

RESOLUTION

Urgent motion on ensuring democratic accountability in times of crisis in Spain

Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting via Zoom, 18.04.2020

Recognizing that:

- Spain is fighting against the global pandemic caused by the outbreak of covid-19. Currently, it is leading the statistics both in contagion per million inhabitants and in deaths per million inhabitants.
- On the 14th of March the government coalition composed by the social democrats (PSOE) and the communists (Podemos) announced the introduction of the "State of Emergency" through the Royal Decree 464/2020¹. Since then, the State of Emergency deadline has been postponed two times by the Parliament. The Prime Minister has neglected the requests done by the opposition to allow the Parliament to exercise its duties. Therefore, the only sessions held by the Congress are those where the Government requests an extension of the State of Emergency.

Acknowledging that:

- On the 7th of April Partido Popular requested to the Presidency of the Congress the immediate reinstatement of regular plenary sessions, commissions and to allow the political groups to held press conferences in the buildings of the

¹ https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2020-3692

Congress. The request was accepted, preventing a further undermining of the constitutional privileges of the Spanish Congress².

- The Spanish government has announced, since the beginning of the emergency, it would fiercely fight against the “fake news”³ coming from the so-called radical right. In that sense, the cabinet of the Prime Minister, decided to limit the media questions to the government by closing the press conference room in the government palace. The press conferences have been held through a WhatsApp group controlled by the Secretary of State of Communication since the 12th of March. The government had the power to handpick which questions to answer. The Madrid Press Association complained about this undemocratic practice. This complain was upheld by a dozen media that decided not to take part in what they considered a “charade”. The government slowly rectified the position by the beginning of April
- To advance the social control measures the Centre of Sociological Research (Spanish EUROSTAT) realized a barometer to identify to which degree the Spanish people would accept a restriction on the free information and free press to the favour of public sources.⁴ The latest barometer, released Wednesday, asks a question linking the dissemination of “fake news” with freedom of information and questioned whether “total freedom” of information about the coronavirus should be maintained, with the option of limiting information about the pandemic to “official sources”. Various journalists' associations claim that

² <http://www.pp.es/actualidad-noticia/alvarez-toledo-reapertura-parlamento-es-una-victoria-presion-democratica-pp>

³ https://www.abc.es/espana/abci-abc-deja-participar-ruedas-prensa-censura-previa-gobierno-202004041745_noticia.html

⁴ <https://elpais.com/espana/2020-04-15/el-cis-pregunta-si-hay-que-mantener-la-libertad-total-de-informacion-sobre-el-coronavirus.html>



Head Office
10 Rue du Commerce
1000 Brussels
Belgium
Tel: +32 2 285 41 63
Email: yepp@epp.eu

the question is "tricky" and "misleading". This research suggests that the government is working on further implementing censorship on social media with an ideological ground, as well as limiting the contents aired by both private and public media.

- Eight regional governments (lead by different political parties) have questioned the official statistics presented by the Spanish Government. This practice is undermining the transparency principle that every democracy need, especially when it is facing a crisis under temporary measures that are restraining the citizen's rights.

YEPP calls on:

- The EU Member States to ensure that during the Covid-19 crisis democratic accountability is provided for by maintaining regular parliaments sessions and that free access to the government from the press is ensured.
- The EUROSTAT to conduct an audit on the covid-19 related statistics provided to the public by the Spanish Government;
- An investigation on the proportionality and legality of the measures adopted in the framework of the "State of Emergency", especially those directed at underscoring the free press and freedom of speech.