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Press release | 09.11.2018

MEPs concerns at harsh sentences sought for Catalan leaders

Press release from the EFA Group in the European Parliament

MEPs from various political groups in the European Parliament, including the European Free Alliance, have signed a joint statement expressing their concern at the harsh sentences for Catalan political prisoners demanded by the Spanish prosecutor this week.

Several Catalan pro-independence leaders have been in pre-trial detention for more than a year following their role in organising Catalonia's self-determination referendum in October 2017. Two former MEPs from the Greens/EFA Group are among those held (Oriol Junqueras and Raul Romeva).

The joint statement has been issued by members of the EU-Catalonia dialogue platform, set up to promote a stronger role for the EU as a mediator in the current situation between Spain and Catalonia.

This week, the Spanish prosecutor demanded a total of 177 years in prison for the Catalan pro-independence leaders, who had peacefully and democratically pursued their nation's right to self-determination.

In their statement the MEPs say:

We, the members of the EU-Catalonia Dialogue Platform, want to express our deep concern about the request of the Spanish prosecutor to demand a total of 177 years in prison for the Catalan pro-independence leaders, who have been in pre-trial jail for more than a year for having organized a referendum on self-determination on October 1st 2017.

On Friday 2nd of November, the attorney general of Spain's Supreme Court, formally charged Oriol Junqueras, the former Catalan vice-president, with rebellion, and demanded a 25-year sentence for him. The former Catalan government ministers Joaquim Forn, Jordi Turull, Josep Rull, Raül Romeva and Dolors Bassa all face 16-year sentences. Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, the President and the former leader of the two main Catalan grassroots movements respectively, and Carme Forcadell, the former speaker in the Catalan parliament, face 17 years as "promoters and leaders" of the rebellion.

According to the written accusation released, the defendants were "aware" that violence could have erupted during the attempt to bring about the independence of Catalonia, and they are accused of a "general uprising, leading to acts of force, aggression and violence." Not only these accusations are false and made up to fit into a narrative that justifies the charge of rebellion, but they have also been refuted by the Belgian and German

Courts, when they refused to extradite the former Catalan President Puigdemont (twice) and the Ministers in exile on the grounds of rebellion.

Catalan leaders have been accused of crimes they have not committed based on violence that has not existed. Rebellion is for instance that a Colonel from the Civil Guard entered armed and fired at the Congress of Deputies (1981). Furthermore, the fact that the press had access to the document before the lawyers of the defendants is, once again, a clear evidence of the many irregularities and violations of the rights of the defendants that are surrounding this cause.

The decision to pursue the most serious charges laid against the accused has destroyed any hope that the socialist government might lead to any meaningful negotiation on the Catalan issue. The lack of political response by the Spanish authorities is provoking dramatic consequences and we will do what it is in our hands to denounce it. There has been no crime; this construction has nothing to do with reality.

The trial is expected to be held early next year. If such sentences passed, this could set a dangerous precedent in Spain and in turn, in the European Union. The already shrinking position of the EU as guarantor of fundamental rights would be irreversibly affected; and its silence has also contributed to make European citizens feel that the European Institutions are far away and do not really protect them as they are supposed to.

For all these reasons, we want to make a call to the European Institutions to urgently reconsider what does protecting, promoting and guaranteeing civil and political rights mean to them. If they do not start making a gesture of responsibility to rebuild the European Union which was founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law that pro-European citizens dream of, euroskeptical movements will fill the gap they are leaving by making false arguments of hope -as it is currently starting to happen-.

Respectfully,

The Members of the EU-Catalonia Dialogue Platform

For more information see www.eucatplatform.eu

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