



## Interview with Joan Barrera ▶ We talk about housing and cross-border relations with the may

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Joan Barrera is the mayor of La Seu d'Urgell after winning the last municipal elections in May. Barrera, who was head of the Compromís x La Seu-Candidatura de Progrés (CxLS-CP) list, welcomes us to the town hall building, which is celebrating 550 years, to explain the housing situation in the Headquarters, the measures being taken and the relationship between the municipal government and the Government of Andorra.

**–I understand that two large areas are currently being built. Don't you think there is a real danger of killing traditional trade in La Seu?**

–We have always said that we are not against large stores, but we are not in favor of shopping centers on the outskirts of La Seu. We have already seen it with what is already working, that what it does is that Andorrans come down and people from other places come, enter the shopping center and leave again without entering the center of the town. This results in no synergy whatsoever. They should be in the center so that trade is favored. Obviously, all of this can have a repercussion and it does, but commerce is already affected enough by the internet and platforms like Amazon, also the generational shift, and there is still another problem with shopping centers. Having said that, we are optimistic and we believe that we will get by and we must carry out all the necessary policies to help local trade by facilitating management and other things that we will have to work together with trade and associations and entities to recover this trade that is what gives you life in the city center and allows you to have this urban wealth in addition to providing jobs. If you walk around and see everything closed it's a pitiful image. Therefore, it has an impact and will have it, but we have to fight for it to be minimal.

**–Do you think it would be good for the City Council to set aside public land to build affordable housing (both for rent and purchase), given the lack of housing?**

–Obviously yes, we are working on it. We work to make affordable housing available to citizens for vulnerable families, young people and those who need it. Public housing policies have not been made at La Seu for a long time and we are working to do so and to make it a reality as soon as possible. It is being worked on, but right now I would not like to commit to dates, we are working on social flats and there will be results soon.

**–Do you think that the Government of Andorra is ignoring the housing problems and leaving them to La Seu?**

–It is a complicated subject. We have had our ups and downs with the Government of Andorra and



**Joan Barrera** mayor of La Seu d'Urgell

«Each territory must manage its problems without affecting the rest»

myself with the Head of Government, but having said that, it is a delicate issue that affects both sides of the border. They are two territories with different dynamics, but both with a housing problem. When there was controversy, it was because here we have serious problems of lack of housing and this causes prices to rise and people cannot live decently because they cannot afford the rents that are being charged. Whether or not the fleas are removed is a matter that is not for me to say, at the time I already said that we must be careful with statements. There has always been permeability between territories, but each must manage its own problems without affecting the other territories, but we have always collaborated with Andorra and will continue to exist without doubts. At our own level, we must offer the public affordable housing and help overcome all of this.



«Beyond the moment of tension with the issue of housing, the relationship between La Seu and Andorra is very good»

**-What do you think would be the solution for the Principality and La Seu?**

-There are no magic wands. I focus on La Seu because everyone administers their own territory, which has enough work. We criticize that there is an urbanization that has not been delivered after 15 years, there has been quite bad management. This is an important part, and since the city council has not made a municipal housing policy either. We have to work to finish this urbanization and on the other hand, make a public policy. We must have our own housing stock and rent official sheltered housing.

**-What are the measures they are taking to minimize the problem?**

-It's complicated because we have the skills we have. We are doing everything possible with all the cases that come to us, and we are doing everything we can. We don't have flats available and it's a real problem. We do and undo with the resources we have.

**-Yesterday the Government was talking about doing a study to see the feasibility of installing cable transport in Andorra. In principle it would be within the country, but do you think it would be good to do it also from La Seu?**

-Honestly, I find it smoke screen. There has also been a lot of talk about the train here and in the end we have what we have. I wish there was more transportation, but I just haven't seen it. These are multi-mi-

llion dollar investments and I see it as complicated. We would like to have a train, but I find it cumbersome to be able to have it quickly.

**-What policies does your government have for cross-border workers?**

-There are several things here. There are more than 1,500 cross-border workers and we thank the Government of Andorra for their work in terms of transport. In a fairly prudent time and after discussions, it has won a tender and operates a new line every half hour between Andorra and La Seu and with a lower price. We have to work even harder to make the price more affordable. Then, on the subject of health guarantees, we have to deal with the Government

of Andorra and Spain; and another important issue is the queues at the border like those that have been experienced during this long-weekend. In terms of health, there is already talk of being able to use the Nostra Senyora de Meritxell hospital for some diagnoses and services that here at La Seu are a little short.

**-How are relations between La Seu d'Urgell and Andorra currently?**

-Very good! This is how they have been, this is how they must be and this is how they will be. Beyond that moment of tension we had over a sensitive issue such as housing, relations are good with the entire Government team and the municipalities. We will do many things together. ≡



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