

WE INTERVIEW...



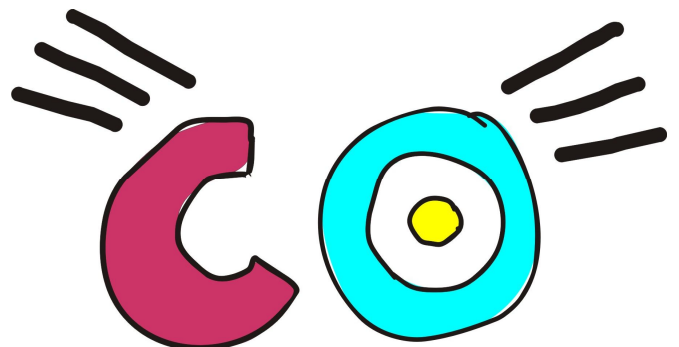
EMILIO PÉREZ TOURIÑO

- Former President of Galicia -

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Emilio Pérez Touriño was born in A Coruña on the 8th of August, 1948. He finished his doctoral degree in economics at the University of Santiago de Compostela. As a professor he developed an intense academic activity, teaching and publishing a lot of essays on economy. He completed a course of specialization at the University of Grenoble (France).

As a young man he lived the transition to democracy (1975–1982), after the dictatorship under Franco and he became a students' leader and a left wing political activist and even participated in the draft of the Galician Statute of Autonomy of 1981. He joined the cabinet of the minister Abel Caballero, a good friend of his, at the Spanish ministry for transportation, tourism and communications.

In 1997 he resigned from Congress in order to take part in the Galician elections in the list of the Socialist Party of Galicia -PSdeG.

In 2005 he ran for the presidency of Galicia and PSdeG got 25 seats, PP got 37 seats and BNG got 13 seats. Touriño, thanks to a coalition with the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), became president of the Xunta de Galicia.

Emilio Pérez Touriño was the former president of the Xunta de Galicia from August 2005 to March 2009 and he was the Secretary General of the Socialist Party of Galicia (PSdeG) from 1998 to March 4th 2009, when he resigned after having lost the presidency of the Xunta de Galicia. His political views are pro-Galician, federalist and social democratic. He is said to be moderate, calm and a great manager.



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Former President of Galicia

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How did you start in politics?

That was long ago, but understanding politics not like a professionalised activity but like an important and relevant activity in your life which implies a certain level of compromise with society where you want to get involved.



Most people from my generation started this same way. In the late sixties, when I was about your age, fifteen or sixteen, through Christian progressive movements which encourage solidarity and social justice, I approached a Catholic young students' organization. When I started college in Santiago during the school course 1967-68 we had been living under a dictatorship for a long time and it was the beginning of students' movements which were fighting for liberty, for democracy, for free Unions...The first free elections at Santiago University were possible thanks to our fight and I came here to study Business. It was the first year you could do that career here. At that time political parties were forbidden. During that first year at university I was chosen as the Business faculty's delegate and little by little I got into politics, and since then I became involved in students' movements first, then in teachers' fights for quality in education, steady posts, researching at university...From there I got into contact with underground political parties. I finished my career in 1972, we were the first graduates in Business in Santiago and I became a member of the Galician Communist Party, which at that time was one of the few stable organizations which was working for the change of regime, from a dictatorship to a full democracy.

What did the time you spent in the Galician Government mean for you?

My time in the 'Xunta de Galicia' was preceded by many years of work and compromise with my country. I can't forget all those years working in different social and cultural movements. At that time I was a university professor and I had already finished my doctoral thesis

on agriculture in Galicia. I mean, being at the 'Xunta de Galicia' and being responsible for the government, is the expression of a lot of work and constant compromise of a whole generation with their country and its needs, its past and with a project of future. Since 1998 I had assumed the responsibility of being the Secretary General of the Galician Socialist Party and so, I had been in the opposition for a long time and finally in 2005 we could set up a progressive government where I was the President. That meant a lot of things, it's difficult to say. First, a real passion because it was the highest responsibility with a country and its people in order to get a project we had worked on together off the ground and make a better Galicia, more modern, more just, more supportive, more balanced, respectful with its territory, its cultural identity and its language. We didn't want our country to be at the bottom of the league but to move forward fast to catch up with the more advanced countries in the European Union. In some things we succeeded, not in others, however, I remember those years, still quite recent, with extraordinary satisfaction and I'm proud of them. You assume a great responsibility and you are worried about each person in the country. And you also learn that you are not alone, that you do not depend on yourself but on your team, which is not just the 'conselleiros' (ministers) but all the people who work in the administration. Governments reflect the reality of a country at a certain time. You learn a lot of things and, of course, you go through difficult moments, too, extremely hard times. We happened to suffer those terrible fires in our first summer in the government. Unfortunately, some people died. There were also some natural disasters, rains and floods...really hard times for people. But that gets balanced with the very pleasant positive things that we started to do such as the changes in state education and public health, the protection of the coastline...Everything has its positive and negative side.

