

Spain on the Brink of a Major Crisis

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Global Research, October 02, 2020

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

Spain currently faces one of the greatest crises in its recent history. The second wave of COVID-19 is approaching extremely quickly, with the world record for deaths by number of inhabitants. The situation is strongly aggravated by a lack of coordination of health policies, leading the country to chaos. Still, an unprecedented economic crisis is beginning to have its first effects, in addition to a scandalous political and institutional scenario.

Spain is currently marked by a strong tension between the central government and the regional governments. For example, the government of Pedro Sánchez is considering an intervention in Madrid due to the serious health situation in the Spanish capital. Isabel Díaz Ayuso, president of Madrid, is accused of negligence in fighting the virus and is losing more and more allies, even within her own party. On July 5, the central government had announced a national victory against the coronavirus, assuming that the country could already return to normality with proper precautions, which greatly strengthened the image of Sanchez and his socialist party. Since then, the responsibility for controlling the pandemic was passed on to each autonomous community in Spain, leaving the regional governments to protect their own territory. Above all, the early declaration of victory over the pandemic only served to improve Sanchez's image and transfer the responsibility to regional governments, taking the blame from the central government.

Apparently, the terrible wave that once again threatens the health of Spanish citizens and their economic and social situation is not a sufficient reason for political forces from different wings to unite to fight the pandemic. On the contrary, the virus is used as a political weapon and rhetorical instrument during the endless debates and public confrontations of the conflicting sectors, while citizens helplessly watch over 30,000 deaths due to the new coronavirus (according to official data from the government, which differs from the National Statistics Institute's data - which points to a total of 50,000 deaths).

In parallel to the virus, relations between the King and the government have become increasingly worse. The crisis peaked in late September, when the Spanish government vetoed the King's participation in the inauguration ceremony for new judges in Barcelona, which is traditionally celebrated by the monarch. As a justification for preventing the king's participation, the government said the measure was necessary for the "institutional security", without providing further details. However, the most plausible thing is that the government has simply tried to prevent an increase in tensions with the Catalan separatists due to the presence of the monarch, which would be interpreted as an insult by the separatist movements. In any case, the absence of Felipe VI profoundly irritated the Judiciary Branch, which severely repudiated the government's attitude. Subsequently, members of the Judiciary met with the king in a virtual meeting, in which the monarch endorsed the repudiation against the government. This was interpreted by the vice president of the central government, Pablo Iglesias, as a break of neutrality - which is a

posture unconstitutional for the king according to Spanish law.

While the political sectors are fighting each other, the national economy is ignored, which further contributes to aggravate the approaching social crisis. Spain counts on European support to face the disaster caused by the policies of social confinement, but such aid becomes truly impotent when the country occupies the second position in the unemployment ranking in the European continent, with a figure that exceeds 16%, only surpassed by Greece.

According to the Bank of Spain, in 2021, the Gross Domestic Product could grow between 4 and 7%, a figure well below that estimate in the last summer. Unemployment, on the other hand, may exceed the 22% mark. The debt, which had already reached the historical maximum of 110% of GDP in July, growing by 89.5 billion euros, would rise to 128% in 2022. In fact, there is no way of economic recovery for Spain in the near future.

With the anticipated growth of the second wave of the pandemic, everything is only going to get worse in Spain. The main metropolises in the country continue with their stores closed, activities suspended and people off the streets. After a brief period of attempt to break the isolation through a “new normal” with mild precautionary measures, the failure of the “victory over the virus” announced in July proved to be insurmountable, bringing not only an exponential increase in the number of deaths, but making Spain once again the epicenter of the pandemic in Europe.

In fact, the solution to all of Spain’s problems goes through a central point: internal political pacification. A country that is politically fragmented, with tensions between the government head and the head of state, and the central and regional governments will not be able to carry out adequate economic and social recovery planning to overcome a crisis such as the new coronavirus pandemic. If the structures of the European Union are still in operation, the aid provided by the bloc will not be limited to economic assistance but will include a mediation of the political crisis. However, it remains to be seen whether the EU really still has such an influence on its members.

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This article was originally published on [InfoBrics](#).

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