The first point was to decide on whether it would run in the upcoming election at all. The second issue on the table, to consolidate if it would run alone and lead its own candidacy or decide to join in a unitary platform with other pro-independence parties, like left-wing ERC or center PDeCAT. Ultimately, the 64.05% of CUP voters who participated opted for a candidacy that was “as broad as possible,” discarding the possibility of a joint candidacy.

Elections called with Article 155

The upcoming December elections have been called by the Spanish government as part of the implementation of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, activated to seize Catalan self-rule. Indeed, the constitutional article was triggered as a response to a unilateral declaration of independence, approved in the Catalan parliament on October 27.

Now, CUP’s decision to run alone or in a joint candidacy will contribute to setting the tone for the end-of-year elections. The party choosing to not participate in a country-wide-list, which would unite pro-independence entities and potentially give the movement a better chance at winning the polls, makes a joint candidacy less likely.

A “clearly rupturist, pro-independence” and “left-wing” platform

The assembly, in which a total of 1,206 people participated, ended with the decision that the party would indeed run in the elections, and it would do so by leading their own candidacy. Their platform, as stated in their social media, is to be “as broad as possible,” one that is also “clearly rupturist, pro-independence” and “left-wing.”

91% of those who voted agreed that the CUP should run in the elections, and 64.05% voted for the party to continue leading the candidacy. One of the options that voters could choose, that of running in the elections as part of a list without politicians, earned 12.59% support. Meanwhile, the option to participate in a coalition or list to “defend the Republic of Catalonia” as well as the amnesty and freedom of political prisoners garnered 21.72% of the votes.

4,000 party members were originally set to participate in the assembly. On the day of the meeting, 1,206 individuals participated. Out of the 1,125 that were eligible to cast their vote, 1,099 did so.

Participants were asked to answer two questions on the same ballot. The first, to determine whether the CUP should run in the December 21 elections: the results ended with 91.63% for yes, 7.83% for no, 0.36% left blank, and 0.18% not valid. The second question proposed three scenarios for the upcoming elections: a country-wide list without politicians, a country-wide list based on the defense of the Catalan republic and amnesty and release of prisoners, and a candidacy led by the CUP itself. The third option received the most votes, at 64.05%.

Catalan News

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Deposed Catalan ministers in Belgium call on citizens to vote “in mass” on December 21

Meritxell Serret, Toni Comín, and Clara Ponsatí spoke at a protest in Brussels to decry the imprisonment of other Catalan pro-independence leaders.

A protest was called today in Brussels, Belgium to demand the immediate release of the deposed Catalan ministers and civil society leaders held in custody in the Madrid area. The demonstration was attended by around a thousand protesters, including three of the dismissed ministers themselves: minister of Government Meritxell Serret, minister of Health Toni Comín and minister of Education Clara Ponsatí, along with ERC MEP Josep Maria Terricabras.

Part of the dismissed Catalan ministers currently exiled in Belgium (including ousted Catalan president Carles Puigdemont), Serret, Comín, and Ponsatí called on Catalans to participate “in mass” in the upcoming December 21 elections. This, the deposed ministers assured, would serve to “restore democracy.”

The demonstration was called by the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) in support of the incarcerated ministers and civil society leaders, including the ANC’s own president, Jordi Sànchez, as well as the president of organization Òmnium Cultural and the remaining deposed minister’s own colleagues. There has also been a protest called for December 7 in the Belgian capital by the same civil society entity.

“Those who govern today are the heirs of the Franco regime, but the greatest shame is that they have the support of the Socialists”

“Yesterday, the whole world saw that the people of Catalonia are still standing despite the repression and cruelty of the Spanish government,” proclaimed deposed minister of Government, Meritxell Serret. “And today, the people of Catalonia are still standing in Brussels, and that is the force which, in the coming days, will push us once more towards the place where we’ve always won – at the polls,” she continued.

“We don’t want to do to anyone what they’ve done to us,” said the dismissed minister of Agriculture, adding that she and the other deposed ministers were “continuing to fight.” “They cannot silence us,

they cannot deny us, we are a people and we want the rights of any people, and, the main one of all, to decide our future, defend our institutions," she stated.

The exiled and dismissed ministers also reminded citizens that their support was valued and essential. "Your support, your firmness, your serenity and conviction to go forward are very important," Serret noted, adding that hers is a "positive" project.

The first step forward is to undo the last step backwards, explained Comín

Dismissed minister of Health Toni Comín explained what it was like for him and his fellow deposed ministers in Brussels to know that their colleagues are in prison. "Every night," he explained, "when they go to sleep, they cannot kiss their children, they cannot say good morning to their children." Inasmuch, he stated that "Spain has a serious democracy problem." Comín further argued that the executives that are imprisoned in Madrid are indeed "political prisoners." "When a criminal is in jail, have you seen a million people take to the streets?" he asked, referring to the massive march in Barcelona on Saturday November 11.

According to Comín, "the first step forward" that they can take now is to "undo the backwards step" of implementing Article 155 in Catalonia. Another priority, said Comín, is to "end repression and judicial processes."

Comín: a "fight between authoritarianism and democracy in Catalonia"

Referring to the December 21 elections called by the Spanish government as part of Article 155, Comín said that "it is very important for elections that are unlawful to be turned into legitimate ones through mass voting." "We will vote, and we will be many, and we will win," he said, "starting on the 21st, and it will be a very important step." He further called on all citizens to vote: "On the 21st all of us have to go," he added, "the 2 million who voted on October 1, and more." "It will be our first victory in the short term," he stated.