What did you like the most during that time?

Undoubtedly the contact with people, going out and taking part in different events, being near people's problems. But above all, my best memory is our great effort to improve education. I'm really convinced that the future of a country depends on its education. Education is the most important and powerful tool to acquire culture and live with freedom. It's also good for personal development and job promotion



and it helps to make all citizens equal. You can be born in a remote village or in the city centre, but if you have access to a good education, in a good state school, that gives you the chance to compete with the rest of citizens. That's why I think that everything we can do to improve education, schools, vocational training, teacher



training, languages learning and so on is essential. In Galicia, probably due to our historical circumstances, education was relatively ill-treated, not well-promoted enough. That compromise with education, for me, was what I was most interested in and, therefore, it's my best memory.

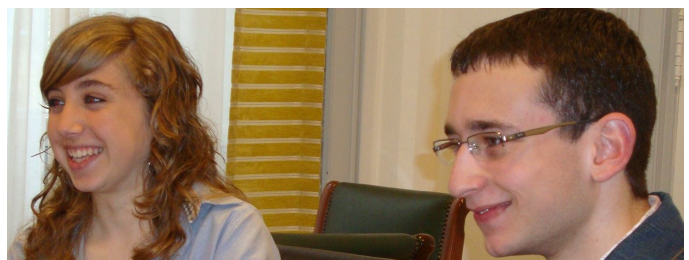
Would you make any changes from that period?

Probably a lot of things, because life is a learning process. I've always liked reflecting on what you have done. And now, when you think about it, you realise that you have probably made many mistakes and some things should have been done in a different way. Maybe we should have worked with people we didn't. We should have had more initiative in some measures and slowed some others down. I had to govern in coalition with another party. They are parties with a different political culture, with rules and a traditionally different political behaviour, with a different way of seeing the country and seeing life, and we shared a common project of country change and renovation. We had to coexist despite our differences, and that was a difficult daily exercise. From this is where I get more experience. A government in coalition, particularly in Galicia, won't probably be an exception, and maybe in the future it will take place again because in Galicia there are three big political parties, and unless one of them has a permanent absolute majority, they will be forced to unite if they want to govern as an alternative to the other party. And learning to coexist in a government is a real important exercise.

What were the greatest political and personal achievements when you were the President of the Government?

As I said before, education in Galicia was the poor relative. Let's imagine that the national budget is a cake, almost two thirds of the cake, more than 60%, go to education, health and social services. So, when we talk about a change in the education budget it means a lot of money. Well, for years and years, education, that big piece of the cake, didn't increase, but the cake did. The budget cake usually gets bigger year after year. Now we are in the middle of a crisis and we are in recession, but in prosperity the cake grows because there are means. But education didn't grow according to the cake's growth. During the four years I was the President, the education budget grew 25%, almost 30%, more than the general budget. We made a big effort in education. We started with the process of free textbooks. We promoted equality in education and in foreign language learning and we introduced new technologies in schools. We increased teachers' salary because Galician teachers were at the bottom of the pile. We did our utmost for education.

A second element was land protection. If we look at a country in the long term, in order to have a better capacity for the future, to compete, to have more productivity, to catch up with other countries' social welfare state, two things are essential. One is called the human capital in economy- education, knowledge, capacity of innovation- and the other is the physical and technological capital. The physical capital is the territory, the quality of life in this territory, town planning, infrastructures...We also made an important effort trying to improve the quality of life in the country. The



coastline in Galicia was suffering from an excess in construction that was out of all proportion. Our rivers and 'rias' are a prized value, a treasure we have to preserve and leave for future generations. We set up a law, known as the 500-metre law, in order to protect our coast. We took steps with the aquaculture plan in order to make sure that there was a public concession system and no aquaculture farms were set up in 'Natura 2000 network'. We made the spatial planning guideline, which was the key to protect the most prized ecological values in our ecosystems. We also tried to give a boost to public politics trying to reduce the waiting lists in public



