



WE INTERVIEW ...

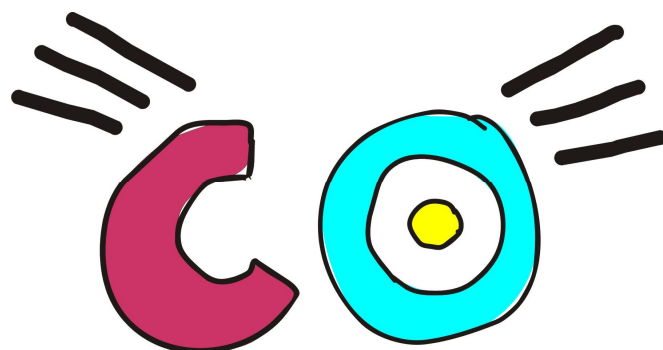
JESÚS VÁZQUEZ ABAD

- Minister of Education of the Galician Government -

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Education and Culture
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Jesús Vázquez Abad was born in Nuremberg (Germany) in 1967. He studied Economical and Business Sciences at the University of Santiago and got his doctor's degree at the University of Vigo.

He worked in the *Banco Gallego* for a year.

He was a Professor of the Spanish Open University (UNED) in Ourense and Dean of the Faculty of Business Sciences and Tourism in Ourense.

Work & Activities:

He is a deputy and national spokesman of the PP in all matters related to University.

He developed an interesting research and is the author of scientific works, books and monographs as well as several reports presented in conferences. He gave courses and seminars at several universities. He was a Member of Parliament in Madrid representing Pontevedra.

Since March 2009 he has been 'conselleiro' (Minister) responsible for Education.



JESÚS VÁZQUEZ ABAD: Minister of Education of the Galician Government

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We have read in your biography that you were born in Nuremberg on the 22nd of September, 1967. So, you are also German, aren't you? Did you obtain both citizenships?

No, I only have one nationality. I am an emigrants' child and at a certain time I had to choose. I am only Spanish.

Several ministers in Mr. Feijóo's government are around 40 years old. It seems that a new political generation has arrived. How do you feel about this within the cabinet?

Well, it's positive. We are all between 41 and 50. I think the youngest is the Public Works Minister, just a few months younger than I, and several Ministers are in their mid-forties. All of them, except two, are the same age as the President. It's true that it is a very young cabinet.

How did Mr. Feijoo persuade you to be part of his government in a Ministry that spends so much, and that you have to defend before the rest of the cabinet?

Ha, ha, ha. When you make a decision in your life you have to be there for the better and for the worse. A year earlier I had entered politics within a party and, when you do that, you are at the party's disposal. In this case the fact that I became part of the government was the President's personal decision and he didn't have to persuade me, I mean, I just had to comply with some rules. I was very happy as a member of the Spanish Parliament. At the time, I was the University National Spokesman and I had some other responsibilities, but then this opportunity arose.

You got your degree in Economics in Santiago and you did your PhD in Vigo. What was your

research about? Could you explain it to us in a way easy enough for us to understand?

The title of my research was very long, about three or four lines. Well, I work on Management. There are usually two models, the American model against the Japanese model. They are very different from each other. Apart from strategy, they also differ in timing because, whereas the American model and the European one, too, tend to short-term objectives, the Japanese model prefers long-term objectives. Enterprise conglomerates in Japan are very big. Let's think of Toyota, for example. Behind Toyota the main piece isn't the car industry, but Toyota Bank. There is always a financial institution behind a Japanese enterprise group, which is called a conglomerate here. I tried to make a comparative analysis between these two models within the car industry taking two main parameters, the operating leverage and the financial leverage, which are indicators of the risk that a company is running, and the strategic management model. I mean, I combined strategic management, operating leverage and financial leverage.

First, you worked in a bank and later as a teacher in the university. They are very different things, aren't they?

Totally. I remember exactly what the personnel manager told me when I called him to let him know that I was leaving the bank and was going to work at university, 'I know they are different worlds, therefore I can't offer you anything to make you stay in the bank, because the objectives are different'. I told him that, of course, I had already made up my mind.



Did your experience as the dean of the faculty of Business Studies of Ourense make you understand the educational system in a different way?

