



Interview with the Mayor of La Seu d'Urgell, Francesc Viaplana ▶ The City Council welcomes

URGELL HEADQUARTERS TOWN HALL

Francesc Viaplana in the plenary hall of La Seu City Council.



## Francesc Viaplana

Mayor of La Seu d'Urgell

«I think it would be positive for Andorra to take part in the Winter Games candidacy»

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Francesc Viaplana took over as mayor of La Seu d'Urgell last September, in compliance with the government agreement that emerged from the 2019 municipal elections between Esquerra Republicana and Junts. With a pandemic that seems to be dissipating, the local government will join forces to meet all the objectives set by the mandate, and all this, while maintaining a good relationship with Andorra.

**-There is a little more than a year left in office. What initiatives do they have left to fulfill?**

-We have several. We are carrying out the procedures with Salut to transfer the land to them and for the construction of the new hospital to begin, which is a historic claim of La Seu and to achieve this will be a milestone. We are confident that we will be able to have a new hospital before the end of 2023. We have also done a project of works for the current hospital and we are waiting to detail with what funding we do it, since the Department of Social Rights offered

us the possibility of applying for European funding.

We are waiting for the Next Generation funds to come out so that we can welcome and carry out the new equipment for the elderly, which already has a preliminary project on the table. And another facility that we want to improve in the coming months is the municipal swimming pool, where we have planned to expand and change the location of the children's pool, while gaining more square meters of space for towels.

We are also working on a project that we are very excited about, which is that of the Ciutadella technology hub, the *Tech Mountain Pyrenees*, and just next week we will make the presentation of the association that will manage and promote this space. We also hope that in the course of this year the light cover and the collector of the Horta de Valira urbanization will be completed, with which it will be definitively finished and which is a task that has been dragging on for years. And in this same urbanization, the barnahus is planned, a facility of the Generalitat to take care of children and teenagers who have been victims of sexual abuse and which I think is very relevant.

Apart from that, we will continue to work on improving the public road, and other open fronts and issues that may arise. We have a lot of work ahead of us.

**-Is there an initial purpose that will have to be postponed due to the impact of the pandemic?**

-More or less, everything we set out to do as a government team, we are doing. The problem is that with the pandemic, we have had to



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deal with the urgency and the deadlines have not been the ones we would have liked.

**-How was your experience in these first months in office?**

-The truth is that very well. First of all, I want to say that as a government team, I am very pleased with how this legislature has worked and how we have been able to work. There is an understanding between the two groups and we always try to put the interests of La Seu and Castelliutat first. On the other hand, it is an honor and a pride to hold the mayoralty, because it is the highest responsibility in the city council of the city where I was born and raised. So, I do it with all the enthusiasm in the world.

**-Is the candidacy being repeated in 2023?**

-This must be decided by the militancy of the Left, as it is the local assembly that decides the head of the list. But my will is to run again in the next municipal elections.

**-How do you see the current situation of the covid at the moment?**

-If I look at it now and compare it with a few weeks ago, we are

much better. But, like everywhere else, it's been a roller coaster ride from relatively good data to having a very high impact, and doing everything we can and holding people accountable. We hope that this 2022 will be a year of normalization and that we can overcome this pandemic as much as possible, although it is true that the health crisis has been one thing, but there has also been an economic one and social that also worries and concerns us.

**-For a few months now, the Sant Hospital Foundation has been offering the possibility of terminating the pregnancy pharmacologically. How do you think the council has implemented this care?**

-Very positive. Precisely, it was the council that put it on the table, along with the Department of Health. The truth is that until this legislature I didn't know that this procedure was not done in the hospital because the board had not authorized it, and I think we do nothing strange, but we do what we have to do and we guarantee this right of women.

**-How is the new Inefc Pyrenees**



**center working?**

–Fantastically. It is one of the big projects of the legislature and we believe it marks a before and an after in our city. We had all the indications that this training here in the Pyrenees would be successful, but at the time of enrollment, where we had more than 200 pre-registrations in the first option and close to 500 in the second, we were able to check it. We are now getting closer to having the ultimate equipment, which is the university. Two weeks ago we finished the competition phase to choose the project of what this new university should be, and we are moving forward with the deadlines to achieve this important milestone for our city: to become a university city.

**–You have been charged with embezzlement. How do you deal with it?**

–We have not received any complaints. This complaint has been filed with the Public Prosecutor's Office and we have been informed through the media. The truth is that we are very calm about how the whole procedure was done. After all, what happened was that a service commission was not renewed, basically because the boss was not satisfied with the way this agent was doing. In addition, I remember that the administration may or may not renew the service commission without having to justify it, but in this case it was justified, and in addition, there was the appearance that this agent had promised to get the necessary title of Catalan to be in the square and during this year it was not removed. Therefore, we are very calm and waiting for the Prosecutor's Office to decide whether or not to close the case.

