

New Catalan Cabinet in line to end 7-month power vacuum

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Madrid, May 30 (AP) - Catalan President Quim Torra has appointed a Cabinet composed of members not being investigated in a judicial probe into last year's independence bid, paving the way for an end to the seven-month vacuum in the regional government.

Spanish central authorities, who are managing Catalonia directly since separatists passed a unilateral declaration of independence in October, need to publish their names now in an official gazette. Madrid's special controls over the prosperous region will lift once the new Catalan Cabinet is sworn in, possibly over the weekend.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's conservative government refused to publish a previous list of ministerial nominees that included two people in pre-trial custody and two more fighting extradition to Spain from Belgium.

The respite in the Catalan crisis comes as Rajoy faces a parliamentary no-confidence vote Friday following corruption convictions involving members of his ruling Popular Party.

Torra, who came to power last month promising to resume efforts to create an independent republic of 7.5 million inhabitants in northeastern Spain, signed a decree with the new appointments late on Tuesday.

Among the new nominees is Elsa Artadi, a key adviser to ousted Catalan president Carles Puigdemont, who is now in Berlin and also sought by Spanish judicial authorities.

Artadi will also be the regional government's spokeswoman, Torra's decree said.

The spat over Catalonia's future prompted Spain's worst political crisis in decades, though its three main political parties at the national level have been united against Catalan independence so far.

The opposition is nevertheless trying to oust Rajoy's government with a parliamentary debate on Thursday and a vote on Friday to replace the conservative leader with Socialist party chief Pedro Sanchez.

The Socialists are trying to rally enough support to pass the motion of no confidence. They are short of 20 votes to achieve the absolute majority of 176 lawmakers in the 350-seat Congress of Deputies.