

CATALONIA BACKGROUND INFORMATION [SERIES E / 2013 / 10.1 / EN]

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THE GENERALITAT. THE CENTURIES-OLD GOVERNING BODY OF CATALONIA

The *Generalitat* is the Catalan name of the democratic political body that governs Catalonia, as established in the Statute of Autonomy currently in effect (statutes are the legislative corpus that govern the autonomous regions of Spain). Following the death of Francisco Franco in 1975 and the end of his dictatorship, the Statutes of 1979 and 2006 regulated how the regional Catalan government functions. However, the political institution of the *Generalitat* has a long history, with origins that date back centuries, and it was revived again in the 1930's.

The *Generalitat* first came into being in the mid-14th century, when Catalonia was a sovereign state, and a part of the Kingdom of Aragon. That confederation was made up of three independent states: Catalonia, Aragon, and Valencia, all under one monarch, which lasted until the 15th century. Then the Kingdom of Aragon was united with the Kingdom of Castile, to form what was known as the Hispanic Monarchy. That union lasted from the 15th to the 18th century. The *Generalitat* began in the 13th century as a permanent council of the courts of Catalonia. It soon transitioned from a tax-collecting body to a full-blown political entity that governed Catalonia, and oversaw enforcement of Catalan rights and constitutional order as laid down in the constitutions.

The *Generalitat* operated as Catalonia's political power until 1714, when the forces of the centralist and absolutist King Philip V of the French House of Bourbon occupied Catalonia in the War of Spanish Succession. His first decision was to eliminate the *Generalitat*, bringing an end to Catalonia's independence, with all powers and laws now governed by Castile.

From 1714 onwards the main objective of Catalan politics was to reinstate the *Generalitat* and regain Catalonia's autonomy.

Attempts to regain power came to a head in 1918-19, but failed when the Spanish parliament (known as *Las Cortes*, the courts) refused to allow it, generating serious political tensions between Catalonia and the Spanish state.

With the fall of the Bourbon monarchy and the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic on 14th April 1931 the *Generalitat* was reinstated. The provisional Catalan government, headed by Francesc Macià, with the consent of

the Spanish republican government, reinstated self-government in Catalonia under the name of the *Generalitat*. This government was provisional until the end of 1932. It passed the first Statute of Autonomy for Catalonia since 1714. Following parliamentary elections in Catalonia in 1932 the *Generalitat* was no longer provisional but became the normalized government of Catalonia. Henceforth the *Generalitat* became the full-functioning body for the self-government of an autonomous Catalonia.

Following General Francisco Franco's Fascist military uprising in Spain in 1936 the *Generalitat* led a war against the dictatorship. But when Franco's troops reached Lleida in April 1938 their first action was to suppress Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy and the *Generalitat* government, a process that was completed in February 1939 with the end of the Spanish Civil War and the complete military occupation of Catalonia.

The President of Catalonia, Lluís Companys, and his government had to flee into exile. Companys was soon captured by the Gestapo in Nazi-occupied France, and handed over to Franco, who ordered his execution in October 1940. This is considered as one of the most significant political crimes in that period of European history.

Nevertheless, the institution of the *Generalitat* carried on in exile. Josep Irla (1940 – 1954) succeeded Companys as president. He resigned for health reasons, and exiled members of the Catalan parliament met in Republican Spain's embassy in Mexico (a country that refused to recognise the Franco regime) and elected Josep Tarradellas as the next president.

Franco died in November 1975. After his death the clandestine Catalan political parties were once again officially recognized and called for the return of President Tarradellas, as well as the reinstatement of the *Generalitat* as Catalonia's governing body. This was achieved in 1977 in a provisional way, and it was formally accepted in the 1978 Spanish Constitution plus the 1979 Catalan Statute of Autonomy. This had enormous symbolic and political value, as it represented the recognition of Catalonia's historic rights once again.

Complete political normality only returned to Catalonia with parliamentary elections in 1980. Jordi Pujol was then sworn in as the 126th President of Catalonia, following in the footsteps of Presidents Macià (1931 – 33), Companys (1933 – 1940), Irla (1940 – 1954) and Tarradellas (1954 – 1980).

In summary, the governing body of Catalonia, known as the *Generalitat*, has a long history. Catalans have never given up on it, and they have always defended its role as the chief political institution in the country. Its legitimacy comes from carrying out this historical role, and it embodies the level of sovereignty that Catalonia has maintained for centuries.

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