

# Catalonia: Independence declared after Rajoy refuses last-minute deal

Saturday 28 October 2017, by [NICHOLS Dick](#) (Date first published: 28 October 2017).

**Tens of thousands of people gathered outside the Catalan parliament to celebrate its proclamation of independence.**

Just after 3pm on October 27, the Catalan parliament voted to ratify the results of the country's October 1 referendum on self-determination, proclaiming Catalonia "an independent state in the form of a republic".

In the 135-seat Catalan parliament the vote was 70 in favour — the MPs of the pro-independence coalition Together for the Yes (JxSi) and the anti-capitalist People's Unity List (CUP) — 10 against — the MPs of the left coalition Catalonia Yes We Can (CSQEP) — and two informal votes.

The other 53 MPs from the unionist parties Citizens, the People's Party (PP) and the Party of Socialists of Catalonia (PSC), walked out of the chamber in protest at a vote they said violated the Spanish constitution.

Outside parliament the vote was greeted with cheers from the tens of thousands of people who had gathered for this historic moment.

The vote marked the end of a tortuous two-year "process", which began after the pro-independence parties won a majority of seats (but not votes) at the September 27, 2015 "plebiscitary poll".

Almost immediately, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whose government is about to launch a takeover of Catalan government and institutions under section 155 of the Spanish constitution, tweeted: "I ask all Spaniards for calm: the rule of law will soon restore legality in Catalonia."

The Spanish Senate voted 214 to 47 (with one informal vote) to give the Rajoy government all the powers it needs to sack the Catalan government of Carles Puigdemont, control the Catalan parliament and launch an assault on Catalonia's institutions.

## The berserk road to independence

October 27 was therefore a historic day. But the most amazing, convulsive, day in modern Catalan political history took place the day before.

In the space of eight hours on October 26, Puigdemont shifted his stance in the face of the looming takeover by the central Spanish government from supporting a declaration of Catalan independence to supporting early elections and dropping independence and, finally, to dropping early elections and having the Catalan parliament decide on independence.

Puigdemont's disorienting shifts came after three days of negotiation and debate within the mass organisations and parties of the Catalan independence movement had finally produced a decision in

favour of declaring Catalonia independent.

The establishment Barcelona daily La Vanguardia certainly thought so: on October 26 its gloomy front page headline read: “Radical milieu pushing Puigdemont towards UDI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence]”.

The independence declaration had been on hold since October 10, when Puigdemont recognised the result of the October 1 referendum but suspended its application to call for negotiations with the PP government.

When Rajoy ignored this call and pressed ahead with his war on Catalan self-rule, Puigdemont said the Catalan parliament would consider lifting the suspension. After the PP government’s draconian plans for intervention were detailed on October 21, the declaration of independence seemed a certainty.

### **The establishments mobilise**

However, that conclusion underestimated the huge pressure that the Catalan, Spanish and European political and economic establishments would bring to bear on the Catalan government. The 72 hours between October 23 and October 26 saw a near-panic mobilisation of these powers-that-be.

Nonetheless, their offensive failed for two reasons: the resistance of the Catalan independence movement and the refusal of the PP to drop what it sees as a precious chance to liquidate Catalan self-rule as part of its long-held recentralisation agenda for the Spanish state.

The mounting pressure on the Catalan administration, which included an ongoing campaign to scare companies to register themselves outside Catalonia and stern statements from European Union spokespeople, severely shook up the Puigdemont ministry and the ruling JxSi parliamentary fraction.

At the same time, it had no impact on the CUP that had been insisting that the overwhelming Yes vote be ratified by the proclamation of the Catalan Republic.

### **The conflict unfolds**

Here is how the week unfolded:

October 23, 6pm. There is no indication of the drama to come, as both the government and JxSi parliamentarians agree that the Catalan Republic should be declared on October 27.

October 24, 10am. As the details of the extent of the article 155 intervention start to sink in, discussion opens up in the Catalan cabinet as to whether it is even possible to defend the country’s institutions and whether going to early elections might not be wiser. This discussion spreads to the JxSi parliamentary group.

October 25, 4pm. The JxSi parliamentarians adopt by a large majority the position of “declaring the Republic and resisting with the people” and speakers’ notes are prepared outlining the arguments for use at 100 meetings called by the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Catalan culture and language association Omnim Cultural.

However, during the meeting, voices are raised against this “suicidal” course, provoking an all-in debate, the content of which is communicated to Puigdemont.

