

Consell de Formentera premiere Alejandra Ferrer joined a conference hosted by Spain’s Senate today on the special situation of islands and peripheral cities such as Ceuta and Melilla. During remarks, the premiere praised senator Vicenç Vidal and all those who had worked to take Formentera and the Balearic Islands' plight as insular territories to the Senate floor, she said, pointing out that the smaller of the Pine Islands has no senator of its own — “a situation we hope to see remedied soon”, she added.

Ferrer began her address by describing Formentera and its idiosyncrasies to give legislators a sense of islanders’ everyday reality. She went on to enumerate the challenges inherent in an economy so heavily structured around a tourist season that starts in May and concludes in mid-October.

Before the Consell de Formentera existed, Ferrer pointed out that residents had long clamoured for their own government — “one that would let islanders defend hometown issues locally and ensure they enjoyed the same rights as the rest of Spain’s citizens”.

Since its founding, the island’s government has taken on a wide range of new functions, coming to guarantee many basic services like care for dependent individuals and people with functional diversity, not to mention working to promote inclusiveness in employment and society at large. “We implement specific plans and policies for gender equality, children and young people, but disparities remain because we continue to lack many crucial services”, Ferrer said, holding up examples of medical care like radiotherapy, haemodialysis and mental health services which, to obtain, Formentera residents must leave the island. “The same goes for central government services like paperwork processing for our foreign-born residents, or administrative formalities involving the courts, taxes, the treasury and social security, all of which must be done on the neighbouring island. Likewise, many local decisions are affected by the economic interests of other territories. Moorage and inter-island maritime travel, for example, are regulated by multiple agencies which are subject to pressure from lobbies who place their own benefits above the wellbeing of our island’s natural environment”.

Sustainable island

Ferrer also spoke to many local steps past and present to reduce the environmental footprint of

tourism, citing protections for posidonia meadows, the island’s plastic bag ban, new e-vehicle recharge points and caps on vehicles during the high season, a scheme which is ultimately projected to cut local traffic 16% by 2023.

There is still a long way to go, Ferrer asserted, “not just protecting our land, but also in terms of guaranteeing basic human rights, especially in a year that has laid bare social inequity and, above all, economic precariousness”.

In that respect, the premiere called for fair funding for the islands: “The Balearic Islands generate wealth and constitute an economic engine, but the funding we receive isn’t commensurate: we’re at the bottom rung in terms of average per-capita investment from the central government”. Nevertheless, Ferrer trumpeted the recent announcement from Madrid that the archipelago would receive special aid for crisis-hit freelancers and business owners.

Triple insularity

Ferrer stressed that Formentera endures a situation of “triple insularity”, a fact entailing “disadvantages when it comes to travel, accessible basic services, goods transport, competitiveness, export capacity or internationalisation, meaning that for an island like Formentera, due to our size, population and geographical situation, diversifying our economy is extremely tricky; in this sense we share problems with rural mainland territories suffering depopulation”.

Ferrer cited problematic corollaries like a higher cost of living —Formentera residents pay an average of 30% more on basic goods than their neighbours across the archipelago— and stiffer than than average rates on desalinated water. Given demand is uniquely seasonal and critical mass of water users is very small, one tonne of water costs €1.96, more than anywhere in Spain and an expense which Formentera residents must pay entirely out of pocket.

Ferrer referred additionally to the housing crunch, saying, “Like the effects of our insularity, exorbitant prices and problems accessing affordable housing are magnified three-fold in our case: Formentera has no periphery, so everything is sold at high street prices”.

“Reverse discrimination is crucial to guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities, more competitive costs, aid to families of students who study off the island and funding to maintain

services and infrastructure”, Ferrer added. “In practice, Formentera is part of the hinterland and should receive benefits similar to the Canary Islands at the European and national level”, she insisted.

Finally, Ferrer insisted the healthcare and social crisis had underscored economic fragility and social inequity in the islands, asserting, “If we want to tackle disparities, now more than ever, we need fair funding that reflects our geographical situation and particularities in the regions’ special tax regime”. “We’ll have to roll up our sleeves if we want to see the kind of economic diversification and recovery in the region that will enable us to be competitive in the future and guarantee social equity and islanders’ well-being and quality of life”, she concluded.

18 March 2021
Communications Department
Consell de Formentera