

EMILIO PÉREZ TOURIÑO / General secretary of the PSdeG

## “Galicia has slipped out of the PP government’s hands”

C. E. C. / X. H., Madrid  
Emilio Pérez Touriño watched just last year as ruling Popular Party (PP) regional premier Manuel Fraga once again won by an absolute majority in Galicia, followed in second place by the Galician Nationalist Bloc (BNG) and the Galician Socialists (PSdeG). But now, in the wake of last November’s *Prestige* crisis, the PSdeG general secretary is convinced that everything has changed, and that the PP’s period of dominance in the region is coming to an end.

**Question.** After four months battling the *Prestige* oil spill, are people losing their enthusiasm?

**Answer.** The impressive demonstration [in Madrid on Sunday] is proof that they haven’t. It exceeded all expectations. People have clearly shown that they don’t want to be fobbed off, that they want to know the truth...Galicia has changed: it’s woken up from its historical resignation. This is one more target for *Nunca Más* [Never Again]: Galician silence.

**Q.** Many of the young people

taking part in the demonstration say that they don’t believe any politician.

**A.** The relationship between politicians and the people became very complicated during the crisis. But I think that the feeling of abandonment is directed at the government that took the decisions. During the anti-war demonstration in Santiago on [February] 15, the people applauded [Xosé Manuel] Beiras [the leader of the BNG] and me. That must mean something.

**Q.** How do you hope to represent this wave of critical opinion?

**A.** When we took the difficult decision to present a censure motion in the Galician parliament, we were looking to represent people in the street. To bring [into the Chamber] the hundreds of thousands of people who were demanding answers. For that reason, we tried to make useful opposition, with concrete proposals for the regeneration of Galicia.

**Q.** And the idea of bringing Galicia to Madrid to demonstrate. What was that all about?

**A.** We came to the capital to

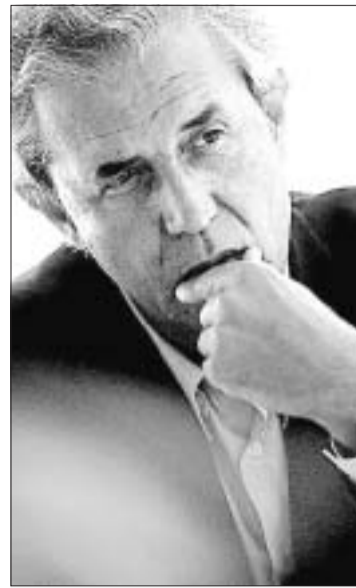
call on the rest of Spain to show solidarity with our catastrophe, because it’s everyone’s problem. We already saw this with the volunteers who came from all over. It was a meeting of the [different] Spains in Madrid.

**Q.** Is it possible for the PP to make up lost ground with its policies of subsidies and investment in Galicia?

**A.** What they are trying to do is too obvious. Aznar goes to Galicia and says, ‘We’ve dealt with the *Prestige*.’ He tries to change the subject by decree, but it’s not possible. They don’t know what they are going to do with the tanker. There are no emergency plans to prevent another catastrophe, nor for the recovery of damages...The Galicia Plan, a multi-million euro proposal, has neither a time scale nor a budget. Nobody believes any of them, and least of all Fraga.

**Q.** But the subsidies of €1,200 that arrive every month, don’t they have any effect on morale?

**A.** Instead of sorting out the crisis, they share out subsidies.



Emilio Pérez Touriño.

But Galicia is a mature country where there are thousands of citizens who don’t live by the public purse...What the opinion polls reflect, including sentiment within the PP, is that Galicia is slipping out of their hands. They are afraid because they are not in control of the situation.

**Q.** The crisis in Iraq has drawn attention away from Galicia. Are you worried?

**A.** I don’t want to see Galicia immersed in the *Prestige* crisis for years. It is still a live issue, but there are other things. And the war is also important. One thing does not cancel out another, and [Sunday’s] dem-

onstration is proof of that.

**Q.** To what extent will all this affect the local elections in May?

**A.** The local elections should be local, and not primaries for other [polls]. The electorate can distinguish [between the two]. But in this case, the distance between the people and the PP is so great that they are going to take a lot of punishment in May.

**Q.** Has the PP’s aggressive attack on the *Nunca Más* campaign begun to lose steam?

**A.** The government had disappeared during the crisis. What most hurt people was not the lack of [emergency] measures, but the government...turning its back. The movement has got on the PP’s nerves. They haven’t understood anything, and have been rudely dismissive. They tried to put an end to *Nunca Más*, but they made a mistake in trying to drown out the best of a people in a moment of crisis. They only want to divide the Galician people...They have failed. *Nunca Más* is, and will be, a great asset for Galicia.

**Q.** What do you think of Fraga when he calls on God not to retire him from politics through an electoral defeat?

**A.** That he has reached a level of pathos. And [I say] this despite the fact that I have always had respect for him as a politician. He is just desperately searching for his niche in history. It is a very bad way to end up.

