

## THE SATURDAY PROFILE

## Catalan Leader Boldly Grasps a Separatist Lever

By RAPHAEL MINDER

BARCELONA, Spain — ARTUR MAS, the leader of Catalonia, has a clear message for Madrid: He is serious about his threat to let the people of Spain's most economically powerful region decide for themselves in a referendum whether they should remain a part of Spain.

In fact, he said in an interview this week, he would personally vote for independence if the opportunity arose. "Our ideal is to be part of the United States of Europe," he said.

That kind of posturing has thrust Mr. Mas, 56, to the forefront of Spanish politics and made Catalonia the biggest domestic headache for Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, who is facing troubles on all sides as he tries to satisfy demands from the European Union to straighten out Spain's economy and from Spain's heavily indebted regions, including Catalonia.

The question now for Mr. Rajoy, and for all of Spain, is just how far Mr. Mas, a once relatively obscure politician who was elected regional president two years ago, is willing to go in posing what may be the most serious challenge to a sovereign entity in Europe since the implosion of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Mr. Mas's talk is not idle. With a \$260 billion economy that is roughly the size of Portugal's, an independent Catalonia and its 7.5 million inhabitants — 16 percent of Spain's population — would rank ahead of a dozen of the 27 nations in the European Union. But like most of Spain's regions, it is under great financial pressure and would like a better deal from Madrid.

In that respect, his threats may amount to nothing more than brinkmanship, as he applies to Madrid much the same tactic it has used to gain favorable treatment in its own dealings with Brussels: that is, that Catalonia, which has its own language and sense of identity, is simply "too big to fail" without calamitous consequences that no one wants to see. On Friday, Catalonia's government raised the pressure, saying it would not be able to meet its September payments for basic services like health care on schedule.

The great risk is that Mr. Rajoy's government — squeezed as it is, itself weighing a European bailout — is hardly in a position to appease Catalonia's demands under a Spanish tax system that redistributes revenue from the richest to the poorest regions, without also raising tensions with other struggling regions.

The grievances run in both directions. In Catalonia's view, Madrid has drained its finances, while Madrid accuses Catalonia, like nearly all of Spain's regions, of mismanaging its books.

In the interview on Wednesday in the Catalan government's medieval palace, Mr. Mas was unre-



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*"Our ideal is to be part of the United States of Europe."*

ARTUR MAS

pentant about further unnerving investors who already question Mr. Rajoy's ability to meet agreed deficit targets and clean up Spanish banks. Instead, he contended that it was Mr. Rajoy who had forced Catalonia down the separatist path, after rejecting its demands unconditionally.

"When you get a clear no, you have to change direction," Mr. Mas said. Although he acknowledged that there was no guarantee Catalonia would succeed in imposing its claims on Madrid, he argued that "the worst-case scenario is not to try, and the second-worst is to try and not get there."

His advice to Mr. Rajoy was to avoid further delay in tapping a bond-buying program, devised by the European Central Bank largely with Spain's rescue in mind. European financing — in the form of billions of dollars in subsidies received after Spain joined the European Union in 1986 — had already played a major part in Spain's development, he noted.

"The problems of Spain now supersede its capacities, so that it needs help," Mr. Mas said. "If you have no other choice than to ask for a rescue, the sooner the better." Asked, however, where Spain would stand without Catalonia, its industrial engine, Mr. Mas was unperturbed. "Spain without Catalonia is not insolvent but more limited," he said.

An economist by training, Mr. Mas comes from a Catalan family linked to the metal and textile sectors, which were at the heart of the region's development after the Industrial Revolution. Having

studied at a French school in Barcelona and then learned English, he also stands out as a rare multilingual leader in Spain's political landscape.

He climbed the ladder of Catalonia's politics over a long career as a public servant in the shadows of another politician, Jordi Pujol, who ran Catalonia for more than two decades. While hardly unknown in his region, Mr. Mas has surprised even party insiders this year by the way he has thrown caution to the wind in challenging Mr. Rajoy.

"We all knew Mas as an efficient technocrat and one of our very best managers, but I don't think many people expected him to show such courage and patriotic feelings," said Josep Maria Vila d'Abadal, a mayor and member of Mr. Mas's party, Convergència i Unió.

Mr. Mas insisted that his separatist drive was "not about personal ambition," saying he would retire from politics once Catalonia achieved sovereignty. He is married with three children.

Even though Catalonia would face an uphill struggle to join the European Union, particularly given Madrid's opposition, Mr. Mas said that Brussels had shown in the two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union that it could adjust to much more dramatic and unforeseeable nationhood claims.

Mr. Mas has already put words into action. Shortly after being rebuffed by Mr. Rajoy over his tax demands, he called early elections in Catalonia — on Nov. 25, two years ahead of schedule — that could turn into an unofficial referendum on independence, after a mass rally in Barce-

lona on Sept. 11 in which hundreds of thousands of Catalans demanded to form a new European state.

