

Spain: Election of new Catalan president could resolve many political problems

Five months after the elections, Catalonia has a president. This could settle three big political questions in Spain



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1 New elections avoided

After the regional elections in December 2018, pro-independent parties who got a majority in Parliament tried to select a new president. But each time they proposed a candidate that faced prosecution over the unilateral independence push. Yesterday, Quim Torra was finally elected, although the Catalan parliament is extremely divided (66 were in favour of Quim Torra, 65 against and 4 abstentions).

The pressure to select somebody was increasing over the past few weeks. If no president had been elected by 22 May, there would have been new Catalan elections. This has now been avoided.

2 Possibility to lift Article 155

Due to the independence referendum in October 2017 and the tensions afterwards, the central government invoked Article 155 of the constitution, leading to direct control by the central government of Catalonia. This was all done on the condition that it would be revoked once a new Catalan government is installed. Now, Quim Torra can form a government and start to push for lifting Article 155.

3 Smoothing the path to approve the 2018 Budget

Last year, the normal approval of the budget had to be postponed as the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) withdrew its support to protest against the government's management of the Catalan crisis. But now, there is initial parliamentary support for the budget from several political parties. The PNV agreed to proceed with this after a deal with the government to boost public pensions in 2018 and 2019. Even though this first step has been taken, the PNV continued to say that it will not back the budget until the central government removes its direct control over Catalonia. Now that lifting Article 155 is a possibility, the 2018 budget is another step closer to getting approved.