

President Josep Borrell insists he is as European as he is Catalan

Catalan president faces challenges of apathy, division and Euroscepticism

MADELEINE SHEAHAN / AGENCIES

The newly elected President of the European Parliament, Catalan Josep Borrell, says his majority vote promises stability. "I feel that I have been invested with the legitimacy I need to lead this Parliament." A Socialist MEP, Borrell was elected in the first round of voting with 388 votes, against the Polish Bronislaw Geremek's 208 and with France's Francis Wurtz trailing with just 51 votes. His election was ensured by a pact between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists whereby Borrell will hold the post until 2007 when he will be replaced by the German leader of the Democrat group, Hans-Gert Poettering.

The European Parliament represents 750 million people and uses 20 official languages but Borrell's greatest challenge will be persuading European citizens that the parliament is relevant to their lives. Widespread apathy was made alarmingly clear by the low turnouts throughout the continent for last month's elections.

He describes himself as a "unitar" and says he does not believe in labels that perpetuate divisions. "I am European, just like I am Spanish and Catalan, he said yesterday. "But I come neither from the old nor from the new Europe, I am simply a European."

Born in Lleida, in 1947, Borrell embarked on his political career in Catalonia 1979 and was at one stage leader of the Socialist party. His political



European President Josep Borrell was elected by a clear majority / EFE

career ran into trouble in 1999 when he felt compelled to resign from his post amidst a fraud scandal involving two former busi-

ness associates. His election to the parliamentary presidency suggests that his political recovery is now complete.

Eurosceptics promise to make trouble

The newly elected European Parliament faces a rough ride as the largest ever number of Eurosceptics take their seats within the institution they so vehemently oppose. The UK Independence Party which lured large numbers of British voters away from the already sceptic Conservatives has vowed to wreck the parliament. Party leader in Europe, Nigel Farage, ceremonially tore up his ballot paper during a press conference alongside the session.

Meanwhile, in Poland, the Catholic EU League of Polish Families came in second with ten seats. And in France, the "Souveranistes", who reject both the Euro and EU membership, held onto their three seats. Anti-corruption platforms also scored high. The Netherlands' Transparent Europe party, whistle-blowers against European corruption, won two seats. And Austria's Hans Peter Martin won a surprise two seats after exposing expense-fiddling by MEPs.

In spite of the rise of scepticism there is still a solid contingent making up about two-thirds of the 732-seat parliament which believes in an ever closer union for Europe.

HEALTH

Pacemakers recalled

The Department of Health has identified 47 patients with the NueroCor pacemaker, which was recently recalled, and is arranging for all of them to have replacements fitted. Those affected were fitted with NueroCor's IBERIS Plus model, after 2000. 33 were patients at the Corachán Clinic in Barcelona, one was fitted at the Hospital of Barcelona and 13 received the devices at Bellvitge Hospital in Hospitalet.

GIRONA

New library underway

The first stone has been laid at the site of the new library at the University of Girona's Barri Vell campus. The university's Rector, Joan Battle, said the new building would reinvent traditional notions of a library. It would be much more than a place to borrow books and would be site that generated important academic and research material, he said.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

12 cities join forces

Catalonia's 12 biggest cities have joined forces and are demanding more money and greater powers to comply with recent legislation to modernise local government. The 12, which include Leida, Reus, Terrassa and Girona, admit that working collectively might slow them down but in the long run it promises to be more effective.

FORUM

Responsible Business

Governments need to take an active role in ensuring that business acts in socially responsible ways. That was the message from the head of the International Organisation of Work, Goran Hultin, during a Forum Dialogue about Companies in the 21st Century. He said that multinationals had to be vigilant about the companies they subcontracted.

Cheap flights boost visitor numbers

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Almost 40 million tourists came to Spain in the first half of the year with Catalonia seeing the biggest increase in visitors. Of the 37.2 million visitors, 62 per cent stayed at least one night, while 14.1 million were daytrippers. Catalonia welcomed 5.2 million visitors, 9.4 per cent more than for the same period last year (more than double the increase for all of Spain) with the French making up the largest single visitor group. British visitors were well up, thanks largely to the impact of low cost airlines.

The Canaries were the second most popular destination, with Andalusia and the Balearic Islands close behind. Germans were more present than ever in the Balearics while British numbers were down. The reverse was the case in Andalusia where Britons made up 39 per cent of the total. Most visitors ar-



Tourists in Catalonia / L.J. / ARCHIVE

rive in Spain by air and the Ministry of Tourism has noted the impact of low cost airlines which now bring in 28 per cent of all visitors, a third more than in the same six-month period last year.



Hitler, pictured here with De Gaulle and Franco, survived virtually unscathed from the failed assassination attempt / ARCHIVE

Failed plot to assassinate Hitler commemorated

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German resistance leaders were remembered yesterday for their opposition to the Nazis in events marking the 60th anniversary of the most famous plot to assassinate Hitler. The commemorations focussed on Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg who tried to kill Hitler with a briefcase bomb on 20th July 1944. Hitler

survived virtually unhurt when a conference table protected him from the full force of the blast. Stauffenberg and his co-conspirators were executed the same day. July 20th was just one example of the resistance, said the German Minister of Culture Christina Weiss. It was also an opportunity to remember the many other Germans who gave their lives.