

Party members convened today for the October full-house assembly of the Consell de Formentera. The session brought cross-party backing for a motion to prolong into the first half of 2021 a set of economic and fiscal measures which councilmembers approved in May. “The crisis hasn’t disappeared”, declared finance and tax office chief Bartomeu Escandell. “Today’s vote is about giving a helping hand to those affected by the Covid-19 crisis”, added the conseller, “we don’t leave people behind here on Formentera”.

Assembly members united in support of seven proposed tax ordinance changes. Three aimed to extend 50% cuts on fees at the island’s early-learning escoletes, music and dance school and sports facilities for “crisis-hit” islanders (a term applied to freelancers whose professional activity has dropped 50%), the unemployed, furloughed workers and individuals receiving benefits or universal social income.

The fourth change renewed support for modification of La Mola lighthouse entry fees. As a result, admission costs at Far de la Mola will continue to be waived for island residents, youth and the unemployed. Number five places an additional six-month freeze on fees at the island’s slaughterhouse — a measure the local finance chief offered was “about helping the island’s crisis-hit agricultural sector”.

Changes six and seven involved the six-month extension of a freeze on the public-space occupancy tax on merchants and market vendors. The tax break will continue until 30 June — the same extension that councilmembers adopted concerning the fee for newly listed vacation rentals.

In line with a report issued 29 June 2020 by the Balearic Women’s Institute (IBdona), unanimous backing was also secured for a measure to halve fees on municipal facilities, services and sporting events levied on individuals who receive universal basic income and female victims of gender violence not receiving other benefits.

Estate tax

With support from the GxF-PSOE cabinet and the opposition's abstention, assembly members provisionally backed a measure to reduce the estate tax (*impost sobre béns immobles/IBI*) from 0.80% to 0.75%.

Cutting fees and taxes

As part of 'Formentera, every corner counts' (*Formentera es cuida a cada racó*), the Consell de Formentera has streamlined processing of permit requests for small works projects and slashed fees and taxes associated with such renovations and upgrades. Land department chief Rafael González described the measures as a boon for the local construction, refurbishments and maintenance trade.

Accordingly, plenary members united behind a fiscal ordinance tweak bringing a 95% reduction of the tax on construction and installations and an end to fees on public space occupancy requests or small works with plans not previously communicated to local government. Requests must be submitted by 30 April 2021 and may not entail new buildings or expansions.

With cabinet approval and despite a "no" from the opposition, the assembly resolved to reject requests by hotels involving buildability, surface area or occupancy increases. On 15 October, Balearic legislators voted to temper Covid-19 crisis fallout with urgent one-time economic stimulus and a streamlining of local government administrative formalities. According to Conseller González, the change gives tourist accommodations the ability to seek surface area increases of up to 15%, but puts the permit granting process in the hands of island councils.

Maritime excursions

Assembly members came together again to press the Spanish Ministry of Interior and Industry to assure the presence of the Guardia Civil Maritime Service on Formentera and to station a rapid-response rescue boat at La Savina harbour. The tax office chief framed the petition as a question of "adequately responding to maritime emergencies" and "ensuring a closer control of nautical activities and respect for environmental regulations".

Assembly members also unanimously agreed on the foundations of work with the Farmers' Co-operative (Cooperativa del Camp) to continue reinvigorating local agriculture and beautifying scenic and rural areas. A collaborative pact reached in May carries a pledge of €52,000 in assistance, and the present agreement entails €78,000 in direct subsidies — "€130,000 so the Cooperativa can continue reactivating local agriculture, safeguard traditions and offer quality products", said Escandell.

Weaning Formentera off reusable masks and sun creams

Ultimately securing support thanks to backing from the local cabinet and despite opposition abstention, environment chief Antonio J. Sanz tabled a measure to reduce use of single-use masks whenever possible. Sanz recommended the move be accompanied by conservation measures and a plan to cut waste: “We’re met more and more frequently with the sight of single-use masks on the roadside, not to mention in our nature reserve. A reduction is crucial.”

Assembly members urged the Consell de Formentera to work to stem buying, selling and use of sun creams with environmentally harmful products like titanium dioxide, zinc oxide and oxybenzone. Conseller Sanz, who tabled the measure, stressed the long-term goal was “a gradual elimination of these chemicals from local shores” and called on the regional and central governments to come up with plans to halt production and sale of such sun creams.

