
JAILED CATALAN SEPARATIST LEADERS DENY VIOLENCE, CALL FOR DIALOGUE AS TRIAL ENDS

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13.06.2019

Deutsche Welle (12 June 2019)

The jailed Catalan leaders were given a chance to speak for 15 minutes at the end of their trial in Madrid. They denied the charges of rebellion, sedition and misappropriation of public funds, and called for dialogue.

Thousands of people took to the streets of Barcelona on Wednesday night to show their support for the "political prisoners" on trial in the Supreme Court in the capital. They had gathered during the day to watch the statements broadcast on large screens in downtown Barcelona.

Showing posters of the imprisoned 12 former leaders, activists said the Catalans had been exercising their democratic rights when they held a referendum, declared illegal by the Constitutional Court of Spain, on breaking away from Spain in 2017.

At the end of their four-month trial in Madrid, the jailed leaders again denied the charges brought against them.

"Casting a vote cannot be considered a crime," former Catalan vice president Oriol Junqueras said during his statement, adding that the 2017 secession bid had been nonviolent.

Dialogue, negotiation

Junqueras called for a dialogue to resolve the crisis: "The best for Catalonia, Spain, Europe, everyone, would be to return this issue to the political arena ... to the arena of dialogue, negotiation and agreement." Junqueras and four of his co-defendants were elected as national parliamentarians in the April general elections, although they were later suspended from parliament. Junqueras was also elected to the European Parliament in the May elections.

The Catalan parliamentary speaker Carme Forcadell said: "I am being judged for my political career, for being who I am, not for my acts, not for my deeds."

Chief prosecutor Javier Zaragoza argued the secession bid was a "coup d'etat" aimed at "wiping out the Spanish constitution."

Decision after summer

The nine defendants charged with rebellion, including Junqueras, could face 25 years in jail if convicted on the charges. The three other defendants face lesser charges of disobedience and misuse of public funds.

The current Catalan president, Quim Torra, and parliamentary speaker, Roger Torrent, both attended the court session.

The judges will take several weeks over the summer before they make their decisions.

Kaynak/Source: