

MEPs blast harsh sentences for Catalan political prisoners

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News

MEPs from various political groups in the European Parliament are up in arms over the excessive prison sentences the Spanish prosecutor wants to hand down to Catalan pro-independence leaders.



Photo credit: PA

The EU-Catalonia dialogue platform has signed a joint statement expressing its deep concern at the “harsh” sentences demanded by the Spanish prosecutor for Catalan political prisoners who had “peacefully and democratically” pursued their nation's right to self-determination.

Several Catalan pro-independence leaders have been in pre-trial detention for more than a year following their role in organising Catalonia's self-determination referendum in October 2017.

Oriol Junqueras and Raül Romeva, two former MEPs from the Greens/European Free Alliance group, are among those held. Their trial is expected to be held early next year.

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A joint statement signed by members of the EU-Catalonia dialogue platform, set up to promote a “stronger role for the EU as a mediator” in the current spat between Spain and Catalonia, has now been sent to the Spanish authorities.

In the statement the MEPs say: “We, the members of the EU-Catalonia Dialogue Platform, want to express our deep concern about the request of the Spanish prosecutor to demand a total of 177 years in prison for the Catalan pro-independence leaders, who have been in pre-trial jail for more than a year for having organised a referendum on self-determination.”

According to voting figures provided by the Catalan government, approximately 90 percent of the votes cast were in favour of independence.

Last Friday, the attorney general of Spain’s Supreme Court, formally charged Junqueras, the former Catalan vice-president, with rebellion, and demanded a 25-year sentence for him. The former Catalan government ministers Joaquim Forn, Jordi Turull, Josep Rull, Raül Romeva and Dolors Bassa all face 16-year sentences.

“Catalan leaders have been accused of crimes they have not committed based on violence that has not existed”

Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, the president and former leader of the two main Catalan grassroots movements respectively, and Carme Forcadell, the former speaker in the Catalan parliament, face 17 years as “promoters and leaders” of the rebellion.

According to the court papers, the defendants were “aware” that violence could have erupted during the attempt to bring about the independence of Catalonia, and they are accused of a “general uprising, leading to acts of force, aggression and violence.”

In the statement, the MEPs say, “Not only are these accusations false and made up to fit into a narrative that justifies the charge of rebellion, but they have also been refuted by the Belgian and German courts, when they refused to extradite the former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont (twice) and the ministers in exile on the grounds of rebellion.”

Puigdemont is currently in exile in Belgium.

The statement goes on, “Catalan leaders have been accused of crimes they have not committed based on violence that has not existed. Furthermore, the fact that the press had access to the document before the lawyers of the defendants is, once again, clear evidence of the many irregularities and violations of the rights of the defendants that are surrounding this cause.”

“The decision to pursue the most serious charges laid against the accused has destroyed any hope that the socialist government might lead to any meaningful negotiation on the Catalan issue. The lack of political response by the Spanish authorities is provoking dramatic consequences and we will do what it is in our hands to denounce it. There has been no crime; this construction has nothing to do with reality.”

The MEPs said that if such sentences are passed it would set a “dangerous” precedent in Spain and the European Union.

“The already shrinking position of the EU as guarantor of fundamental rights would be irreversibly affected; and its silence has also contributed to make European citizens feel that the European Institutions are far away and do not really protect them as they are supposed to.”

“For all these reasons, we want to make a call to the European institutions to urgently reconsider what protecting, promoting and guaranteeing civil and political rights mean to them,” the statement added.

About the author

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