

BARON, Enrique

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AM-COMMUNITY-BARON-(MAN-IN-THE-NEWS)

:AM-COMMUNITY-BARON (MAN IN THE NEWS) 1989

SPANISH LAWYER NEW PRESIDENT OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

MADRID, July 25, Reuter - Spanish socialist Enrique Baron, elected president of the European Parliament on Tuesday, is a lawyer who was sidelined in national politics but gained prominence abroad when Spain joined the community three years ago.

An accomplished linguist and former transport minister, 45-year-old Baron is the first Spaniard elected to head a European Community institution.

He tried unsuccessfully for the post in 1987 but it went to British conservative Lord Plumb.

Baron was assured of it this time after the Socialists, the biggest single group in the Strasbourg assembly, struck a deal with the second biggest, the centre-right Christian Democrats.

'To build Europe you have to have a big consensus,' Baron told Reuters. 'Polarisation is bad, either on the left or right, we just want a majority who are working for Europe 1992.'

He said his main aims were to help the community advance towards unity and to ensure decisions on that were taken democratically.

'This doesn't mean displacing national parliaments, but it means decisions (on Europe) should be made in the European Parliament,' Baron said.

Spain has just ended a six-month term as president of the Council of Ministers and Baron said his election would be a further source of pride for the country, isolated for years under dictator Francisco Franco who died in 1975.

'For Spaniards, it's important to feel we really are accepted,' he said.

A lawyer by training, Baron has also taught economics and said he always had a strong leaning towards Europe, an interest shown by his command of languages -- he speaks Spanish, Catalan, English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese.

Like many of his generation in Spain, he entered politics as a left-wing student in the 1960s working behind the scenes against the Franco dictatorship.

His past legal cases include defending veteran communist trade unionist Marcelino Camacho.

Baron was secretary-general of a small left-wing party until it merged with the mainstream Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) in the 1970s. A member of parliament after the first post-Franco elections in 1977, he was PSOE spokesman on economic affairs.

As transport minister in Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's first government from 1982 until 1985, he had some difficult tasks -- implementing drastic cuts in the state railway and dealing with three major air crashes as well as striking pilots and air traffic controllers.

A victim of Gonzalez's first cabinet reshuffle in 1985, Baron turned his ambitions to Europe. Spain's first delegation to Strasbourg in January 1986 was based on party strength in the national parliament and he went as spokesman for the socialists.

He became vice-president of the European Parliament in 1987.

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AM-COMMUNITY-PARLIAMENT

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Liberal candidate Rudiger von Weizsäcker, a former West German diplomat who served as ambassador to Britain and to the United Nations, was second with 93 votes.

The Christian Democrat bloc struck the deal with the socialists on the understanding that its candidate would be given a clear run at the presidency in 1992 for the second half of the parliament's five-year life.

The parliament is playing an increasingly important role in the European Community's drive to become a giant, barrier-free market by the end of 1992, giving its opinion on legislation and suggesting amendments.

As president, Baron will represent the assembly in dealings with other EC institutions, attending the start of the twice-yearly Community summits, and will act as a sort of ambassador to the outside world.

His predecessor, British Conservative Lord Plumb, visited 30 countries in his 30 months in office.

The president also plays a crucial role in managing parliamentary business, setting the agenda for debate, chairing plenary sessions and mediating between the 10 multi-national political groups.

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AM-COMMUNITY-PARLIAMENT

:AM-COMMUNITY-PARLIAMENT =3 STRASBOURG (REOPENS)

Baron, a lawyer who defended labour leaders under the dictatorship of the late General Franco in Spain, served as transport minister in the socialist government from 1982 to 1985.

He speaks six of the EC's nine official languages and entered the European Parliament in 1986. He was narrowly defeated by Plumb for the presidency the following year and was elected instead to be one of the assembly's vice-presidents.

Baron's election in the first round of voting was a notable personal success as deputies have in the past taken advantage of the secret ballot to break party ranks. Previous elections have required up to four rounds of voting.

His election followed a mass walk-out during the traditional speech by the assembly's oldest member, French right-winger Claude Autant-Lara.

The 87-year-old film-maker, elected last month on the National Front list of Jean-Marie Le Pen, presided over the inaugural session of the assembly.

The 180-strong Socialist group walked out of the chamber en masse as he began to speak, leaving a red rose in each of their places, while Green deputies held up a banner saying "Fascism, never again".

Members of almost every other parliamentary group followed as Autant-Lara began a harangue against the threat to the diversity of European culture from the United States.

Only fellow right-wingers and about two dozen other deputies, among them some British conservatives, remained in their seats.

Greens later staged another protest over the British first-past-the-post electoral system which meant that despite winning 15 per cent of the vote in last month's elections, the Greens won no seats in Britain.

Green deputies from other countries placed 12 chairs on their desks to represent the 12 deputies who would have been