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Scotland wants closer ties with the Balearics: See Page Three Inside

Socialists and Podemos open coalition talks

Madrid.—Spain's Socialist party and anti-austerity newcomer Podemos will hold talks on forming a coalition, exploring an as yet untried combination to break a deadlock that has left the country without a government since inconclusive elections in December.

With the deadline for calling new elections little more than a month away, the parties' leaders - meeting for only the second time this year - agreed yesterday to start negotiating a possible deal this week.

"I have seen a joint willingness to have this dialogue," Podemos' Pablo Iglesias told a news conference. "Starting this week I will roll up my sleeves and personally head Podemos' negotiating team."

Iglesias also said he was ready to withdraw from any prospective coalition government

if that helped secure a deal. A left-wing coalition, even if it also included the former communists of Izquierda Unida, would still be short of a parliamentary majority, and would need other parties to abstain or vote in its favour in a confidence vote, which may not be easy to achieve. A series of attempted alliances over the past 100 days involving the leading four parties have failed to end the stalemate. If there is no deal by May 2, new elections will have to be held, probably at the end of June.

While Podemos believes a left-wing coalition should and could be backed by smaller parties and regional groups, the Socialists insist liberal party Ciudadanos should be part of the equation, something Iglesias does not want.



Spanish Socialist leader Pablo Sanchez with Pablo Iglesias.

RAJOY RELENTS ON PARLIAMENT REFUSAL

SPAIN'S acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy agreed yesterday to go to parliament and report on his latest meetings with the European Council, backing away from an earlier refusal to submit to parliamentary oversight of his caretaker government.

The dispute between parliament and Rajoy's centre-right People's Party (PP), which lost its parliamentary majority in a December

national election, has added to political deadlock in the country which has been without a government for 100 days.

He has refused to answer to a parliament that he says does not support him, meaning many bills passed have not become law.

But Rajoy, who had declined to inform parliament about previous EU meetings such as one on expulsion of refugees to Turkey, on Tuesday yielded to pressure from oppo-

sition parties and said he would appear before lawmakers on April 6.

"It will be an informative hearing to tell (the public) what was discussed (in Brussels) and to say that I have listened and defended Spain's mandate according to parliament," he told Onda Cero radio.

He said his shift did not represent a U-turn from his previous stance, and he would still contest parliament's control over his government.

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