

SUMMARY

Summary of Report 4/2022, relating to the elections to the Parliament of Catalonia in 2021

Barcelona, 30 March 2022

The Public Audit Office for Catalonia has issued Report 4/2022, relating to the elections to the Parliament of Catalonia held in 2021, in accordance with current legislation and in fulfilment of its Annual Programme of Activities.

The report, which was presented by the Chairman, Mr Jaume Amat, was approved by the Audit Office Board at its meeting on 8 February 2022.

The purpose of this report is to offer an opinion on the regularity of the election accounts presented by the political groups that obtained representation at the Parliament of Catalonia in the elections held on 14 February 2021 and, in the event of detecting irregularities, to propose the non-awarding or reduction of their electoral grants.

From the audit carried out the Public Audit Office concluded that all the political groups required to do so had submitted their election accounts through the Audit Office's institutional website before the established deadline. Furthermore, they had complied with the statutory overall maximum limit for electoral expenditures and the sublimits for advertising, as laid down in articles 55 and 58 of Spain's General Electoral Regime Organic Act (LOREG).

Based on the audit's aim, scope and methodology used, the Public Audit Office stated that the expenditures justified by each of the political groups assessed were those included in tables 59 and 60 of the report and it proposed that there should be no reductions to or non-awarding of the election grants envisaged in electoral legislation.

The findings from the work carried out, as given in the Conclusions section of the report, are as follows:

- JxCAT did not present the asset groups in its financial statements in accordance with the Accounting Plan Adapted for Political Groups (PCFP) approved by the Resolution of 21 December 2018 issued by the Chair of the Spanish Court of Audit.
- The information submitted electronically by VOX and two of the files submitted by ECP-PEC in relation to their election accounts did not follow the models provided by the Public Audit Office for Catalonia, as approved by the Board in its Instruction for the Auditing of Election Accounts.

- The political group JxCAT paid election expenditures of € 11,334.07 after the deadline of ninety days subsequent to the elections laid down by LOREG article 125.3 as the time limit for using funds in election accounts.
- Certain expenditures declared by the political groups were not subsidisable because they were not deemed to be necessary for the election campaign, because they could not be included in the types of election expenditure laid down in LOREG article 130, or because they had not been adequately justified. The total figure for expenditures deemed non-subsidisable came to €339,882.44.
- Several suppliers of election expenditure items failed to comply with the requirement of sending the information stipulated in LOREG article 133.5 to the external auditing institution. The suppliers and amounts are identified in the results of the review of the political group in question.

The Conclusions section also includes seven recommendations, which can be summarised as follows:

- Legislators should regulate the legal vacuum existing in relation to new forms of private funding that involve providing credit facilities, such as microloans arranged through digital crowd-funding platforms.
- Electoral regulations ought to precisely define the election expenditures referred to in LOREG article 130.
- The Audit Office considers that, for future elections, it would be more accurate to link the limit on election expenses to the number of voters targeted by the election campaign, instead of linking it to the number of inhabitants in the electoral constituencies where candidates are being fielded.
- There is a need to identify more clearly, in regulations, the expenditure items that should be included in outdoor advertising costs and in press and radio advertising, in relation to the statutory limits laid down by the LOREG.
- Given that the election accounts presented by the political groups are not homogeneous in terms of their closing date, this date ought to be expressly stipulated, and it would be advisable for it to be beyond the ninety days subsequent to the election. That way administrative management and supervision of the entities involved would be much simpler in all regards.
- There is a need to evaluate how efficient it really is for political parties to send out envelopes and voting slips or promotional material to voters. It ought to be possible to set up a new system to make use of new technologies and avoid wasting all the material resources (paper, ink and so on) and money spent on each election campaign. The total cost of expenditure on mailshots in the election campaign for the ballot held on 14 February 2021 came to € 13,532,358.47.

Decree 149/2020, issued on 22 December, increased the grant figure for direct personalised mailings from €0.17 to €0.20 for each registered voter. The review of expenditures on mailshots showed that, of the maximum subsidisable amount for mailshots, €7,271,659.40, the political groups only justified a figure of €3,680,406.86, just 50.6% of the total. The Audit Office considers that this increase in the grant for direct personalised mailshots was not justified, and was one of the reasons why the government department in charge gave out advances for the elections in excess of the final amount calculated by the Audit Office: €727,936.34.

- The Audit Office considers that the Political Parties' Agreement on Transparency and Self-imposed Limits for Electoral Expenses and Financing signed on 26 February 2001 by the political parties Catalan Democratic Convergence (*Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*), Catalan Republican Left (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*), Initiative for Catalonia Greens (*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*), People's Party (*Partit Popular*), Catalan Socialist Party (*Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya*) and Catalan Democratic Union (*Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*) should be revised. It also considers that both the contents of the ten points it included and the signatory parties need to be updated.

This summary is solely for information purposes. The audit report (in Catalan and Spanish) can be consulted at www.sindicatura.cat.