

Felix Sierra outlines the new plan for competitiveness for South Tenerife

For residents in South Tenerife there has long been a feeling of discontent, of being ignored, of being second-class citizens when it came to decisions taken about the island in general, the allocation of funding for infrastructures, or the development of zones for investment with all that entails.

For too long the often legitimate allegation was that while the south, through tourism, was the economic motor of Tenerife, it was way down the list when it came to investment. The rest of the island was more than happy to see monies generated by tourism related industries in Santa Cruz, but felt very differently when it came to handing that money out for transport, education or health related projects in the same part of the island. However, that justified sense of neglect should soon be very much a thing of the past.

The Tenerife Cabildo, the elected authority for the whole of the island, is making concrete strides to change the focus and spread the vision of the Cabildo southward. Recently they opened new offices in Playa de Las Américas giving them a permanent presence in this important part of the island, and at the start of February the councillor with responsibility for the region, and for municipal cooperation, Felix Sierra launched a plan to improve competitiveness for Tenerife South.

The intention is to develop a strategy for the south as one region (all the mayors of relevant councils are already on board), which will be a conduit for investment opportunities for private and public funding as well as promoting diversification beyond the boundaries of the tourism and construction industries. Six boroughs are included, Granadilla, San Miguel de Abona, Vilaflor, Arona, Adeje and Guía de Isora, and certainly the six



PLAN FOR COMPETITIVENESS

Strengthening the south

councils have been coming together in recent years and developing joint strategies on a number of cross-borough issues, such as a new runway for Reina Sofia airport and the lack of progress on the new public hospital for the south. For many one of the catalysts in bringing the councils together was the collapse of the arterial road in Los Menores, the main commuter link between Adeje and Guía de Isora, in early 2006, which saw a united front pushing for a rapid and efficient response from Santa Cruz. And Felix Sierra agreed that this latest move by the Cabildo was harnessing that level of co-operation that such situations had given rise to.

However the study will do a lot more than react to issues and problems. Over the next 10 months the study will evolve a plan to benefit the region as a whole. The objectives are multiple: identify the needs and potential in the socio-

economic activity in South Tenerife which will allow for improvement in different sectors, the first to be looked at will be agriculture and fishing, an area identified as in need of immediate attention, followed by industry and agro-industry, and thirdly tourism and commerce. Innovation and assisting emerging sectors is also prioritised by the plan's designers.

Following that analysis the study will examine the need and possible diversification of economic activity in the zone (with all this stretching beyond individual borough frontiers), provide for public institutional co-operation including resources and the promotion of regional development, developing a long term strategy which should harness the potential of each of the six boroughs and draw up a plan of action. On the latter Sierra was adamant that the finished document would

be acted upon immediately, and was not a "plan for the archives". Private as well as public investment will be invited to participate and the Cabildo offices also welcome input from members of the public. Much of the analysis will happen on-site with working visits scheduled as well as a number of sectoral roundtables. Sierra also underlined that while they would be looking at the development of new cross-borough economic areas, this would not be at the expense of existing industries, but rather they would strive for "consensual participation" from those concerned.

Certainly the initiative is to be welcomed and let's hope that it does move quickly to identify those areas where development potential is ready to be realised and jobs created to breathe new life into the south's economic engine as well as finding new sources of 'fuel'.

Puerto spy

TRAITOR

• Roberto Flórez, the man arrested in Puerto de la Cruz in 2007 and accused of passing secrets to Russian intelligence, has been condemned to twelve years in prison for treason.

On 10th February Flórez, a member of the CNI, Spain's intelligence services, was found guilty of treason for obtaining secret information and offering it to the Russians. Although the Russians never actually received the information he is alleged to have offered, Flórez has been charged.

This is the first ever such case since Spain became a democracy after General Franco's dictatorship.

The information he is alleged to have stolen included internal CNI codes, structural information and names of people working for Spanish intelligence. The special tribunal held that the information, had it come into the hands of a foreign power, would have seriously damaged national security. All the documenta-

tion was discovered in the properties of Roberto Flórez and his in-laws in Puerto de la Cruz. It was attached to letters addressed to Mr. Melnikov, whom the intelligence services assumed to be Petr Yakovlevich Melnikov, an attaché at the Russian Embassy in Madrid between 2000 and 2003. In one of the letters Flórez is alleged to have offered his collaboration in return for the sum of US \$200,000. The spy's lawyer said Flórez would be appealing as he considered the sentence was disproportionate, considering no information was actually passed to the Russians. Besides, Flórez has always maintained that the plot was not to actually sell secrets to the Russians but to test security within Spain's intelligence services, then known as the CESID, an excuse that the court found, "implausible". He insisted his seniors had commissioned him to carry out the operation. Flórez has been resident in Puerto de la Cruz since he left the Service in 2004.

Crime wave

NORTHERN THEFTS

• It would seem that the longer the economic crisis goes on the more people resort to crime to make ends meet.

That is the signal coming from towns like Tacoronte and La Matanza in the north of Tenerife, where the police are struggling to cope. In mid-February the Civil Guard were still trying to identify a gang that broke into a restaurant earlier in the month, getting away with cash and alcoholic drinks. The raid was only discovered by the owners when they turned up for work the following morning. They have been plagued with bad luck lately as the restaurant had only recently been restored after a fire last year.

Public safety

MORE COPS

• There is police trouble brewing in a small northern town.

The police unions in Tacoronte have been demanding better pay and conditions for almost a year and now the unions in San Juan de la Rambla have complained the municipality's four cops, including the chief, can't cope with so much work. The economic crisis and rising crime is stretching them to the limit and one of the four has been off work on sick leave for months. A spokesman for their union pointed out recently that the recommended number of police officers per inhabitant is approximately two to every 1,000 inhabitants. At the moment the three policemen on duty have to look after a municipality of 5,000.

Atalaya

Horsing around

Tenerife's Atalaya Riding Club got into the 'Carnaval' spirit in the shape of a themed gymkhana for its members, young and old.

The La Laguna club dressed up its ponies and horses to match members' festive enthusiasm and organised a day of mounted competitions which marked a major contrast with the seriousness of the dressage competition held there a fortnight earlier. The events included a fancy dress obstacle course for children as young as four, including stops for apple-ducking and sack and wheelbarrow races, and a 'carrera de sortijas' in which adult riders demonstrated their horseback prowess by spearing small rings hanging from a tall bar. The day ended with a Fancy Dress Dinner for members.

