

1. EXPERT WARNS AGAINST CATALAN DIVISIONS

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Expert warns against Catalan divisions

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The division in Catalonia between those in favor and those against the region's independence from Spain is quite similar to that in Northern Ireland, with sectarian tensions possible too, Professor Ignacio Molina of the Elcano Royal Institute and the Autonomous University of Madrid warned at an event organized in Athens on Wednesday by a leading Greek think tank.

Speaking at the European Parliament's Athens office, where the event by the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) was held, Molina shed light on the divisions in Catalan society that have created "not two but three Catalonias," as he explained.

The main factor in the failed independence bid a couple of years ago was "the structure of the conflict, with half of local people being against independence," he argued, declaring his own belief that "just like Canada without Quebec is not Canada, Spain without Catalonia is not Spain."

Molina presented the picture of a "plural" Catalonia, "that is more plural than Spain," and presented the latest survey by the Catalan authorities

which found that only 35 percent of people supported independence from Spain, down from 45-48 percent in previous years. "Never has popular support for independence gone above 48 percent of Catalans," he stressed.

The Spanish professor conceded that "having Catalan politicians in prison does not help Spain's case" and that "the use of force on October

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1 [2017] was counterproductive," referring to the date of the illegal referendum in Catalonia, but he added that "it is not easy to deal democratically with sedition from above combined with mobilization from below," and underscored that "the secessionist drive has produced an anti-secessionist backlash."

He went on to partly attribute the Catalan crisis to the rise of populism, which he defined as "the idea of having a very simple answer to a very complex question."



Catalan separatists protest at University Square in Barcelona earlier this month. According to a recent survey, only 35 percent of Catalan people supported independence from Spain, down from 45-48 percent in previous years.