

Interview with the Ombudswoman ▶ Review of the activity in the General Council and challenges

## Suñé wants to increase citizen participation

The Catalan Ombudswoman finds it a «good initiative» to hold events at the General Council to bring the inhabitants closer together.

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The general trustee, Roser Suñé, would like to establish the structures that «allow to increase citizen participation». That is to say, to find the formula that favors that the General Council is «a house where the citizens also articulated». This was stated in statements to EL PERIÒDIC, where she acknowledged that this idea «is a wish that I hope will be fulfilled in the future», although she clarified that «I do not know how it should be addressed; it is something that should be evaluated, worked on and programmed». In any case, the Ombudswoman reaffirmed that «I would like the possibility that, at certain times, the voice of the citizens could be heard and worked in Parliament».

In Andorra, as in many other places in neighboring countries, the most widely used way to implement citizen participation has been participatory budgeting. This action is undertaken by various corporations, making reality projects such as the reverse recycling machine installed in Ordino or the basketball courts located in Santa Coloma. In some towns abroad, in addition, binding consultations have also been held regarding specific decisions and in order to apply the criteria of the neighbors. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of citizen participation, and the possibility of transferring the popular initiative to the General Council would

be one of the most unique and pioneering options in the world.

In any case, as long as this is not possible, the institution tries to facilitate an approach of the inhabitants to the General Council through the celebration of acts. This initiative begins when the Council moves to this house in 2011. At that time, there is a will of the union team to use and bring the spaces closer to the citizens», explained Suñé, who pointed out that «the lobby space is facilitated to organize a series of events». In any case, the Ombudswoman made it clear that «the lobby is still what it is, and therefore there are events such as the presentation of a book or those that end on the same day that have a place here». But «those events that involve previous preparations, such as a concert, which would require a rehearsal, it is impossible to host it because we are working during the day», as well as it would not be feasible to host exhibitions because the opening hours would be the coincidence with the work of a large part of the citizens.

However, Suñé assessed that «I think it is good that the Council, choosing those acts that have more to do with what its dynamics are, can do them», adding that «for me it is a good initiative, because of somehow, it facilitates access to the house», and remarking around this opportunity that «otherwise, people only approach the institution in the open days we do on March 14th», the day of the Constitution. ≡

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### «It would be good to reflect on decisions that are here and we have to deal with them»

**ROSER SUÑÉ** Ombudswoman

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The end of July is approaching, when Andorran politics will stop and resume activity on September 12th with the Political Orientation Debate. The course that is now closing will have been marked by the end of the most critical moments of the coronavirus pandemic and the beginning of the outcome of the current legislature. Thus, the Catalan Ombudswoman, Roser Suñé, takes stock of the last months of activity in the General Council and the challenges that Andorra has to face.

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–What is your assessment of the political course that is now coming to an end?

–In the General Council we move in periods from September to January, and then from March to July. So the latter, it can be said, has been active. Laws have been worked out and a pace has been

taken that can be considered less tied to urgency, as legislated in the covid pandemic period.

–Which texts approved at this stage would you highlight?

–In this period, important laws have been approved such as the Transparency Law or the Equality Law. Just two weeks ago, the Circular Economy Act and the Digital Assets Act were passed, and last week, the Civil Protection Act. And in the remaining session this month, the



▶▶ Suñé and Vela present 'Andorra, challenges for the future'.

Family Code and the amendment to the Civil Service Law are pending approval, both of which are very relevant texts.

**- Do you think there is one that could have been worked on better?**

- The dynamics of the commissions are marked by their nature. For example, there are texts like the one on the Circular Economy that the councilors worked on very well, in the sense that they were able to discuss the amendments and come to an agreement. Other times, however, it works just as well and no agreement is reached when the amendments are passed, and the laws become unanimously unsupported. But that's what legislative work is all about: there are times when it's understood because there's a more shared view on one issue, and on the other hand, there are more complexities in others.

**- Gradually normalcy is restored, and this means being able to receive visits. At what point is the institution's relationship with the outside world?**

- The truth is that we have had fewer visits than usual, and I would say that it is one of the, in quotes, shortcomings of this legislature. It is important to remember that when the legislature began and the machinery was set in motion, it was May. We had a first phase during the fall and winter, and the following spring, which is when we should have been more active, the covid came and it all stopped.

The fact is that the movement has not been able to recover until now. But there has been activity from the international delegations that have come out, although in the highest phases of the covid everything was telematic. And we have received visits from young OSCE parliamentarians as such. At the same time, there were two trips of the friendship groups, going to Paris and Madrid. I hope that these dynamics can be resumed, because I think it is an element that enriches the work and maturity of directors, as well as the institution as such.