hospitals. And in social services we started to establish a protection system for people who are dependent on others and it's true we had some problems because it absorbs a lot of financial resources. We also put big efforts in our economical policy trying to change the model. We didn't want Galicia to compete in low salaries, precarious work, with a lot of young people emigrating, but to change towards a different model where we could compete at the top creating innovation, supporting companies in their exporting capacity, creating added value and adding value to their products, creating and commercializing brand names because today we can't compete with emergent countries which use precarious jobs and salaries, typical of the third world. Today if we want to have a competitive future it must be based on education, innovation, capacity of creating value and generating brands to have a market. These are the main points of what we tried to do.

What was the main reason of the bipartite defeat?

The whole interview could be based on that question! I think there wasn't just one reason but a group of reasons altogether. Nowadays everybody agrees that the worst terms of the crisis in Spain were the last term of 1998 and the first term of 1999. That's true and the information about it is there. And what is also true is that the autonomous elections in Galicia took place in March 1999, just after six months of the worst

international crisis. At that moment we weren't probably fully aware of the historical moment we were living because you don't have a perspective, you don't know if six months later you'll be better or worse. Three months after the Galician elections the European elections were carried out and 'surprisingly' the opposition in Spain won those elections against the socialist party in power. In August that year I was with the Portuguese Prime Minister, José Sócrates, in Lisbon – he is a very good friend of mine- and elections in Portugal were about to take place. He told me that he was quite sure that he was going to lose the elections because of the crisis. He was convinced that winning was almost impossible. At that moment he had a large absolute majority in his government. Well, luckily he won the elections, but he lost the majority and he had to accept a coalition government. I mean, since then, all the opinion polls place the Popular Party, the opposition, over the ruling party. Now, from the distance, I'm sure that crisis affected us in a direct way. From that base, I think that there were two factors, first, the incapacity of the socialist party, and myself as the candidate, of transmitting the government's action. Somehow we couldn't transmit, connect, reach and mobilize our electorate to maintain the government and the change. Together with this I think there are two or three elements we must point out. On the one hand, the socialist campaign was designed to be very institutional, very presidential, like Obama's, of unity of the country against the crisis, with no direct attacks to the opposition, whereas the campaign of the opposition was intense, mobilizing, hard, discrediting, a campaign which succeeded in mobilizing their electorate. Our campaign was very soft and I think that was a decisive factor. Accusations of squandering money and the ill-use of money, repeated insistently in a context of crisis were hardly answered by us because we didn't want to use that tone, because we think that our country does not



deserve such a campaign. Later we saw it was a mistake, that it was the wrong campaign to mobilize people. On the other hand, in the last phase, in August 2008 - the elections were in March 2009 -the two forces of the coalition took their electoral competition to the heart of the government. Citizens started to sense that instead of a government there was a bi-government, and



against the opposition saying that Galicia needed a government, a president with authority, there were two forces fighting in the government. The coalition government offered an image of two parties fighting for the power and that led to indifference in most of the electorate. In any case, in Galicia since we have a democracy, since the early eighties, the right wing party, that is the Popular Party (PP), never got under 45% of the votes. During their best times with Manuel Fraga as President, they even reached 53%. The parties in the opposition, that is the Galician Socialist Party (PSdG) and the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG), together got the 47% of the votes when we won the elections. This was the political scene in Galicia. There was not a big difference in the number of votes. As a matter of fact, when we won the elections in 2005 we only had one representative more, and in the last elections in 2009 we lost by one representative, and there are 75 members in our Parliament. Today Galicia is living a peculiar situation because both parts got 47% of the votes, but because of our electoral system they won and got 1 representative more. We are very balanced. Years ago it was different. There used to be a big difference. Let's see what happens in the future.

Why did you decide to resign from being the spokesman of the PSdG (Galician Socialist Party)?