No. I think everybody should play different roles, assume different challenges, within the world we live in. It's true that when you are a teacher you don't see things in the same way as the management team. If we all had to go through the different phases, we would

understand our behaviour and our colleagues' behaviour in a different way, we would find an explanation to why people do this and that, and we would become much more flexible. I think that in this case everyone should be part of a management team because it would help to understand many of the decisions made. My experience as a dean taught me, not about the teaching-learning process (teaching is a very vocational job, I know), but to understand that sometimes you need to rationalize, to resolve on colleagues' conflicts, but they are also your colleagues and eventually you'll be a simple teacher again because the management teams change... And that is what makes you a more flexible, understanding and tolerant person in all the aspects.



It seems that you started your political career focused on economical issues and later, on the world of education. What is this change due to?

Well, I am a bachelor in Economics and Business Administration and then I got my PhD in Economics and Business Studies in Vigo. When I went into politics... Well, first, I am a very lively and active person, as all my friends know. When I was sent to Madrid I had to give priority to one committee –there are more than twenty committees in Parliament and they are made up of about 24 people (president, vice-president, secretary...). As a Member of Parliament you have a commitment and you have to take part in these committees. As I belong to the party with an absolute majority I only had to be in three committees. There are 350 representatives in Parliament and they have to divide into the different committees. But if you are the representative of a party which has only a few members, for example CIU, which has eight representatives, they have to be part of the 28 committees and therefore, each of them must attend many more meetings. They asked me to choose three and I chose Economy, Industry and Education. But then a surprise turned up. University changed from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Science and Innovation and then, the chief spokesperson of my party asked me to be the University National Spokesman because I was working in the University and I knew that field quite well, although you never know a hundred per cent. Everything was very fresh in my mind because a couple of weeks earlier I was still the Dean and teaching at University at a moment of conversion in which the Spanish university is adapting to the European High Education Space. So I knew about it.

Therefore when the Chief spokesperson told me she wanted me to be the university representative I agreed and she appointed me. And a year later our party won the elections in Galicia and the Galician president called me to be part of his cabinet in Santiago.



You have a very active biography. You have done many things in a short period of time, where do you get so much energy?

I think it's my character. I am a person who likes getting into 'trouble', doing things. I like being active and I hate being idle. I think 24 hours a day is enough time to harmonize family life, friends and work. Except when you go into politics, because then one part is weakened, family life and friends. Then you realize that you don't have enough time, but anyway, in 24 hours you can do a lot of things.

Xesús Vázquez Abad has Facebook, and he supports the EPP (European People's Party) and one of his favourite products is Vizcaya curtains. We are amazed, what are all those things?

Well, the first one is a university institution. You are living in the age of social networks, such as Twenty or Facebook. So nobody better than you to know that lot of people from different fields can join you. Luis Vizcaya is an acquaintance from Ourense who has got a company. In politics, sometimes, we use Facebook as an instrument because it allows you, for example, to send a mail in a minute to thousands of people. It's an instrument which allows you to be in touch with institutions and companies of different kinds which



share something with you, even critics. In my web page in Facebook there are people who belong to other political parties and trade unions and they are very critical of my actions. But, by sharing mails and opinions, you can get ideas and suggestions. I mean, within my Facebook group of friends are European institutions, (some of them are part of my political party), companies whose owners are acquaintances and use Facebook as a marketing tool, and then there are, obviously, people you don't know, but you have something in common with, or you share political ideas with. And some people join your web to criticise you or what you do. But that's OK.



Is it possible to admire both Mariano Rajoy and Esperanza Aguirre as you have written in your Facebook?

Yes, definitely. I can even admire people from a different ideology. I do. It's perfectly compatible. Then, at a particular moment you may agree with one more than with the other in their model or their behaviour. I like how the national president of my party, Mariano Rajoy, behaves. I think he is a man of his word, very calm and relaxed. And I like that. He doesn't get irritated or overexcited easily. But I insist that I like people from different ideologies. Even my partner, you know, doesn't share my same political ideas and that's not a problem.

It was a surprise for us that you decided to give us some of your valuable time for our interview, something we really appreciate. Do you understand politics as a service to citizens which demands being close to them?

