



## Interview

# «Aopa Andorra values an airport in the Principality as positive»

**ROBERT GUIRAO** President of the l'Aircraft Owner and Pilot Association (Aopa) Andorra

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Robert Guirao Bailen, professional policeman, head of cooperation at the European contact office Interpol in Andorra and now recently named president of the Aopa (Aircraft Owner and Pilot Association), explains to EL PERIÒDIC D'ANDORRA how this initiative came about and tells us about the trajectory that has taken him this far. His versatile profile is interesting and mysterious, the father of a teenage girl, Ada, a mathematician and a passionate about horses, lives between Andorra and Lyon, where he has developed his professional career and personal life with great success.

### –Why is an association of pilots like Aopa Andorra being created right now?

–It is a coincidence, in my case I personally started aviation classes in 2010, even though I was a grandson of pilots and therefore aviation was already present in my life. From 2010 to 2013, the period in which I train, I see that everyone goes their own way, they are lone wolves, so I talk to some pilots and I tell them that it would be good to try to group us, I start researching in this regard and I find Iaopa International. I talk to them and they tell me that they have no representation in Andorra and that they would be happy to create it.

From 2013 to 2020 everything is exchanges of documents, meetings, background of possible charges, because as it is represented worldwide they are looking for people who do not have problems with justice. They thought it was great to be in the police force.

In this impasse they contact me with a group of pilots who want to finish creating the Aopa Andorra, but the Iaopa has explained to them that they are in talks with me, then we agree to finish it and propose to me to be the president, since I had initiated all the formalities. We drafted the statutes and founded it in February 2020, the Americans accept us as the 82nd member country, but we still have the statutes in government pending, then the pandemic arrives, we do not get government acceptance until June 2020 and once it was legalized, we were able to make ourselves known, there were also a series of plane crashes that slowed down the process, we decided to make the presentation in June and Haritz Galarraga and Jordi



EL PERIÒDIC

Figueres were killed. As an association, one of the things we plan to do later, when the protocols of the health crisis allow it, is an act of recognition to all our colleagues who have left us.

### –Do you want to be a 'lobby' for the creation of an airport here in the Principality?

–We are currently operating in La Seu, in fact we already feel represented there, because the airport itself is called Andorra-La seu. Yes, we would be interested in talking to the Government of Andorra to be more representative in this territory, but of course the airport depends on the Generalitat de Catalunya, so what we would like is to negotiate a bit on this issue.

We are general aviation, we do not enter commercial aviation or regular flights, so in a future airport in Andorra we could not make certain flights, what we can as an association is to provide specialists in air legislation and our advice to



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level of security, there must be someone in charge of air transport in the Government of Andorra and we are willing to collaborate in all those aspects that affect these issues.

### –The EFA, an association of Andorran family businesses, organized a webinar in July to talk about the airport, do they have a relationship with this organization to try to take joint action?

–For now we have not contacted, but we are always open to give our views to any organization that asks us and even help them in what they consider appropriate in this discipline.

### –How many members does the association have today?

–At the moment we are only the constituents six members, we have a list of forty people who are waiting and six more who have expressed interest, what happens is that the health crisis and the established protocols have delayed the

power to hold a meeting together and be able to start creating work tables.

### –Are you in favour or against of having an airport in Andorra?

–We think that having another way in and out of the country and not having to depend on Spanish and French infrastructures is good, we value it as a positive, because it is a progress for the nation at all levels. We have the example of this pandemic where we have seen a border closure and limited traffic. The fact that we have our own airport is very beneficial in terms of security and emergency, we have the hospital heliport, but if at some point you need to go further, you have to do a complicated assembly, so have an airport in national territory makes things and communications much easier.

On the other hand, the members of Aopa Andorra, and the Government can take note of this, make our aeronautical infrastruc-

re available, if they ever have to go looking for medicines, personnel or medical equipment and what is certain that we will contribute if at some point this project is carried out, it will be the measures at the level of regulations, because all this will have to be legislated and advice on air safety with the support of international specialists.

**-How is it financed only with membership fees or do they have other sources of funding?**

-Today, the first funding we have received is from the founding members, but the idea is that, like any non-profit association, it is supported by its members. We also do not rule out that later we may receive grants or aid that will always be welcome, because the budget will be used entirely for the operation of the association as indicated in its statutes, but for now the work we are doing we do altruistically and because we like it.

