

Brussels Court Defers Ruling on Puigdemont's Extradition



Brussels, November 18 (RHC)-- The Brussels Chamber of Counselors presiding over the cases of Carles Puigdemont and four former Catalan cabinet members has deferred a decision on Spain's extradition request for the exiled leaders until next month.

The case is set to resume on December 4th, a day before the start of Catalonia's regional election campaign season. Puigdemont, Antoni Comin, Meritxell Serret, Clara Ponsati and Lluís Puig have been under house arrest for the past two weeks, after they turned themselves in to Belgian authorities.

The five officials fled to Belgium in late October after facing arrest and charges of sedition, rebellion and embezzlement for their role in the October 1st Catalan independence vote. The Catalan Parliament later voted overwhelmingly to declare the region independent from Spain.

Puigdemont has said he doesn't trust the Spanish system, adding that Madrid had "no interest in justice, only revenge." The Spanish government then sent an international extradition request to the Belgian government demanding the five be sent back to Spain.

The Belgian court has three options for any or all of the five Catalans: filing for extradition to Spain, requesting more information from Spain regarding the cases or deciding that Spain's charges for the extradition have no Belgian equivalent and don't fit the supposed crimes.

Taking the last option would mean that the Belgian court would tell Spain it is “pursuing” the defendants “for political reasons, without a legal basis.” According to international law, the Belgian court must also consider in its decision that no “real risk” to the defendants’ “human rights” exists in extraditing them back to Spain.

Considering which option the court takes, legal proceedings could last up to 90 days. El Mundo reported that if Belgian courts reject the extradition and the five in question don’t return to Spain, they’ll have to remain in Belgium, without being able to leave the country.

While in Brussels, the five Catalan leaders have been meeting with other members of Puigdemont’s party, the Catalan European Democratic Party, to strategize for the upcoming regional elections on December 21.

The party said there’s a united pro-independence front, yet not all parties were able to form one official coalition party for the elections. Nonetheless, pro-independence parties Republican Left of Catalonia, Together for Catalan and the United Popular Candidature will all present separate candidates on the December 21st ballots.

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