

European election victory for Catalan socialists

CiU continues its downward spiral, coming in third after PSC and PP

While the Spanish Socialist Party has solidified its lead over the Popular Party in Spanish politics by winning the European Parliamentary elections by two percentage points, in Catalonia the Catalan Socialist Party (PSC) celebrated an ample victory over its rivals from the PP and Convergence and Union.

PSC obtained 42.78% of the Catalan vote, well ahead of PP (17.76%) and CiU (17.42%).

Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) has solidified its gains from last March's general elections by winning 11.82% of the parliamentary vote. The Green Party (ICV) maintained its traditional base of support by winning 7.19% of the Catalan vote.

The spectacular rise of PSC continues an upward trend that started with the general elections in March,

when it won 39.47%, up from 31.16% in the 2003 autonomous elections.

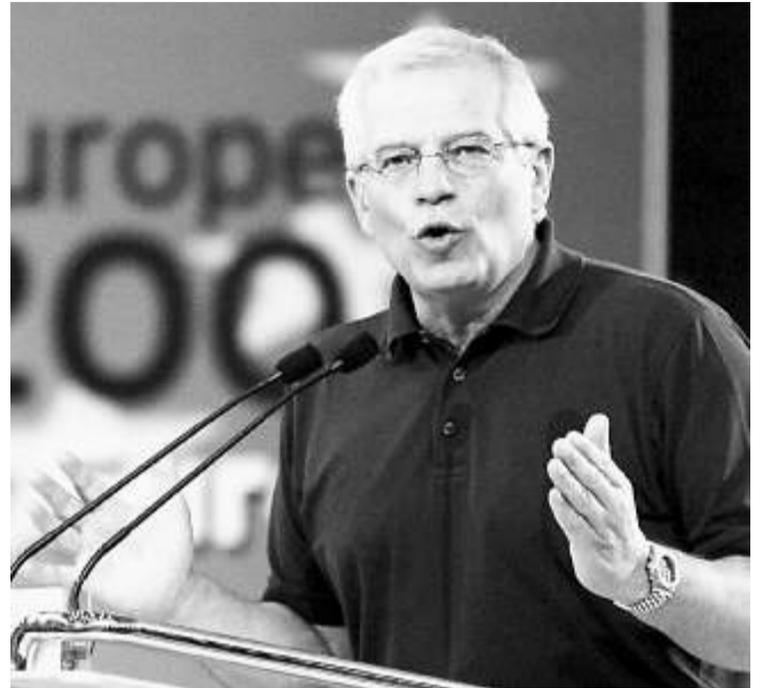
The spectacular losses of CiU continue a downward trend established in the general elections in March, when it lost about 10% of the support that it won in 2003. In March CiU obtained 20.78% of the vote, compared with 30.94 that it won in 2003. Some will see these latest elections as the latest in a series of losses which brings the political era of Jordi Pujol to a definitive close. CiU, who had become used to having plenty of hegemony over its political opponents, has now slipped down to third place in the world of Catalan politics.

PSC is now better positioned to be the most powerful and stable Catalan political party, while ERC looks like it will hold on to its base of sup-

port without threatening the position of PSC.

Meanwhile the PP continues its steady rise amongst the electorate that began with the municipal elections in 2003, when it captured 11.1% of the vote, followed by 11.89% in the autonomous elections the same year. In the March 2004 elections it obtained 15.89%. The positioning of the PP as the second most voted party in Catalonia were perhaps the most significant aspects of this European Parliamentary election. ERC's 11.8% of the vote gives it almost twice the percentage it had in the 1999 European Elections.

The low voter turnout in Catalonia, 59.75%, was higher than the Spanish average (54%) and the European-wide average (55.8%). The overall picture in Catalonia gives the



Josep Borrell led the PSOE to its best-ever European election result

three leftist parties — PSC, ERC and ICV — a combined total of 62% of the vote.

CiU leader Autur Mas characterised his party's poor showing as "not satisfactory, but surmountable", saying that his party will look

forward to regain lost ground in the municipal elections in 2007. He attributed some of CiU's misfortunes to the low turnout, saying that too many voters did not assign enough importance to the European Elections.

Roman artifacts unearthed in Lleida

Recent discoveries in Lleida could serve to make it more prominent on archaeological map of Catalonia. Workers renovating a shopping centre in Lleida have discovered artifacts from the Roman era, including part of an old Andalusian city wall and the foundation of the medieval chapel of Sant Esperit, who was worshipped by Lleida residents until the 18th century.

The discovery was made in a small area in a street in the city centre.

Archaeologists also discovered the intact remains of an adolescent male from the Roman era just a few centimetres away from the site of an Arab wall from the 14th century.

The necropolis of the ancient city of Ilera had been built about a half a kilometre from where the youth's body was discovered.

Some archaeologists speculate

that the youth may have received a private burial ceremony away from the main necropolis.

Large blocks of stone found next to the Arab wall attest to the strength of the structure, which had been the city's most prominent building until the 17th century.

Historical experts believe that the remains belonged to an access door to the city's eastern side.

The city plans to cover the ruins after excavation and documentation activities have finished. Other areas in Catalonia where ruins have been discovered include Empuries, which have both ancient Greek and Roman ruins.

Medieval ruins and a necropolis have also been found there.

The most well-known ancient ruins in Catalonia are the Roman ruins in Tarragona, which date back to the first century B.C.

Catalan birth rate up 27% over last 10 years

Catalonia's "thirty-somethings have finally started making babies. There are 27 per cent more babies being born now than 10 years ago, according to a report by the Centre for Demographic Studies of Catalonia (CEDC). The report was based on information collected by *Benvingut nadó!*, a programme run by Caprabo which registers 80 per cent of all births.

The study is significant because it offers more recent figures than the Institute of Statistics of Catalonia. However, while illustrating new social tendencies, the Caprabo study misses 20 per cent of the population.

The report reports a 5 per cent contribution to the rising birth rate made by the immigrant population. This number could be higher, considering that many immigrants do not participate in the supermarket chain's programme.

By the end of the year, there will have been 4,300 more births than in 2003. This continual growth is due to the fact that the generation born after the baby boomers has begun to have children, the report says. The average age is over 30, as young couples tend to wait longer before having children. Since the 80s, men have delayed parenthood by three years, and women, by four. Despite the increase, Catalonia's birth rate is still very low. As a result, in 25 years half the population could be over 50.

The CEDC found that Catalans are more likely to conceive while on holiday. Multiple births - which for reasons unknown seem to occur most in the province of Tarragona - have doubled in the last 10 years, currently accounting for five per cent of the total. This is probably due to artificial insemination, according to CEDC researcher Pau Miret.

ENVIRONMENT

Glòries to be greened

The Glòries Square in the centre of Barcelona will be transformed into an urban park over the next two years in a bid to ease traffic flow and create a greener environment for pedestrians in this part of the city.

As part of the plans, around 200,000 cars that pass over the square each day using Gran Via and Diagonal will be diverted underground to cut back on traffic jams. A new, green square will be built.

WELFARE

Old people get raw deal

Residential homes for old people in Barcelona and in the region of the Ebre have been criticised in a City Council report which describes them as insufficient.

SPORT

Catalonia excels at sport

Catalan athletes have achieved success out of proportion to their numbers. They notched up nearly half of Spain's international wins, according to a report from the Generalitat.



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