



SECTION 6. COMMITTEES AND TOPICS

6.6 CRISIS: CATALONIA

Note: Research for this committee should focus on historical background ONLY leading up to January 1st, 2020.

Catalonia is a region in northeastern Spain, along the Spain-France border. It controls 19% of the GDP of Spain and holds 15% of the Spanish population. Barcelona, the second largest city in Spain, is located in Catalonia and hosts 19.1 million tourists each year. The political tensions surrounding the Catalonia region in Spain and its independence have reached a critical point in recent years. With the natives of the region becoming more and more unhappy with their quality of life under the Spanish government, many have resorted to riots and separatist protests. In recent months, riots have become increasingly violent with the use of more powerful police weaponry resulting in several injuries.

The tension between the population of Catalonia and the government of Spain has been strained since the 1600s, when Catalonia was absorbed into Spain. In 1716, the legal system of Catalonia was officially abolished by the Spanish, which put Catalonia directly under Spanish control and outlawed the Catalan language in all administrative roles of government. Catalonia has had varying degrees of independence and dissent against Spain throughout history, with most recently their autonomy being granted in 1979.

In the past decade, Catalonia has attempted to regain their autonomy in hopes of gaining more power and financial independence. In January 2013, a declaration of sovereignty was made and promptly overturned by the national government. In November 2014, an informal referendum vote took place to assess the opinion of the public. More than 80% of voters voted for separation from Spain. As protests broke out, the region was quickly placed under direct rule of Madrid.

In October of 2017, the Catalanian people held an independence referendum to gauge the population on its thoughts on independence from Spain. With 91% of the 2.2 million voters voting that independence was in their best interest, Spanish national police raided polling stations and arrested hundreds of would-be voters. The Catalanian government stated that they intended to act on the results of the poll and push for independence.

Since the October 2017 referendum, Catalonia has been in a state of intermittent chaos with other attempts at independence being hindered by Madrid. Catalanian leaders have been subject to arrests and accused of sedition with possible jail time potentially being as high as thirteen years. In October 2019, 12 Catalan leaders were sentenced to nine to thirteen years in prison for sedition charges. While the Catalanian people claim their rights have been violated by the Spanish government, will Madrid have mercy on the independence leaders?

¹<https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/21/heres-how-bad-economically-a-spain-catalonia-split-could-really-be.html>

Guiding Questions

Why does Catalonia want its freedom?

How do the countries surrounding Spain feel about Catalanian independence?

What would be the economic impact of Catalanian independence locally, nationally and internationally?

How has the past history of Catalonia impacted the present situation?

Sources for further reading

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29478415>

<https://www.history.com/news/the-catalonian-fight-for-independence-has-medieval-roots>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/14/world/europe/catalonia-separatists-verdict-spain.html>

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Spain/Government-and-society>