



## Interview with the Consul General of La Massana, Olga Molné ▶ Pandemic Management and

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The Consul General of La Massana, Olga Molné, takes stock of the first half of a term that has been marked by the coronavirus pandemic and the integration of EMAP into a new society, Setap, whose goal is, in a long term, to cover all the mountain resorts in the country.

**–What is your assessment of the first half of the legislature?**

–It has been a bit complicated for two years, in which we have had to be able to manage the health situation, but also a stage of achieved objectives, because we have been able to carry out all the proposed projects. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, at the very beginning of the term, we set some lines of government, the most important of which was the change of model of the EMAP station, as it had been many years since the situation was stuck and, after talking to several investors, both national and international, we opted for a model of integration and country between EMAP, Ensisa and Crèdit Andorrà.

**– What has the management of the pandemic meant in the municipality?**

–We have constantly adapted to new situations. The outbreak of the pandemic directly affected the station's accounts due to restrictions on the mobility of tourists, as well as the entire business fabric of La Massana. Luckily, we were able to adapt and had a great summer season, which affected the business of the parish, and now we have a very positive start to the winter.

**–Do you have numbers?**

–It's still early, because we only have 40 days of the planned 150 days of the season, but I can say that the Department of Tourism is in constant contact with hoteliers and shopkeepers, who say they are reaching 2019 numbers, and some have already surpassed them by 10%. We also see that there are more and more new businesses; according to data from last week [Thursday, 26], we have 1,650 businesses registered, an increase of 28% compared to 2020, when there were 1,284. It is a very high figure for a parish of only 10,700 inhabitants.

**– What has been the hardest part of the pandemic for almost two years?**

–To organize, once we had everything organized, the sanitary measures would be changed, in addition to coexisting with the constant losses of positives. Except for the mass events, we have been able to reinvent the rest of the projects and, in one way or another, we have carried them out. It has been a constant effort, in which the worst was the uncertainty, it made us suffer a lot.

**– What projects have had to be left in the drawer?**

–None of them have been left in the drawer, because, despite the pandemic, we have worked very hard on all the proposals we have in the electro-



## Olga Molné

Consul General of La Massana

«Sooner or later a solution will have to be found for traffic in La Massana»

ral program. In addition to changing the model of the EMAP station, we set out to have a sustainable parish, so we built a solar park so that the station itself would consume 30% of renewable energy. At the same time,

we have begun the plan to pacify and improve the parish and, in this sense, the most important works to date are the comprehensive reform of Costes del Teixidor and the first half of the section of sidewalk that goes

from Sispony to La Massana.

**–How is the process of uniting the parish across the sidewalks?**

–We are working on it, and we also urge the Government to carry out



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«La Massana is growing and there are areas where there is no space to park and we want to find land that can be enabled»

the sidewalk between La Massana and Arinsal, as being a main road, it depends only on it, and it was the winning project of the participatory budgets. A bit of work is being done right now, but we want to move forward on the subject and have the rest included in the accounts for the coming years.

**– What is the challenge for the remaining two years of office?**

–We have noticed that there is a lack of parking in several areas of the parish, because La Massana is growing and there are residential areas where there is no space to park vehicles and we want to find land, both communal and transfer, which they can be enabled and offer the best answer. We will also invest in Santa Caterina Park, with the aim of providing a leisure space for teenagers, who currently do not have age-appropriate meeting or entertainment equipment. And we also want to dedicate a lot of resources to the water network, because with the increase in residents we have to ensure a good supply to the whole population, but also to hotels and other kinds of businesses.

**–In this sense, is La Massana ready to welcome all these new residents?**

–At the moment, in the 2022 budget, we are looking at some money to make a diagnosis to be very clear about what we need to do, how far we can grow and what future water needs we will have. According to this study, we will make the necessary investments, which we estimate will be about 370,000 euros, but the tender has yet to be published.

**–The investment item in this year's budget is 45% higher than in 2021. How will this money be spent?**

–We will go from 2.3 million euros in 2021 to 3.3 million this year. It is a significant increase, which we will use for widening and road improvements, taking into account the most complicated points, such as the se-



cond phase of the Sispony road, or the beautification of the roundabout in La Cabanota, which will follow the same aesthetics as the in front of Crèdit Andorrà, on Sant Antoni Avenue. We also have parking areas and Santa Caterina Park planned, as I mentioned before.

**-Where will these car parks be?**

-We are looking for a place in Arinsal, where above all the restaurateurs demand more parking for their customers, in the Escàs area, which is growing a lot and the neighbors leave their vehicles on the road, which is dangerous and makes it difficult to pass, and at the entrance to the village, a little above the Anyós roundabout.