**- As for the current state of the chamber, a parliamentary group has recently left its party. How did you experience this fact?**

- It has been lived with a lot of normality because it is a fact that has

happened in practically every legislature. I think there has been a separation of parliamentary groups in each legislature, and therefore there is a structure that allows for immediate adaptation. If directors are left alone, they become considered non-attached directors; and if they can stay in a group, they stay. It has to be said that you are personally sorry because you know that there was probably a personal breakup inside. But beyond that, when it comes to working on committees, I don't notice anything at all: everything keeps up. What parties and divisions between people do in their lives is up to everyone.

**- Once the activity returns in September, the legislature will enter the final stretch. What texts do you think are essential to approve in what is left?**

- There is a very important modification of the Justice, which is a law that was introduced and that must be worked on, and it is the one that will allow, or this is its will, to speed up the procedures. Then there are texts like the Qualified Professions, which is a necessary law for groups in relation to the association agreement, and I suppose the Environmental Impact Act will also pass. In addition, the Foreign Investment Act has just been introduced, which I hope the groups will have time to work on.

Of course, there will also be the budget, which is ultimately the most important law because it will determine the work that can be done. In addition, they are working on urgent housing measures, which come in every year and this year has been brought forward so that it can be debated in the autumn.

**- Some councilors sometimes refer to the fact that there is a frantic parliamentary activity. Do you agree?**

- If they are small groups, it is normal for them to see it that way, because of course, for them it is more agitated. Larger groups have more work capacity, and attempts have not been made, which have not always been successful, to define a timetable that allows for sufficient time to work on the amendments. With many laws I would say that there has been more than enough time, but in some texts it is clear that the majority groups have gone faster and moved forward.



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**- And once the activity returns in September with the Debate on Political Orientation, when do you think it has left in the legislature?**

- For some time now, the head of government, Mr. Espot, has stated the same schedule. He talks about December of this year and March of next. March would be the closest to the four-year term, but from December onwards, one could speak of a technical advance rather than an advance as such. I think it will all depend on the pace he sees. In the end, this is a whole decision of the Government, and therefore we will see when the head decides. But I understand that we will move on this fork between December 2022 and March 2023, and so I planned my work.

**- Many parties are already taking the first steps in the next general election. When will Democrats decide who will be the head of the list?**

- The party has its internal working mechanisms, and when it is considered, which I believe will not be until September, there will be the proclamation of the candidate.

**- Will you be on this list?**

- At the moment, I haven't worked at all. I am very focused on my work, and when we start talking about it or the real schedule is made visible and from the game we start to define the program and all that, then I will decide. I think we are a group and it is up to everyone to decide which place is best.

**- But are you available?**

- At the moment, here I am, yes.

**- And what do you think about the proliferation of political formations?**

- It is a phenomenon that is the result of a moment, as happens in many European societies, of generational changes, because if we look, there are many profiles of people around forty who are entering very powerful, and with a firm will to be actors in Andorran politics. It also goes beyond the need to respond to important concerns created by the pandemic and the economic situation at the moment, accentuated by the war provoked by Russia. Then, I understand that groups are coming out, what happens is that the dynamics of many

groups I do not know what leads to as a country. So I hope to see if these initiatives manifest themselves as political parties or platforms that seek to open up another kind of debate, and who is running and who is not in the next election. For me, the more people who want to be active in politics, I think it's better, but I don't know what capacity a very fragmented Council mechanism will have to give an agile response to certain situations. We'll have to wait and see how it's built.

**- And given the situation, do you find it difficult to re-issue a government with a majority?**

- Yes, of course. Clearly, once there are results, whoever has the most votes, and therefore the most councilors, will have to see what other forces they work with if they do not have an absolute majority. But the legislative work could go ahead as well, because there are people who make consensus work much easier or agree to take initiatives forward. The model does not prevent it.

**- How do you think the pandemic has influenced this context?**

- I think we are not yet aware of what covid has meant and how the perception of certain things has changed. It's interesting to see that it's like we want to go very fast on a lot of things again, I don't know if because of that inner feeling of thinking: because security has faded, we have to keep moving because things don't move in motion. I think a period of reflection would be good for us in terms of the need for a series of decisions that are here, that are important and we have to deal with them because there is no need to hide, how to see what happens with the retirement system, the CASS funding, what model of tourism policy is being defined, what economic growth can sustain the country ... All these will be elements of debate that will come out and that I think concern the younger generations, like the others, all and that I feel like these new groups are starting to get very active doing these reflections. In the end, the pandemic should have helped us think about all of this, but I don't know if it did. It's an element that I may have more of an opinion on when a little more time has passed. ≡

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

(+376) 747 747

laportella@andorra.ad

Casa Nova Olivet 10 · Ordino

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