That question makes me smile because this is very recent and I still haven't said anything about it in public. Well, I think that, in a democracy, you must assume the responsibility for the results, either you win or you lose. For me it was obvious that thousands of Galician citizens had put all the responsibility for a change, for the first time, in an alternative government, different from the right wing. The right wing party is very strong in Galicia and we had to wait for more than fifteen years to see that a coalition had enough support from the electorate to form an alternative government. It was my responsibility as the president and we lost the opportunity and therefore someone, I thought it was me, had to assume the loss of that opportunity, the loss of the government, the loss of that project. I didn't want to provoke a crisis in the heart of the opposition

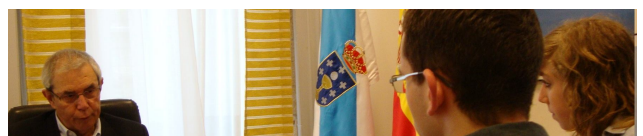
and my own party. I had to take a step backwards and assume the responsibility for the defeat and therefore facilitate the renovation of the socialist party. Although we lost the government, we didn't lose any representatives. I considered I should give way to another team.

Why did you leave politics for good?

I've been in politics for more than 25 years. I spent ten years in Madrid, working full-time as a member of Felipe González's governments, with three different ministers and three different governments and then, in the late nineties I came back to Galicia and assumed all the responsibility in the socialist party and finally I became the President of the 'Xunta de Galicia'. I'm convinced that generational renovation is essential. I consider my period in the political front line finished. On the other hand, when someone who has been the President takes that step backwards, he must let someone else go to the front line and assume the responsibility. I think it's good to keep this chain, good in a democratic way and healthy in a personal way. It's not easy to do it, however I am not leaving politics, what I am doing is leaving the front line, the responsibility for a post. For someone who has spent all his life in the public life, the *res publica*, I'll always be there, either writing, either thinking, either contributing...but always with a political key in my head and worried about the community, about Spain, about Galicia, about Europe, about the problems, about the future...But I insist, I've only decided to leave the front line.

What do you think about the current president of the Xunta de Galicia and his politics?

Well, it's quite obvious, but two months before the elections nobody thought that we were going to lose them. Núñez Feijóo carried out an extremely smear campaign and he promised the possible and the impossible, for example he said that he could solve the crisis in 45 days, he could create employment, etc. It was the kind of campaign you do when you know that you won't have to do it. There are two things we must bear in mind. First, Galicia is immersed in a big crisis and there is a lot of unemployment and everything he has promised is impossible to fulfil, some things even counterproductive, I think, the promise of reducing taxes, for example, because if you don't have money,



how can you reduce taxes?, and, as a matter of fact, he gave up the idea of reducing the income tax. On the other hand, he had to form a government very fast, something he hadn't planned because they probably weren't expecting to win the elections. This is a burden and it is conditioning the present time. What worries me

more is that a president must, above all, look for unity, he must integrate. The president's task is to join, to add, to strengthen his country, not to break, to confront and to divide it. And some of the things they are doing, especially with the language, are bringing



back the confrontation around the language, which is a vertebral element of union, cohesion and identity of a country and it is creating an internal confrontation and break, an unprecedented case. He is introducing political revenge, revising everything done by the previous government which means introducing elements of confrontation and division. That is a negative factor. What worries me is that Galicia can lose the opportunity to catch up with the most advanced countries in Europe, and that means investing in education, innovation, university...And his current lines of action go the opposite way. They spend less in education, in universities, in research and innovation, in spatial planning, etc. And I'm afraid he can bring Galicia to a standstill.

What do you think about the current Spanish president, Rodríguez Zapatero, and his politics?

I think that the fact that Rodríguez Zapatero, and the socialist party, govern in Madrid adds the differential element of betting on plurality, on diversity and on freedom in the broadest sense of the term, and betting on the fight for public politics, especially on equality, on social politics. He did it during the expansive phase of economy with important measures for the recognition of liberties and new citizens' rights and also in the social field with the *Law of Dependency*, in support of the job active policy, protecting those in a situation of vulnerability and exclusion, gender policy... That's the most relevant contribution. When the crisis explodes in 2008, priorities changed, but Zapatero tried to solve the crisis but safeguarding the social policy. He didn't want the cost of the crisis to fall on the weakest sectors. His greatest difficulty is the capacity of taking steps and giving answers to the big problems of the Spanish economy and society. Spain is different from the rest of European countries in one thing. When we have to tackle a crisis we destroy a lot