Definitely. It may sound as if I were praising myself, but actually I am thinking about what my president told me the very first day, 'Here you must work 26 hours a day, eight days a week'. And this is our rule and we work on Saturday and Sunday. I understand politics as a service and there can't be service without a daily contact. In a few minutes, after this interview, I am having lunch with old university mates at the Business Administration Faculty here in Santiago. And it's good that people see

you as a close person, especially at this moment when public-opinion polls by CIS (Sociological Investigation Centre) say that the third problem in Spain is politicians. It is high time politicians themselves did something about it. I don't agree with this opinion. I think that, despite the political colour, politicians work for citizens and they all fight for the same thing. So, being close to people is good. And we are normal people and we have feelings, too, you know.

Part of your job involves attending the media. What is your relationship with the press like?

I usually have a very good relationship with everybody. But if you are asking me if I have enemies, I suppose I do, as everyone else does. If you ask me if I make enemies on purpose, I'll tell you I don't. That is the worst thing you can do in your life, trying to have enemies. My relation with the press is good. And so is my relation with the other political parties which are now in the opposition. My personal relationship with the representatives of the Socialist Party and from the Galician Nationalist Bloc who work in the Education field is good, it's quite normal, although then we'll probably have different objectives. And journalists, sometimes, work under certain conditions and certain political ideas and a particular newspaper. The same headline can have different approaches. They can say that you are doing something good, and others can say that it's bad. But at a personal level my relationship with the press is good.

Some Teachers' Unions say that your Department increased the budget for private schools at the expense of the reduction in the budget for public education. Which are your strategic lines for Galicia?

Well, I'd like to say that it is not true, it is completely false. By law public education is compatible with 'private education financed with public money'. In relation to the first statement, it's impossible that we had increased the budget for private schools because school agreements are renovated every four years, and that means that during those four years we have a fixed amount of money. So, we just spent the money which had been assigned by the previous government. And sometimes some of these 'half-private half-public schools' close down or they reduce the number of classes and you can spend that money on another school. But the final amount of money is always the same. And the Treasury Department wouldn't let me do any changes. If you want to change the amount of money, you need a new order. But some things can be modified. For example, sometimes the number of students decreases



considerably in a rural school because of the aged population whereas in another one it gets bigger and bigger. So, once again I insist that the statement is false.

