



Interview ▶ We analyze Andorran current events with the former head of government

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At Periòdic d'Andorra, we wanted to talk and analyze with Toni Martí, former Andorran head of government, the current state scenario, the pre-electoral context, the future challenges that the country will have to face in the coming years, and his clear and honest opinions regarding the most delicate or controversial issues of this last legislature. To talk with the ex-president is a whole lesson in national politics that certainly does not leave anyone indifferent. Outspoken, and with the freedom he grants, he is not part of any institutional setting, he says what he thinks with frankness and independence.

–What are you doing at the moment?

–I am an architect by profession and therefore I had to redo my architecture office, and this is my main occupation at the moment.

–Would you like to return to active politics?

–No, I wouldn't, because I think that a leader must know when it is no longer his time, I will soon be 60 years old. I have been lucky and honored to have been elected seven times, three times as general counsel, twice as consul and two more as head of government, and with my successes and failures there comes a point that you have to let others pass. It's not so much a personal choice of what you believe, but common sense; when one has become head of government in two legislatures, to try again would seem to me to be beyond any reasonable logic. In addition, I have already commented on repeated occasions, there is life beyond politics, and it is the life I want to live. I do not aspire to hold any public office, I follow what happens politically with interest, but my decision is unequivocal.

–What do you think of the current political landscape?

–The situation is changing. In my time, I had initially been a member of the Liberal party, which I left to present myself as consul with an independent group, and subsequently I founded Democrats for Andorra (DA) with other people. Therefore, I look at the current atmosphere with a certain paradox from the point of view that our party was lucky enough to obtain two absolute majorities. Today is the time for pacts before the elections, this started in the last elections to the General Council with the agreement between the social democratic formation and the liberals, and now almost everyone does it. I understand that this phenomenon can lead to some confusion for citizens, but I think it is up to the political parties to explain it correctly. The proliferation of forces makes it difficult to once again give broad consensus around a single formation, which is why alliances will be essential.

–How is your relationship with your successor, Xavier Espot?

–He is a friend. Precisely this Tuesday we had breakfast together, but it had been a long time since we spoke, and I understand that, because he must not



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Toni Martí

Former head of government

«In these elections, it is very important that whatever happens, tension does not reach the General Council»

be dependent at all on my judgment or on the pronouncements that I can express to him. When we see each other –which is not too often, I give him my thoughts in a very sincere way, because we have collaborated for years in the government together, so I would say that it is a good relationship even if it is not constant, which I see

ems healthy for it to be so.

–You were not in favor of the pact with the liberals. How do you rate this legislature with the coalition government?

–It's true, I personally wasn't in favor of it, but it's another position in front of many that are diverse and plural. It is true that Mr. Espot thinks that coa-

lition governments work, and the reality is that from the perspective of institutional stability it has worked. As for the evaluation, I think that this legislature has been divided into two parts: the first two years, the government –like all states–, has made almost the same policies and focused all efforts on solving the health crisis

of the pandemic, which has not been a local problem, but an international one, and therefore the measures that were adopted were global and practically identical everywhere. I think that in this sense the executive managed well, but also a lot of money has been spent, all Western countries have gone into a lot of debt, and sooner or later a policy will have to be implemented containment that prioritizes in a very important way the correct management of public money, because the administration, faced with an emergency situation, has had to contract a debt that will have to be returned and the resources are what they are.

The second part of the legislature is a consequence of the first, and what has been done has been to allocate a lot of public capital to reactivate the economic fabric, and this has been a mimetic procedure carried out in general by all the territories, whether whatever color they are. If you do not want to increase the fiscal pressure in the Principality, you will have to be very careful when choosing investment preferences, because there will be no policies to say yes to everything.

–In 2019 you resigned from the Democrats, and you are now a supporter. Will you lend a hand in the campaign in any way?

