
SPANISH ELECTIONS: CATALONIA ISSUE DOMINATES FIRST TV DEBATE

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Just four leaders took part in Spains election debate after an invitation to nationalist newcomers Vox was withdrawn.

The candidates went head to head for an hour and a half. Differences on the economy came to the fore. But it was the issue of Catalanian demands for independence that generated the most heated exchanges.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez presented himself as a safe candidate for traditionalists to support: "Separatists have the right to know that independence is not going to happen. They know that the problem in Catalonia is not independence but cohabitation. With a socialist government there won't be independence, there won't be any referendum for independence and the constitution won't be violated."

But Popular Party leader Pablo Casado claimed Sánchez was planning to pardon the Separatist leadership: "What is unacceptable is that for the first time in the history of Spain youve reached agreement with those who want to divide Spain. It's unbelievable youre not willing to say you won't pardon the Catalanian separatists if they are condemned by the Supreme Court. Say it!"

Ciudadanos leader candidate Albert Rivera took a similar line: "I want a Prime Minister who doesnt go down on bended knee to those who want to destroy Spain... I want a prime minister who supports Spain... and doesn't go hand in hand with nationalists. I want independence, yes, but independence from Quim Torra, Carles Puigdemont and from those who spit on Spain."

Pablo Iglesias from Unidas Podemos' struck a conciliatory tone: "There are a lot of people who are watching us that maybe feel emotional about having different flags, who have different opinions and who speak different languages. We have to ask ourselves what all these citizens have in common. When somebody has to go to hospital or has to bring a relative to a hospital, nobody asks him if he voted for the Popular Party, if he's separatist or if he votes for the socialist party."

Journalist Jaime Velazquez told Good Morning Europe that Sánchez had successfully defended his position as favourite, but that he might come under more fire in Tuesdays second debate.