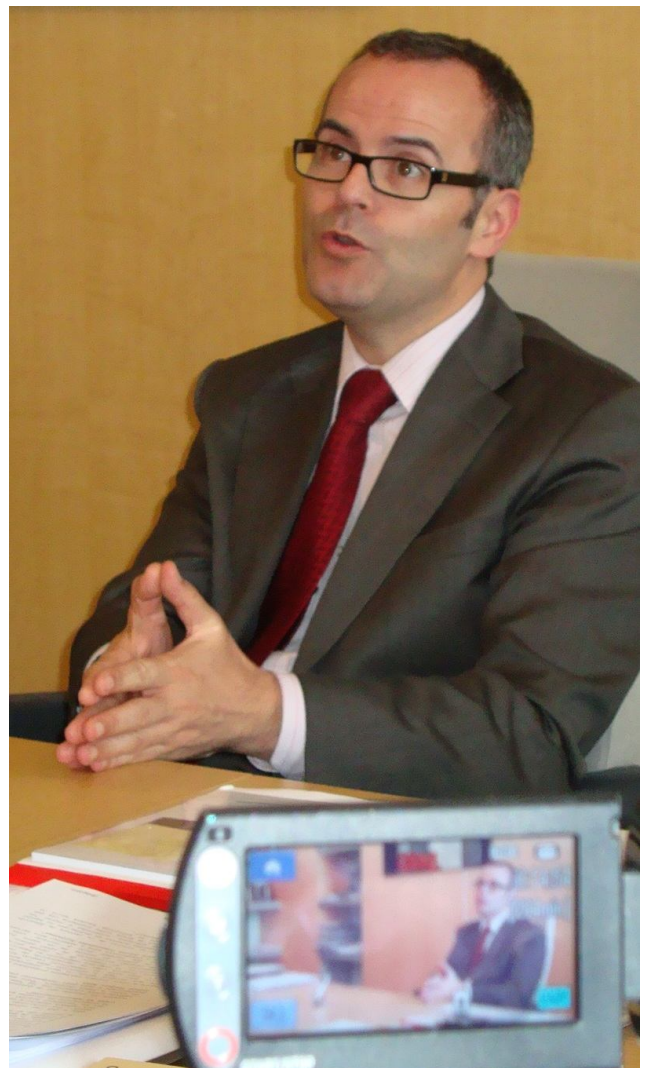


Then there are two central themes I'd like to work on. First, I want you to be able to speak a third or a fourth language. And in the second place, I want to introduce ICT in a cross-curricular way. I don't want ICT to be considered another school subject, but to use ICT in all school subjects in such a way that, in a near future, our schools will be digital centres where every student will have a computer in the classroom and every teacher will have a more powerful one, and there will be smart boards, and wireless local area network (WLAN) technology, and a very big computer here, in the central area, with contents and programmes which teachers, students and parents can use. I think that, by using these two elements, students can get better results and find learning more motivating and there will be less early school leavers. On the other hand, teachers will have tools which will allow them to teach in a more personal and individualized way. There are some objectives we would like to fulfil, but they are not only my personal objectives, they are general aims. Now that we are talking about a possible National Agreement on Education and we are thinking of the year 2020. By that time we should concur with the rest of Europe at least in problems such as early school leaving and school failure. But there are challenges like vocational education, foreign language learning or ICT teaching that we must face.

The Galician Language Decree is a draft at the moment. Do you think that it will suffer many changes during the parliamentary proceedings?

Well, at this moment it's already at the Consultative Board. We have worked with the firm conviction and the firm responsibility that we have to go back to a situation where, first, a good command of the two co-official languages is guaranteed, and then try to take measures to strengthen education in order to promote its use. In

the last general students' evaluation carried out in Galicia in October, I think, the results showed that our students have a better competence in Languages than in Maths. And the competence in Spanish and Galician was quite similar. Besides, there is a General Secretariat which works trying to promote the use of the language, so that people speak that language, especially in certain areas and in certain fields. We understand that the Decree came up under certain rules and then it has been modulated. It has been a long way since that first parents' survey was carried out as a starting point and we think that there is not much left to be modified. Before the Decree was sent to the Consultative Board, various institutions were consulted, which lasted over a month. Then, after the meeting with the Teachers' Unions, some changes, suggested by one of the Unions, were made. Later, the Permanent Committee on School Board in Galicia voted for the complete withdrawal of the Decree and, so, their formulations couldn't be discussed, however, eight or nine of them, (out of seventeen or eighteen), were incorporated. And after all this, it was sent to the Consultative Board, where it currently is.



Some groups accuse your Department of taking language measures that will cause conflicts among the speakers. How do you see the future of the coexistence of the two languages?



Exactly the same as we are seeing it just now. In my particular case, as the 'conselleiro' (Galician minister), I see it as I have always seen it during my forty-two years. I understand that there is no reason for a conflict. In education there must be an obligation, in the sense that students have to acquire skills in both languages. I think that this Decree shouldn't create more conflict than the previous decrees generated, in 1983, 1995, and even less than the conflict caused by the decree in 2007, although many people may not agree with me.

It is also said that in the last elections your political party took advantage of the language prejudices that our society still suffers just to get more votes. Do you think that our language is a heritage that must be protected?

Nobody doubts it. But one thing is to promote and to protect the Galician language, and another thing is that if you ask me if I am convinced that the previous decree caused rejection in some children and some families, I can prove that some people, who had always spoken Galician, now speak Spanish as a way of showing their rejection to that decree. So, I don't think we took advantage of anything, but there was a very important current, which is quantified in different ways, and we are aware that we got votes from people who usually don't vote our Party, but we had a compromise and an election program. Nobody can accuse us of cheating. They can disagree with our ideas, but our electoral project was discussed and criticised before the elections and, even so, it had the support of most of the society, because we won the elections by an absolute majority. There is a sign of identity, which is the Galician language, but it is also

true that there are two co-official languages and our Constitution protects the rights of all Spanish people, and as Galician people we are also part of a State which is Spain, and so there are some citizens' rights which must be protected. Therefore, what we are only trying to do is to comply with that rule, but being aware that our commitment, and mine as a 'minister', is to achieve a turning point. If in a few years' time, because results in education are never a short-term question, if in eight years' time, for example, when I am not longer the 'minister', I am told that there is a turning point and our teenagers, mainly, speak Galician again, I would be really satisfied. I don't doubt that the former government had the same interest, but I think they caused the opposite effect, and you can never govern against a society. Whether you share people's ideas or not, you can't carry out a project, not only a linguistic one, even knowing that it can work in 20, 40, or 60 years, if society is against it.

