

# *Thousands rally for Catalan lawmakers outside EU Parliament*

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Strasbourg, July 3 (RHC)-- Thousands protested Tuesday morning at the European Parliament (EP) in Strasbourg, France, in support of Carles Puigdemont, Oriol Junqueras and Toni Comin -- three pro-independence Catalan leaders who were elected as European Parliament members (MEPs) but cannot hold office.

"We expect Europe to react, to help us, to not forget about the Catalan people. This is an issue of democracy," Francesc Planas, a young protester said.

Exiled former President of the Catalonia government Carles Puigdemont, jailed former Vice President Oriol Junqueras and former lawmaker Toni Comin supported the independence referendum which was held in Catalonia on October 2017.

As a result, they and nine other leaders were accused of rebellion by the Spanish state, which is calling for up to 25 years in prison for the pro-independence politicians.

Nevertheless, Catalan pro-independence parties presented jailed or exiled leaders as election candidates to draw attention to their plight and create pressure for their release. As part of this strategy, Puigdemont, Junqueras and Comin were elected as MEPs on May 26th.

In June, however, the Spanish authorities prevented the three Catalan leaders from taking oath as EU lawmakers, which is a requirement to receive credentials as MEPs.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) rejected Monday a precautionary measure in favor of the elected Catalan MEPs. It argued that their situation must be resolved by "national authorities." They previously filed a legal appeal before Spanish courts.

During the EU Parliament's first meeting Tuesday, Sinn Fein MEP Matt Carthy took the floor in defense of the rights of the Catalan people and leaders.

"Three representatives of the Catalan people have been denied representation in this house. This house needs to stand up for democracy," Carthy said and added "if this house doesn't value the votes of the Catalan people then the credibility of this house itself will be undermined."

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