

Spain's Prime Minister Rajoy Ready to Trigger "Nuclear Option" as Hundreds of Thousands Protest Against Independence in Barcelona

By [Zero Hedge](#)

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One week after the historic Catalan Independence Referendum vote reopened Europe's populist Pandora Box of nationalist secession movements, tens of thousands of people took to the streets of Catalonia's capital Barcelona on Sunday to express their opposition to any declaration of independence from Spain, which [according to Reuters showed](#) "how divided the region is on the issue."

Last Sunday, more than 90% of the 2.3 million people who voted backed secession, according to Catalan officials. But that turnout represented only 43 percent of the region's 5.3 million eligible voters as many opponents of independence stayed away. Now its the *others'* turn to be heard.

5.
 - Long live Spain/Cat.
 - I am Spanish
 - Jail for Puigdemont
 - THIS is the people of Catalonia [@lasvocesdelpuepic.twitter.com/Blig4ol1Oe](https://twitter.com/lasvocesdelpuepic)
- The Spain Report (@thespainreport) [October 8, 2017](#)

The protesters rallied in central Barcelona, waving Spanish and Catalan flags and banners saying "Catalonia is Spain" and "Together we are stronger", as politicians on both sides hardened their positions in the country's worst political crisis for decades.

1. Big march in Barcelona this morning. Rally point already full of Spanish and Catalan flags. [@emilialandalucepic.twitter.com/jRzd4F09ag](https://twitter.com/emilialandalucepic)
- The Spain Report (@thespainreport) [October 8, 2017](#)

As is typically the case, estimates of the crowd size varied enormously, with the range given as between 350,000 up to a million.

- So now we have three estimates for crowd size this morning:
- 350,000
 - 950,000

- "more than a million"

— The Spain Report (@thespainreport) [October 8, 2017](#)

According to [Reuters](#), the demonstration in Barcelona was organized by the anti-independence group Catalan Civil Society under the slogan “Let’s recover our senses” to mobilize what it believes is a “silent majority” of citizens in Catalonia who oppose independence.



“The people who have come to demonstrate don’t feel Catalan so much as Spanish,” said 40-year-old engineer Raul Briones, wearing a Spanish national soccer team shirt. “We like how things have been up until now and want to go on like this.”

Cries of "THAT's our police!" from crowd waving Spanish flags outside police HQ in central Barcelona.

Via [@RTLbcnpic.twitter.com/mMhO2fWsjh](#)

— The Spain Report (@thespainreport) [October 8, 2017](#)

It was a second day of protests after tens of thousands of people gathered in 50 cities across Spain on Saturday, some defending Spain’s national unity and others dressed in white and calling for talks to defuse the crisis.

Leading Barcelona march today:

Montserrat (PP, Health Minister)

Enric Millo (PP)

Albiol (PP)

Rivera (Cs)

Arrimadas (Cs)

Mario Vargas Llosa [pic.twitter.com/bxDzsGNmFm](#)

— The Spain Report (@thespainreport) [October 8, 2017](#)

Meanwhile, [in an interview with El Pais newspaper](#), Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy said he will consider taking the so-called “nuclear option” - the dramatic measure of suspending Catalonia’s autonomous status - as Catalan leaders escalate threats to declare independence from the country, which could culminate with a parliamentary announcement as soon as Monday.

Asked if he was ready to trigger article 155, Rajoy told El Pais newspaper: “ I am not ruling out anything that the law says. What I have to do is do things at the right time, which is the most important thing right now. The ideal situation would be to not have to take drastic solutions, but for that to happen there would have to be rectifications.”

Until this weekend, Rajoy has remained vague on whether he would use article 155 of the constitution which enables him to sack the regional government and call a local election.

Reverting back to a hardline stance, the conservative prime minister ruled out using mediators to resolve the crisis – something Puigdemont has said he is open to – and said the issue would not force a snap national election. The Prime Minister also added the government would “prevent any declaration of independence from materializing in anything”. “Spain will continue being Spain,” he said.

Rajoy reiterated that until the regional government abandons its intention to proclaim independence, no talks can take place.

“As long as it does not go back to legality, I certainly will not negotiate,” Rajoy said, adding that while the Spanish government appreciates proposals to mediate between the national and Catalan governments, it will have to reject them. “I would like to say one thing about mediation: we do not need mediators. What we need is that whoever is breaking the law and whoever has put themselves above the law rectifies their position.”

Rajoy’s position is understandable: losing Catalonia – Spain’s wealthiest region – is unthinkable for the Spanish government. It would deprive Spain of about 16% of its people, a fifth of its economic output and more than a quarter of its exports. Catalonia is also the top destination for foreign tourists, attracting about a quarter of Spain’s total.

“We are going to stop independence from happening. On that, I can tell you with absolute frankness, that it will not happen. It is evident that we will take whatever decision that we are permitted to by law, in view of how things are unfolding,” Rajoy told El Pais. He also called on “moderate” Catalans to “come back” and move away from “extremists, radicals” as well as the Popular Unity Candidacy party (CUP) spearheading the movement. It is the first time he has reached out to the Catalan people since the referendum.

Rajoy also slammed the independence bid as part of a current wave of populism sweeping across Europe, pointing to the rise of far-right parties in France, Germany and the UK. “Another form of populism, without doubt, is this nationalist populism that we are experiencing, which violates the fundamental principles of the European Union, goes against the rule of law, against law enforcement, and so it is a problem also from Europe.

“And that’s why Europeans have stuck up for us and all the governments have supported the Spanish constitution and the upholding of the law.”

Actually, the reason why European have stuck with Spain, is because if Catalonia achieves independence it will unleash a waterfall sequence of copycat referendums, where [other independence movements](#) will pursue their own secession dreams.



It remains unclear just how the current Spain crisis is resolved: the past week in Catalonia has been nothing short of chaotic. Madrid responded to the vote with force, sending thousands of police to the region to shut down the vote. Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont has threatened to declare independence early next week, and hundreds of thousands of Catalan protesters marched in favor of splitting from Spain this week.

Below is a live feed from the Barcelona anti-independence protest:

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