Doesn't the direct opposition of the Galician cultural institutions to your proposal of the Multilingual Decree make you doubt about the appropriateness of your language policy?

No. However, we must discern. When you say cultural institutions, what do you mean? We must discern, because sometimes there are attempts to politicize certain cultural institutions. The Galician Culture Council in its latest statements showed a certain approach, saying that some issues they had referred to had been modified. It is very difficult for an entire



society to agree on anything. But there are a lot of institutions, cultural and non cultural, which are sending mails and letters in favour of this Decree. I could mention a lot of educational organizations, business organizations and socio cultural organizations. I am looking forward to being asked in Parliament and being allowed to say the names of all the institutions and people who support this Decree. There will always be people, from one side or the other, who won't be happy. But we must govern. And this is part of the job we are paid for.

If a person has the right to choose one language, but in practice he only knows one, does he really have language freedom?



Let's see. The right to choose is in our Constitution. Currently, if a student wanted to speak Spanish at school, except in some subjects, he would have the right to do it, because individual right is protected by the Constitution. Collective right is another thing. But if someone in particular wants to speak Galician or Spanish in a non linguistic subject, he can do it, but at a particular level. A different thing is separation due to language. In Cataluña, Valencia and the Basque Country they have a separate model because they have that right in the Constitution.

Students are sponges and play mimetic behaviour of teachers. If the teacher speaks Galician, students will eventually speak Galician. Students do what teachers say, not what they impose, in any sense. On the other hand, the law requires that children must learn how to read and write in their mother tongue. That's the law. And that happens when they are four or five years old. In your parents' time it used to be at the age of six or seven. So when children start Primary education a second co-official language is introduced, and even a third one, a foreign language. When students come from a Galician speaking area where their parents and grandparents speak Galician and they start primary at the age of six, can the teacher talk to them in Spanish the very first day? I don't think so. The same right have those students who come from a Spanish speaking environment on the very first day of school and the teacher speaks Galician. I don't think it is a good idea to impose Galician language from the very beginning. They need guidelines and flexible ways so that they can have a good command of that language by the end of that educational stage. That competence must be guaranteed because there will be an evaluation test at the end of the stage. We are so sure that the skills will be acquired that we include that test. If I wasn't sure, I wouldn't include it because I would fall into my own trap. We think that flexible methods are good to eliminate conflicts which may not exist in your school or in many schools, but there were in some others. And we must try, with total neutrality,

to avoid that disagreement showed by some families, some teachers, (some teachers accused others due to linguistic reasons)...All these things must disappear. I am a teacher, a government employee. I have to obey the rules and the law. It's our obligation. We have to work in such a way that you can have a better future. We must convey our knowledge, our values of coexistence, of respect, of solidarity, of looking after people and nature...and far from politics. Education can be ideology, but not politics.

What does Linguistic Normalization gain by moving from the Department of Presidency to the Department of Education?

Well, I think it's purely a political decision. The General Secretariat of Linguistic Policy must be a cross-sectional area and so it could be under the Department of Presidency or under the Civil Service Department or any other Department. But this government considered that it should be under the Department of Education. It would be the same if it were under another Department because it has to carry out cross-sectional policies. We work with the economic and the productive sectors. We work with companies trying to convince them to make their web pages and their labelling in Galician language; we work with the Press in order to make the use of the Galician language



something normal in their work. At this moment we are organizing courses for the State Security Forces so that the agents who are sent here can learn the language. We are also working on specialized dictionaries for magistrates, for doctors...It could be under any Department. But it is true that it is very important for education and for that reason it was moved. But I insist that its work includes everything. They also work with the Church in order to promote the use of Galician language in this field. It could also be under the Culture Department. It is not a question of gaining or losing, but due to particular circumstances we decided that the Education Department was the best place.



