

Spanish government passes 1st hurdle to legalize euthanasia

February 11 2020, by Barry Hatton



A protester from the pro-life group Derecho a Vivir stands outside the Spanish parliament in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020. Spain's new parliament is expected to accept in its first legislative session a majority vote the debate on a law that decriminalizes and regulates euthanasia. Banner reads ;'The right to kill does not exist'. (AP Photo/Paul White)

Spain's parliament has endorsed an effort by the new Socialist-led government to legalize euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide.

After early elections twice last year thwarted the Socialist party's attempts to change the law, parliament voted Tuesday by 201 votes to 140 in favor of accepting its [euthanasia](#) bill for consideration.

The step puts the bill on a path to possible approval. It now goes to a parliamentary health committee for discussion and then heads to the Senate before returning to the lower house for a final vote.

There is no fixed timetable for those stages, but Health Minister Salvador Illa said he hoped to see the euthanasia law enacted by June.

That would make Spain just the fourth European Union country—after Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands — to allow euthanasia, which is when a doctor kills patients at their request. As well as those countries, assisted suicide—where patients administer the lethal drug themselves, under [medical supervision](#)—is also permitted in Switzerland and some U.S. states.

Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez urged politicians to move forward quickly.

"We know that many people are waiting, that there is no time to lose," Sánchez said in a tweet.



A protester from the pro-life group *Derecho a Vivir* stands in a mock coffin outside the Spanish parliament in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020. Spain's new parliament is expected to accept in its first legislative session a majority vote the debate on a law that decriminalizes and regulates euthanasia. Banner reads ;'The right to kill does not exist'. (AP Photo/Paul White)

Both euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide are currently illegal in Spain, and carry prison sentences of up to eight years. Left-wing parties have tried on a dozen occasions since 1997 to pass bills to help facilitate assisted dying.

The parliament in neighboring Portugal, where Socialists are also in power, will discuss later this month a similar proposal to allow euthanasia and assisted suicide.

Recent Spanish opinion polls have indicated broad public support for the left-of-center coalition government's plans. The issue has met resistance from conservative politicians and the Catholic church.

The Spanish Bishops' Conference says on its website that euthanasia "is always a kind of murder" and proposes improvements to palliative care. That proposal is backed by the conservative Popular Party which, along with far-right party Vox, are the only opposition in parliament to the Socialist party's proposal.



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Protesters from the pro-life group Derecho a Vivir carry a mock coffin outside the Spanish parliament in Madrid, Spain, Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2020. Spain's new parliament is expected to accept in its first legislative session a majority vote the debate on a law that decriminalizes and regulates euthanasia. (AP Photo/Paul White)

The proposed law in Spain would apply to people suffering an incurable condition, with the patient waiting no longer than a month for the procedure after requesting it.

The request triggers a consultative process, with the patient's doctor required to obtain a second opinion from a colleague outside his team. After two weeks, the patient must repeat the initial request, which is then

forwarded to a committee for assessment.

A doctor can administer the dose directly or patients can get a prescription and administer it themselves, either at home or at a public or private medical facility.

Doctors unwilling to be involved in the procedure can opt out as conscientious objectors, but a replacement doctor must be found.

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