

UPDATE ON SPANISH POLITICS - 10TH NOVEMBER 2015

By Michael Tangeman

In Kevin's absence, Michael Tangeman kindly accepted the invitation to comment on the current state of Spanish Politics, in particular on the situation in Cataluña.

The governing CDC party of Cataluña, under Artur Mas, continues to push for independence with its Junts pel Sí ('Together for Yes') coalition partner, the ERC party. On 9 November, the 62 deputies of the Junts pel Sí coalition in the Catalan Parliament joined with 10 deputies from the small anti-capitalist and Euro-sceptic CUP party to pass an Independence Resolution, giving the regional parliament 30 days to draft a new Catalan Constitution and new laws to completely take over the Healthcare and Taxation functions reserved for the Spanish central government. The resolution also mandated that Catalan authorities must only obey laws passed by the regional government and ignore any rulings by Spain's highest constitutional court, the Tribunal Constitucional. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, leader of the governing PP, vowed to overrule the resolution either by seeking an injunction from the Tribunal Constitucional or even to use the Spanish State to issue an order against seditious activity. Because Mas and his Junts pel Sí coalition do not have the 68 parliamentary votes necessary for an overall majority, he meanwhile has been attempting a deal with the CUP to get the necessary votes for him to be reinstated as Cataluña's President. In recent months, Mas and his conservative CDC party have been wrapping themselves in the Catalan independence flag to divert attention from alleged corruption within party and taking the opportunity to blame unpopular cuts to public spending on the central government -- though many of those cuts were initiated with vigor by Mas and the CDC, even prior to the PP coming to power in Madrid. Rajoy is using the current situation in Cataluña to make the sovereignty of Spain a major platform for upcoming 20 December general elections and has invited the PSOE and Spain's new parties, Podemos and Ciudadanos, to make this an issue of solidarity for all Spaniards, summoning leaders of all three parties and others to publicly meet with him on the issue. PSOE leader Pedro Sanchez organized a pan-regional summit of PSOE leaders to show the PSOE stands united against Catalan secessionism, while trying to place some distance between the PSOE and Rajoy's attempt to assert PP leadership on the issue in the election run-up. In the most recent national poll, the PP was still in the lead, with PSOE trailing by 4-5 percentage points, followed by the new center-right Ciudadanos party; Podemos has slid sharply in the polls and was in fourth place. The PP is looking strong going into the 20 December election, but most analysts say the PSOE still has a chance to unseat the PP through a coalition government, most likely with Ciudadanos but also possibly with Podemos.