What kind of obligation does the Department of Education have with the General Language Linguistic Normalization Act passed by the Galician Parliament?

I would say, 'a lot'. Only in the educational field we are conducting more than thirty measures of the Linguistic Normalization. If I take into account all the other areas we have been talking about in the previous question, it will mean we are implementing more than a hundred measures in relation to that Linguistic Normalization. It is true that there are still a lot of issues that must be implemented and in some cases step by step, very slowly, in order not to create conflict and rejection by part of the population.

Apart from reinforcing the English language in the curriculum, what other measures will be taken to improve communication among European citizens?

That's funny! Why do I say that? Well, of course this interview must have been prepared some days ago, but I say it is funny because the European Committee for Education and Culture from Brussels arrived here yesterday and we had a long meeting. There were representatives of Spain, also from Galicia, because one of them was from Pontevedra, and other European countries. And we were talking about all these things!

One of the topics discussed was encouraging mobility of ESO students and a bigger effort is needed to try to generalize the projects that already exist, like the Erasmus at University. I think students' mobility is a very good project. When students travel they learn to be more tolerant, to respect others, to coexist, to care, to understand and therefore never prejudge their mates. We also talked about other European values and about promoting Erasmus Mundi with South American countries. There are a lot of Galician people who live there and it would be important if this old continent remained as the cradle of knowledge as it has always been. If people from underdeveloped countries come here, that is an investment, because when they go back home, well-prepared, they can help to make a more just world by making their countries more democratic, more supportive and more understanding.

It is well-known that people of our age show a great interest in travelling abroad. Do you think that we have enough institutional support?

No, there is not enough institutional support. There should be much more, obviously. We need to make a much bigger effort, but we are going through a very hard economical situation. We are really far from what it would be considered a good support to families. There are students who can't get the grants for summer courses because there are limits because of their incomes and, with only their parents' salary, they can't afford spending a month abroad. Other criteria should be taken into account, such as the student's capacity or interest. We should invest more in education and in mobility.



Have students' grants for language immersion abroad been reduced due to the global economical crisis?



Yes, they have been reduced because of the budget cuts from Europe and from Spain. We are in a very hard economical situation. We may think that the crisis only affects families, but the Administration also has problems. When the economy has problems, we are all affected; if there is a lot of unemployment, the government pays the consequences. For the first time in Galicia since we are an Autonomous Community, budgets have fallen, for the first time the State has cut ten or twelve per cent of the budget sent to Galicia and the European Union has cut about seven per cent. That means very serious cuts. However, we are making a big effort and there will be students, for the first time, taking part in new activities. For example, a small group of students will spend a month in Britain and Canada in September and they will share all aspects of life and the educational system there. They will live with a native family; they will attend a local school with local students. That's an activity which is pioneer. On the other hand, we decided to remove some



scholarships because the final results weren't as good as expected. We are trying to do almost the same, but

with much less money. Some activities which used to be carried out outside Galicia, will now take place here at a lower cost.

You are in favour of immersion programmes in foreign languages. Why not in the Galician language?

Because society has rejected it. Because society has said no. And society decides. And if we are wrong, in three years' time society will decide, because there will be elections again. I think balance is the way to stick people together and not to create discrepancies. I am not saying it is not good. But if you accept immersion in Galician language, could you say no to immersion in Spanish? No, because everybody has rights. A model of separating students according to their language would be impossible to implement. But if we had assumed the model of the Basque Country or Cataluña where there is total or partial linguistic immersion, this controversy wouldn't probably have arisen. Each person would decide. But we had a model of coexistence which was



moving towards immersion in Galician language and society has rejected it. And parents also have something to say. And that is not only my opinion. A lot of people think in the same way. The model we are implementing here is being carried out in the Community of Valencia. And in the Community of the Basque Country forty multilingual schools are about to open this year. It's true that they didn't do the survey. And their model includes 20% in Basque language, 20% in Spanish, 20% in English and the other 40% is up to the school to decide which language they want to increase. But we are more or less playing with the same variants. And I really think that rights must be the same for all citizens. And there are some laws we must comply with, the Linguistic Normalization Act from 1983, the Galician Statute of Autonomy and the Spanish Constitution. Of course we have to help those who want to speak Galician language in their daily life and so we must try to have press in Galician language, cinema in Galician language...so that they can do what they want. But when one part of the society rejects a model, because they think that they are not offered the same opportunity, that's when confrontation starts.