of employment and thousands of people are fired. And in times of expansion we create more jobs than the rest of the countries. Now there are more than four million people unemployed, a rate which is double than in Europe. Most of the problems come from the real estate boom which has been a characteristic of our country for more than fifteen years, that's to say easy money, low bank interests, a very profitable activity, that is building. But when this bubble bursts all those jobs disappear. And you know, in Spain building means the 16 % of our GDP whereas the average in the European countries is 7 or 8%. So all these people who lost their jobs must find another different job, and we have to re-qualify them. We have a big problem which we have never wanted to face. Our work market is dual. On the one side, there are people with a fixed post and well represented by Unions and, on the other side, thousands of citizens, especially young people and women who want to start working, had precarious jobs and bad contracts, and during the crisis they lost their jobs. So, some steps must be taken, the work market has to be reformed. And to do that, a Social Contract is needed. It's a sort of contract between those with a fixed job and those with an unstable job. We have to assume that because it means advantages for some and loss of some advantages for others. To balance this situation and manage that everybody has a stable job, we must find a break-even point. That's the political key of a work market reform. And this is something we must face.



What political and personal qualities would you mention about Rodríguez Zapatero?

He is a man who brings generational renovation, coolness and good disposition. Politics for him doesn't mean constant confrontation and sharpness. He is a relaxed man, both as a person and as a politician. It's easy to agree with him and he facilitates calmness and



political relations. That's a great value, the value of dialogue, the value of tolerance, the value of conciliation...I like this way of exerting political leadership, far from tension, and not considering opposition as a permanent fight against the government. His new good disposition and way of understanding politics is Zapatero's big contribution to Spanish political life.

From your point of view, are they carrying out an appropriate economical policy?

Partially, I've already answered to that question. When you go through a crisis you have to face structural reforms which are really essential. I've already mentioned the labour market reform and the introduction of new technologies and the capacity of production so that the Spanish economy can gain in productivity. We must also reform our financial system. The government must lead this process, but the opposition has to assume their part of responsibility, too. And we have another problem. All the countries, facing the crisis, acted in two different ways. First, they rescued the banks, because they went bankrupt. Obama did it in the USA, it was also done in Britain, and in Spain we have to make an effort in that direction. That is one line and the other is fiscal policy. Fiscal incentives are needed. Fiscal policies must complement private initiatives. But to do that, governments ask for credits and get into debts. It's impossible to overcome a crisis alone. A shared and mutually responsible effort is necessary. In Spain we lack this mutual effort because the opposition is carrying out a weakening policy, in the national government and in the different autonomous communities.

What do you think about the actions taken by the different forces involved in the Caixas's fusion?

I see that you have a clear idea of what it is important for Galician politics and society. Well, as you know, the 'Caixas' are very particular, very *sui generis*

institutions. They are like banks. They started thanks to all the Galician people's savings, which today are in 'Caixa Galicia' and 'Caixa Nova'. They are a mixture between a private bank and a public institution which protects them. The 'Xunta de Galicia' has to guide them by law. I think that Galician people have the right to have a big competitive Galician bank, a big 'Caixa', and that can be the result of a fusion of 'Caixa Galicia' and 'Caixa Nova'. I think that is a reasonable aspiration which should be boosted. Nobody should hinder it. This is what they are trying to do, with lots of difficulties. The 'Caixas' don't belong to a city. They don't belong to Vigo or A Coruña. That's false. Having a big solvent 'Caixa' would be good for Galicia and I think that not all the political forces and political leaders are up to the circumstances because they are trying to weaken the opponent. But the most important thing is the defence of the general interests of the country. Sometimes, although you are in the opposition, you can coincide with the government if that is good for Galicia. Nothing happens, it's quite the opposite. Some coincidences are very positive for the country. We tend to deny everything to the government when we are in the opposition, and when we are in the government we think that everybody must accept our proposals. That's a sin we all commit, but we must be aware of it and try to improve.

What steps would you take to mitigate the effects of the crisis?



Many different ones. As I told you before, we can't overcome a crisis alone. The crisis is global and we do not have an international coordination to solve the situation. If we don't learn that, we can have another similar one anytime in the future. It's a global crisis and it needs a global answer. Economy is globalized, finance is international and the financial world

isn't regularized. This crisis starts in the USA, out of the non-regularized bank system. So an essential task is to reform the international financial system. We need an international monetary fund which controls international finance. It doesn't exist. And then Europe, which doesn't have one only voice. We have a system with the same currency, but not a common fiscal policy. Each country has its budget. There is an asymmetry in the capacity of answering against the crisis. And this has proved to be a big fault which can put the existence itself of Europe at a risk. Think of what is happening to Greece. So there are many problems to be solved. And then Spain has its own problems, caused by ourselves, the destruction of

employment that we have to solve with the reform of the labour market. And then Galicia has its problems, apart from all these, due to our historical circumstances. Here is where education is essential, together with research and vocational training. I can't forget the



territory protection and safeguard our values. I think the future is for those countries which are able to attract a skilled workforce, to generate training, and which are competitive in environmental and social terms. That social environmental educational balance is what defines a competitive country, which is able to compete in a world full of problems.