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### THE THREAT OF WAR AGAINST IRAQ

## Freedom in exchange for bombs?

Arab democrats are skeptical of the idea that the war will bring about political reform in the Middle East

JAVIER VALENZUELA, Cairo  
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT.  
Maguib Mahfouz has been hospitalized twice in recent weeks. At 92 years of age, and never fully recovered from the stab wounds inflicted on him by some Islamic fundamentalists, the only Arab winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature is suffering from a heavy cold. His health is precarious, but even so, Mahfouz, returning home from his second stint in hospital, has sent a message to the Cairo daily *Al-Ahram*. He says he is “very worried” by the war that the United States is preparing against Iraq, and shares the feelings of the millions of people who have demonstrated against it.

“My position is very clear,” says Mahfouz. “I’m against this war. I’m against Saddam. The war will generate a huge amount of destruction, not only in Iraq, but across the Arab world. This is something we don’t need. At the same time, the regime of Saddam is the quintessence of everything negative in Arab politics: oppressive, autocratic and irrational.” In its simplicity, this statement by the author of *Midaq Alley* expresses the feelings of the majority of intellectuals, artists, professionals and students who, from Morocco to Qatar, dream of a secular, democratic Arab world that respects human rights.

Having failed to convince these

sectors with its arguments about the seriousness and imminence of the supposed danger of the weapons that Saddam may still be hiding or about his supposed ties with Osama bin Laden, Washington is now proffering the idea that the war against Iraq will be the beginning of a “profound remodeling” that will bring freedom to the Middle East. “It’s something we are in need of,” says the Egyptian cinema director Youssef Chahine, “but I don’t think the war on Iraq is the right instrument for it.”

Indeed, Chahine is protesting because the Egyptian government is not allowing street demonstrations by people who, like him, are against the war. Driven into the interior of the mosques and the universities, the Egyptian demonstrators, who have not the least sympathy for Saddam but no more for Bush, often face arrest.

“I feel violated and humiliated by the police state that exists in this country,” Chahine said a few days ago at a press conference in Cairo. Since 1981, the Nile valley has been living in a state of emergency. The Mubarak regime, at peace with Israel and a US ally, prohibits street demonstrations and empowers its police to arrest anyone without charge. The main victims of this rule are the Islamic fundamentalists. Some 30,000, according to Egyptian human rights or-



Nobel Prize winner, Egyptian Naguib Mahfouz. / REUTERS

ganizations, remain in prison without trial.

It is significant that those Arab democrats to whom the United States is seeking to sell the idea of a “reshaping” of the Middle East complain that the authoritarian regimes allied to Washington do not allow them to demonstrate against the war in Iraq. “The problem with the United States,” says Diah Rachwan, a researcher at the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Social Studies, “is its lack of credibility.” “The reasons,” he adds, “are obvious: its support for Israel, its

indifference to the sufferings of the Palestinians, its complicity with so many authoritarian Arab regimes, and now, with Bush, its thirst for vengeance, for petroleum and for imperial rule.”

Saaedin Ibrahim is an exception to the skepticism with which the US offer of a “reshaping” of the Middle East is viewed. Ibrahim, a professor at the American University of Cairo, with dual Egyptian and US nationality, is now at liberty and awaiting trial, after months in jail. His “crime” is that of having denounced the

fraud in the Egyptian elections, the discrimination against the Coptic Christian minority and the possibility that Mubarak is preparing his son Gamal to succeed him.

The Ibrahim case has been causing tension between Mubarak and Washington, which, as with Saudi Arabia, seems to be just now discovering that its Arab allies are not exemplars of democracy. Ibrahim told *EL PAÍS* he was confident that the United States would keep its word. “I am convinced,” he said, “that the United States will seriously try to install democracy in the Middle East, starting with Iraq. However, no one can predict whether they will succeed or not.”

Some prestigious US columnists are spreading this idea, citing the example of Germany and Japan after the Second World War. Yet they themselves are quick to offer objections to this view. “Is the Bush team ready for this? Is the United States ready for this?” asks Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times*. “I’m not sure,” he answers. Meanwhile, David Ignatius quotes Marwan Muasher, Jordan’s foreign minister, who warns that the first result in the Arab world of an attack on Iraq would be popular anti-US demonstrations and new support for the Islamists. To avoid catastrophe, Muasher notes, the United States will have to demonstrate swift support for the creation of a Palestinian state.

Edward Said, the Palestinian writer resident in the United States, is one of the 30 Arab intellectuals who signed a manifesto describing Saddam as “a nightmare for Iraq and the Arab world.” Said, in an article reproduced in the Egyptian press, notes that the United States announced that up to 500 missiles a day would fall upon Iraq, and wonders, “What kind of god would affirm that this will bring democracy and liberty not only for the people of Iraq, but for the rest of the Middle East?”