



Interview ▶ **Jaume Bartumeu assesses the current situation in the country and presents the**



EL PERIÒDIC
The president of SDP, Jaume Bartumeu, in his office.

Jaume Bartumeu

President of Progressives-SDP

«DA has drawn a picture in which only the rich live and from here comes the unviability of Andorra as a country»

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The president of Progressives-SDP, Jaume Bartumeu, reviews the most important aspects of the candidacy announced last week with the Social Democratic Party (PS) to run in the next general elections. A left-wing alliance that seeks to end the hegemony of the Democrats and whose main points of union are the association agreement with the European Union, public debt and social fracture, including the issue of housing and the loss of purchasing power of citizens.

–Was the SDP + PS union the logic to face the next elections?

–I don't want to forget or underestimate that for two years I have been arguing that what the country needs is a great State pact to face the difficult situation we currently ha-

ve and the one that will come from the installation of the new Government. After repeated meetings with almost all political forces, we came to the conviction that there was no will to reach any agreement before the elections and we [Progressives-SDP] had to consider how and in what way we could move the progressive proposal to the electorate. Since the assembly we held on June 16th, we have always said that what we did not want was to add another list to this profusion of candidacies that are there, but what we thought was necessary was to seek a social democratic alliance to have more strength in the General Council, and to bring about the fall if possible, with the will to extend a hand to all the political parties that want to draw a country different from the one we currently have.

–Do you have any news regarding the

name of the union or the people who will be on the lists?

–There are those who like to put sauce where it is not needed, and different rumors are coming out, but we are going at our own pace and there are still no news that we can announce.

–Why won't you show up?

–Because I have no will or personal desire and it seems to me that what I have to do is campaign alongside our candidates within the agreed alliance and then we'll see what happens. I am not in a position to run for office or to discuss who should lead it. The Social Democratic Party had already decided who would be its candidate, Pere López, and we had decided that we would not make any candidacy on our own, so I will not run.

–Do you think the union has enough

strength to end the hegemony of the Democrats?

–The alliance is not structured as DA was born in 2011 to evict someone from the office on the third floor of the Government's administrative building, but rather our proposal is for the future and to try to rectify the current situation. I think that the way things are going, Democrats are all alone making efforts to shake their hegemony.

–On the day of the presentation you said you were open to new additions. Were you thinking of someone in particular?

–We were not thinking of anyone in particular, but what was meant by this is that, as the situation evolves, which is completely abnormal, there will be many announced candidacies or buried proposals that will not come to fruition. From here, if someone or some want to join our social

democratic and progressive alliance, we have an outstretched hand.

–How would you summarize the candidacy?

–The basic axes are our three main concerns: first, a good agreement must be reached with the European Union, and the adjective good is important, because we believe that as it seems, and I say seems because there is very little information and a lot of concealment about it, which is being negotiated, we are not convinced that it is the right proposal. Second, the growth of public debt; this is an issue that has worried me for a long time, because the State debt is absolutely skyrocketing and the pandemic is no excuse, because the historical debt was already there and now we just have to verify that, with the evolution of international financial markets, rising interest rates will make the service

much more expensive, and so this is a key issue no matter how stubbornly DA denies the evidence. And, third, the will to work to stop the social fracture and the two Andorras, and this includes housing, health, social care, etc. Only this is already an electoral program, later there will be more things, such as transparency in the actions of the Government or the inadmissible issue of continuing to hide the relationship of companies and professionals who requested and obtained a loan guarantee during the health crisis. It is impossible for us to understand that BOPA publishes pensions to support the rental regime or school grants, or their denials, even with the first and last names of minors, and, instead, some lists are hidden that should be public, not because we say so, but because the law says so.

–How do you see the movements that have emerged in recent months with the creation of so many political formations?

–The Constitution that we wanted, and that just last week it was 30 years since it voted in the General Council, establishes the principle of the freedom to create political forces and, therefore, I will not oppose what the citizens and Andorran citizens want to legitimately defend a political proposal. But politics must be attempted from a serious point of view and, of course, sometimes we read and hear ideas that are a little outlandish, with all due respect.

–And that worries you?

–Well, the citizens, who are always smarter than the politicians, will take care of it.

– Do you think that today’s politicians live the same reality as the rest of society?

–The head of government and the government of DA live in absolute isolation from reality. They live in a bubble of self-satisfaction, applauded by the national chorus of grateful stomachs. This is not a criticism, but the manifestation of enormous concern, because if the Government does not have their feet on the ground, it will hardly be able to face with responsibility, seriousness and options to overcome the great challenges that the country faces.

–I said before that the current agreement with Europe is not good enough. Why?

