Beat: Local

Catalonia votes to break away from Spain in illegal referendum

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USPA News - The autonomous region of Catalonia has voted in favor of breaking away from Spain to become an independent country, according to preliminary results released on early Monday after nearly all votes were counted. Madrid has condemned the referendum.

With 95.9 percent of votes counted, 80.78 percent of participants had voted in favor of independence from Spain by voting `yes-yes` to the two-part question. Another 10 percent voted in favor of Catalonia becoming a country but chose `No` when asked whether it should be independent from Spain. Only 4.53 percent voted against the region becoming a state. The official figures showed that just over 2.2 million people participated in the referendum, putting the turnout at just 41 percent of those eligible to vote. All residents - including foreign citizens and teenagers aged 16 and 17 - were able to participate in the non-binding referendum, which took place between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. Catalan Vice President Joana Ortega, who is also minister of Governance and Institutional Relations, said the referendum took place in "an absolutely normal manner" and praised the work of more than 40,000 volunteers who organized the event. "[They] are helping to make the day into an exemplary event of participation, civility and democratic quality in the eyes of the whole world," she said. Sunday`s referendum drew inspiration from Scotland`s independence vote earlier this year, but Spain`s Constitutional Court sided with officials in Madrid and ordered the Catalan government to suspend the vote. The autonomous region went ahead nonetheless, although it made some changes to indicate that the vote has no legal effect. Catalonia, which has a total population of 7.6 million people, has long sought independence from Spain. Many of its residents feel that the wealthy region contributes far more to the Spanish economy than it gets back through central government funds. Recent days saw protests from both sides.

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