

Spain Probes Russia's Role in Catalonia Referendum – El País

November 22, 2019



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Spain has opened an investigation into the role of a secret Russian military unit in Catalonia's 2017 independence referendum, the country's [El País](#) newspaper [reported](#) Thursday.

The Spanish government tried to [prevent](#) Catalonia's independence referendum that it declared illegal, leading to hundreds of injuries. Spanish ministers [said](#) in 2017 that Russia-based groups promoted the referendum on social media in an attempt to destabilize Spain, a claim Moscow rejected as "hysteria."

A judge overseeing the Catalan separatist probe has opened a sealed investigation into an elite Russian military intelligence unit's activities there, [El País](#) cited legal and police sources as saying.

The unit, the Main Intelligence Directorate GRU's 29155, has been engaged in a campaign to destabilize Europe, [The New York Times](#) [reported](#) last month.

Spain's early-stage investigation suggested that Unit 29155 aimed to take advantage of the crisis to destabilize Spain, El País [reported](#) Friday. The alleged Russian spying activities were not coordinated with Catalonia's pro-independence figures, it said.

The investigation reportedly includes information about one of the three GRU agents [suspected](#) of poisoning former double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter in Britain last year.

Related article: [Secret Russian Military Intelligence Unit Linked to 'Campaign to Destabilize Europe' – NYT](#)

Alleged high-ranking GRU officer Denis Sergeyev traveled to Barcelona twice under the false last name Fedotov, the open-source investigative website Bellingcat reported this year. On his second trip, Bellingcat [said](#) Sergeyev arrived in Barcelona two days before the Oct. 1 Catalonia referendum and left toward Switzerland immediately after.

A text message from a leading Catalan separatist to then-Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont "guaranteed" that former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev would support Catalonia's declaration of independence, El País reported Thursday.

Another message cited President Vladimir Putin's emissary as confirming that Russia would support Catalonia's declaration of independence, the newspaper said.

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