



## POLITICIANS' BIASES

# Dangerous denial

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In doing so, he doomed the institutional declaration, which had to be adopted unanimously by all members of the Upper House, to failure. Back in February, he had refused to sign a document against LGBTBI phobia which offered support for gay, lesbian and transgender athletes.

## Not a party matter

"This is the path of the ultra-right in Spain. They refuse to admit that in Spain there is violence against women, a phobia against homosexual and trans-sexual people and a climate change leading to devastating fires and torrential rain, as we have seen this summer in Gran Canaria and on the Spanish Peninsula. This is not a party matter, it is an issue that concerns all political groups, because it affects the environment and therefore all of us, so it is a national matter" said Andrés Gil, spokesman for the Socialists in the Senate.

The mixed group in the Senate includes the Vox, PRC, AS Gomera and UPN parties. All the members agreed, putting the matter above party interests, except for Francisco José Alcaraz. "After the mixed group learned of Alcaraz's veto, they clasped their hands over their heads. It didn't surprise us, because everything that the ultra-rights have anything to do with has consequences" Gil commented. He blamed the representatives of the Partido Popular and the Ciudadanos party for supporting Alcaraz's assumption of office in Andalusia and making it possible. He called on them to refrain from such support in the future so that the ultra-rights would not appear in even more institutions. "The ultra-rights are getting out of hand, not only in Andalusia, but also in autonomous communities like Madrid and Murcia" warned Gil. Important agreements are endan-



## ↑ Are forest fires a consequence of climate change?

gered by right-wing extremist vetoes. "We do not share the attitude of Alcaraz, who refused to sign this institutional declaration."

Ruth Goñi, senator and deputy spokeswoman for the Ciudadanos party in Senate, indicated that her party does not "at all" share Alcaraz's position of not signing the institutional declaration "We don't agree and we don't understand that there won't be a declaration for the biggest fire in this country in six years, something that is so evident and obviously because of climate change."

Despite the refusal to approve the planned climate resolution, the Socialists announced various measures to combat climate change. The socialists' spokesman in Senate, Andrés Gil said that "Spain is committed to the fight against climate change and this will be a clear strategy of the PSOE (Socialists in Spain). It will not be prevented from doing so by the ultra-right of Spanish society."

## Special unit in search of clues

As a consequence of the devastating forest fires in August, Gran Canaria Island Council set up a special unit to investigate the forest fires. It will get to the bottom of the cause of all the fires by carrying out a detailed and scientifically substantiated search for traces and will work closely with the Guardia Civil. Their work will begin as soon as

the starting point in order to discover the focal point of the fire and the means of ignition. With precision to the millimetre, magnifying glasses, gas detectors, temperature gauges, and even magnets, the forest floor is searched to determine the cause of the fire and possibly even its originator.

The public is not informed of any suspicion, until there is well-founded evidence. "This can take weeks and months:



## ↑ Specialists investigate the causes of the fire in minute detail

all other important measures have been carried out. With this special unit, Gran Canaria, along with Madrid, Catalonia and Valencia, is leading the way in Spain.

"Every fire is like a living creature: it is born, grows and dies" said BRIFF (Brigade of Investigation into Forest Fires) Coordination Inspector Juan Carlos Santana. The path of the flames is traced back until the source of the fire is located. Then the reason has to be found. Elements such as the topography of the site, the type of fire, the climate on the day and the type of combustible material are examined. With the help of red and white flags and the reading of progress, intensity and extent of damage to stones, branches and terrain, they manage to reach

That is why we ask the media and the public for patience and for time, as we need to get a well-founded result. Rash assumptions only lead to mistakes that we cannot afford" Santana stresses. He pointed out once again that the causes of the forest fires in Gran Canaria are one hundred per cent man-made. In most cases they are caused by negligence and in rare cases by arson. "Negligent means that people carelessly use spark spraying devices near forests at times of risk. That's why we in the Island Council will continue to work to ensure that people understand that we live in an area where forest fires are a real threat" the Island Council representatives summed up in a press release promising further education. ■

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

## Animal welfare

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This was preceded by scientific publications that documented the stress suffered by the whales and dolphins. Even residents who go out to sea regularly to see the animals often find they have to change their plans and go further out than expected to find them. Is this a sign that the numbers of visitors have just become too much for the cetaceans?

"We have accepted the moratorium with great satisfaction, because the well-being of whales and dolphins has absolute priority over tourist activity in this area. We want whale and dolphin watching to be carried out in a sustainable way," said councillor for tourism José Gregorio Martín Plata. To this end, it's necessary to limit the number of people who travel to see the animals every day and to ensure that providers of such tours adhere to strict guidelines. By 2022, Proyecto LIFE Intermares scientists will have assessed the current situation and will have established guidelines on how to proceed in order to protect the cetaceans. The marine reserve is to be given similarly intensive protection as that which the Mount Teide National Park receives.

## Tourist attraction

Every year more than 700,000 holidaymakers take advantage of the opportunity to visit the whales and dolphins to experience the animals in their natural habitat. It is the second most important tourist attraction on the island, with an annual turnover of over €26 million. But the economic side must not be placed above ecological interest. In the name of sustainability, it is hoped that more stringent regulations will be introduced. The number of licences has risen sharply in the last five years, from 30 in 2014 to 70 today, meaning that the industry has grown by 133 per cent in a very short time. Applicants do not have to fulfil any conditions vis-à-vis the Ministry in order to obtain the licence and, once it has been issued, there are too few controls. Yet, as early as 2011, the Island Council issued the Carta por la Sostenibilidad para el Avistamiento de Cetáceos (Charter for Sustainability in Whale and Dolphin Watching), thereby taking a huge step in this direction. A total of 15 companies with 32 boats have taken this commitment seriously from the outset and joined the initiative, and others followed later. The charter includes ecological aspects on the correct approach to marine mammals as well as compliance with nautical, fiscal, economic and labour standards. Transparency and continuous improvement were promised. Companies that belong to this charter are allowed to mark their boats with a blue flag. This initiative has even been rewarded with a nomination for an award by the World Tourism Organisation for Innovation and Sustainability. Only if the animals are protected and not stressed by tourist activity can they be conserved and their well-being guaranteed. ■



## ↑ Often, cetaceans voluntarily approach the boats



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