

# *Catalan Leader May Face Trial for Independence Referendum*

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Barcelona, June 30 (RHC)-- A Spanish court has recommended that Catalonia's former leader be tried for staging a non-binding independence referendum in 2014 in breach of a legal order, potentially fueling separatist discontent in the wealthy northeastern region.

Catalonia is home to a strong separatist movement, and in November 2014 pro-independence campaigners held a non-binding vote on whether to break away from Spain while Artur Mas was regional governor.

Strongly opposed to Catalanian secession, the conservative government of Mariano Rajoy in Madrid had earlier lodged an appeal against the referendum at the constitutional court. The court ruled that Mas' government could play no part in the vote, even though he supported it.

Held two months after Scotland voted to remain part of the United Kingdom, the symbolic ballot was manned by volunteers to get around the restrictions. However, a court in Catalonia ruled there was evidence that Mas had failed to stop his administration from hiring third parties to manage the vote and had overstepped his authority.

It recommended that Mas and two other former ministers stand trial. Under Spanish law, prosecutors and claimants now have the last word on whether the trial should proceed, though it is rare for cases to be

withdrawn at this stage.

Mas stepped down earlier this year and was replaced by another pro-independence leader, Carles Puigdemont. The case could stoke tensions between Barcelona and Madrid, where Rajoy's conservative People's Party, which strongly opposes Catalan independence, is running a caretaker government following two inconclusive general elections.

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