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<u>en</u>

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Spain accused of 'criminalising dissent'

EFA MEPs supporting Catalan academics

Spanish authorities have been accused of 'criminalising dissent' after it emerged that supporters of Catalan self-determination are facing legal action and other measures simply for supporting a peaceful referendum.

The issue was raised at a meeting of the EU - Catalonia Dialogue Platform at the European Parliament in Brussels this week. The platform is a cross party forum for MEPs who support dialogue between Spain and Catalonia to resolve the question of Catalan self-determination.

EFA MEPs Diana Riba, François Alfonsi and Tatjana Ždanoka supported the initiative.

Representatives of the Catalan organisation 'Universities for Civil Rights' had travelled to Brussels to present their joint manifesto which rejects the harsh and disproportionate sentences given to Catalan political prisoners who supported a peaceful and democratic path towards Catalan self-determination.

The manifesto is supported by Catalonia's university community.



Josep Pagès, professor of Constitutional Law at the UAB Autonomous University of Barcelona and a former representative of a body that dealt with the Catalan independence referendum came to Brussels to share his experiences. Although he'd already resigned from the *'Sindicatura Electoral'* before the referendum took place, members of the electoral body, including academics, are now facing prosecution for alleged crimes such as 'disobedience'.

EFA MEP **Diana Riba** commented:

'We are increasingly witnessing the criminalisation of dissent in Spain.

Not content with making political prisoners out of Catalan politicians who advocated a peaceful and democratic self-determination process, Spanish authorities are now persecuting the academic community and civil society out of pure spite and vengeance.

'We are talking about people such as University professors who supported a democratic self-determination process, and community activists who did the same, now being pursued through the courts.

Spain's continuing slide backwards to authoritarianism should be a matter of grave concern for the whole European Union, because if we allow it to happen in Spain, then it is only a matter of time before other authoritarian leaders will take advantage of the EU's indifference.'

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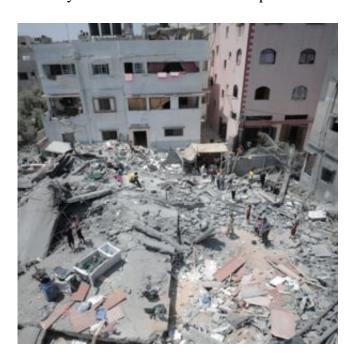


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Responsible MEPs



François Alfonsi

Member



Diana Riba i Giner

EFA President and first Vice President of the Greens/EFA Group

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