

ARTUR MAS

PRESIDENT OF CIU

Photos by Xabier Miquel Laburu

Mr Mas is the leader of the Convergència i Unió Party and their candidate for President of the Catalan government. This year he will have his last opportunity to be elected President of Catalonia. Currently he is well positioned in the polls.

Nowadays the European project is in crisis. What Europe does the CiU party believe should be built in order to overcome the current stagnation?

A Europe of peoples and citizens, but at present these two Europes don't exist and only the Europe of states is visible. We want a Europe of nations, which means of its peoples and citizens.

What role should stateless nations such as Catalonia play?

As long as they don't have a state, what they need to do is find a place for themselves in the world. I'll give a couple of examples: Catalonia doesn't have its own state, but Catalan culture can nowadays project itself to the world in a way that's different from Castilian culture. We could project ourselves to the world more strongly and we don't do it well enough. We have to improve our capacity for exchange with the outside world.

Stateless nations find themselves sidelined in terms of the European decision-making process. Is there a way to alleviate this shortcoming?

They are most certainly sidelined, yes. Nearly all of them, with the exception of Flanders, are part of

very powerful states, such as Britain, France and Spain. Can these stateless nations find a place for themselves in the world? I believe that they can and that we need to boost their level of involvement to the maximum degree.

On a more general level, in this Europe in crisis, do you think that the public continue to see Europe as the solution to all our problems?

In spite of everything, Europe is more of a solution than a problem. We need to be part of Europe. Of course we need Europe to once again become the solution. Europe is undoubtedly in the midst of a crisis, but we must never lose sight of the collection of ideas, values, economic security and legitimacy that Europe has brought us as a whole.

Will we need to rethink Catalonia's role within the European Union if we don't become a state?

I believe that if we aren't a state it'll be almost impossible. If we aren't a state it's very hard to rethink our role within the EU. We have commercial, logistical, economic, cultural power and so on, but on its own this doesn't give us power within



European institutions. If we install suitable Catalans within the decision-making organisms of the European institutions we could exercise a greater influence. But this doesn't sit well with the Catalan character and we haven't done it very much. If anything we're too reserved.

Following the fiasco surrounding the new Statute, do you think that there is a way ahead in Catalonia's relations with the Spanish state? Does the famous 'tolerance' still exist?

In the good times, when there was a more or less democratic system the tolerance existed. Unfortunately, there's been repression most of the time since 1714. Catalonia wasn't strong enough to make Spain into a plurinational state and although Spain has at times exercised its strength with great brutality it hasn't been strong enough to put an end to the Catalan issue. Catalanism has shown itself to be

naive, both on the right and left, in thinking that it could change Spain. Even if we had our own state we would have to conclude that our own independence would be limited.

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Based on people's attitudes, do you believe that Spain wants to eliminate any Catalan national aspirations?

They have never been interested in Catalan culture and our difference annoys them. At various points in time there have been clear attempts to eliminate our culture and our institutions. The relationship has never been perfect and it is going through an especially difficult period at the moment.



You have made it clear that CiU's electoral manifesto does not include independence. So what exactly is your commitment to the right to decide?

I never said that independence will never be part of our programme. At the moment, independence won't be included in our manifesto. That battle should only be fought in order to win it. I don't want to lead the country in defeat. Keeping in mind our mutual 'tolerance' of Spain has to come to an end, Catalonia as a nation has every right to decide its own national future: that's what

the right to decide is all about. In order that it doesn't fail, I see that the right to decide should be applied progressively. As social majorities grow and become consolidated we will advance in terms of the right to decide.

Do you feel disappointed by everything that has emerged from the approval of the new Statute? Some commentators say that it's the price that had to be paid to make people understand that, 'there's no solution to Spain and the Catalan nation will never be well-received'?

Yes, I feel deeply disappointed because the Statute was a noble aspiration in order to renew a collaboration, on a more ambitious level: the relationship between Catalonia and Spain. While this basis is an advance in terms of the 1979 Statute it is no way the culmination of our aspirations. It was not the end of the journey and neither was the Statute that was approved by the Catalan Parliament. It was aborted by the state's apparatus.

While the objective wasn't in order to prove that nothing can be done about Spain, this may well have been the outcome. This wasn't the objective; it was a noble objective to move Catalonia and its self-government forward and at this moment in time this is being frustrated.

Do you favour strengthening the area of international relations in a future government led by the CiU Party?

As is the case of any country with ambitions and its own personality, I would like the government of Catalonia to have its own Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I'm not sure if we'll be able to do it

from the start due to budgetary limitations. Nevertheless, I'm certain that we in the government will project a first class foreign policy.

In your speeches you continually speak of 'rebuilding Catalonia following the political and economic crisis'. Does this imply that management policies will be in sympathy with national reconstruction?

This must be the case. We not only have to manage, we have to help Catalonia find its place in the world. We have to find Catalan culture's place in the world for example, as we have world class people in almost all fields. Not every country is able to say this. We have an excellent position in the Mediterranean which means that in the future, if we do everything right, we could be the capital of southern Europe. We have a capital like Barcelona with an international reputation that we need to maximise. Catalonia needs to have a wide vision, it has to be connected to the Valencian Country and the [Balearic] Islands and lead a project with a great potential and with enormous challenges. We have complementary economies and we have to take advantage of this.

Economic theory places a big emphasis on human capital as generating wealth in a society. What human capital does Catalonia possess? What are our great challenges as a country?

We have great professionals in almost every field. We have doctors at the highest European level. We are beginning to have research centres that we didn't have ten years ago that have attracted scientists from Catalonia and further afield. We have elite sportspeople, we have the best chefs in the world and therefore gastronomic creativity, we have great professionals in the world of graphic and industrial design, and we have great economists, writers, professionals in the arts, music and so on. The challenge, however, is to help them, to provide an impetus that adds to all this human capital. We are a small country, but we continue to produce great people.



Do you support the idea of building synergies in the field of international relations?

Yes, of course. As I mentioned earlier, in this sense we have important assets as well as great ambassadors. We have an organisation like *Barça* [Barcelona FC] that is internationally well-known. No other country in the world of a similar size excels to the extent that Catalonia does. This gives our country a lot of strength and if you add to this a government of similar standing to the aforementioned, then we could go a long way.

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I wonder whether in reality we don't have a broader problem in terms of a lack of political leadership and a lack of ambition when facing Europe's common challenges.

Nowadays, leadership in Europe is weak, but we have the European Union's experience which should help us to find the way. If we add the fact that nowadays the states largely decide the EU's policies it is clear that there is not much of a role for a European leadership.