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“Hung” Spain Threatens EU Tech and Climate Drift

By Enrique Dans

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Spain’s recent election led to a “hung” parliament, with neither major party able to form a coherent government. The results leave the country’s tech and climate policy adrift.



The current political deadlock arrives at a delicate juncture as Spain manages its six-month European Union presidency. Madrid is entrusted with the responsibility

of guiding critical EU tech and climate agendas, including the continent's ambitious carbon neutral program, a new regulation for gig work, and the world's first major artificial intelligence legislation.

Since the election, both dominant parties—the conservative PP and the socialist PSOE—have engaged in discussions about forming coalitions with nationalist parties. Prospects are, at best, for a weak majority. In the meantime, programs and policies, particularly those linked to climate and technology, have faded into the background.

This is lamentable. Spain, like its European counterparts, finds itself in the midst of a digital transformation. The collision between entrenched politics and the digital era's rapid advancement requires coherent and forward-looking climate and tech policies.

Under Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's leadership, Spain took robust stances on tech. It proactively regulated gig work and home-sharing platforms. It introduced a digital tax and mandated Google to remunerate publishers for their content. Although these policies initially stood as avant-garde vis-à-vis the EU landscape, they have now integrated into the mainstream.

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Spain also has been a frontrunner in Europe's climate change efforts. Between 2005 and 2019, the country successfully slashed emissions by 27%, outperforming the EU average. Prime Minister Sanchez's socialist government declared a climate emergency in 2020 and increased investments in renewable

energy. Notably, Spanish energy behemoths such as Iberdrola and Siemens Gamesa have taken the lead in pioneering wind energy initiatives.

In stark contrast, the conservative PP climate agenda appears less ambitious. At a conference back in 2019, I expressed my profound satisfaction with the dismantling of Meirama, a polluting coal plant located in the northwest region of Galicia. Alberto Núñez Feijoo, the then-autonomous president of Galicia and the PP's current candidate prime minister, was present and opposed me. He argued against the plant's closure due to concerns over job and industry losses.

While Feijoo's PP program contains sporadic references to "transforming Spain into a renewable powerhouse," it lacks details on key proposals. Spain's current political deadlock will undoubtedly cast a significant influence on broader European tech and environmental policies. In recent weeks, conservatives in the European Parliament have endeavored to dilute policies aimed at rendering the continent carbon-neutral by 2050.

The EU's tech dossier also could stall. As EU president until the end of December, Spain is committed to advancing existing dossiers, advocating for the completion of an AI Act, and seeking a balanced resolution on platform work.

If strong political efforts are needed to broker acceptable compromises, a preoccupied government in Madrid might easily lose its focus. New EU-wide initiatives like the recently introduced toy safety regulation for e-commerce, unveiled in late July, look sidelined and will be postponed until after the Spanish presidency.

Spain's prevailing political impasse not only dampens its robust influence on EU tech policy but also jeopardizes the country's own pursuits. As the EU grapples with essential issues encompassing data protection, digital taxation, and tech antitrust, the nation's political parties seem engrossed in placating the demands of smaller nationalist factions, who fixated on acquiring funds or additional territorial competencies.

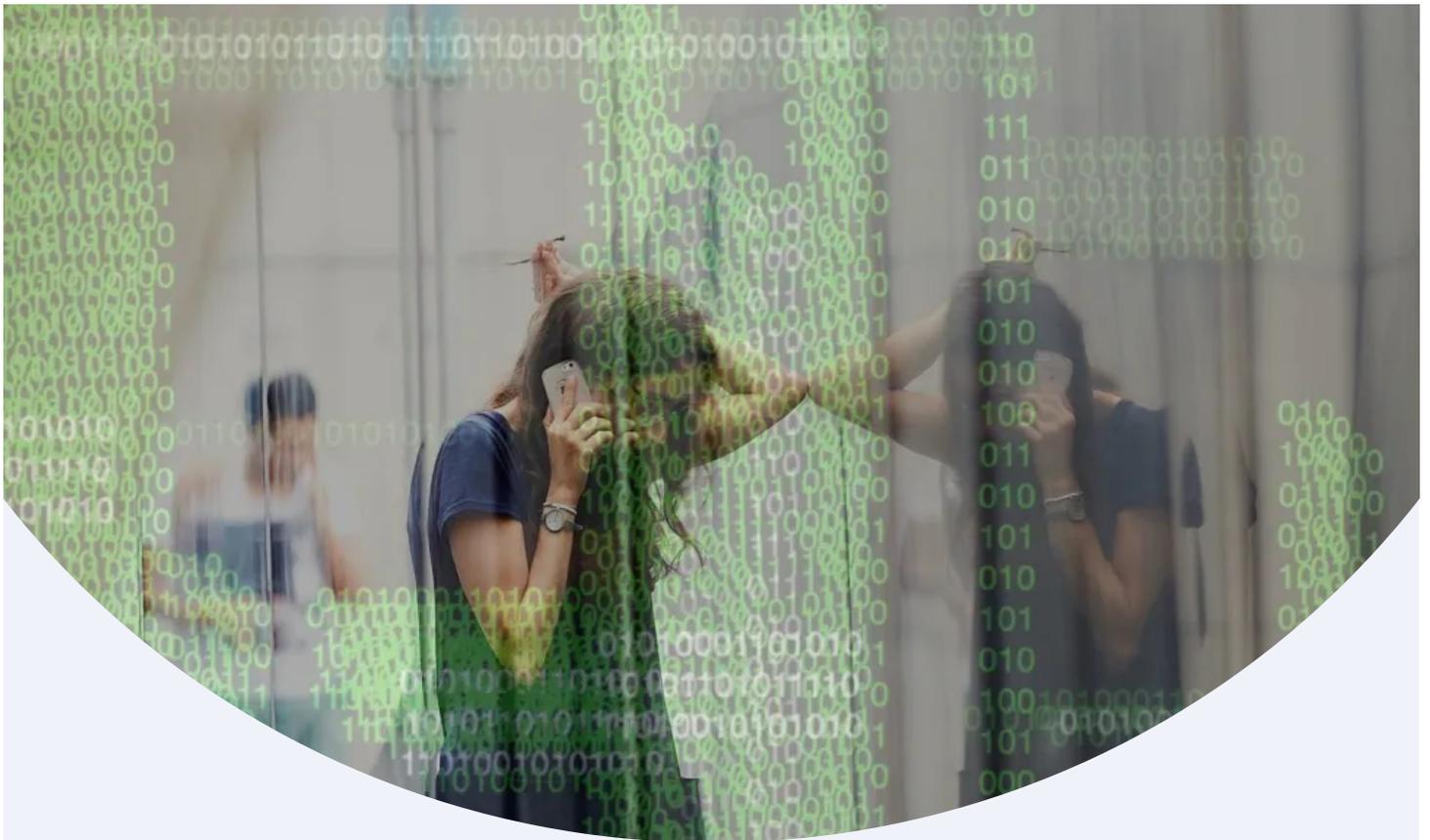
The prospect of a "grand coalition" between the two principal parties, the conservative PP and the socialist PSOE, appears remote due to their acrimony evident during the campaign. PSOE's leader, Pedro Sanchez, seems firmly entrenched in a "no means no" position.

This "hung" election necessitates a call for dialogue, cooperation, and a consensus-driven strategy transcending party lines. However, pragmatic

approaches appear regrettably scarce. The political deadlock could signify more than a fleeting political impasse. It could stand as a defining watershed moment, shaping both Spain and Europe's collective tech and environmental future.

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