**-What objectives or activities will they promote in favour of this discipline?**

-Promote, preserve and represent the interests of members in general aviation of pilots, aircraft owners and aviation enthusiasts. Facilitate the international movement of aircraft for peaceful purposes.

Coordinate the points of views and opinions of member organizations regarding proposed requirements, best practices, procedures, standards, facilities and international aviation services.

Represent the views and interests of the association on general aviation matters at the national, regional and meeting levels of the Commission, the Committee and the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

Develop and promote desirable and useful standardization for general aviation regulation and guidance. Encourage the implementation of planned systems, facilities, services and procedures to promote flight safety and efficiency. And collect information, data and statistics related to general aviation member organizations.

**-You are a professional policeman. How did you end up as president of Aopa?**

-I studied mathematics, but for personal reasons I was forced to return home and go to work, I beca-



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me a police officer in 1995, accidentally, not vocationally, but I discovered that it is a very attractive and mysterious job. When you investigate you discover things, secrets, ways of working that are not normally explained and should not be explained, because you are fighting crime, the ordinary citizen does not know even half of the reality of what is happening in the world and it's better that way, because what we need to do is make people have a good quality of life and be happy.

My job here in Andorra is to search for and detain fugitives, so my team and I proceeded to arrest an American fugitive who had been wanted and captured by the FBI for 7 years, then the links from the FBI of Spain who are in charge of

working together with the links of Spain, Portugal and Andorra invited me to run in the elections to enter a command course at the national academy of the FBI, I took the tests, one written and one oral, and we selected me from the three countries: Spain, Portugal and Andorra.

I go to Quantico in Virginia and I graduated from the FBI National Academy. Quantico Marine Corps Base is a military base and there you see in training constantly planes, then that's when I start thinking about getting my license, I don't train there, because the schedules were incompatible, when I come back here is when I started classes and when I got into this world of aviation I got excited to create the Aopa Andorra of which I am now president.

**-You have also been Interpol's European delegate in Andorra for 20 years, what is your role and responsibility in this area?**

-I joined Interpol Andorra as a liaison officer and I am now the head of the police cooperation office and Interpol. I run a department to exchange information between the Andorran police, the Andorran judiciary and the Ministry of the Interior and Foreign Affairs. In addition I continue to have another competence, which is the search and arrest of fugitives and everything that involves such as extraditions to bring them to justice.

**-Have you taken part in any international missions that have marked you in particular?**

-I have participated in many, but the fact of joining the FBI has influenced me a lot, because I discovered another way of working, they have studied ways of researching, psychologists, scientists and they are always looking for formulas to be more efficient, they have more method as they have also had more cases and this gives them more experience.

In terms of missions, the one that caught my attention the most was one from the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in a presidential election in Armenia. The OSCE is like the United Nations, but at the European level, I went as an observer to see that there was no corruption and illegal acts within this electoral process, it was a curious experien-



ce of which I keep a special record.

**-You have five police medals. Which has been the most important or especially significant to you?**

-They are all important, because they all have a history behind them, but there is one that I will remember for the rest of my life, which is the French defence medal given to me by the French defence minister Alain Juppé and at the time of imposing the medal on me, the colonel who put it on me in a public ceremony held in Perpignan, stabbed me in the chest. He noticed, but we let the ceremony end and once it was over he came to apologize like about ten times, when I opened the uniform I had a big blood stain on my white shirt, it had to be an experience exciting that I lived with some discomfort.

**-He has been awarded several times by foreign police organizations, do you have anything left to achieve professionally?**

-I am satisfied and grateful, there are always things pending, but after all these years of cooperation with neighbouring countries one of the decorations that I would be excited to have is the French Legi-

on of Honour, it is very difficult, because they only give it to the French people who have done a very relevant act, to people who have given their whole lives for France such as the high command and those foreigners who have maintained close co-operation with the country. After these 20 years of collaboration with the French authorities, I would be especially happy to receive this award.

**-You are a very versatile man, another of your great passions is the Arabian horses. Where does this hobby come from?**

-As a child I was a singer with my brothers, we sang Mexican songs and made recordings for Spanish television and it came to Andorra to make a video clip of a Mexican song that was about the story of a horse and we had to ride. I've been a fan ever since.

**-How do you see the future post-pandemic, are you optimistic?**

-Yes, you should always be optimistic, never throw in the towel. Many things will change at the level of work and relationships, but we will adapt. ≡

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