On the heels of the rally, Mr. Mas and his nationalist party are counting on significant gains in next month's election as they try to convince Catalans that Mr. Mas can erase their longstanding complaints about control from Madrid.

"We have created a big feeling of hope among a big part of our society," Mr. Mas said.

SUCH comments, however, have also prompted criticism of Mr. Mas, led by Madrid politicians as well as other regional leaders, who have denounced Catalonia's attempt to break ranks in a time of crisis.

While Mr. Rajoy has steered clear of the wrangling, some conservative politicians have warned of retaliatory measures. His deputy prime minister warned Mr. Mas last week that Madrid would use every legal instrument available to block a Catalan vote on independence, which would violate Spain's Constitution.

Others accuse Mr. Mas of using the tussle with Madrid to shift the blame for Catalonia's economic difficulties onto Mr. Rajoy and to distract voters from his government's own shortcomings, including a failure to meet the deficit target that the Catalan government set for itself last year.

Last week, Pere Navarro, the leader of the opposition Catalan Socialist Party, called Mr. Mas "a false prophet," who talked about a promised land instead of recognizing that he had made Catalonia "worse than two years ago," when Mr. Mas took office.

## New Yorker, Fired by Hotel In Israel, Kills Co-Worker

By JODI RUDOREN

JERUSALEM — A New York man who was fired from a hotel in the Israeli resort city of Eilat on Thursday returned there on Friday morning and opened fire amid a crowd of tourists, then killed a kitchen worker before being shot to death by police officers, the authorities said.

The gunman, William Herskowitz, a 23-year-old potter from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., had arrived in Israel on Aug. 27 for a five-month program known as Masa that combines travel and Hebrew study with internships, in this case in hotels in Eilat, a Red Sea port. Yuval Arad, a spokesman for the program, said Mr. Herskowitz was told Thursday that he had to leave the program and decide by next week whether to return home or to remain in Israel with relatives.

"There was some problems with his attitude and with the hotel staff," said Mr. Arad, declining to elaborate. Another official with the program, Ofer Gutman, told The Associated Press that Mr. Herskowitz was a "normal guy," adding, "There was nothing that indicated what would happen in the end."

Micky Rosenfeld, an Israeli police spokesman, said the episode began around 9 a.m. Friday, when Mr. Herskowitz grabbed a pistol from a security guard at the Leonardo Club Hotel and fired several shots in the dining area before storming into the kitchen, where he killed a cook, Armando Abed, 33, from the Arab Christian town of Miliya, in Galilee. The shots fired in the dining room did not strike anyone.

Mr. Herskowitz then "barricaded himself in the kitchen," Mr. Rosenfeld said, raising police fears of a hostage situation. Around 10:15 a.m., antiterrorism units from the Israeli Defense Forces "moved in on the suspect, and he opened fire again," Mr. Rosenfeld said.

It turned out that no hostages had been taken, and guests in the lobby and dining area were ordered to return to their rooms and lock the doors. Two women were treated for shock.

Israeli officials originally identified the gunman as William Herskowitz, but public records in the United States listed his

Irit Pazner-Garshowitz and Jonathan Rosen contributed reporting. Alain Delaquerière contributed research from New York.

name with a W instead of a V, the more common American spelling, and without the second H.

Mr. Arad said Mr. Herskowitz was among thousands of young adults in Masa, a program combining tourism, study and work that is financed in part by the Jewish Agency for Israel and run by Oranim, an educational tourism provider. He was one of 80 Masa participants living and working in Eilat hotels, Mr. Arad said.

The Jewish Agency said after the shooting that it had appointed a committee to investigate the circumstances under which Mr. Herskowitz had been accepted to the program.

Relatives of Mr. Herskowitz's in the United States did not respond to phone calls on Friday. Public records and Internet searches suggest that he attended the State University of New York at New Paltz and worked there as a ceramic technician, then became the proprietor of Merlin Pottery.

In an article posted on Ulster Happening, an online magazine, the potter referred to himself as William Merlin, saying he borrowed the name from a grandfather, and described the ancient "salt fired" technique that he favored. "We have a rich heritage of magic in our bloodline," he said. "We have always worked hard and overcome great odds and the work I make is surely a historic landmark of human perseverance and resilience."

The shooting occurred during the holiday of Sukkot, one of the busiest weeks of the year in Eilat.

Guests at the hotel described the mayhem. "I was sitting in the lobby and reading a newspaper," one guest, Eli Zmor, told Maariv, a daily newspaper in Israel. "I heard screaming, and I saw someone jump on the security guard. I saw him take the security guard's gun and start shooting all over."

Another guest, Nissim Rubin, said he tried to stop the gunman. "I went out, jumped on the assailant and we both fell to the floor," he said, according to Maariv's Web site. When the shooting started, Mr. Rubin added, "panic erupted and people took cover beneath the tables."

Once the guests were told that it was safe to come out of their rooms, people emerged "happy, clapping," another guest, Michal Bouaron, told Israel's Channel 2.

"We won't let this ruin our day and our vacation," she added.



