

# *Catalan legislature searching for new figure to lead region*

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Barcelona, March 6 (RHC)-- The parliament in the northeastern Spanish region of Catalonia has officially started consulting major separatist parties to name a leader to replace former president Carles Puigdemont.

Reports in local media said Roger Torrent, head of Catalonia's regional assembly, met with representatives of the seven parliamentary groups to discuss who could replace Puigdemont, who is now in self-imposed exile in Belgium and is barred by Madrid from taking office again.

Puigdemont has thrown his weight behind Jordi Sanchez, head of the hugely influential pro-independence ANC citizens' group, who has been in jail since Spain launched a crackdown in Catalonia to prevent an independence drive by Puigdemont and other separatists. Sanchez, however, lacks enough support among all separatist parties in Catalonia.

Madrid has outlawed any move that could allow Puigdemont to rule Catalonia from exile as he is being probed for sedition and rebellion over his push for a referendum in early October and a declaration of independence later that month. To help ease the standoff, Puigdemont announced last week that he was abandoning his bid to return as regional president.

The regional parliament, which was elected in December, is now seeking a replacement for Puigdemont to restore Catalonia's autonomy and end Madrid's control over Catalonia. Based on the Spanish constitution, the semi-autonomous region of 7.5 million people has direct control over sectors like healthcare and education.

Separatist parties have vowed to repeat their push for full independence which they say would give Catalonia what it deserves as an economically prosperous territory.

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