

Beat: Politics

## **Flanders accuses Spain of hostility for rejecting its delegate**

### **For the criticism of Spanish democracy**

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**USPA NEWS** - The government of the Belgian region of Flanders on Wednesday described as "very hostile act" the withdrawal of diplomatic status to its delegate in Spain, André Hebbelinck, after the president of the Flemish regional Parliament, Jan Peumans, criticized the Spanish democracy. The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs canceled the diplomatic credentials of Hebbelinck in response to the "continuous disqualifications" of the Flemish authorities.

The minister-president of Flanders, Geert Bourgeois, affirmed on Wednesday that the withdrawal of the diplomatic status to his delegate in Spain is "an unprecedented fact in the relations between countries of the European Union" and "a very hostile act," so announced his intention to call the ambassador of Spain in Belgium to ask for explanations and try to get Madrid back on its decision. "This has never happened in the history of the European Union, ever since the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community," a precedent of the current EU, Bourgeois said in an interview on Flemish radio.

The Flemish leader said he did not yet have an official notice sent by the Spanish Government and reiterated that he does not know the reasons that led Madrid to withdraw diplomatic protection to its representative in Spain and to announce that it will not accredit any other person in the same position. The origin of the controversy is found in a letter from the president of the regional Parliament of Flanders, Jan Peumans, to the former president of the regional Parliament of Catalonia (northeastern Spain), Carme Forcadell, currently in pretrial detention for her participation in the secessionist attempt of the Catalan authorities. In that letter, Peumans doubted that Spain meets the standards to be part of "a democratic European Union."

Meanwhile, the Belgian federal Government recalled Wednesday that foreign policy is fixed by Brussels and not by the president of the Flanders government. A spokesman for the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed, in statements to various Spanish media, that "this is a problem between Flanders and Spain, undoubtedly accentuated by certain statements, especially in the Flemish Parliament," and recalled that "Spain can decide autonomously who are the representatives to whom it grants the diplomatic status."

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