

Interview with Victoria Alsina ▶ Resumption of diplomatic relations between Andorra and Ca

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The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Open Government of the Generalitat de Catalunya has recently had many meetings with ministers of the Government of Andorra. Before the end of the year, the Catalan delegation in the Principality will be open, with the aim of promoting projects in two directions: from Catalonia to Andorra, and vice versa. In this interview, Victòria Alsina addresses one of the topics that form part of the collaboration agenda: the projection of the Catalan language in the world, and she does not rule out Andorran participation in the candidacy for the Winter Olympics.

–Last Monday you saw Trini Marín. How was it?

–We had a very good meeting, as we talked about many possible collaborations. We addressed issues of open government, transparency, participation and open data. We explained everything that has been done in Catalonia in recent years and the projects that we have underway, and we identified which ones might be of interest to Andorra and vice versa. Thus, we came to the conclusion that Andorra should capitalize on all the experience that Catalonia has in the application of the law of transparency, a key issue that they are promoting from the ministry. And to this end, we have set ourselves the task of carrying out a technical working group.

–It has recently been announced that Catalonia will open a delegation in Andorra. Where will it be located? What functions will it have? Which people will work there?

–In fact, I can advance something that we have not yet said publicly, which is precisely what makes the project more interesting, which is that this delegation will also be a platform at the service of the Government of Andorra to carry out projects in Catalonia. We do not understand it only as a delegation that the government of Catalonia opens to carry out initiatives that arise from Catalonia to Andorra, but it intends to do so, with the same intensity, also in reverse. In other words, we will create a team that is available to the Andorran Government to carry out projects in Catalonia. From you to me, and from me to you. In addition, the aim is to strengthen good neighborly relations with Andorra and to be able to collaborate in all areas, as we have immense historical, cultural, economic and social ties and a cross-border relationship that we need to improve. Covid has stressed the importance of being connected across borders, and therefore this delegation wants to grow all these connections. For example, through the Pyrenees Working Community, one of the most active networks out there, but we don't have enough. In short, we want to be a platform for Catalonia to grow initiatives in Andorra, and vice versa.

–Do you already know the location



Victòria Alsina

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Generalitat

«The delegation will also be a platform for projects in Catalonia»

and the people who will work there?

–From now on, we will call a public competition to choose the person who will lead the delegation. As for the headquarters, it will be in Andorra la Vella, although we do not yet have the exact location and, from there, we will set up a work team that

will be hired from the same delegation, with Andorran employment contracts. That is why we will establish ourselves as an Andorran legal entity, and we are now working on this with the Government of Andorra itself to see what is the best formula we can use for this purpose. So, on-

ce we have this legal personality, we will rent the space in Andorra la Vella and hire the rest of the team before the end of this year.

–What profile of people will they need?

–Our base team with which we cre-

ate any delegation of the Generalitat abroad is a delegate, who heads, leads and is the most responsible, then there is a technician in charge of institutional relations, a communication technician with citizens, businesses and the media, and an administrative support person. From there, delegations grow and increase staff depending on the projects that arise. In this case, our idea is to grow and hire a larger team in the future.

–With this delegation and the regular meetings, it is clear that his government has the political will to strengthen relations with Andorra ...

–I am constantly calling the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Andorra, Maria Ubach, and therefore the communication is constant.

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«We have concluded that Andorra can capitalize on all the Catalan experience in the application of the law of transparency»

«Apart from the delegate, we will hire an institutional relations technician, a communication technician and an administrative technician»

–Why did you decide to make this bet?

–Because we understand the links we have with Andorra, not only commercial, but also cultural, historical, natural heritage and shared work spaces such as the Pyrenees Working Community, and the importance of improving sectoral agreements, such as in fire prevention, mental health, forensic medicine, waste management, road and rail transport, high performance sports or open government are priority areas. Apart from this, cooperation in the promotion of Catalan at an international level is also a priority, as well as improving the relationship between the Institute and the Ramon Llull Foundation.

–Does the mayor of La Seu d'Urgell have a role to play in relations between Catalonia and Andorra?

–No, we are a delegation of the government of Catalonia, who is the one who settles in Andorra, it is a matter between governments.

–I was not referring to the specific delegation, but to the usual bilateral relations.

–We understand that it is from the government of Catalonia to the Government of Andorra, and this involves all Catalan municipalities, although it is true that the Cathedral is the gateway by proximity. All the towns in the Pyrenees that have an interest in strengthening relations with Andorra have a place. Our delegations abroad are at the service of any public or private entity, therefore at the service of all the municipalities of Catalonia, including La Seu, or any NGO, platform or Chamber of Commerce that wants to use the delegation.

