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WARMEST YEAR SINCE 1981

● Average temperatures in the Balearics in November were one degree lower than usual.

Balearic president calls for reform: P4



Former Catalan leader says to stay in Belgium for time being despite warrant being dropped

Brussels.— Former Catalan leader Carles Puigdemont, facing arrest in Spain for organising an illegal independence referendum in October, said yesterday he would stay in Belgium for the time being.

Spanish authorities dropped an international arrest warrant for him on Monday in order to bring his case solely under Spanish jurisdiction and avoid a lengthy extradition process through the Belgian courts.

“For the moment we will stay here,” Puigdemont said at a press conference in Brussels.

Puigdemont declared the north-eastern region of Catalonia an in-

dependent republic on 27 Oct., leading Madrid to impose direct rule on the regional government and fire the pro-independence administration.

The resulting political uncertainty has led to thousands of companies moving their legal base from Catalonia and has dented tourist figures and retail sales in the wealthy Mediterranean region.

Puigdemont and four ex-cabinet members travelled to Brussels shortly after he was sacked by the central government. His former No. 2, Oriol Junqueras, is in custody in a Madrid jail while his role in the organisation of the referen-

dum is investigated. Puigdemont faces charges of rebellion, sedition, misuse of public funds, disobedience and breach of trust in Spain. His party, ‘Together for Catalonia’, is campaigning on a pro-independence ticket for 21 Dec. elections called by Madrid in an effort to resolve the crisis.

The central government hopes the elections will usher in a new administration that favours unity with Spain.

Puigdemont said he hoped to be able to return to Spain if he was elected a member of the Catalan parliament, but he was not sure if he would be arrested and put in custody.