ANDREW MARR SHOW, ALFONSO DASTIS

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ALFONSO DASTIS
Spanish Foreign Minister

AM: The leader of the Catalan movement, Mr Puigdemont, has
said this is the worst crisis to face his part of Spain since the days
of General Franco and it is in effect a coup d’etat.

AD: Well, thank you for having me, Andrew. I’m delighted to be in
one of my favourite TV programmes. If this is a coup d’etat, if
there is a coup d’etat at all it’s the one that has been followed by
the – Mr Puigdemont and his government. What we are doing is
following strictly the provision of our constitutions. We are in no
way exceptional. They are a carbon copy of the German
Constitution and it’s a kind of provision that you can see in many
western constitutions.

AM: It is of course very, very different from our system. A lot of
people look at what happened here in Scotland where the Scots
were given a legal referendum and made their own choice. If the
people of Catalonia want to break away from Spain, is there any
legal way for them to do so?

AD: Well, there is a legal way. We have to study and work through
the possible amendment of the constitution, but in any case what
it is clear is that this is a matter to be decided by the whole of the
Spanish people. You know a part cannot decide for the whole. I
know that you have the precedent of Scotland but yours is a very
different history and constitutional setting and honestly I think you
are a bit of an exception if you look at the rest of democracies and
certainly partners in the European Union, they wouldn’t accept a
division as such to be taken by a part of the country.
AM: That means in effect that the Catalans cannot by themselves decide to be independent. They would have to persuade people all across Spain to agree with them, which in turn seems very unlikely. Now you have suspended Catalan’s autonomy, you’re waiting for the Spanish Senate on Friday, I think, to ratify that. After that happens you’ve said that Mr Puigdemont, the leader of the Catalan movement is going to be removed from his position. He is clearly determined to carry on. He’s going to go into his office, he’s going to go into the Catalan parliament, what do you actually do? Do you arrest him? What happens?

AD: No, no, we are not going to arrest anyone and by the way we are not going to suspend the autonomy or the self rule. It is them who have been in fact disregarding the norms and the rules of that govern the Catalan autonomy and all the government is trying to do, and reluctantly, is to reinstate the legal order, restore the constitution, but also the Catalan rules and proceed from there.

AM: But Mr Puigdemont goes into the Catalan parliament and he says, I don’t accept what Madrid are telling us, we’re going to carry on as before and I’m going to carry on as the leader of this parliament and we’re going to have our debates as before. What do you then do?

AD: Well we are going to establish the authorities who are going to rule you know, the day to day affairs of Catalonia, according, as I said, to the Catalan laws and norms and what we are trying to do is to restore normalcy, to restore togetherness for the sake of all Catalans, preserving their basic public services and their rights and freedoms, and then end up calling an early election in Catalonia to give, you know, the word, their say to the Catalan people.
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AM: I understand that, I’m still struggling to understand in practical terms what actually happens. Do you for instance suspend and replace the head of the Catalan police?

AD: Well, how do we do it? We disregard and I hope everyone will disregard whatever instructions they will be planning to give, because they will not have you know the legal authority to do that once the Senate has authorised the government.

AM: So you’re calling on people in Catalonia to disregard what the Catalan police and the leader of the Catalan parliament tells them to do, to ignore them?

AD: You mean the Catalan police? I didn’t hear that very well. Yes, they won’t have the authority, the legal authority once the Senate has authorised to - you know the implementation of the Spanish Constitution, they won’t have any legal authority, so they would be you know equal to anyone who – a group of rebels trying to impose their own arbitrariness onto the whole people of Catalonia.

AM: So stop listening to the Catalan police. At that point do you have to bring in the Spanish police and possibly the Spanish Army to keep order in Catalonia?

AD: No, no, it’s not a matter of bringing in either the Spanish police or let alone the army. We hope that the regional police once put under the control of people who are, you know, who respect and who uphold the Catalan rules and the Spanish rules everything will be fine, there will be law and order and peaceful coexistence and normal life in Catalonia, which is what we are after.

AM: It’s also been suggested that you’re going to suspend the pro-independence Catalan television station. Is that true?
AD: I don't know whether we are going to do that. We want to ensure that there is a plural view of what Catalonia is about in all the regional services. That is true, yes.

AM: You do make it all sound very gentle at the moment but we have seen those scenes of police taking women by the hair out of polling stations, smashing up polling boxes and so forth. It appears to be a very brutal situation there.

AD: No, I don't think there is any brutal situation. Look, I think by now many of those pictures have been proven to be fake pictures.

AM: Really?

AD: And if there was any use of force it was a limited one and prompted by the fact that the law and order agencies were prevented from discharging the orders of the courts.

AM: You're saying that those pictures that people saw of Spanish police intervening aggressively in polling stations are all fake pictures? They didn't happen?

AD: No, I'm not saying that all are fake pictures, but some of them are and you know, there has been a lot of alternative facts and fake news here and as I said, if there was at all according to the pictures there was some use of force it was not a deliberate use of force, it was a provoked use of force.

AM: Forgive me for going to a domestic issue of interest in Britain but you were part obviously of the summit at Brussels and I just wondered, is your understanding that enough has been done for there to be talks between Britain and the rest of the EU on their future relationships and trade by the end of the year?
AD: Well I hope, I hope we’ll be able to do that. We have seen you know a new atmosphere and a new attitude from the UK government since Prime Minister May’s speech in Florence. We are waiting for that new attitude to be transposed into position papers on the negotiating table, but we are hopeful that we will – I mean we are going to start our internal preparations, the 27, and we are hopeful that in the end we will be able to find an agreement that is good for both the UK and the European Union.

AM: But it may not happen. There’s been some talk of no deal. In that situations there are three quarters of a million British people living in Spain at the moment, what would be their status if there was not a deal between the UK and the EU?

AD: Well as I said I do hope that there will be a deal. If there is no deal we will make sure that the lives of ordinary people who are in Spain, the UK people is not disrupted. As you know, I mean the relationship between the UK and Spain is a very close one in terms of economic relations and also social exchanges. Over 17 million Brits come to Spain every day – every year, I’m sorry – and many of them live here or retire here and we want to keep it that way as much as possible.

AM: Mr Dastis, thank you very much for joining us. I hope we’re still your favourite political programme...