STORM COMMUNICATIONS, VIA REUTERS

Israeli soldiers patrolled near a hotel in the Red Sea resort city of Eilat after a shooting by a former employee on Friday.

## German Catholic Church Links Tax to the Sacraments

By MELISSA EDDY

BERLIN — It is a paradox of modern Germany that church and state remain so intimately tied. That bond persists more and more awkwardly, it seems, as the church's relationship with followers continues to fray amid growing secularization.

Last week one of Germany's highest courts rankled Catholic bishops by ruling that the state recognized the right of Catholics to leave the church — and therefore avoid paying a tax that is used to support religious institutions. The court ruled it was a matter of religious freedom, while religious leaders saw the decision as yet another threat to their influence on modern German society.

With its ruling the court also dodged the thorny issue of what happens when a parishioner formally quits the church, stops paying taxes, but then wants to attend services anyway. The court said that, too, was a matter of religious freedom, a decision that so rankled religious leaders fearful of losing a lucrative revenue stream that they made clear, right away, that taxes are the price for participation in the church's most sacred rituals: no payments, no sacraments.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Germany issued a crystal clear, uncompromising edict, endorsed by the Vatican. It detailed that a member who refuses to pay taxes will no longer be allowed to receive communion or make confession, to serve as godparents or to hold any office in the church. Those who leave can also be refused a Christian burial, unless they "give some sign of repentance," it read.

"Whoever declares they are leaving the church before official authorities, for whatever reason, impinges on their responsibility

to safeguard the community of the church, and against their responsibility to provide financial support to allow the church to fulfill its work" before their death, it read.

The tussle highlighted the long-established but increasingly troubled symbiosis between church and state in Europe that, repeated polls have shown, grows more secular-minded as each generation moves further away from the church. Like many European countries, Germany's churches are independent but

*Despite increasingly secular times, church and state remain connected.*

function in partnership with the state, which collects taxes from members of established religions and then funnels the revenues back to the religious institutions, for a fee, in keeping with a 19th-century agreement following abolishment of an official state church.

Income from church taxes in Germany amounted to about \$6.3 billion for the Roman Catholic Church in 2011, and \$5.5 billion for the Protestant, mostly Lutheran, churches in 2010, official statistics show. The money goes to support hospitals, schools, day care and myriad other social services, but a sizable amount of the Catholic money is also channeled to the Vatican.

The German church tax — which is 8 to 9 percent of the annual income tax — is so steep, however, that many people formally quit the church to avoid paying, while nevertheless re-

maining active in their faith. That is what is angering Catholic Church officials.

To many faithful, the court ruling validated that choice, and the edict from the Catholic Bishops' Conference amounted to a sharp response by church leaders against the government's increasingly aggressive secularism taking root in society. They see it threatening the future of the religious institutions upon which Germany's modern democracy was founded.

Unlike the United States, where politicians attend prayer breakfasts, and service as an altar boy is cast as a solid political credential, discussion of faith plays little role in German public discourse. Although Chancellor Angela Merkel's party is called the Christian Democrats, and her father was a minister, the outward emphasis is far more on democracy than on Christianity.

The contrast could be seen starkly at a recent gala in Berlin honoring 30 years since the former leader Helmut Kohl's first term as chancellor. Of a dozen international speakers, only three sought God's blessing for Germany. Two were the American speakers, the elder George Bush and Philip D. Murphy, the ambassador to Germany. The other was a Catholic priest.

Even so, it is the United States, where churches are tax exempt, that prides itself on a constitutional separation between church and state, while most European governments continue to support their churches through a variety of means.

In Belgium, Greece and Norway, churches are financed by the state. Churches in Austria, Switzerland and Sweden all use the state to collect taxes from members, but the contributions are either predetermined amounts or, compared with Ger-

many, a more modest 1 to 2 percent of the annual assessed income tax. Spain and Italy allow congregants to decide whether they would like a percentage of their income to flow to religious organizations or be earmarked for civic projects.

In Germany, roughly a third of its 82 million people are Roman Catholics, and about the same number belong to the country's Protestant churches. All of these members, as well as the estimated 120,000 Jews, pay taxes to the state. Muslim organizations rely on donations or support from outside sources, often based in countries abroad.

Critics charge that the German bishops' decree denying sacraments to tax dodgers was driven more by greed than necessity, pointing out that belonging to a congregation in neighboring countries like the Netherlands or France is based on tithes, not a predetermined charge levied by the government.

Indeed, the tax in Germany is blamed in part for driving about three million members from the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church over the past two decades, as disgruntled parishioners decided the payments were better spent on something else.

Norbert Lüdecke, a professor of canon law at Bonn University, said that while every disobedient Catholic is to be punished based on the sin committed, the bishops' decree effectively placed refusal to pay church taxes nearly on par with the most severe offenses in the church.

"Now refusing to pay taxes is considered an offense only slightly less bad than denial that Jesus Christ is the son of God," Mr. Lüdecke said. "While at the same time, there is no specific punishment for other offenses, such as, for example, the sexual abuse of minors by clerics."

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