–**On the situation of Catalan, what agreements can Catalonia, Andorra and other Catalan-speaking territories sign to give more prestige to the language? What role can Andorra, in the hands of Catalonia, play in improving the situation of Catalan?**

–To begin with, Andorra has the resources of any state; therefore, the Principality can use Catalan at the UN, it can promote international treaties that are in our language and, in the framework of negotiations with the European Union, the agreement involves translating the EU legal compendium in Catalan, and in this we offered resources to the Andorran Government in case they needed them to be able to make these translations, since we are interested in the European legislation being officially translated into Catalan. Therefore, there are many spaces and the agenda that we addressed in February in the bilateral meeting was ambitious, in the sense of exploring everything we can do and collaborate.

–**Recently, the Generalitat has reached agreements with the Balearic government in linguistic matters, also this agreement with Andorra that you tell us. Wouldn't it be more convenient to reach agreements with all the governments involved to be stronger, including the Valencian one?**

–We want to be part of any agreement between the Balearic Islands or Valencia for the protection of Catalan at the international level. In fact, the Ramon Llull Institute itself collaborates very closely with the Balearic and Valencian governments, and this is part of the same logic.

–**Do you need a strong boost from the Ramon Llull highschool?**

–I think there is room for the high



«We offered resources to the Andorran Government to translate the EU legal compendium into Catalan in the framework of the association agreement»

«Catalonia understands that Andorra is a natural partner for any project that puts the Pyrenees in the world, as is the case of the Olympics»

school and the foundation to expand the projects and areas of collaboration, and the delegation will also be a tool to facilitate the workforce and the institutional channel for this to flow.

–**Do you think that Andorra could do more for the language when it maintains bilateral relations with Spain and France?**

–We believe that Andorra has the resources that a state has for the protection of its own language. Therefore, in any initiative that we can work together we will be there and, if necessary, as I said, contributing financial resources to translate certain legal texts or international treaties. Everything to do with language is vital to us.

–**There are often tensions between Andorra and Catalonia, some of which are difficult to perceive from Catalonia, for example on the subject of the Olympic Games or during the pandemic when the border was closed. Is there work to be done to weave this misunderstanding?**

–The government of Catalonia understands that Andorra as a country is a natural and fundamental partner for any project that puts the Pyrenees in the world, as is the case



► Victòria Alsina, in a room of the Palau de la Generalitat, working on her laptop.

of the Winter Olympics, with a natural and cultural heritage that is part of a set that it is important to work it from the collaboration, beyond the administrative divisions. Apart from that, we have all learned a lot from the covid experience, including the importance of regularly arranging cross-border relations in all its dimensions. So I think the delegation will be a good space. In this sense, remember that the borders were also closed in Catalonia, between municipalities, between counties, with night curfews. And the closure of borders was not exclusive to Andorra, but general.

–**The candidacy for the Winter Olympics does not currently have the support of Aragon. Wouldn't it be better to change partners and opt for Andorra's participation?**

–The government of Catalonia believes in the project. On the other

hand, we have called a consultation that will take place on July 24th because we want the citizens of the Pyrenees to decide whether or not to finally apply. Therefore, we will have to wait until July 24th to confirm the submission of this application. My government also said it was satisfied with the agreement reached with the Spanish Olympic Committee (COE).

–**Do you think that there is any possibility that Andorra could be part of it beyond ceding the hotel infrastructure?**

–I believe that a project of this magnitude, which wants to put the Pyrenees in the world, must have the expertise of the political and sports authorities of Andorra.

–**Hosting competition events in the snowfields?**

–This will already be studied, but it

must have Andorra, because it is by the same definition and the objectives of the project that it must be like this. It is not possible to carry out a project that values the Pyrenees that does not include a collaboration between the heritage that Andorra and Catalonia share.

–**Since you referred to the July 24th consultation, will residents in Andorra in the affected counties be able to vote?**

–If they are registered in their municipalities of origin of the counties that will be consulted, they will be able to vote in person, so they will have to travel to the municipality where they are registered.

–**Continuing with the Catalan residents abroad, there is the problem from the difficulties of being able to vote when there are elections. How is this topic?**

–Unfortunately, there is a part that does not depend on us, because the two elements that make it more difficult to vote abroad are the requested vote and, on the other hand, the impossibility of enabling telematic voting. These two things depend on Spanish electoral law. That being the case, we have pushed for the elimination of the requested vote and for the incorporation of the telematic vote, but this does not depend, unfortunately, on the government of the Generalitat or the parliament of Catalonia. In this context, what we will do is a bill to modernize the electoral system so that part of the voting process is telematic, but we cannot do anything in the main hurdle, which is the requested vote.

–**Finally, in terms of communication infrastructures, do you think that La Seu airport is a good example of cross-border cooperation? Do you think that communications between Andorra and La Seu need to be improved by train or cable transport?**

–We make a very positive assessment of La Seu airport, as it is an important infrastructure for Catalonia and Andorra. It is a project that works and we understand that what Catalonia needs to have is a network of airports around the country that connect with the different needs. And in terms of infrastructure, at the bilateral summit in February it was decided to create a working group of the Department of Territory of the Generalitat and the Government of Andorra to address these issues in depth. ≡

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