Can you disclose some new European projects we can benefit from, as students?

Not at a European level. We are working on a very interesting Library Plan we are going to implement. We are also working on a plan against early school leaving which needs collaboration from other administrations and other governmental departments because all society must be involved. And we are working on a multilingual plan which is very attractive for the educational community and which we have called Foreign Language Promotion Plan.



Our school is taking part in a Comenius project together with Lithuania and Poland and it is turning out to be much better than we had expected. How is your Department involved in this kind of projects?

We were talking about this yesterday in the European Committee Meeting. We observed the good results of the Comenius projects and we think that they should be promoted. The same thing happens with the well-known Erasmus projects. But all the grants aren't enough. And there are great differences in the various autonomous communities in relation to the direct help that families get. For many families paying for some of the expenses abroad is a handicap. You are lucky for having this Comenius Project.

Do you think that the educational system should be an instrument of European integration?

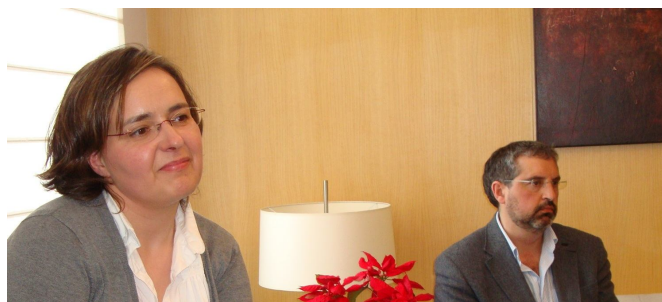
Yes, yes. The educational system must be part of the social cohesion, but inside and outside our area of influence. If we understand education as a body of knowledge and values, with the integration of multiculturalism the frontiers which still exist and cause clashes will tend to disappear. It is really important that people travel, see, share, and get to know different people and cultures because this knowledge will bring tolerance, and we'll understand why some people behave in a different way or wear different clothes.

Has Jesús Vázquez ever travelled to Poland or Lithuania?

I had the opportunity, but I didn't go. At university there are agreements with other countries and when I became the dean I had already travelled to other countries. At university there is even a person responsible for international relationships. As you know, I was born in Nuremberg, but I only lived there for nine months. I hadn't been there again and when I entered politics I had already agreed on an interchange with the University of Ansbach, in Bavaria, where Nuremberg is. So I had the opportunity. But university professors are not very fond of travelling abroad and sharing the educational systems, because when they do it they have to teach and give talks in English. They speak Spanish only on a few occasions. Sometimes there are vacancies for universities abroad and, incredibly, nobody goes. I also went to a university in Prague and I stayed there for a week, teaching.

Would you like to go to these countries?

I love travelling. I always say that travelling is the best university in the world. It teaches you to be a cordial person and to understand and to reason with people. And it means richness. I always tell my mum, as a sort of joke, that I don't understand why they brought me here when I was nine months old and they went back there. As all Galician emigrants, they went there having in mind the idea of coming back, because we feel very homesick abroad. If I had lived there for six or seven years, I don't know if my life would have changed considerably. But I could have had some knowledge of German, which I don't have this way. And that is impoverishing.



What previous ideas do you have about these countries?

I try not to have previous ideas. I try not to prejudice and not to have preconceptions about a country. Each country is different. They are two of these European countries which are taking big steps forward, decisive steps. They are in a similar situation to ours, but of course, with a lot of cultural and linguistic differences, with different traditions, folklore...They are trying to improve their welfare.

In which foreign languages can Jesús Vázquez keep a conversation?

I studied French, at school and at the French Alliance, but I can't speak it, because I forgot it. I can only speak English, and at a certain level. It would be presumptuous to say that I can speak Italian or Portuguese, just because we can, more or less, understand each other when we speak our own language. When I travel abroad or, like yesterday with the European Committee, I speak English.