In addition, he also denounced the role of the European Union in the Catalan crisis, as well as that of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE.) "Listen, Europe, you were founded to ensure that totalitarianism and fascism never returned to the continent," Comín said, stating that there is currently "a fight between authoritarianism and democracy" in Catalonia. "Those who govern today are the heirs of the Franco regime, but the greatest shame is that they have the support of the Socialists," he argued.

"Human rights are in danger," warned Clara Ponsatí

The deposed minister of Education, Clara Ponsatí, warned that "the policies of Putin and Erdogan" are "beginning to become effective from Madrid." "Human rights are in danger," she said, and also called for mass participation in the elections of December 21. "Let's demand responsibility from political leaders, demand responsibility from ourselves," she incited, re-iterating "for no-one to be missing on December 21."

MEP from the left-wing ERC party Josep Maria Terricabras, also spoke at the protest, asking what more has to happen for Europe to react to the Catalan situation.

Catalan News

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Spanish president calls on “silent majority” in Catalonia to vote in upcoming elections

During the pre-campaign inaugural event, the head of PP in Catalonia also “thanked” Rajoy for implementing Article 155.

Spanish president Mariano Rajoy addressed the “silent majority” in Catalonia at a pre-campaign opening ceremony for conservative right-wing People’s Party in the run-up to the December 21 elections. In a speech, the Spanish president called on his listeners to fill “the ballot boxes of truth,” and to turn their voices into votes. Rajoy further stated that it’s necessary for “the voice of democracy go to the ballot boxes and fill them in favor of coexistence and tranquility in Catalonia, Spain, and Europe.” This has been Rajoy’s first visit to Catalonia since the October 1 independence referendum.

The speech was received by the applause of an audience of more than 1,000 who came to see the PP leaders at the Hotel Barceló Sants in Barcelona. During this speech, Rajoy also addressed the application of Article 155, deeming it “inevitable” after having run out of options faced with the independence movement in Catalonia. He justified its application by stating that any other country in Europe would have done the same when faced with the situation.

A “clean, fully democratic” election, said Rajoy

Indeed, the event was a direct result of the application of Article 155. In the measures, the Spanish president also called snap elections on December 21 in Catalonia, which Rajoy claimed would be “clean, fully democratic,” as well as “with transparency in their development and scrutiny.”

This will not be the last time that Rajoy visits Catalonia during the electoral campaign. His next visit is already set for December 8, the same day as the leader of his party in Catalonia, Xavier García Albiol, turns 50.

Xavier García Albiol “thanks” Rajoy for application of Article 155

In the pre-campaign opening ceremony, the head of PP in Catalonia and its candidate for the upcoming elections, Xavier García Albiol, thanked Mariano Rajoy for applying Article 155 of the Spanish constitution. This measure was applied by Rajoy following the declaration of independence in the Catalan parliament, in order to seize Catalan self-rule. Albiol further thanked Rajoy for “deposing Puigdemont, Junqueras and his government,” as well as for “closing embassies” abroad. The Spanish government closed all Catalan foreign delegations abroad, except for the one in Brussels.

Albiol also spoke of the possibility of forming some sort of agreement with the Catalan Socialist Party (the PSC) and unionist Ciutadans (C’s), which he believes would offer “an alternative project.” Albiol also warned the PSC into entering into an agreement with pro-independence parties instead as it would constitute “a betrayal of thousands of Catalans and Spaniards.”

The leader of PP in Catalonia also denied that the civil society leaders and deposed Catalan government ministers who are currently incarcerated for their role in the independence movement

are “political prisoners.” He insisted that in Spain nobody is put away for their ideas, but rather for acting illegally.

Catalan News

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The Podemos Catalonia branch of the Terres of Lleida announces its dissolution in protest against the intervention from Podemos in the Spanish state

Podemos Catalonia branch of the Terres of Lleida Declaration

For some time now Podemos has ceased to be the instrument that many thought would make it possible to put an end to the regime of 1978, turning the tables and ending corruption and social inequality. It is no longer a broadly representative organisation.

The turn imposed on the organisation from Madrid recently manifested in the sacking of the Commission of Guarantees [control commission] because it had denounced the breach of the agreements reached at Vistalegre II [Podemos’s second Spain-wide congress]. Now, a few months later, this authoritarian attitude of Pablo Iglesias and Pablo Echenique has arrived in Catalonia with the imposition of a consultation without the minimum legal guarantees, in violation of the statutes and internal documents voted by the membership, and to which we militants had already responded negatively. It provoked the resignation of the Secretary General [Albano Dante Fachin] to avoid the imposition forcing him to accept standing in the [December 21 Catalan] election with Catalunya en Comú.

We have also found out that the ticket for the December 21 poll has already been worked out, which is a serious irregularity, given that the statutes of Podemos require the choice of candidates through primaries.

We view this interference as totally unacceptable for a party that wants to build its structures and take the decisions from the bottom up, giving the leadership role to the rank and file.

Finally, the imposition from Madrid of a management committee to lead Podemos Catalonia without taking into account its Catalan members is further proof of forms of organisation and decision-making not different from the rest of the parties, with an opaque dynamic and a total lack of transparency.

The TERRES OF LLEIDA branch of Podemos deeply regrets this situation and we unanimously agree that the only reasonable solution is to dissolve the branch definitively and to hand in our resignations as members of Podemos, since we are not identified with this way of doing politics and with the current Podemos project. Podemos today is no longer the party we joined in August 2014 and it therefore makes no sense to continue representing it.

From the blog of Dick Nichols

