

NEWS

ERC lead the way on transparency of party finances in Catalonia

The announcement of the creation of an anti-fraud office leads to cross-party agreement

NEIL STOKES

Since President Pasqual Maragall's famous 3 per cent comment, the shadow of corruption has been hovering over Catalan politics. Now, with the initial crisis all but over, leftwing nationalists, the ERC party, have taken the initiative by opening up their accounts to public scrutiny in a bid to present themselves as the "clean hands" party. The gesture followed the agreement between all parties in the Catalan parliament to debate a series of measures to increase transparency and the Government's announcement of its intention to set up an anti-fraud office to investigate funding of political parties.

On Tuesday, vice-president Josep Bargalló announced in Parliament the Generalitat's plans to create the Oficina de Lluita contra el Fraud (OLAF). Although OLAF will answer to Bargalló, who has chosen anti-corruption prosecutor David Martínez Madero to lead the unit, the vice-president insisted that, "it will have clear organic independence." Predictably, his words failed to satisfy all the parties, with CiU and PP in par-

ticular calling into question OLAF's autonomy.

Bargallo's announcement formed part of a parliamentary session which included a proposal by ICV spokesman, Joan Boada, for a debate on adopting measures for increasing transparency in the funding of political parties. There was, however, still plenty of disagreement with accusations flying to and fro. Most venom was reserved for CiU, the party on the receiving end of Maragall's 3 per cent accusation and the one which receives the most in anonymous contributions. CiU spokesman, Felip Puig, responded with aspersions cast on ERC's accounting.

Which in part led to ERC's announcement by the party's secretary of Organització i Finances, Xavier Vendrell, that the party's accounts were to be made public. Vendrell wished to show that his party had "fair, clear, transparent and austere" finances. The spokesman also took a swipe at the other parties, accusing PSC, CiU and PPC as annually receiving between 1999 and 2001, 3 million euros in anonymous donations.



ERC's Xavier Vendrell (above) announced the opening up of his party's accounts / EL PUNT

Textile trade fair to open in Barcelona

The 7th Saló Textil Internacional de Barcelona returns this month to la Casa Llotja de Mar in Barceloneta (Marta Wendlinger writes). Once again Barcelona becomes the meeting point for professionals in the textile and fashion industry. This year the STIB will host over 37 exhibitors including Arcana 97, Blau Dominichello, Ibercloth, Quindi and Texlook and will also showcase design teams from multinational firms such as Burberry, Massimo Dutti, Mango and Zara with over 340 collections of fabrics and accessories.

The STIB bridges the gap between the bigger fairs in Paris and Milan and attendance is expected to reach over 1,300. Local Catalan designers affirmed the importance of the event. Antonio Miró said, "It's an opportunity for us to find out about all the latest trends in fabrics and accessories." The STIB starts on the 16th March and runs until the 19th March.

Catalan HQ for NATO exercise

NATO is set to carry out a major military exercise from the army base of Sant Climent Sescebes (Alt Empordà) in Catalonia at the end of May. The base will serve as the headquarters for the operation that will include naval and army exercises. NATO and the Spanish ministry of defence are currently improving the communications network at the base — this includes installing digital technology so that it can co-ordinate the military forces. The naval operations will be centred around the Barcelona area of the Mediterranean while the army will be based Aragon. The NATO exercises are expected to last a month. Sant Climent was used to train troops from central America before they embarked for Iraq in 2003.

Terrassa the next Hollywood?

Catalan president Pasqual Maragall has congratulated Terrassa for establishing its very own "Hollywood", to be known as *Ciutat Audiovisual*, a complex located in the Hospital Tòrax building which will house facilities for leading audiovisual companies. The complex is part of a larger project called *Parc Audiovisual*, which will cover more than 50 square kms and house facilities for, among other organisations, Filmax Entertainment and Filmoteca de Catalunya. Terrassa's city council is funding 80 per cent of the project, while the Generalitat is providing the remaining 20 per cent.

Report claims that the Barcelona immigrant influx is on the decline

CATALONIA TODAY

Barcelona's popularity as a city that attracts foreign residents appears to be — relatively speaking — on the wane. Latest figures reveal that 14.6 per cent of the city's 1.5 million inhabitants is made up of people from overseas. According to city authorities, 230,942 registered foreigners were living in Barcelona last year, an increase of 28,453 from the previous 12 months.

However, figures also show that in previous years there was a higher influx of overseas people moving to the city — in 2003 the increase was 24 per cent (40,000 people) while during 2002 it was 53.8 per cent (nearly 50,000). Barcelona city council considers that this indicates that the number of immigrants coming to live in the city will continue to decline over the next five years.

Barcelona has attracted foreigners from 159 countries across the world. 52 per cent of overseas residents are men, although in some groups, such as amongst Bolivians and Dominicans there are six men to every women. The average age of foreign residents is 31.

Council figures reveal that seven of Barcelona's 38 areas have more than a 20 per cent foreign population. El Raval tops the list (47%) fol-



Immigrants protesting in the Sant Medir sports centre in Barcelona / L.CRUISET

lowed by Ciutat Vella-Parc (34%) and Poble Sec (26%). The neighbourhoods with the least foreigners are Verneda (7%), Sant Andreu (7.5%) and Horta (8%).

So far 101,105 immigrants have been granted legal status in Barcelona and its provinces since the start of the government campaign to enable immigrants working illegally

in Spain to register with the social security system. However, nearly 500 immigrants staged protests against Spain's immigration laws in Barcelona last weekend. They are demanding that the process of giving immigrants legal recognition should be carried out without conditions. "Papeles para todos" (legal documents for all) was the chant.

More noise protests at airport

CATALONIA TODAY

The residents of Gavà-Mar will carry out further protests against the noise levels caused by aircraft using the third runway at Barcelona's El Prat airport close to their homes. Last week the Spanish government introduced measures aimed at limiting the disturbance following months of lobbying by angry residents.

But campaigners claim that the measures which reduces the number of planes that can land on the third runway by half (from an easterly direction) are insufficient. "They are an insult," said president of the campaign group, Elisabeth Martínez. This weekend Gavà residents will protest at the El Prat airport wearing a "crown of thorns and hoods like in the Easter processions" to show their anger at the environmental impact caused by the planes. Martínez claims that the noise levels "go above the legal decibel levels."

The mayor of Gavà, Dídac Pestaña (PSC) said the measures introduced by the government "were not a solution for anybody" and he claimed that both the government and the public-run airport authority, AENA were "incompetent."