

ROSER CLAVELL I SOLDEVILLA. CATALAN SECRETARY OF AFERS EXTERIORS

Catalonia wants its 'voice' to be heard

The Generalitat's Secretary of Afers Exteriors has the mission of making Catalonia achieve a more active role on the international stage

N. STOKES / J. WILSON

● With a degree in law and international relations from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, Clavell became the new Secretary of Foreign Affairs for the Generalitat this past June. Previously she had worked at the British consulate in Barcelona. Vice-president Josep-Lluís Carod-Rovira has announced that he will appoint Clavell as his number two. She talks with us about her strategy for the foreign policy of the Catalan government.

— The Secretary of Foreign Affairs website talks about establishing an ambitious foreign policy. Exactly how far does that ambition go?

Our ambition is to do what the new Estatut [the statute that defines Catalonia's autonomy to Spain] and jurisdiction allows us to the maximum. At the moment we are building a very solid foreign affairs structure with the goal of promoting Catalonia abroad, raising the awareness of what we do, who we are and what we can deliver. This means opening delegations abroad; our objective by the end of 2008 is to have opened three delegations— one in Paris, one in Berlin as well as one in New York.

—Why these three?

Well, Paris because France is our neighbour with whom we have very important relations. Also in Paris there is UNESCO,

and we want to carry out some lobbying there.

Catalonia wants to be seen not only as an observer, but as a voice. In New York, there is the United Nations. To fight against poverty we have signed an agreement with an agency with the UN to support the Declaration of the Millennium and we already have an office here in Barcelona to aid and develop Catalonia as an international actor against poverty.

And of course Germany is important because we have very important economic activity in Germany. Also it is very near the emerging Eastern countries, so it very important to have a presence there.

—And London?

Our relations with the United Kingdom are very important. We already have agreements with Scotland and Wales. But just because we have relationships with these countries doesn't mean that those are the only ones. The UK will come, but of course we have to prioritize. We are looking at the UK as well as Morocco and Portugal for future delegations.

"This is the moment for the stateless nations of Europe"

—You also mention on the Department's website that you want to make Catalonia an international "actor of first order". What does this mean exactly?

When you go abroad and say I'm Catalan, you usually have to say "I'm from Barcelona" because there is not enough



Roser Clavell, Secretary of Afers Exteriors/ Afers exteriors

knowledge about Catalonia, about who we are and what we do and what we can provide on the international stage. So one of our main objectives is to do that through our delegations.

—In practice, how do you achieve that?

For example, I have just come from Jordan where we sat at a table with donor states who give aid to Palestinian refugees, and we were all there at the same level. The new Estatut gives us the possibility of being an international actor. International politics are no longer handled only by states. Now regions and local authorities can also act.

—You have mentioned the new Estatut a few times now. What does it provide you?

The new Estatut provide us with a legal umbrella to open delegations. But also we have jurisdiction to sign bilateral agreements with other states. For example, we are just now preparing an agreement with Andorra. Being able to deal with not only other regions but with other states as well positions us at the same level with other states.

—What about your relationship with Madrid? Isn't there a possibility of conflict?

We cooperate with Madrid and keep them informed, but what we can do on our own, we will do. Madrid is aware of what we can do and the legal framework allows us to do, we are in constant communication. I have to say that, although I have only been in my post for a five months, personally I have a very good relationship with the Exterior Ministry. In the sev-

eral occasions we have had to cooperate there has been no problem at all. For instance, at the donors' table in Jordan, Spain was right across the table from us and there was no problem at all. I believe that through information and explaining there is no reason to worry about possible conflicts.

—In the Catalan press there is always a lot of talk about what Catalonia can learn from places like Flanders and Scotland, but what can they learn from Catalonia?

What is interesting is to look at the level of jurisdiction that each one has and compare them. For example, Wales doesn't have the same as Scotland. Scotland is a mirror for us, and while it is true that in some aspects that Scotland has more autonomy than we do, in other aspects it actually has less.

But I think that as far as the relationship with the state, Catalonia can learn more from the UK than the other way around. The relationship that Scotland and Wales have with Westminster is based on years of democratic tradition that we are lacking here.

—At the moment it seems Belgium is falling apart, in Scotland there is a move to force a referendum on independence, do you think the moment has come that the stateless nations of Europe?

Absolutely. With globalization and the construction of the European Union in the making, this is the moment for the stateless nations of Europe. It is happening, and we want to join in.



Roser Clavell and Catalan vice-president Carod-Rovira/ EL PUNT