–I will not campaign actively like the last 40 years. One is already starting to have an age and it is not up to me to be on the front line or to knock on doors, that belongs to those who present themselves and to the militancy that is currently active and that have positions of responsibility; they are the first to do whatever it takes to communicate their message in the best way possible. For my part, I continue to be sympathetic, but I will not ask for the vote for the parish of Escaldes-Engordany. If they ask my opinion, I will be in favor of it, but nothing else.

–What do you think that Tercera Via has declined to run for the upcoming elections?

–Mr. Pintat had the deference to call me personally, just two minutes after the announcement came out, for which I thank him. I know that he is a very conservative person, although I know that he also called other active personalities. We were talking for a while. Our trajectories have coincided doing politics in several periods; he opposed me harshly, but was extremely loyal and therefore the decision surprised me and I felt sorry for the sympathy I have for him, because in one of the most complicated moments of my mandate he voted for a text on transfers and competences of the municipalities, that basically what he was doing was clarifying the powers and removing at the level of transfers more than 14 million euros to the municipalities, which made it possible that today it is still possible to invest, and in this sense he made a demonstration of very strong nationalism to help me pass this qualified law, because I needed their votes and these were decisive, since Liberals voted against it. I have a real appreciation for him, and I was disappointed by the news, because it seems to me that there was a spec-

trum of voters who would have placed their trust in him. Having said that, many times we look for very strange or complex socio-political explanations when in reality they are only personal or emotional issues without more. I'm not saying that's the case, but politicians are people like anyone else.

-Do you think that the three new formations have a chance of becoming part of the parliamentary arch?

-The two major parties with a vocation to lead the government at this time are Democrats and Committed Citizens with their parochial alliances, and on the other side the Social Democratic Party together with Social Democracy and Progress; even so, I think that Concordia can get a great result. This is the feeling I have, well, I've been wrong so many times that this might be one more. As for Action, I also see possibilities, but I don't think that all the formations that are presented will get representation.

-Would you like them to obtain representation or do you think it would be an obstacle for the governability of the country?

-I consider it positive, we are in a context where we are playing very important things; the time will come to have to return the money, we have the issue of pensions, which will have to be increased, and there is the association agreement, and many more challenges ahead that will not be easy. Therefore, having a strong and stable government will be essential, but multi-parties does not have to be negative.

-As an architect, how would you solve the serious housing problem facing the Principality?

-I have said it on more than one occasion, that whoever claims to have a solution is deceiving himself, but the most serious thing is that he is deceiving people with this proposal, because there are no magic formulas. Construction is at an unbridled moment, which does not help with housing prices; on the other hand, land release policies are not the exclusive power of the Government of Andorra, they basically belong to the municipalities. Already in 2019 it was observed that after one or two years there would be many promotions underway and bearing in mind that not all municipalities have the same financial situation, so it is a way to enter. Specifically, parishes such as Escaldes or Andorra la

Vella have a good economic situation partly due to this factor. The law of the sun allows factions to allocate the money collected in building. If this alternative had been applied from the beginning, by now there would be many flats that would be the property of the municipalities and that could be sold at an adjusted market price. But there must be a shared will between government and parishes. Consequently, there are no miracle recipes, but what must be ensured is that this does not go further. Surely, in these elections the parties will make proposals trying to find balance, which would be desirable.

-What do you think of the controversial P3 laboratory in Ordino?

-I am not a specialist on biological and other issues, what I understand is that it is an innovation investment that will be welcomed in Andorra, therefore, I will not make any statement against it. We must try to aim a little higher, we must free up public land and develop areas that are well-conditioned with an attractive cost for everyone equally, and thus be able to diversify the economy more and better, because not all activity falls on tourism. I believe that on those issues that cause tension or controversy, referendums will be held more and more, and I don't think that's a bad thing; now, from here to where a query is made for any circumstance there is a big difference. It is good to ask the opinion of the people on specific matters, because unfortunately in the country there is less and less voting and we have to make the population feel much more involved in the decisions that are made, even if it is through a referendum.