Putting rural women in the foreground

In a nod to International Day of Rural Women on 15 October, assembly members issued a cross-party plea to the Govern balear to lead a multipronged yearly plan highlighting the role of rural women in agriculture. Members also expressed their will to collaborate on local commemoration of International Day of Rural Women. In the words of equality chief Vanessa Parellada, “it’s about dignifying and valuing the role that rural women, past and present, have had in Balearic agriculture. But it’s also about increasing visibility by coordinating our tribute to the rural woman across various levels of government”. Plenary members likewise urged the regional government to pilot a study on the impact and efforts of rural Balearic women in recent years.

Public transport

In a vote marked by GxF-PSOE cabinet support and the abstention of Sa Unió members, the assembly gave preliminary backing to the “Plan for regular highway transport” (*Projecte de serveis del transport regular de viatgers per carretera*
). The mobility chief described the move as “the first step towards tendering an initiative that will bring Formentera public transport closer to islanders’ current needs”.

The tentative plan defines pillars of the future transport such as four new routes in addition to the current five; stops in both urban and rural neighborhoods; two-tier, one-/two-hour service frequency and a ten-vehicle fleet (five minibuses and five midibuses, plus one supply midibus).

González cast the smaller sized vehicles as “better suited to the realities of the island, not to mention better adapted to the needs of individuals with reduced mobility and equipped to carry bicycles and suitcases”. The mobility director projected the new service —part of a ten-year contract and subject to a two-year phased rollout— would entail a 31% growth in demand.

Funding waste transport

Assembly members crossed party lines to push the Govern balear to continue assuming costs associated with the out-bound transport of local waste, whether to Eivissa or to other treatment plants. The environment chief charged that guaranteeing earth-smart waste management would require the regional government’s inclusion of such costs in its 2021 spending plan. Likewise, the assembly voted to press regional and central governments to convene a joint committee of representatives of the authorities with jurisdiction in the area.

At the initiative of Sa Unió representatives, assembly members lent cross-party backing to a standing committee ruling and reiterated an August 2018 appeal from the plenary to write the Consell de Formentera’s membership in Consorci Eivissa Patrimoni de la Humanitat into the group’s charter. The plenary called on the consortium to accept the observations presented by the Consell in 2018 regarding the CEPH charter tweak.

Report by Rafael González

Mobility and land chief Rafael González outlined his departments’ central actions as the legislative term got under way. Looming large in the conseller’s account was Covid-19 and the accompanying crisis — turmoil which ensured attention in both González’s departments was focused on adjustments to emergency orders, easing of lockdown restrictions and, today, transition to a new normality.

Having concluded discussion of the crisis González turned his attention to the mobility department, where efforts are simultaneously centred on three sweeping projects: the Sustainable Mobility Plan (*Pla de Mobilitat Sostenible*), the formentera.eco scheme to regulate inbound and local vehicle traffic and improvements to public transport. Looking ahead, González highlighted the creation of a cycling and pedestrian trail around S’Estany Pudent; completion by Balearic Port Authority of a bike lane from the harbour to Camí de sa Guia; access upgrades at Illetes; more pedestrian areas and fewer architectural barriers in towns.

González also anticipated the drafting and adoption of new urban planning strategies in Ses Bardetes, Es Ca Marí and Sa Roqueta.

Lastly, González said the relocation of his office's urbanism and activities division had given way to better working conditions, improved public service and optimised use of human resources. He also described updates to the OVAC's online service catalogue — a change which, together with regulatory changes to streamline procedures, he hoped would soon be obvious.

Turning the page on the treatment of trans* as a medical affliction

Assembly members came together behind an official proclamation for International Day for Trans* Depathologisation. Presenting the motion was equality chief Vanessa Parellada, who said "ending treatment of trans* realities as pathology and full acknowledgement of every individual's right to a unique gender identity" as "two sides of the same coin". She dismissed the notion that being trans* was a source of anguish among trans* youth ("trampled rights are the real source of suffering for trans* youth and their families", she charged) and asserted, "Our great enemy —that of trans* people and of all society— is disinformation". Parellada likewise highlighted the ongoing struggle for trans*-specific healthcare and for an end to medical prerequisites for the legal processes of gender identification, calling herself "a champion of the right of every individual to make decisions pertinent to their body with absolute freedom". The consellera concluded by asserting "neutrality has no place in public policy. It's neutrality that perpetuates inequalities".

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