
Catalonia crisis: Separatist protest draws 350,000 in Barcelona

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Some 350,000 people, police say, have turned out in Barcelona for a protest at the jailing of separatist leaders in Spain's Catalonia region this month.

Previous protests in the regional capital also drew big numbers but were marred by rioting which saw at least 600 people injured and 200 arrests.

Organisers had called for a peaceful march which was also meant to underline support for self-determination.

Nine separatist leaders were jailed on 14 October by Spain's Supreme Court for between nine and 13 years after being convicted of sedition.

The days that followed saw some of the worst violence in the history of the modern independence movement, which prides itself on its peaceful tactics.
What happened on Saturday?

Grassroots independence groups had urged independence supporters to fill the streets but said they are committed to peaceful protests, Reuters news agency reports.

A sea of protesters stretched from the city's waterfront to the landmark Sagrada Familia church.

"It is time to sit down and talk," one protester told Reuters. "I think it is time for the state to find a solution because it seems that this has no end and we are always at the same point. We have

come here because we are fed up with so much repression that we have suffered from the state."

"We have always defended non-violence," said another. "What is happening in Barcelona is not a reflection of us, we separatists are not violent, we want our country, we want to be free."

The day had begun with a gathering of mayors from across Catalonia to endorse the campaign for self-determination.

Mayors of 814 out of the region's 947 local authorities gathered at the regional government's headquarters to meet Catalan President Quim Torra.

As the mayors chanted "independence", Mr Torra said Catalans must unite to oppose "repression" and "force the Spanish state to talk".

On Sunday, politicians from Spain's two main centre-right parties, the Popular Party and Ciudadanos, are expected to attend the unionist rally, which comes two weeks before the Spanish general election.

Meanwhile, supporters of the far-right Vox party rallied in the Spanish capital Madrid on Saturday to hear calls for a harder line on the separatists.

Party leader Santiago Abascal attacked Spain's mainstream parties, including the ruling Socialists, telling the crowd: "Faced with criminal separatism, there is only Vox!"
