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**CATALONIA: 'RAJOY WILL NOT MAKE CONCESSIONS TO ANYONE'**

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The regional government in Barcelona has been dissolved. Where do things go from here? Günther Maihold of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs advises the government in Madrid to show restraint.

DW: Things moved very fast in Catalonia at the end of last week. The regional government in Barcelona has been dissolved and the question is: What happens now. Will the separatist camp be weakened by the coercive measures — or will it gain a fresh wave of support?

Günther Maihold: That will very much depend on how the Spanish government implements these coercive measures. If it decides to make a forceful intervention, giving the separatists the opportunity to keep staging actions against this crackdown and creating martyrs, it will be a difficult time. If, however, Madrid declares itself in favor of an intelligent strategy and takes very few coercive measures, opting instead for governance from Madrid without a presence in the region, the application of Article 155 could run smoothly up to the vote on 21 December.

What do you recommend Madrid do?

Setting the date for election fairly soon is a positive decision, because that, of course, will reshuffle the cards in the separatist camp. It also means that an end of the application of Article 155 is in sight for everyone, because it's clear that there will be a new parliament. Then there will be fresh negotiations to establish the basis for the relationship between Barcelona and Madrid. Restraint in implementing the measures is advisable in every respect.

Even before last Friday, it was clear that, realistically, a declaration of independence would not have a chance. Didn't the separatist movement run straight into a brick wall with its eyes wide open?

They wanted to be sure to hammer this "political post" into the ground. They've put this declaration of independence out there and said, "This is now the point from which we negotiate." That's how it should be understood. No one believes that this was the start of a process that will lead to a constitution, even if some people try to present it that way. It is clear now that the next political reference point is the election on December 21. The majority of Catalan parties are already positioning themselves in preparation for this election. I believe that the acute phase when everything escalates is now over.

Is Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy willing to make concessions to the Catalans, including on the question of finances? Does he have to?

The acute phase when everything escalates is over, Maihold said

He won't make concessions to anyone, because he's completely focused on a victory for supporters of Spain on December 21. A new parliament in Barcelona would then rescind the declaration of independence, or turn it into a mandate for negotiation. For him, negotiations can only take place after the constitution of a new, legitimate parliament.

You've just described a scenario in which the Spanish camp retains the upper hand in the elections. But what would happen if the vote in Catalonia went in the separatists' favor?

Then, just as in the first case, the first thing needed would be negotiations. We would have to talk about the spread of the independence movement. We would have to look at questions about the conditions of autonomy, and perhaps also about the conditions and possibilities of sovereignty.

Is the Spanish state with its autonomous regions still in line with the times? Or does the country need a federal structure?

The decisive point is that the Catalan movement has said it opposes a federal order, as it can only be a federalism of difference. Catalonia has its own historical identity and must therefore always be treated differently from other regional identities. In this respect, the German model of transition from a centralized state to a federal state cannot be implemented in Spain. Nonetheless, it would make sense to change the statute of autonomy to make it a predictable statute. As things stand, there are many things that always depend on the goodwill of whoever is Spanish prime minister.

The political atmosphere between Madrid and Barcelona is poisoned. Can the rift be mended?

I'm putting my hopes in the effect of the vote. This is the point when sovereignty speaks and suspends the government's power games. I'm assuming that, in spite of all the polemicization, the situation will calm down and there will be a rearrangement of the political camps.

Günther Maihold is the deputy director of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) in Berlin. He is researching, among other things, topics related to Latin America, Spain, and organized crime.

The declaration

As the world watched, Catalonia's parliament voted 70 to 10 for the region to declare its independence from Spain. "Our legitimate parliament has taken a very important step. This is the people's mandate," Puigdemont said after the decision. Dozens of opposition lawmakers from the Socialist Party, Citizens Party and Popular Party had walked out of the parliament chamber to boycott the vote.

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