

JOAN PUIGCERCÓS

PRESIDENT OF ERC

Photos by Xabier Miquel Laburu

Mr Puigcercós is the current president of the Esquerra Republicana Party. In the elections scheduled for next fall his party may once again play a key role in obtaining a majority in the Catalan Parliament.

As someone who is well aware of the European reality, do you believe we are witnessing changes in European morphology?

It's happening by default. The states' greed in holding onto and even increasing their power has led citizens of European stateless nations to increasingly see the need to create their own. The European project is being blocked by the states. In such a context it's logical that emerging states can't find a place to make their voice heard within the existing Europe and for this reason favour the establishment of a new arrangement. This is why the issue of internal enlargement will take centre stage in the political agenda.

What role do you see for Europe?

Europe needs to understand that it is no longer at the centre, it's on the margins. Europe is no longer the reserve of human rights, democracy, civil liberties and social protection. Its role is trembling. The economic situation breaks the moulds and the nerve centre has moved towards the East. As Europeans we face the challenge of reinventing ourselves economically and constructing an authentic political project.

In the future, Europe will have a knowledge role, with a democratic state model, a role as moderator between the US and China and defender of a sustainable, environmental model. Europe has to find new partners such as India, with its strong Anglo-Saxon tradition that is worth taking advantage of, and new emerging regional powers, like Brazil.

During the process of national emancipation, should we continue to operate on left-right lines, or should we evolve towards pro-independents and unionists?

We should prioritise the national axis, while recognising that, in the majority of cases, the secessionist movement comes from the left, such as in the case of the SNP in Scotland, in Catalonia and the Basque Country. The only exception is Flanders due to its unique internal circumstances.

What challenges do we Catalans face in the international arena?

We have to reach new markets. I have always emphasised the need for the internationalisation of the Catalan economy. We have the Maghreb very





close by and we have to become its gateway to Europe. Algeria has gas and its economy is growing. We have to do business there and we have to find business partners there who might want to do business here. The same is true of Morocco, Egypt and the rest of the region. We're already present, but not in sufficient numbers. And not to forget Asia, where aside from China, Korea is a country with an enormous potential. We could become its great partner in Europe, not only in southern Europe, and we could help them reach Latin America. We have to meet new challenges and bring ourselves closer to new realities, and do so while always striving for excellence.

Your party predicted the end of the autonomous state's journey with surprising foresight. Nevertheless, this hasn't prevented you from supporting a government with a clearly unionist option such as that of the Socialist Party. How does this fit in with the strategy of national liberation?

It works thanks to the inherent weaknesses of Catalan society. Catalan society is complex, partly thanks to the significant influxes of immigration which it has received. It's a society which we have made increasingly more cohesive, but the Catalan

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emancipation process has two difficulties: on one hand there is the internal division of Catalan society and on the other there is Catalan economic dependence on the Spanish economy. Once the country has overcome the autonomous process it



has to decide to move ahead and find allies with those formations that defend the Catalan national project.

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What route map does ERC propose in the medium and long term?

The next parliament should be one of change. The question won't be which government we should form, this is secondary; the question will be what to do when we're faced with the fact that the autonomous process has been exhausted. We need to be sufficiently agile to create synergies between the pro-independence parties and be able to oblige the undecided to take the final step. *Convergència* could be an ally even though its leadership is still not pro-independence. The key is whether we can provide security and confidence to those who see the federal relationship with Spain has been shown to be unviable. We are faced with a signifi-

cant qualitative change and we have to go where up to now the pro-independence movement has been unable to go. This is our great challenge.

And how will we get there?

There are various ways: they require the highest degree of civil cohesion, a reduction to a minimum of the discourse of opponents' to Catalonia, an increase in the degree of openness of the Catalan economy and the finding of common ground for taking the next step. For its part, Spain will do the rest as it is creating the conditions for a profound institutional crisis that cannot be resolved, similar to what happened in 1898. Many Catalans have given up on the Spanish project. The economic crisis has led us to a great institutional crisis.

What do you think about a possible summit of European leaders from different countries who are currently involved in national emancipation?

We would need to make a club with the understanding that sooner or later we would have to leave to become a state. Our combined experience is a resource that can't be underestimated or ignored. I think the idea is very interesting. We need to think how we can help each other and be clear on the fact that we are emerging states and that the condition of not having a state is not permanent.