–I can’t answer this question, not because I don’t want to, but because I don’t have all the necessary information. I have a lot, in fact, I think I have more than many general councilors, which is worrying, but not all that we all citizens should have. When I say that we want a good partnership agreement, I mean that the first thing we need to do is to know exactly what is on the negotiating table, and secondly, to explain to the public and to employers the pros and cons. If we want a favorable result in the referendum, which we want, as long as it is a good agreement, we need a good political communication in which all the cards are put on the table and not the chloroform communication we currently have. To continue with this system in which it seems that when a small spark of results is achieved it is announced with great fanfare shows that they do not know what an international negotiation is, because there is the principle that says that while everything has not been agreed text, nothing has been agreed upon.

–What do you mean by advantages and disadvantages?

–I am the head of government who requested the start of a partnership agreement with the European Union in 2010, with which I sought to enable Andorran entrepreneurs, professionals and young people to work, trade and study in Europe with the same conditions as the rest of European citizens. What counterparts are there? That if we enter the European internal market, the four freedoms will have to be applied to Andorra with modulations and transitory periods, but without them making us a tailor-made suit. In other words, they will fix our sleeves, but not the whole dress. So, pretending, and this is one of the keys they are now hiding from us, that Andorra continues without the free movement of capital being applied to the country, is deceiving the people. I know they don’t have their feet on the ground on many things, but I can’t believe that they don’t know that this point will have to be in the agreement.

–The main concern of citizens is housing. How can it be solved?

–Stopping the speculation that DA has promoted for the last 12 years, since the appearance of a foreign investment law that has only brought speculative capital to the country and that has ignited the real estate market to unsustainable levels. They have drawn the picture in which only the rich can live there and from here comes the social fracture and the unviability of Andorra as a country. How to solve this? Stopping speculation and following the example of countries that are not part of the communist sphere, such as Canada, which have adopted very clear legislative provisions limiting foreign investment and with legal certainty, which we also miss a lot here. The problem of housing is not easy to solve, but first we must stop allowing foreign real estate investments and, then, promote initiatives related to public housing.

–Has the urban growth gone away?

– Yes, but willingly. This is not a spontaneous creation, but has been favored by the Government, especially in the last four years. The foreign investment law causes this, but the Executive can redirect it and



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so far it has not done so. Moreover, they have proposed demagogic solutions.

–What do you mean?

–For example, that there is the private foundation of a family that wanted to build, and pay for, a building with apartments for rent at a reasonable price and that we have to bear the image of the DA candidate in the media as if were his Government which has promoted this initiative is the demonstration that the sense of reality has been lost here.

–What do you suggest for pensions?

– The program is still being made, but my opinion is that pensions should be updated to the point where people can live decently in the country in which they have worked all their lives and also to review the investment policy for old age social security points to check that we are on the right track. I think we are not, but, once again, more information is needed.

–Regarding the health system, what should be changed?

–First of all, to put an end to this system of importing big personalities who manage hospital companies to run our country’s public health. We must save the system and, therefore, there cannot be totalitarianism in management and we must understand that the social wage to which citizens are entitled to good attention cannot be managed with profitability criteria. Nostra Senyora de Meritxell Hospital is not a company, it is a public service.

–The head of government says many times that Andorra has one of the best health systems in the world. Is it true?

–Andorra has a health system that at the time was a benchmark, but unfortunately, it is no longer so, because the pandemic has been the final straw for the patience and fatigue of the professionals who work in the ‘hospital, these are indeed wonderful. I think that from the auxiliary staff to the doctors they are tired of a lack of respect, which is not only derived from poor remuneration for their work, but also from professional consideration. The staff is not considered enough and this leads to resignations and layoffs for

all kinds of reasons and to solve this a great national pact is needed.

–Are changes needed in Education?

–In Education, a kind of examination of conscience is needed on whether all the modifications that have been made in the last study plans give us students who reach the Baccalaureate with a sufficient training base or not. I do not think so. And this is seen later, in higher education.

–What did you think of the measures to improve the purchasing power of citizens?

–It is more a demonstration of the communicative cosmetics of the DA Government than a solution to the serious problems of families who are on the poverty line and which are increasing every time.

–How have you found that society is fractured?

–It’s the difference between living locked in an office or living with the public and going shopping in the same places where people who may not be as lucky as we are, those of us who have a fortunate position and a heritage, go shopping. But it is becoming more and more obvious to me that there are different neighborhoods and that there are people who, when filling their shopping basket, have to reduce their expenses, which was not the case before.

–Once society is fractured, can it be repaired?

–The question is: do we want to be a low cost country, but with a top level of rich people living in the towers of Escaldes at a million euros per unit? Or do we want to be a quality country? This also involves tourism and, therefore, quality wages to provide quality services. Here those who should do an examination of conscience are the Andorran Business Confederation, which is characterized by shouting against the slightest increase in workers’ remuneration, and the Chamber of Commerce, which are not playing a good role as helpers of the construction of a future economy.

–If you reach the Government, you will find many open fronts.

– Yes, it will be a headache, but the difficulties serve to move forward.≡

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