

EUROPE, make a move!

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I am writing to you as a citizen of Catalonia, to explain the situation in my country and to kindly request your assistance as one of the world's most influential leaders.

Last September, the Spanish authorities, in reaction to the organization of a referendum on self-determination that, as a potential political solution, was endorsed by 80% of the Catalan population and eventually drew 2,286,217 voters to the polls, unleashed a series of police, legal and governmental actions resulting in serious violations of fundamental rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and even the Spanish Constitution of 1978.

There were attacks on freedom of the press, with media outlets having their premises searched and being subjected to intimidation; on the rights of assembly and demonstration, after restrictions were imposed on events organized by political associations; and on freedom of expression and opinion, with public officials being interrogated for their ideology. Moreover, hundreds of Web pages were shut down.

Since then, the Catalan Parliament has been dissolved, the Catalan Government has been dismissed and all of our institutions have been placed under direct rule by the Central Government. This has gravely affected our fundamental right of political participation, as well as the basic principles of democracy. These measures were approved by the Senate, Upper House of the Spanish Parliament, on agreement by three political parties -PP, Ciudadanos and PSOE- and under article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, in flagrant violation of the Constitution itself.

On 1 October, law-enforcement units, acting under the authority of the Spanish Government, used physical violence against peaceful citizens in 133 municipalities, in retaliation for their participation in a referendum. As a result, 1066 people were reported injured, of whom at least 400 filed a criminal complaint. To date, the Spanish Prosecutor's Office, following instructions by the Central Government, has opposed an official inquiry on these events.

In the area of criminal justice, offenses of the past have been recently reinstated. This has led to the opening of numerous criminal proceedings: more than 150 individuals are currently under investigation, in addition to 712 mayors, most of them elected officials, who were summoned to appear in court in the run-up to the referendum of 1 October for their outspoken defense of the right to self-determination. Today, judicial independence and impartiality are seriously compromised in Spain, in the face of a clear absence of separation of powers.

By bringing an intrinsically constitutional conflict to the terrain of criminal justice, the authorities have placed the effective implementation of the rule of law under threat. The highest-ranking public officials in Catalonia have been indicted on charges of rebellion and sedition, crimes that require, respectively, violence and tumultuous action. Every person involved in the events in question is fully aware that acts of such nature never took place.

The pre-trial detention of six Catalan Cabinet Ministers, of the former President of the Catalan Parliament and of two civil society leaders has also been repeatedly denounced as a disproportionate measure by legal experts, politicians and non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International. In a recent manifesto, more than 130 Spanish criminal law experts strongly condemned the indictments on charges of rebellion and sedition, which can only be advocated by seriously undermining the principle of legality in criminal procedures.

Similarly, the European arrest warrants issued against President Puigdemont, Ministers Ponsatí, Comín, Puig and Serret and Ms. Marta Rovira are based on false and arbitrary charges, and it is therefore our hope that the judges of the European countries where these persons await a ruling will reject their extradition.

For all of the above, we believe that the rights and freedoms enshrined by the international and European human rights treaties, and incorporated in the 1978 Spanish Constitution, have been manifestly put at stake by the actions of Spanish authorities, not least because the safeguards on the rights and freedoms of the persons involved have proved insufficient in the face of an overwhelming positioning by the Spanish judicial authority. The rule of law, in our opinion, is therefore under threat.

The European Community was created with the noble objective of eradicating, once and for all, the poison of authoritarianism and fascism from the heart of Europe. Today, the fundamental mission and soul of the EU are at risk as the Union is allowing one of its Member States to drift into authoritarianism without taking any steps to prevent it.

This letter is a plea for help. Those who are committed to the defense of democratic values and human rights can no longer ignore the events taking place in Catalonia, nor can they look the other way.

Therefore, I respectfully request your kind assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



**ASSOCIACIÓ
CATALANA
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Impulsada pels familiars dels Presos i Exiliats polítics catalans

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