-How do you see the salary increase law that the Executive has approved?

-To be as fair as possible, my government did something similar even though inflation was not that high at the time, and I asked business to at least increase the average wage and not so much only the minimum, which is mandatory. It does not seem fair to me that, on the one hand, 8% is applied to the public sector, and to the private sector in stages. I want to think that this has been done in a very exceptional way. 70% of the companies in this country have between one and three workers and therefore there will be companies that will not be able to take it on or it will put them in a very difficult situation. But I also understand

that it was complicated for the Executive, because if he had done nothing, it would have been a problem. This decision, so to speak, is a European singularity, which has its pros and cons.

-And the association agreement with Europe?

-If we have to enter and we don't prepare the requirements that we are asked to do in parallel, it is of no use. The investor wants to know the rules of the game, our taxation is attractive, but if he cannot find a physical space to set up, we are not doing the proper branching of sectors so the partnership agreement is more important, which is to diversify the economy around internal market rules. Then there are internal aspects of security, immigration and banking that will have to be skillfully negotiated. It was not easy to get 30 years for the free movement of goods section; a great negotiation was carried out regarding

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blic. What must be evaluated is whether it is worth it and weigh the pros and cons well, because we play a lot.

-Another of Andorra's major drawbacks is the huge staff turnover. Why do you think people end up leaving the territory?

-Here there is another difficulty for which I also do not have a solution and which is palpable in the atmosphere, which is that living in the Principality and accessing affordable rent is complicated. On the other hand, there are economies that work better in Europe; there is another element that should make us think about our growth and that is that there is not only rotation. When today we have so many Peruvians it is because qualified labor is in short supply in the surrounding countries, surely because everyone has legitimately wanted their children to be doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc., and trades such as a good



«The only revolution that must be made is that of prudence and balance in policies»

plumber is hard to find. This has caused people who come from countries with poorer or humbler economies to want to come. This is an effect of European deindustrialization that is more noticeable in Andorra.

-YouTubers and influencers have chosen this microstate to come and live. Do you think the image being projected of this phenomenon is positive?

-Everything is good if it is not excessive, because the agreements we have always falter when there are excesses in a sector, harming one of the parties. That passive residents come is a positive, that it is a fabulous attraction depending on which spectrum of people is fine, but if it is very loud or ostentatious, in the end it raises all the alarms. We must live from our advan-

tages, but not be too bright a disadvantage for others, because it can be counterproductive. Personally, with respect to passive residents, once it has been proven that double taxation agreements work, I think that for what they receive from the Andorran state compared to what they pay, they should pay much more.

-Next March, the casino will be inaugurated. What do you think of this project?

-It won't do any harm, it's another incentive that the country will have, but obviously as a source of income it won't be a miracle. I want to believe in the professionalism of those who set it up to combat some unwanted effect, but beyond that it is something else that can add up, that will bring a plus to Andorran social life and tourism. I don't know if I will be invited to the opening, but in any case one day I will visit it.

-Do you think that the BPA case will always accompany you as a black mark in your political career?

-No, it was an episode that I wish I hadn't had to live through as head of government, nor the Andorran state as a nation.

-What would be your wish for this 2023?

-I wish the next government the best of luck, because there are so many things at stake and it will not be easy at all, since the current situation is very complicated. Everyone criticizes politicians, but it must be recognized that they probably all go there with great enthusiasm, despite the fact that once you are head of government you often feel very alone and want to run away. However, I am convinced that all those who present themselves are people who love their country, but they will have to be careful with the decisions they make, because in general the West lives in a complex situation. There is a kind of atmosphere in which coexistence is breaking down, and in a small society like ours it would be a drama. Precisely, I have always defended that the guarantee of the Andorran state resides in good internal coexistence and that the policies are extremely balanced. You can be liberal, but the government must intervene if things go badly. Therefore, there is a context that concerns me so, whoever wins, I wish them the best of luck. ≡

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