October 25, 5pm. The position of a minority of JxSi MPs — to shift to an election scenario to preserve

Catalonia's institutions (a position also held by Catalonia Yes We Can) — gets further repeated in the editorials of all the major Catalan dailies, as well as in statements by the economic establishment.

Business minister Santi Vila, who has been publicly reluctant about an independence declaration, puts out feelers to contacts in the Spanish government about the possibility of a negotiated settlement.

October 25, 7pm. At a summit of the independence movement — the government, mass organisations, parties and municipal bodies — the majority view remains that of declaring independence and “resisting with the people”.

However, Puigdemont notes a strong minority current arguing for early elections as a way of stopping an article 155 onslaught. He, too, is concerned about the capacity of the movement to resist, especially if it is divided.

The Catalan crisis is particularly worrying for Basque Premier Inigo Urkullu (Basque Nationalist Party), who fears that a successful attack on Catalan autonomy will encourage the most centralising forces in the PP and Citizens to target Basque institutions next.

Urkullu offers to mediate between the Spanish and Catalan governments: he is supported by other figures with an interest in preventing a 155 intervention, namely various Catalan businesspeople, former Catalan PSC premier Jose Montilla and current PSC leader Miquel Iceta. Their contact person in the PP is Congress speaker Ana Pastor.

These mediators convince Puigdemont that they have enough commitment from the PP for him to call early elections and dissolve parliament.

October 26, 10am. Puigdemont informs his ministers, JxSi MPs and representatives of the two main parties in JxSi — the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDECat) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) — that he has decided to call early elections and dissolve parliament. All he is waiting for is confirmation that the Rajoy government will call off its 155 intervention and thus avoid “extreme violence”.

## **Revolt**

Puigdemont's announcement left the independence camp aghast.

First to comment was CUP MP Carles Riera: “Up until now the Catalan independence movement has had one enemy, the Spanish state. Now it has a second, the Catalan government.”

Next to react were three PDECat MPs, who along with JxSi independent MP Germa Bel, tore up their party cards.

The ERC, while “respecting” Puigdemont decision, said it disagreed with it and, after an emergency meeting of its national council, advised that if Puigdemont went ahead with his plan it would leave the government. Both the ERC and the smaller force, Democrats, called on Puigdemont to reverse his decision.

The ANC and Omnium Cultural reaffirmed their commitment to respecting the October 1 result. Sumate, the organisation of Spanish-speaking supporters of independence, tweeted: “We don't accept Catalan elections, you have a mandate from the Catalan people and you must fulfil it.”

At the same time, the square outside the government building began to fill with angry protesters.

They were led by the university students who had gone on strike that day in support of the Catalan Republic.

The students were halfway through their march when the news started to spread that Puigdemont wanted to call early elections. The chants of the demonstrations changed effortlessly to "Not a step backwards!", "Those who are in prison don't want elections!"[a reference to imprisoned ANC and Omnium Cultural leaders Jordi Sanchez and Jordi Cuixart],"Betrayal"and"No independence without disobedience".

## **Silence**

In the hours after Puigdemont's announcement, the noise of revolt continued to grow, but it was accompanied by total silence from a Rajoy government that was supposed to commit to suspending 155.

When PP spokespeople were finally heard from, it was to say that "we have to re-establish statutory and constitutional legality with decisions of the Senate" (Javier Arenas, in charge of regional government policy) and "stopping the application of article 155 doesn't depend on the calling of early elections in Catalonia but on a clear renunciation from the Catalan government of independence aspirations."(Galician premier Alberto Nunez Feijoo).

By 4pm, six hours after Puigdemont had dropped his bombshell, the media were still waiting for him to make a public statement that had originally been scheduled for midday.

Finally, it was clear the PP was not interested in giving any undertaking to Puigdemont and that, in fact, they were gunning for him.

At 5pm, Puigdemont announced that because he had not received any guarantees, the offer of going to early elections was off the table and the decision on whether to respond to the threat of article 155 intervention with an independence declaration was to be taken by parliament.

## **War**

The main effect of Puigdemont's offer was to further expose the political motivation of the PP: just as the Rajoy government was not interested in Puigdemont's previous clarification that no declaration of independence had taken place on October 10, it had no interest in accepting a truce that would have come at great political cost to Puigdemont had it actually gone ahead.

The determination of the Rajoy government to "get" Catalonia saved the unity of the Catalan independence forces.

Now, having voted for independence, those forces must prepare for war.

**Dick Nichols**, Barcelona, Saturday, October 28, 2017

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<https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/catalonia-independence-declared-after-rajoy-refuses-last-minut>

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