



Mathurin Hybrid Initiative

Global Advisory  
Report

**Catalan  
Independence:  
Spain Divided  
Over Proposed  
Amnesty Deal**

**Laurence Cant**  
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In Madrid, on the 18th of November over 170,000 people turned out to protest against an Amnesty Deal proposed by newly re-elected Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez. Sanchez, who leads the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), first came to power four years ago, winning 2019's general election with 28.7% of the vote. Over the course of his four-year term, economic disruptions caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic as well as the Russian invasion of Ukraine caused large amounts of voters to turn away from the centre left party. It therefore came as a surprise to many when Sanchez called a general election in July of this year. Despite receiving less votes than Alberto Nunez's Peoples Party, Sanchez managed to form government. He did this by partnering with regional parties in areas such as Galician, the Basque country, the Canary Islands and crucially, Catalunya. However, in order to secure the support of the Together for Catalonia (Junts) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) parties, Sanchez agreed to pass legislation providing for a blanket amnesty for those prosecuted for their involvement in the Catalan independence movement.

### **The Amnesty Deal: Background & Backlash**

The amnesty covers acts committed by those involved with the Catalan Independence push from 2012 to the present day. Over this period multiple high profile events related to the movement have taken place. None were more influential however, than the 2017 independence referendum. The referendum, held on the first of October, gave residents of Catalonia the chance to vote on whether they wanted the region to be an independent country in the form of a republic. According to the Government of Catalonia, the yes vote won a landslide majority of 92%, with over million Catalonians in favour of the change. While these numbers look overwhelming, only 43% of the regions population actually voted. The Spanish federal government was staunchly opposed to the referendum, claiming it was illegal. Due to this, the Civil Guard was sent to Barcelona to impede proceedings on the day of the referendum. The resulting clashes with protesters resulted in over 1,000 recorded injuries.

The Amnesty deal would pardon penal, administrative and financial penalties levelled at around 300 people involved in the movement. The highest profile of which is former Catalan regional president Carles Puigdemont. Puigdemont fled Spain after the 2017 referendum when charges of rebellion, sedition and misuse of public funds were brought against him. The recent developments have seen him go from 'fugitive' to 'king maker' in Spain, quite a transition. Despite the cause for celebration for Puigdemont and figures like him, at the time of writing, the amnesty has not yet been finalised and passed through Spanish parliament, and this task may prove difficult. It will pass through the Spanish lower house; however it is likely to be delayed in the senate. Even if this is accomplished the deal is likely to be heavily challenged in the Spanish courts in legal proceedings that could potentially drag on for a long time.

Despite its warm reception in Catalonia, the proposed amnesty has caused a hefty stir elsewhere in Spain. This opposition was voiced by PP leader Nunez, in which he labelled the move a 'Coup D'état in capital letters'. Furthermore, leaders of the far-right

VOX party intend to challenge the amnesty in the Spanish courts, stating that Sanchez is 'giving into blackmail'. Members of the public have also voiced their opposition on Saturday the 18th of November when over 170,000 tuned out in Madrid to protest the deal. Sanchez has defended his actions, arguing that the amnesty will help 'heal the wounds' made during the independence push and help to unite Spain under one flag.

### **What's Next for Catalan Independence?**

While the amnesty represents a win for the movement, tangible progress towards independence still looks unlikely. Over the 5 years since the referendum, the separatists have somewhat lost elements of solidarity and momentum. Despite the fact that approval for the amnesty and a new referendum is high, the overall appetite for independence has fallen. This is largely due to a decline in trust between the Catalan people and the separatist politicians that represent them. Many Catalans felt deceived by these politicians who made it seem like independence was just around the corner in the mid 2010s, when in reality it wasn't. So, while the people largely remain pro-independence, mobilising them to the same levels seen previously will be a difficult task.

The separatist parties who partnered with Sanchez remain hopeful of picking up momentum in the face of the amnesty deal. For instance, self-exiled vice-president of the Junts, Josep Rius recently said that Sanchez's willingness to grant an amnesty he once refused may be a signal of future concessions including a federally sanctioned referendum. Similarly, Congressional leader of the Junts Miriam Nogueras has said that while the deal is a positive step, Catalans must remain focused on the ultimate goal of independence. Stating, "For us, the commitment to independence is un-renounceable. If anyone says that this agreement serves to turn the page, they are deceiving their citizens". So, while a regrouping of the movement may be in order, they remain committed to fighting for independence.

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