

Cuixart, Sànchez: Catalonia Political Prisoners in Today's Europe for Holding Peaceful Rally

Madrid judge denies bail for Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart, the leaders of Catalonia's two main grassroots groups

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Global Research, October 19, 2017
[VilaWeb](#) 16 October 2017

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Judge Carmen Lamela of Madrid's Audiencia Nacional —the special court of law that superseded and was inspired by General Franco's Tribunal de Orden Público [Public Order Court in Spanish]— has ordered that ANC and Òmnium leaders Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart be imprisoned without bail pending trial on charges of sedition, following the rallies of September 20 and 21 in Barcelona city. The Assemblea Nacional Catalana (Catalan National Assembly, ANC in Catalan) and Òmnium Cultural are the two main grassroots groups behind the massive, peaceful pro-independence demonstrations staged in Catalonia in the last few years. On September 20 and 21 people rallied peacefully and without any incidents to protest the arrests of 14 senior Catalan government officials after Spain's Guardia Civil raided several government buildings. Both Catalan leaders face sedition charges, which carry a prison sentence.

The public prosecutor had requested prison without bail for both grassroots leaders, as well as Catalan police Chief Constable Teresa Laplana and Commissioner Josep Lluís Traperó, the head of the Mossos d'Esquadra. The judge has chosen not to keep Laplana and Traperó in custody but has imposed some cautionary measures on them: they may not travel abroad, they have had their passports seized, both must appear in court every two weeks and must remain reachable by phone at all times.

Sedition charges

Under Spanish criminal law, a sedition conviction carries a jail penalty of between 4 and 15 years. According to Article 544 of the Criminal Code, sedition charges may be filed against anyone who rises “publicly and tumultuously” to impede the law being enforced or the work of authorities “forcefully or illegally”.

Towns and villages across Catalonia reacted to the news of Cuixart and Sànchez's imprisonment with loud protests on people's balconies and windows. In some cities people gathered outside town halls. Catalonia's pro-independence grassroots groups have announced massive rallies on Tuesday evening outside the headquarters of the Spanish government's representatives in Barcelona, Girona, Tarragona and Lleida.

Catalan president Carles Puigdemont voiced his concern following the decision to imprison Cuixart and Sànchez for having organised a peaceful protest. The president stated that “this is very bad news. They wish to send ideas to jail but make our need for freedom ever stronger”. Carme Forcadell, the Speaker of the House, wrote that

“peaceful leaders who held massive, trouble-free rallies have been jailed. Unjustifiable. You are not alone, we want you home”.

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