How did Galicia benefit from the admission of Spain to the European Union?

There are some intangible elements and others are more quantifiable. The intangible ones seem the most important to me. First, the European Union is not an economical project, it's a political project which tries to strengthen peace and coexistence. When we joined the E.U. after having suffered a war, like Europe, we entered a world which guarantees liberties. Europe is the best place in the world with the best social welfare state, with the best public school and public health system, balanced social security, retirement pensions, democracy and freedom. It's a sort of oasis in this complicated world where we have to live. In the second place, we needed some structural reforms because we had hyperinflation. When we joined the EU we were forced to liberalise our systems, to make our markets competitive, to make a fiscal reform...We wouldn't have been able to do these things by ourselves in such a short period of time, so the EU was a incentive which forced us to reform things that we had to do anyway. On a third place it's financing. Spain, in general, and Galicia, in particular, was under the European average income and the EU, especially Germany and France financed, through the European funds, our economy modernization, our infrastructures. For example, the motorways to Madrid and all the infrastructure networks were financed with European funds and, of course, also with our own funds. Nothing would have been done without that money. So from a political and macro-

economical point of view, from a perspective of competitiveness and modernization, Europe is a decisive factor which made possible the level of rent and welfare we have today. I'd say that our European membership is a very positive thing. Galicia is a European country by definition, and Europe is our project. We must be more and more involved in this project. It's the best for Galicia. It's the best for Spain.

Do you think that it harmed Galicia somehow?

Undoubtedly, as any partnership in life, it has positive and negative aspects. You have to make adjustments. You have to take steps which have a cost. When we joined the EU we were forced to take very hard steps in relation to reorganization of labour and shipbuilding restructuring. Remember Ferrol shipyard, for example. We were forced to readjust our agricultural sector, the milk quota. These two were the most important ones. But I think it would be a serious mistake to think only about the costs and not see the huge transformation process that the European challenge means. I am very self-critical and hypercritical about the European project, but because it is less than it should be. Think about the fact itself of you being here today carrying out this interview. When I was your age Europe was a distant world. There were no school grants and European mobility was something exceptional. Just a few students could do it and always they had to pay with their own means. If we compare that with the current situation in



Secondary Education you can see the great leap forward. And we must go on in that direction. We are used to seeing Europe as our natural place of coexistence, which doesn't mean that you lose your own identity, but that you gain another one, the European identity. I think that is a great advantage in the economical, social, political, cultural and educational field. But in order to do that, Europe

needs to believe in its project. The crisis makes things more difficult. European population is very old. We have a big demographic burden. We also have big budget deficits in all the European countries, a very expensive welfare system, a great competition with the developing countries which do not have this expensive welfare system or aged populations. Globalization is challenging the European project. There are two ways of approach, to fall back or to try to innovate and strengthen the project. And we'll see what happens in the coming years.

What do you think about the relations between our Autonomous Community and the State?

Well, the autonomous community system has helped decisively to reduce the differences in rent and welfare in Spain. If we look at statistics about the evolution of Spanish society, we can confirm that Extremadura, Castilla León, Andalucía, Galicia have been treated favourably by this system and that made possible that the second-speed Spanish regions caught up with the first-speed regions such as Madrid or Cataluña, or the Mediterranean Spain. The *autonomy* system has worked in a positive way, both politically and economically. This is an important reasoning. Then, there are different outcomes. The state has acted as a balancing and redistributing element. And it has worked to such an extent that the richest and most developed communities now complain. But we have to maintain this common effort. Broadly speaking I think that democracy and autonomy are basic values for Galicia in themselves and as a element of redistribution.

We are famous for spending a whole life studying English and not being able to learn it. What's the problem?