**–At what point are the relations with Andorra from the City Council of La Seu d'Urgell?**

–From the City Council of La Seu d'Urgell there have always been excellent relations with the Government of Andorra, because we have very close ties in all senses: social, historical and economic. It is a very

important complement, so there has always been a fantastic collaboration. The only thing is that we are different administrations, one is state and we are local, so there are things that are sometimes not in our hands and that correspond to higher administrations such as the Generalitat or the State.

**–In fact, a month ago you met with the head of government. How was the meeting?**

–Fantastically. We already met when we entered the government together with the current mayor and I as deputy mayor, to introduce ourselves to the head of government and talk about the issues that affect us on both sides of the border. And later, after I took over as mayor, we went back to this protocol visit, which we couldn't do before because of the agenda and the pandemic. But well, as I say, the relationship is very good and we were able to discuss different issues that affect us on both sides of the border.

**–One of the elements that most worries Andorran citizens is the tension in the rental market. Have you noticed that more people want to live in the Seu because they can't do so in the Principality?**

–Our housing market is completely affected by the current situation in Andorra. In other words, if Andorra has a very tense market and very high prices, this means that here in La Seu, as more people go down to live, prices will also increase. And it is true that because the salaries here and there are different, it makes us have problems accessing housing. However, we are trying to push through all the housing policies we can and are in our hands to try to alleviate this situation.

**–In this way, can La Seu to accommodate more cross-border people?**

–Well, right now it's hard to find flats in La Seu, precisely because there is a high demand. Different promotions are being carried out to be able to offer more, but it is something that depends on private



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initiative and does not correspond to the city council. For us, as long as there is activity and growth, it is positive.

**–Just a week ago, Pere Aragonès visited Andorra. What do you think about the resumption of official contact between the Generalitat and the Andorran Government?**

–It is great. I think that the fact that the president of Catalonia, who is directly the neighboring country of Andorra, establishes these relations is the most normal thing, although I know that they were already there. But I find it fantastic that after years without a visit, the President of the Generalitat travels to Andorra to try to strengthen these ties that we have between the two countries.

**–One of the points they discussed was the 2030 Olympic candidacy. Do you think Andorra should participate?**

–The truth is, I think it would be positive for Andorra to participate in the candidacy for the Winter Olympics, for several reasons. Firstly, for its expertise in holding international competitions, but also for the quality of Andorra's ski resorts. It would seem logical to me. What is happening is that this candidacy must be presented through the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE), which means that not everything will be decided in Catalonia.

**–If this were the case, would it be beneficial for La Seu to have an Olympic event in Andorra?**

–I'm sure. What is good for Andorra is good for La Seu, and in the same way, I think that what is good for La Seu is good for Andorra. We are two very close territories, and as I said, with very great ties. We must always want the best for our neighbor because, in return, it benefits us.

**–The Alt Urgell Council of Mayors was in favor of the candidacy, but with certain conditions. Can you tell us the positioning?**

–The position of the mayors was not unanimous either, and there

are councils that are openly opposed to the candidacy. But what most believed was that the Pyrenees could not miss any opportunity. We hope to have as much information as possible so that the territory can decide whether or not to carry out the event. A good thing is the investments that the Government says the Pyrenees need, which are many and we have been demanding them for decades. These investments cannot be linked to the celebration of the Olympic Games, they must be done both yes and no. The important thing is to see which Pyrenees we want for 2030 and 2040, and if in the middle there is the possibility of holding an Olympic Games and the territory wants it because it is beneficial, go ahead.

**–What is your assessment of the first two months of operation of regular flights to Madrid from Andorra-La Seu Airport?**

–I think the assessment is highly positive. It had been tried several times that there were regular flights and it had not been successful, so I think the improvements that have been made to the airport lay the groundwork and technically allow these flights to be done much more easily and security. I hope that what has been a positive start and with high employment will continue, and that this will mean economic development for our territory as well.

**–How do you expect the commercial supply of the infrastructure to grow?**

–When you have an infrastructure like this, what you really want is for it to work one hundred percent within its capabilities in order to make the most of all the possibilities it offers us. It must be said that with private flights and air taxis, as well as with private helicopter companies, the airport was already in full operation. We also have the GRAE base and soon there will be the heliport SEM base, so regular flights were the missing piece. So if these also work, which we hope and wish we did, we will have an airport in full swing. ≡

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(+376) 353 424 / (+376) 379 769

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