Do you think you are the result of our educational system?

We are all the result of our past and our present. I've studied in state schools and I can remember the names of almost all my teachers, for the better or for the worse, but mostly for the better. I still remember Ms. Delfina, a retired teacher who, almost forty years ago, used to teach us the numbers and letters on a small slate and writing with old pieces of chalk. So, obviously we are the result of an educational system, and thanks to all those teachers we are where we are now. The world progresses due to education, to I+D (Investigation and Development)

It is said that Spanish people have big problems at learning English. What do you think we owe this limitation to?

I think that both in Galicia and in Spain very big mistakes were made and even mistakes in the educational planning. Learning languages has never been a priority for any government. And the fact that all films are dubbed, doesn't force us to make efforts with language. We never watch films in their original version. Things like that are impoverishing. We have the best dubbing industry, but because of that many of us suffer the consequences. It's curious that young people in Portugal have a much better training in English than we have. In Portugal films are not dubbed. There are a number of issues like tradition, lack of involvement of the various governments in the last thirty-five years, which didn't give priority to foreign language learning within the education policy.

One of the objectives of our European Project has to do with new technologies and information. Which are your priorities in this field?

We have a beautiful project, the Abalar project. Before the year 2013, we want it to be possible for 85,000 students (14,000 this year) to have a computer in their classrooms. We'd like to start in September with some software, because only hardware is not enough. We want students to enjoy this favourable atmosphere. They'll probably prefer these digital contents rather than the contents on paper. And for teachers it will mean a change in their teaching. They will have to make a small effort, although some steps have already been taken during the last years. They have to perceive this, not as a complication, but as a new facility which can help them to teach students individually in an easier way. On the other hand, families must also be aware that this represents a change. It is a very interesting model which needs involvement and for the next two years we'll spend most of our money on it. The computer won't belong to the students or to the families, but to the schools. That needs maintenance, and we are talking about more than a hundred thousand computers and smart boards in four years. ICTs will also help in the multilingual process.

If you could make a wish knowing that it would come true, what achievement would you like to obtain as a Minister?

It's easy. I'd like to have 0% of early school leaving. That would imply that three parts are involved. Students would be trained and, therefore, in a better position to find a job. Teachers would be really happy because their job had been carried out well. You know, there is no greater satisfaction for a teacher than to see that all his/her students succeed. And, of course, parents would be glad, too. But, obviously, that is very difficult. At this moment we are trying to go down to ten per cent in the year 2020. This is one of the objectives we have established in the General Agreement on Education nation-wide. I wish we could succeed. It would mean that Galicia, and Spain too, is moving towards Europe.





What would you like to be remembered for after your work in this Department?

I wouldn't like to be remembered. Ha, ha, ha. You get so much pressure when you are a minister that you miss privacy. I don't want to be misunderstood, but the day I cease as a minister I'd like to draw a curtain and feel that Jesús Vázquez Abad has never been a minister of Education. There is nothing wrong with it, and it doesn't mean I want to forget what I have or haven't done during this period. But it's hard to cope with the lack of privacy. You don't have a private life. Sometimes people approach you to congratulate you, sometimes to insult you. It's not easy. Rather than being remembered as a good person, I'd prefer to be seen as just, fair and balanced. Everything in life has a beginning and an end. I insist that when I leave this post, or politics, I'd like to consider that phase as part of my past and to live the present as a teacher and researcher at university or any other possible post I may have. It is as if you asked me how I'd like to be remembered by my students. Well, I don't think about it either. I'd like to have private life and not to be recognised when I am walking along the street.

Let us ask you the last question, as inexperienced interviewers, is there a question you would like to answer but nobody has asked you?

No. I've been asked about everything, about private things, very private things, about my opinion about other people, about the party in the opposition...ha, ha, ha...about everything. I don't think there is a topic I haven't been asked about. Sometimes I am amazed at the indiscreet and tactless questions I hear. But that's life for politicians. Of course, you don't always answer the kind of questions which refer to your privacy. I try not to mix my private and my public life. As to my political life I try to avoid speaking about other politicians.

