
CATALONIA SEPARATISTS SET TO END SPAIN'S POLITICAL DEADLOCK

- 06.01.2020

Deutsche Welle (3 January 2020)

A Catalan separatist party will abstain from an upcoming vote to confirm Socialist Pedro Sanchez as prime minister. The ERC announced the move after agreeing to talks over "the future of Catalonia" with the Socialists.

The pro-independence Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) said Thursday it would abstain from the Spanish parliament's confidence vote, allowing Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez to stay on as prime minister.

Spain went without a proper government for much of 2019 after two inconclusive elections. Sanchez needed the ERC's 13 lawmakers to at least refrain from the vote, slated to take place between January 4 and 7, in order to secure his confirmation in office.

The ERC said it made its decision after the Socialists agreed to an open dialogue over secession for Catalonia. Top ERC official Pere Aragones said the two sides would hold talks to "unblock the political conflict over the future of Catalonia and establish the basis for its resolution."

"It is a difficult, complex path. We think it is worth taking," Aragones, who serves as Catalonia's vice president, told reporters.

Fragile coalition government

Sanchez and the Socialists won 155 seats in the most recent elections in November, well short of a majority in Spain's 350-seat parliament. The Socialists agreed to form a coalition with the left-wing Unidas Podemos party, but still required the support of several smaller regional parties, including the ERC.

Spanish laws allow minority governments to be formed as long as they receive more votes in favor than against in the country's lower house of parliament. The ERC's abstention effectively facilitates just such a scenario.

The Socialist party confirmed it had reached an agreement with ERC on discussing secession for Catalonia, but did not mention the party abstaining from the upcoming investiture vote.

Sanchez and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias said Monday that if approved, their coalition government would increase social spending and introduce higher taxes for banks and wealthy Spaniards.

Spanish politics in turmoil

Spain's constitution bars regions from seceding, and the recent push for independence in Catalonia has fueled one of the worst political crises in decades for the eurozone's fourth-largest economy.

The wealthy northeastern region of Catalonia has seen significant, sometimes violent protests since Spain's Supreme Court sentenced nine Catalan leaders to lengthy prison terms over their roles in a banned 2017 independence referendum and subsequent independence declaration.

Kaynak/Source: