

SPAIN INTENSIFIES REPRESSION IN CATALONIA

The Spanish government refuses all dialogue and rules out an international mediator for the crisis in Catalonia.

REPORT | 4 October 2017

1 October turned out to be far from the celebration of democracy it was meant to be with Catalonia's self-determination referendum. Almost 900 voters were injured by the Spanish police forces using a level of violence never before seen in a European Union member state against its own citizens simply to stop them from expressing themselves democratically by voting. Catalonia once again appeals for dialogue and seeks international mediation to solve the conflict. Nevertheless the Spanish Government refuses to sit down at the table and [ruled out any possibility of mediation](#)¹ while intensifying their repression through threats of doing everything possible to prevent Catalonia going ahead with their plans.

Democracy, civil and human rights have long been under attack with Spain's repression, which has included the violation of freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the freedom of assembly. On 1 October, however, Spain took the violence to the next level. Starting early in the morning, the Spanish national police launched a [widespread crackdown](#)² on Catalonia's disputed independence referendum, raiding polling stations and firing rubber bullets in a concerted attempt to deny the vote legitimacy. Spanish Foreign Minister Alfonso Dastis said he didn't see the Spanish police intervention during the Catalan referendum as [heavy-handed](#)³, though by the end of the day they had injured a total of 893 people.

[International reactions after the police violence on 1 October](#)

Several international personalities and organisations have expressed through social networks their [reaction to the police attacks](#)⁴.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, for example, was "disturbed by the violence in Catalonia on Sunday." In an official [communiqué](#)⁵ he urged the Spanish authorities "to ensure thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all acts of violence. Police responses must at all times be proportionate and necessary."

Also the director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, called on [the Spanish authorities](#) "to ensure respect

¹ <http://www.politico.eu/article/spain-rules-out-mediator-in-catalan-crisis/>

² <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/10/01/europe/catalonia-spain-independence-referendum-vote/index.html>

³ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/wires/news/business/latest-chief-hopes-sides-solve-catalan-crisis-article-1.3535824>

⁴ <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/en/international-statements-about-the-police-repression-against-the-1-o-referendum-on-independence/>

⁵ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22192&LangID=E>

[for fundamental freedoms of peaceful assembly and expression](#)⁶” after the events on 1 October .

In addition, the international observers present at the Catalan referendum were concerned about what they had witnessed. In a [preliminary statement](#)⁷ from the experts, the head of the International Election Expert Research Team, Helena Catt regretted the attempts by Spanish police to stop the vote violently. "We saw numerous and repeated violations of civil and human rights," she said. "It was a centrally orchestrated, military-style operation carefully planned. We are stunned that armed masked officers entered polling stations with the purposes of preventing a peaceful democratic process."

The International Parliamentary Delegation on Catalonia's Referendum on Self-Determination expressed in their [statement](#)⁸ on Sunday that "the Spanish Government should not have resorted to violence breaking the basic principles of Human Rights as established in international documents signed and ratified by the Kingdom of Spain." And they expressed their "abhorrence at the violence of the Spanish State that brought about more than 800 individuals being injured; the electronic sabotage deployed against the democratic vote and the removal of ballot boxes by Spanish State Forces."

Amnesty International Europe and Central Asia Director, John Dalhuisen, also made a statement saying that "[police officers have used excessive and disproportionate force](#)⁹." And he claimed that "Spanish police must avoid the excessive use of force; and whenever the lawful use of force is unavoidable, they must use it with restraint and in proportion to the seriousness of the law enforcement objective."

[Catalonia calls for dialogue and international mediation](#)

After the violent scenes on 1 October, the Catalan government once again reached out to call for dialogue and to seek international mediation to resolve the conflict. The Spanish government refuses to sit down and talk and rules out mediation. Instead, the Spanish executive escalates the tensions with threats of [suspending Catalonia's regional autonomy](#)¹⁰ without any dialogue at all.

The latest escalation of the conflict came on 3 October, when the Spanish king Felipe VI went on national television [threatening the Catalan institutions](#)¹¹ while giving the Spanish government carte blanche to intervene in Catalonia. Instead of acting as the statesman he is meant to be and condemning the violence and calling for dialogue and mediation, he opted for [escalating the conflict](#)¹².

