

## **Majorca bought and sold**

**A quarter of a billion euros have been misappropriated from public funds on the Balearic Islands.**

**A few elected representatives have been found guilty already, and jailed**

by Andreu Manresa

**The Balearic Islands are a major location of European political corruption. More than 40 elected representatives are liable for prosecution, including two presidents of the regional government, five former ministers (*consejeros*) and the president of the autonomous parliament.** The anti-corruption prosecutor in Madrid is investigating many accusations of misappropriation of public funds on the largest island, Majorca (with just under a million inhabitants), which is now reduced to a vast property and tourism complex.

**In this Mediterranean archipelago, the coastline, the towns and even the countryside are coveted by property speculators, and speculation is rife in public institutions, with bribes to anyone in authority with the power to multiply the profits of a construction project by thousands simply by changing the status of a plot of land or moving a line on a map.**

**The code of silence that has protected this collusion between politicians and entrepreneurs (nicknamed Balearic Islands Inc) is cracking at last. After the arrests, trials and first sentences, scores are now being settled, with confessions, betrayals and offers of cooperation to avoid jail.**

The arrests in Majorca revealed the hidden side of this island. Three elected members of the **Popular Party (PP)** are now in prison on corruption charges, together with Tomeu Vicens, the deputy in charge of urban planning and former secretary general of the **Majorcan Union (UM)**, a small, centre-right party that played a decisive role. The UM won 28,000 votes in the 2007 election (6.75%) but has always influenced politics in the Autonomous Balearic Community. Its

ideology is sufficiently flexible to allow any kind of coalition. On the pretext of transcending social classes, its claims to be nationalist and in favour of free markets and public service. **Depending on the circumstances and payments, the three representatives allied themselves in turn with both the PP conservatives and the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), and controlled the region's politics for nearly 30 years, while taking government jobs and budgets.**

In 2009 an embezzlement charge led to the fall of Vicens, also accused in other cases: he was given a four-year prison sentence. The investigation revealed that Vicens had made a "gift" of €12,000 to his private accountant to fake an official report that was in fact plagiarised from the internet. After his arrest the other UM leaders turned against each other. In February 2010 Miquel Nadal, the former tourism adviser and chairman of the UM claimed in court that Maria Antònia Munar, the party leader and president of the Balearic parliament, who had been his political mentor for the past 20 years, had given him €300,000 for a "political operation" prior to the 2007 elections. This meant buying a television channel (Palma TV) for promoting the party, and creating a network of fictitious employees-cum-voters who received real salaries from companies subsidised by the public institutions controlled by the UM.

The UM had peddled political favours with small companies linked to political institutions to obtain false invoices and recruit militants. A lawyer in Majorca has called the organisation "an opportunistic, clientelistic party with an established favour network". **Vicens, Munar and Nadal, as well as many lawyers and investors, made so much money by supporting the major parties that they monopolised tourism and urban planning.** They are alleged to be connected to scandals involving two television stations, a velodrome, a motorway, two tourism institutes, a technology institute, the rural development plan and even undertakers, since the UM received commissions on coffins and the sale of burial plots. Carles Manera, the current socialist minister of economy and finance in the regional government, believes that during the previous mandate the public coffers were plundered of €260-270m.

While the UM party made alliances with PSOE (1999-2003 and 2007-10), it was the PP who governed the island for the longest periods (1983-99 and 2003-07).

The PP has been the most tarnished by the scandals involving the UM. The first president of the Balearic Islands, Gabriel Cañellas, was obliged to resign in 1995 after accusations that he “gave” a tunnel concession to a friend. (Charges in the case were dropped.) Cañellas had allegedly granted the UM several favours, by changing legislation to make it possible to urbanise certain plots of family land along the coast. His successor, Jaume Matas, who was twice president of the autonomous community (1996-99 and 2003-07), also worked with Munar. Like Munar, he is currently being investigated on corruption charges, including embezzlement, misuse of public funds, falsifying documents and taking bribes. He only avoided immediate imprisonment by paying bail of €3m.

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