

What Catalonia's suspended declaration of independence means for Catalonia and Spain



Catalonia's President, Carles Puigdemont, has proposed a suspended declaration of independence to allow negotiations to be pursued between Catalonia and Spain. [Luis Moreno](#) argues that there are several ways to read Puigdemont's position and it is impossible to make a clear prediction about where Catalonia is now headed. However, the situation opens up an opportunity for those parties that are against independence, but supportive of a political compromise, to advance new proposals.



Carles Puigdemont, Credit: [Edicions La Veu del País Valencià \(CC BY-NC-SA 2.0\)](#)

The failure of Catalan secessionists to proclaim a declaration of unilateral independence in the Catalan Parliament has several readings. It has brought about new uncertainties, but also some momentary public tranquillity coupled with the decision by the Spanish central government not to apply immediately the provisions of the Spanish Constitution (by taking control of Catalonia's self-rule institutions).

This follows the adjournment of the unilateral declaration of independence that Catalonia's President, Carles Puigdemont, announced seconds after the validation of the results produced in the unconstitutional referendum held on 1 October (90% of 'Yes' votes with a turnout of around 40% of the electoral census). The Spanish acronym used for the Catalan DUI (*Declaración Unilateral de Independencia*) could be rephrased as 'delayed unfolding of independence' (also DUI in English). Several considerations may be taken into account.

First, the address by Puigdemont before the Catalan Parliament was questioned by the radical left and anti-EU party CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy), which lends support to the Catalan Government (all pro-independence parties form a legislative majority of 53% of the seats with a popular vote of 48%). It remains to be seen whether the CUP will continue to support Puigdemont and his strategy of eventual dialogue and/or mediation with the Spanish central government.

Second, the momentum for separation has suffered a tremendous blow with the decision taken by businesses and corporations to move out of Catalonia. At the time of writing, firms representing some 50% of Catalonia's GDP have already changed not only their legal headquarters but, more significantly, some of them have filed their fiscal registration in other Spanish locations in order to avoid paying extra taxes under a possible future Catalan Tax Agency.

Third, the EU has repeatedly insisted that Catalonia's claim for secession is Spain's 'internal matter', and EU actors have shown no interest whatsoever in mediating in a highly heated political conflict. Needless to say, this type of mediation would be optimal considering the all-embracing *inter pares* and supra-national nature of the EU, but it could create at this point in time a dangerous precedent considering the wide variety of pressing 'internal' issues that exist in other member states.

Fourth, snap parliamentary elections in Catalonia could be a way out of the present deadlock with the fresh renewal of Catalan MPs and the political strengthening – or otherwise – of the secessionist vote. My colleague Daniel Cetrà has rightly [pointed out](#) that pro-independence supporters would inevitably see this option as a step back. This move would most probably create already visible tensions among the plurality of pro-independence parties. But above all, the electoral outcome would probably result in a penalisation of the secessionist bloc after the recent surge of popular mobilisation against separation in Catalonia.

The effectiveness of the 'Slovenian option' adopted by Puigdemont and his nationalist heterogeneous coalition (labelled as 'treason' by young members of the CUP) remains to be seen. Let us remember that the Slovenian government declared independence in June 1991 only to adjourn simultaneously its legal effects, as has happened now in the case of Catalonia. After the Ten-Day War, a referendum supported by all Slovenian political parties was held in December 1990 (95% of the voters favoured the establishment of an independent and sovereign nation).

At present, it is unrealistic to foresee the consequences of the 'delayed unfolding of independence' in Catalonia along the lines of the Slovenian experience. There are no credible grounds even to imagine that an all-party agreement in Catalonia could result in an agreed consultation for independence in the foreseeable future. But a fresh constitutional turn could well take place if the current majority of secessionist MPs were to decide on passing a motion in Catalonia's Parliament to change the 1978 Spanish Constitution.

This initiative is feasible constitutionally and, although it would find opposition at the central Parliament, it would provoke a debate all around Spain concerning territorial accommodation, if this is at all possible. Those parties against Catalonia's independence, but who say there is a need for political compromise in Spain, should expose themselves to the challenge of advancing new proposals.

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Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics.

About the author



Luis Moreno – *Instituto de Políticas y Bienes públicos (CSIC)*

Luis Moreno is Research Professor at the Institute of Public Goods and Policies (IPP) within the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC).