



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The new mandate of Pedro Sánchez – has separatism become acceptable for Spain?



Spain finally formed a government after 4 months of post-election uncertainty. However, the conditions for its formation provide plenty of reason to expect that it will not bring political stability.

Socialist leader Pedro Sánchez (PSOE) won a second term as prime minister, even though his party came second in the election behind the conservative People's Party.

However, the deal Mr Sánchez used to win a majority in parliament will put the country in a political crisis despite having emerged institutionally from a months-long vacuum.

The Socialists will form a minority government during the weekend, together with the left-wing Sumar alliance, as they secured 179 votes in parliament last Thursday, just 3 more than the required majority.

Two Catalan parties, who demanded an amnesty for their members involved in activities linked to the province's previous secession from Spain, including the illegal referendum in 2017, supported the left-wing government's new mandate.

## Amnesty for separatists

Last Monday, the socialists led by Sánchez carried out their part of the agreement when they presented the parliament with an amnesty bill that would pardon 309 individuals who had actively supported Catalonia's secession from Spain between 2012 and the present.

The amnesty also includes Carles Puigdemont, the leader of the 2017 secession movement and the leader of Junts per Catalunya (Together for Catalonia), one of the 2 parties that backed Sánchez's government.

He will soon be able to return to the country from Belgium, where he is in self-exile and continue engagement in politics. This time, as a partner and not an opponent of the central government in Madrid.

There are numerous grounds to question the sustainability of the alliance between the ruling left and the Catalan separatists, not to mention the dangers to Spain's democracy given the circumstances in which it was founded.

## Rejection of the previous consensus

Prime Minister Sánchez tried to defend his plans as a statesman and said he wanted to unite the country and leave the strenuous experiences of Catalan separatism in the past.

"We will guarantee the unity of Spain through dialogue and forgiveness", said Mr Sánchez.

However, no matter how patriotic and statesmanlike his political vision is, it will leave behind divisions that might go beyond the previous ones. Even if a new agreement with Catalan separatists marks the amortisation of their separatist movement, the price might be too high for Spanish democracy.

By including the Catalan parties in the coalition agreement, Sánchez's Socialists disregarded the 2017 national consensus that the Catalan independence referendum was impermissible and illegal.

That consensus was not only within the political establishment; it was general and accepted by the judiciary, law enforcement, and even the partners from the EU unanimously, siding with the government in Madrid and against the separatists.

As a result of Sánchez's decision, research shows that up to two-thirds of Spaniards are against the Catalan separatists' amnesty. A sizeable portion of Sánchez's PSOE supporters are among them.

The Prime Minister's statesmanship rhetoric in defence of his move would have been more convincing if the amnesty had been declared during a stable government mandate when such a law would not be a condition for its

survival.

This means that amnesty is a specific condition for the formation and survival of the emerging government, resembling blackmail, to which the blackmailed party agreed. It could be activated at any time in the next 4 years (if there are 4 years), which was also indicated by the Catalan partners when they announced that their support for the government is not permanent but that they will decide on it on each specific issue.

This represents a regression from the perspective of parliamentary democracy, as the new left-wing government will make decisions not in parliament but rather among its coalition partners.

Making a deal with the Catalan separatists under these conditions is also a heavy blow to the independence of the Spanish judiciary, whose representatives have already expressed their opposition to the new law.

This creates the following prospect: if the courts find a means to challenge it legally, it is probable that the political deal will not be implemented.

## There is little prospect of a stable government

In addition to having a very narrow and unpredictable majority in the parliament, the new Sánchez government will also be unstable due to a powerful and offensive opposition, which, after the agreement between the Socialists and the Catalans, has a potent political weapon in its hands.

“As long as you’re around, Spain will be condemned to division. Your time as prime minister will be marked by Puigdemont returning freely to Catalonia. History will have no amnesty for you,” the leader of the conservative Popular Party, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, addressed the prime minister.

Prime Minister Sánchez needs a peaceful

political scene and public consensus to implement the idea of a great internal reconciliation. However, he currently lacks that. He needs more time, which is essential to implement his plan.

The idea of granting Catalan separatists amnesty has caused massive protests in Spain for several days. These or similar protests will persist even after the formation of the new administration.

The fact that the right-wing parties, including the extreme right from the VOX party, called the protests and that Tucker Carlson participated in one of them is not even the biggest issue for the emerging government. A much larger one comes from the mentioned public opinion polls, which show high and stable dissatisfaction with the new ruling coalition.

## European support and consequences

Pedro Sánchez received congratulations for his new mandate from EU partners, among the first from Germany’s Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz. However, there was also an announcement that the European Parliament would discuss the situation in Spain at the request of Sánchez’s conservative opponents.

European leaders welcomed Sánchez as prime minister with relief, as a continuation of Spain’s distinctly pro-EU course and a buffer against the far right.

However, because of the controversial circumstances surrounding the establishment of the government, their support also signifies an acceptance of the risk of a potential new political crisis in Spain, which might occur at any time.