
CARLES PUIGDEMONT CLEARED TO RUN IN EU ELECTION

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The Spanish separatist has scuppered a ban on contesting the European elections. A court ruled he still has a fundamental right to contest the election even though he has fled the country and faces arrest if he returns.

Carles Puigdemont, the exiled former president of the Spanish state of Catalonia who fled to Belgium after a failed secession bid, has been cleared to run in the European elections, a court ruled on Sunday.

Spain's Supreme Court overturned a ban imposed by Spanish election officials on his candidacy as head of the "Lliures per Europa" grouping.

The court found there were no legal grounds to bar him or two of his colleagues who were also banned. It said fleeing the country did not invalidate his "fundamental right" to contest an election.

Puigdemont was chosen in March to represent his party at the bloc election, campaigning on the right of self-determination for Catalonia.

However he and two fellow candidates were shut down after appeals by the conservative Popular Party and centre-right Ciudadanos.

The two others affected by the ban, and its subsequent overturning, were Toni Comin, a member of the regional government at the time of its secession bid, and Clara Ponsati, another former Catalan minister who also fled Spain.

If Puigdemont is actually voted in, he would face severe challenges given he faces imminent arrest if he returns to Spain.

Puigdemont celebrated his "victory over Madrid" after the decision.

aw/bw (AFP, EFE, AP)