⁶ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/347171>

⁷ <http://www.catalannews.com/politics/item/international-observers-we-saw-numerous-and-repeated-violations-of-civil-and-human-rights>

⁸ <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/en/statement-by-the-international-parliamentary-delegation-on-catalonias-referendum-on-self-determination-oct-1st-2017/>

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/10/catalan-referendum-police-must-not-use-excessive-or-disproportionate-force/>

¹⁰ <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-spain-politics-catalonia-justice/spain-could-use-law-to-suspend-catalan-autonomy-justice-minister-idUKKCN1C70XP>

¹¹ http://www.euronews.com/2017/10/04/hidden-message-in-spain-king-catalan-message?utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#link_time=1507098507

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/03/king-felipe-catalan-authorities-have-scorned-all-spaniards-with-referendum>

A non-declared state of exception

The situation in Catalonia is a non-declared state of exception. The 10,000 police agents, who were brought to Catalonia, according to the Spanish executive to maintain the order during the referendum on Sunday, are still on Catalan soil. And instead of withdrawing the police forces, Spain is extending their stay until 11 October¹³.

Spanish government accuses Catalan parties of wanting people to die in Catalonia

The Spanish refusal of all dialogue and repression in Catalonia goes even further. On 3 October, Catalonia was shut down by a general strike in protest against the repression and in favor of democracy and dignity. Speaking about the strike, the parliamentary spokesman for Rajoy's governing Partido Popular (PP), Rafael Hernando, publicly stated that the Catalan strike was "clearly political, with Nazi¹⁴ connotations" in terms of indoctrinating Catalans into following a separatist ideology. In an interview with the Spanish public radio he added: "I've got the feeling that ERC (Republican Left of Catalonia party) and the CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy party) and other political parties are looking forward to deaths in Catalonia¹⁵." Furthermore, he accused the Catalan government of "showing false pictures of non-existent violence."¹⁶

Alleged crime of sedition

The repression continued on 4 October, when Spain's special high court, the Audiencia Nacional summoned the head of the Catalan regional police, Josep Lluís Trapero, to testify for the alleged crime of sedition¹⁷ in relation to arrests of high-ranking officials on 20 September. The crime of sedition comes under the jurisdiction of this special high court, the Audiencia Nacional and goes back to the Franco regime. The crime of sedition can lead to a sentence of up to 30 years in prison.

The Audiencia Nacional also summoned deputy police official Teresa Laplana and the heads of the independent civil society organisations Omnium Cultural and the Catalan National Assembly (ANC), Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sanchez.

Outcome of the referendum

More than 2.2 million Catalans voted in the referendum, under heavy pressure from the Spanish police and with many polling stations closed by the brutal action of the police. Those polling stations that could remain open all day had long queues that lasted for

¹³ <http://www.elperiodico.com/es/politica/20171003/los-barcos-para-alojar-a-policias-amplian-su-estancia-barcelona-hasta-ej-11-de-octubre-6327937>

¹⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/03/world/europe/catalonia-spain-referendum.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.catalannews.com/politics/item/post-referendum-catalan-strike-is-nazi-says-people-s-party-spokesman>

¹⁶ https://twitter.com/Rafa_Hernando/status/915490763479363585

¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/spain-politics-catalonia-police/spains-high-court-calls-head-of-catalan-police-to-testify-idUSE8N1KC049>

hours. More than 42% of the voters did vote despite this state of siege in which almost 900 people were beaten, assaulted and insulted.

More than 770,000 voters were registered to vote⁴ at the approximately 400 polling stations that were closed by force. Many of these voters, therefore, could not vote. Many others, who had already voted, saw their votes being taken away in the ballot boxes by police action. Tens of thousands of votes were thus stolen by the Spanish police and they are impossible to count.

Taking into account all these factors, many more would have voted if conditions had been normal. Indeed, in those villages and towns where all was normal the turnout was high, with over 50% of those registered voting.

The Catalan Government considers that turnout would have largely exceeded 50% if the referendum had taken place in normal conditions, as occurred in Scotland or Quebec.