This is the most difficult question so far, and the one I'm most interested in because it is true that this problem has always been there and we have to overcome it. We need to keep and reinforce our own identity and, therefore, to have a good command of our language, Galician and Spanish, but in the current world we must leave school with a good command of English, too. When I was the President that was my obsession, I wanted to make significant progress in order to have a trilingual school which allowed school leavers to be able to speak our two mother tongues and a foreign language, mostly English. Something is wrong, that's obvious. There is something wrong with resources, with the system and with the base. It would be commonplace, and false, to say that, all of a sudden, or just with a new law, we are going to overcome it. You can't make that the current teachers, who are thousands, change and be able to teach their different subjects in English. That's not possible. So, the first question is how you manage having qualified teachers, who can teach their particular subject in English. That

requires a deep change and the use of financial resources to, slowly, change, train and prepare teachers so that they can teach in another language. There is a generational process of change which must be undertaken, but it needs time and a technique to be able to do it. Then, there is the question of all the elements which have something to do with the students' learning so that we can offer some additional education such as courses abroad, student exchanges, and so on. But that is something additional and complementary. What is essential in our country is the language learning and that needs a lot of resources, of course. You can preach that you want trilingualism, but if you reduce resources for education and language education, you won't succeed. This question must be a priority. You see that in other countries they have a good command of languages and it's easy for them. I think it's a generational problem. They are born and raised in a different context. I don't think there is something wrong in us which keeps us in this permanent drama of not being able to learn a foreign language. We can overcome it. We just need to be clear about our priorities and give the means and the appropriate technical resources to achieve this objective. That's the thing! I hope today we are conscious about it and we are willing to do it.



Can you speak any foreign languages?

Well, I studied French, but then, if you don't practise, you forget it. I translate French very well, I write it reasonably well, and I speak it, although not very fluently. For some other reasons I also studied English. For me English is part of

that generational trauma because I studied English but I never spoke it. I only studied 'book' English. I can translate it perfectly well and I can read without any problems, almost as well as French, but I find the oral part very difficult, both understanding and speaking, due to the lack of practice and the wrong way of learning. Of course I speak the mother tongues and Portuguese, which is quite similar and easier.

Our school is taking part in a "Comenius" project together with Poland and Lithuania. Were there any similar projects when you were a teenager?

No, not at all. When I was a student we were enclosed because we lived under a dictatorship and that keeps you isolated. Then, when I was at university and in my early years as a teacher, in the late seventies and early eighties, some scholarships were possible. In Galicia we must mention the 'Barrié de la Maza' Foundation, which was very important. In my particular case I was granted one of their scholarships for my master's degree studies in Grenoble, like many other people at that time. But it's not comparable to the current situation, especially in secondary education.

International communication is getting more and more important. How can these projects influence our society?

I think they influence in a very positive and important way. As we can see, and sometimes we aren't aware of it, everything is on the Net just after happening. We live in a world where we know what is happening in Alaska, Malaysia or China. You go anywhere all over the world and they ask you about Real Madrid or Barcelona football team. Television goes beyond borders. The world became smaller, globalized but smaller. Communication, internationalization, getting to know other worlds, is an imposition of reality. Economy and society are globalized. But that doesn't mean that there aren't enormous differences, a huge disparity and that the world is utterly asymmetric. It has nothing to do with it. The world is interconnected and globalized. Therefore you have to live under those circumstances. So, communication, knowledge, identification with other languages and cultures, approaching diversity, recognizing others and their differences, are essential as a way of personal enrichment and to favour coexistence, and also to compete and to find a job. It's very important for everything.



When you were a teenager, could you travel abroad?

First, there was lack of money and all families had a low income. So people didn't use to travel a lot. The transport system wasn't very good, either. There weren't any educational grants. But all of us tried

our best. We tried to find a way of leaving the country, of travelling to France or other places in Europe. When I



studied at university things were worse, but there were less students. Everything was more reduced, less mobility, less public support and we used to travel less. Some countries were completely unknown. When we thought of travelling abroad we used to go to Portugal or France, sometimes to England as waiters or washing dishes in summer to learn English. Then there is the question of emigration, but that was forced travelling. Galicia is a country of emigrants, first to South America, then to Europe. But travelling as part of your education was really difficult.

Have you ever visited Poland or Lithuania for political reasons or for leisure?

Well, the truth is I haven't. Visiting all the countries from the Eastern Europe, except the Czech Republic, is one of my matters pending. I hope I'll have time now and I must say that it appeals to me, that these places are at the top in my list of priorities.

Last April 10th, the president of Poland and a lot of important people from his country died when the plane on which they were flying to Russia crashed. What consequences can this tragedy have for Poland?



