



Interview with the Ambassador of the French Republic to the Principality of Andorra, Jean-C



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## Jean-Claude Tribolet

Ambassador of the French Republic to the Principality of Andorra

«An agreement between Andorra and the EU could be reached by the end of the year»



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Jean-Claude Tribolet has been the Ambassador of the French Republic to the Principality of Andorra since 2020. We talked with Mr. Tribolet about the development of French-Andorran relations and asked his opinion about the negotiations on Andorra's accession to the European Union.

–Although more than a couple of weeks have passed since this event, I cannot help but ask for your opinion on the demonstration against high rental prices in Andorra. Demonstrations are common in France, but here in Andorra, this is probably the first time it has been on such a large scale.

Is this the first sign of a local government crisis?

–The Ambassador's role is not to comment on the political issues of the country where he works. But I agree that this is a serious problem because it also concerns the French who come to live and work in Andorra.

The housing problem is due to the demographic expansion of the country. Andorra is located in the mountains. It is very difficult to imagine Andorra with more inhabitants than it has now. Housing is mainly for tourists, so there is not enough accommodation for those who come here for work purposes. As a result, there is a physical limit to attracting foreign employees. Thus, the housing deficit is a real problem for Andorra's development.

–What is France's position on the negotiations between Andorra and the EU?

–As Ambassador, I cannot take a position on this issue. The negotiations with Andorra are led by the EU, not France.

Andorra's Constitution is thirty years old, and it is a completely sovereign country. Spain and France have a special relationship with Andorra as a neighbouring country, and we support the Andorran authorities in their efforts to get closer to the EU.

I think this is a window of opportunity for Andorra. Negotiations started in 2015, enough time has passed. But still, some issues are of worry to Andorrans.

Next year, there will be elections for the European Parliament. There will be a lot of changes. But even though Andorra is very small, the interests of the EU require a compromise with this country.

It is possible that an agreement could be reached by the end of this



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year or in the first quarter of 2024.

–How many French people now live in Andorra? What has been a dynamic in recent years?

–There are 2,000 French people registered in Andorra. This is very low, and the number has continued to decline over the past few years. It can be assumed that about 1,700 French people are so-called passive residents who come to Andorra to take advantage of tax benefits and invest in property, since, according to Andorran statistics, there are about 3,700 French people living in Andorra.

–How many French tourists visit Andorra each year?

–Andorra's statistics help answer this question. As you know, some tourists stay at least one night and those who cross the border to do some shopping. The second category is more numerous. Most



of these tourists do not go further than Pas de la Casa, and there are about 3 million of them per year. Less than a million spend a night or more in Andorra. For example, in 2022, Andorra had about 700,000 such tourists.

**-What major Franco-Andorran joint projects could you mention, and in which areas?**

-Franco-Andorran joint projects are usually related to the energy sector. FEDA is the monopoly company responsible for producing and distributing electricity in Andorra. Andorra produces about 20% of the energy it consumes. To cover its energy needs, the country imports 40% of its energy from Spain and 40% from France. There are agreements that allow France to support the development of FEDA, which have been renovated. The protocol between FEDA and EDF dates back to 2014 and was renewed in January this year.

Long-term contracts allow Andorra to keep prices low; here, they are not as high as in France.

**-There is another example of co-operation between the two countries in the energy sector: in Andorra, there is a petrol station of the French group TotalEnergies...**

-Historically, Andorra's business model was based on selling goods that were unavailable in France and Spain.

Today, we can find everything everywhere. Andorra is small, but there are plenty of suppliers. In terms of petrol and diesel, there are no Franco-Andorran state agreements. There are trade deals between the various fuel importers. In the case of France, it is a refinery near Perpignan. The market sets the rules.

**-Are there any examples of co-operation in medicine and high technology?**

-CASS is based on the French model and covers social security, pension funds, and health insurance. One of the features of Andorra is that people with social insurance can be treated in Spain and France. This situation is expected to continue if Andorra joins the EU. After all, the purpose of this agreement is to continue developing co-operation in the field of medicine.

I am unaware of specific examples of co-operation in the field of high

technology. There are examples of co-operation with FEDA and with a telecom operator with cross-border communication relations with Spain and France.

**-Could you give us some examples of the major French investors in Andorra?**

-Andorra's economy is based on the service sector and tourism. I don't know any single major French investor. Andorra is a modest size country, where 70% of imports come from Spain. French products are also exported from Spain, which is much more practical.

**-How have rising energy prices affected trade relations between the two countries?**

-All European countries are facing rising energy prices due to the situation in Ukraine. Electricity tariffs in Andorra have increased less than in France or Spain, mainly because Andorra has long-term contracts.

As for fuel, it is subject to less tax in Andorra. Therefore, although gasoline prices have increased, they remain attractive to the Spaniards and the French.

**-Andorra can only be reached by road. There is no airport or railway here. The road connecting Andorra to France is often closed in winter due to snowfall and the risk of avalanches. How does France see a solution to this problem?**

-There are two agreements in force between France and Andorra (2017 and 2022) on national routes 20, 320, 22 and 116, which should improve the situation.

According to the 2017 agreement, Andorra and France must invest 21 million euros, or 10.5 million, for each country.

Near the Train Jaune railway is the National Road 116 leading to Prades. According to the 2022 agreement, the total investment is estimated at 18 million, of which 12 million must be paid by France and 6 million by Andorra.

The situation is improving. Every year, we have more opportunities to protect the road from landslides and avalanches. But the same problem exists in the Alps or Himalayas, where I also used to work.

**-What is the future of the railway line project between l'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre and the Andorran capital?**



►► Foix, Arieja.



«I would be happy if there was a connection between Andorra-La Seu airport and Paris»

-Given Andorra's topography, the development of infrastructure and the construction of railways are very expensive. It is hard for me to imagine that Andorra will invest in a tunnel to build this rail link. There is an association, AndRail, that is researching this issue. There are also projects between Andorra and Spain... But at this stage, there is no concrete project. The costs are staggering. Andorra's 80,000 inhabitants do not provide enough traffic for the millions of euros they would have to invest for a tunnel or an extremely expensive infrastructure.

**-Why do you think there are still no flights from Andorra-La Seu airport to cities in France?**

-I would be happy if there was a connection between Andorra-La Seu airport and Paris, but the government of Andorra has to determine whether the passenger

traffic allows its economic balance.

**-Are there projects aimed at improving public transport links between Andorra and neighboring French cities? For example, new bus lines could help develop gastronomic or ecotourism in France...**

-This is a good question because there used to be a bus service between Ax-les-Thermes, l'Hospitalet-près-l'Andorre and Andorra. But there were problems with smuggling-both on the bus line and the Toulouse-Latour de Carol railway line.

Today, there is only line: Andorra-Toulouse.

We need to restore public transport between countries. This is a problem of financing public transport and also its profitability. The stops of such an international bus should not be limited to the final stop at Pas de la Casa. But the current legislation of Andorra does not allow this. ≡

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