**-Do you think that the widening of the Anyós roundabout really serves to ease traffic congestion?**

-Yes, and it shows a lot. While there was a lane occupied by the works, the queue often reached the entrance of the village, but now it has been greatly reduced and I think that when it is finished and the sidewalk is there it will work even better.

**-On the other side of La Massana, from Arinsal to the village, there are also long queues, especially on weekends after the slopes close. Is there a solution?**

-At rush hour it is difficult to solve, because everyone wants to make the day of skiing as long as possible and then concentrates on the road. Sometimes cones are put in place to try to speed up traffic, but it's not easy. Yes, we have taken other corrective measures in the mornings, when we have the same problem as when going down the slopes, because the workers and the parents who take the children to school coincide. From the municipalities we talked to the schools and staggered the tic-

kets, so that they enter the Agora at 08.30, the French school at 08.15 and the Andorran school at 09.00. It's only a 15-minute difference, but the rush hour chaos has disappeared. Even the parents' association congratulated us, because at first everyone had doubts.

**-The covid-19 has left, the Massana road. Is it a mistake?**

-Well, we are talking about a road that is worth a lot of money, about 60 million euros, and it is true that with the pandemic and giving priority to the Sant Julià road, La Massana road has been left out. All I can say is that La Massana is a growing parish, that it is very much alive, and that sooner or later a solution will have to be found to improve traffic. All in all, I think people's habits remain the same and everyone takes the car before thinking about public transportation or car sharing. We should change our habits as long as there is no definitive solution, but this cannot be the only solution.

**-Is the creation of Setap a break for la Massana municipality, and its finances?**

-More than a break, it is a great excitement because I am convinced that this integration will go very well and achieve a better performance, being more competitive and changing the world of snow in Andorra. On the outside, we sell ourselves as a unit and I think that giving this image is very positive for the country. We have not lost weight, but great hope has been born and I think it is a good solution.

**-But La Massana, through EMAP, has the smallest part.**

-Yes, La Massana currently has 19%, with the possibility of growing a 30% to equate us to Canillo and Crèdit Andorrà. The first increase, up to 25%,



«Stepping the entrance to the schools with only 15 minutes difference has made the chaos at rush hour disappear»

«We have gone from being a winter parish, where hotels closed in the summer, to being active all year round»

will be made with the repurchase of preferences and then we will recapitalize them. To reach 30%, we will be able to buy the shares of other partners at an agreed price, which is the current one, for seven years. This, however, will be decided by the consuls of each legislature, it is not an obligation and, therefore, the future income of the municipality will not be compromised.

**- And will Setap end up being Grandvalira?**

- Ideally, there should be a single ski pass and all stations in the country should be unified. We will work along these lines. At the moment, we are focusing on a joint investment plan to start creating synergies to be more competitive and get the best results.

**- What does this plan contemplate?**

- An investment of 36 million euros is planned to be made in Pal Arinsal, which will consist of changing several old ski lifts and making the ski junction between Pal and Arinsal. We also want to make a service building with a restaurant on the Black Peak. We want the money invested to be as profitable as possible, even though this season is still running separately. Starting in the summer, we'll go hand in hand.

**-How has the success of maintaining Vallnord been during the summer?**

-Since we bet on the bike, we have never stopped believing in it and we have invested time and money in it. We have moved from a winter parish, where many hotels were closed in the summer, to year-round activity. This has also allowed us to diversify our service offering and give us a lot of credibility.

**-You have talked about the solar park before. It has started with con-**

**troversy.**

-I don't like to talk about controversy, because the relations between Andorra and Spain are good and there is a predisposition to resolve the conflict. What I can say as the consul of La Massana is that I am very happy to have this solar park, which is already a reality and is in operation, and which, as it could not be otherwise, the whole project was done according to the official cartography of the Government of Andorra. I understand that if the Spanish state believes that part of its territory has been invaded, it will put it on the table, just as Andorra would do if it were the other way around. This is a border issue and we need to wait for it to be resolved.

**-Has the stoppage of the cable car project at Carroi peak been a failure?**

-No. No bids have been submitted for the project as it was conceived, but we have been talking about it for 20 or 30 years, so the project is not buried and the Andorra la Vella municipality is eager to continue betting on it.

**- But don't you think that turning the capital into a track would harm the hotels and merchants of La Massana?**

- We have commissioned a report so that, if the time comes, we will know their opinion and, although we do not have the results, I do know that there are supporters, but also that they are afraid.

**- Are the relations within the communal team good?**

-We have a very good understanding and we work together. Governing boards are a space for debate, because we are three different ideologies and we deal with all issues from different points of view. There is no conflict between us. ≡

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