We were talking a few minutes ago about coexistence in Europe and also about the Internet and television. When tragedies like this happen, television and the Net give us the chance to share their pain and support them. This is a tragedy which Poland and Polish people are going through now when, all of a sudden, they lose a whole generation of political leaders, the people responsible for the country. This is always a tragedy, a personal tragedy, a tragedy for the whole family involved, but in this case, it has become a collective tragedy. We could perceive the immense pain of a country which is living this situation dramatically. A generation of well educated, trained and qualified people who run a country at different levels is the outcome of a collective effort. It's an investment for a country. So this is an important loss. But I'm really convinced that Poland, which is a great country with a strong tradition, will overcome it and other leaders will gradually appear and they will get over this drama.

You were a professor before getting into politics. Will this experience now change your everyday life as a teacher and researcher?

In my early times in politics when I was the Secretary General of the Socialist Party in Galicia they used to criticize me by saying that everybody could see I was a teacher. I've always liked that criticism because I am a teacher, I like education. It's my basic job. Now I hope I'll work as a teacher again, not full-time. I want to teach postgraduates because it's where I can contribute more. I also want to go back to research. There is an important issue for Galicia, which is its relation with Portugal and which fascinates me, Galicia and the north of Portugal. I'm going to start a research team with Galician and Portuguese universities in order to work in that direction.

Which of your two jobs – as a politician or as a teacher- would you say that took up more hours of your sleeping time? Why?

I must tell the truth and, undoubtedly, it was politics. Education is more gratifying and not as stressing, although it needs great devotion. However, when I was doing research and preparing my doctoral thesis, it was also a very intense period. But politics is more competitive, harder, and you have much more responsibility and tension.

How have new technologies changed the way of teaching? Do you think that, eventually, they will be completely introduced in the world of education?

Well, I think they are a complement, an essential and indispensable instrument and they must be like the teachers' and students' hands and they can never replace their heads, their brains, human talent, discipline, wish, which are essential values in the educational process. Everything has changed, the techniques, the way of teaching, communication. When I first moved to Madrid in 1984 I was a full-time professor at the Economics Faculty at the USC (Santiago University). I was the economics Vice-rector at that time, and one day, one of my closest friends became Minister and he called me to help him start the cabinet. I was supposed to leave for



one year, but I stayed there for ten years. I came back in 1994. When I left we used to use typewriters, not the old ones but the electric ones. Each teacher had a room in the faculty with his things. When I went back to University in 1995 all those typewriters had disappeared from the teachers' rooms and they had been replaced by those strange machines which were the computers. In Primary and Secondary education this question is not at the level it should be. It's one of the big issues we have to solve. But, as with languages, the same thing happens, it's not a question of placing a computer on a desk, it's a question of having qualified teachers who can use them for teaching. And the same thing happens with the smart board.

If you had to choose, would you prefer a piece of chalk or a screen?

I still belong to that generation which prefer and work better with the former.

Are there any possibilities that you go back to politics in the future?

No, there aren't, honestly, not to the front line, in a post of responsibility. I've been doing that for a long time and I think I've covered that period of my life. I will always be committed to my country, helping as much as I can when they ask me, but not in the first line of responsibility. Now, it's another generation's turn and this renovation and change must be done.

If you could make a wish knowing that it would come true, what would you wish for Galicia?

There are many things I'd like for my Community, but, above all, I want Galicia to catch up the developed countries in Europe and stop being that country with a gap in the educational level, in welfare and in income. I wish we could take that huge step forward and be there. But I know that it's very difficult to make it come true.

What do you like reading in your spare time?

I like reading essay, but I read out of obligation, due to my job as a teacher and due to politics. At the moment I'm reading a lot of essays on economy, about the crisis. I am very interested in the challenge of the welfare system, how this crisis can be overcome. I read about politics. But then I also like reading novels very much, novels of different kinds. I read best-sellers as well. I've just finished 'The Pillars of the earth' by Ken Follett. I also like those famous ones by Larson. I like novels.

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. I understand that people must ask about those things which have more public interest and what is kept hidden, and that's good because I never give a motive for that, is all that humane and personal side of my life. This is quite unknown. I realise that I've been a public person for a long time, but my humane side is really unknown. In some countries politicians' personal lives are totally public, but here they are kept quite private. I don't know if this is good or bad, but that's the way things are.

