



Consell de Formentera President Alejandra Ferrer was joined earlier today by the Balearic Deputy First Minister and Minister of Energy Transition, Productive Sectors and Democratic Memory, Juan Pedro Yllanes, in detailing the Action Plan for Civil War Graves 2021-2022. The plan has been spearheaded by the Balearic government, with one of the most important actions on the docket to be performed on Formentera. In terms of the number of victims potentially involved –58 lives were lost at the Formentera prison between 1941 and 1942, according to data from a historical study by Antoni Ferrer Abárzuza –operations in the “*cementeri nou*” (new cemetery) of Sant Francesc are among the plan’s most substantial.

President Ferrer called the work “crucial” and asserted it could “help dignify the memory of Civil War victims”. She also wished the best of luck to the professionals tasked with leading the excavations, remarking that the endeavour would likely be “very tough, not least emotionally”, but insisting such work would make it possible for relatives “to find peace and bid family members a proper farewell”.

Also on hand for the press conference were the island’s Councillor of Heritage, Raquel Guasch; the Balearic Secretary of Productive Sectors and Democratic Memory, Jesús Jurado; Almudena García Rubio of Aranzadi Science Society, the group which has been contracted to perform excavation, exhumation and identification duties as part of the current plan; the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Eivissa-Formentera Forum for Memory, Luis Ruiz and Artur Parrón, respectively; and historian Antoni Ferrer Abárzuza.

In remarks, Deputy First Minister Yllanes insisted that “hanging in the balance is the prospect of guaranteeing human rights, the foundation of democracy”. “We are talking about ending a more than eight-decade wait for relatives who have yet to find the remains of their missing loved ones. This third Action Plan for Civil War Graves puts us at the forefront of democratic memory in Spain. In the Balearics we’ll open seven sites, one here in Sant Francesc, where we’ll study the feasibility of six more and, for the first time, we’ll dedicate resources to restoring objects found in the graves, an unprecedented action on the national territory. However there’s still a long way to go, more graves to exhume and more bodies to identify and return to their relatives. We must continue to guarantee the right to truth, to memory, to reparation and to the recognition of victims”.

"Today on Formentera we present the third plan for exhumations", began Secretary Jurado, who continued by pointing out that one of the plan's most notable features would entail combing the Sant Francesc cemetery in a bid to locate the final resting place of individuals who died at the internment camp in La Savina. In Jurado's words, "the main objective is, of course, the pinpointing, identification and return of remains to the families. Democratic memory is based on human rights, like the right of victims' families to truth, justice and reparation, a right that has been denied them for many decades".

Representing Aranzadi Science Society, Ms García said that related actions to date had included analysis of Mr Ferrer's feasibility study at the new cemetery of Sant Francesc as well as a field visit. "In his report, Mr Ferrer identifies three areas in which different witnesses have indicated that burials took place, some of whose localisation appears more viable than others. We've proposed working on all of these sites in hierarchical order: starting with the most reliable based on the oral testimonies that have been collected", she said. The Aranzadi Science Society chief additionally offered that the Sant Francesc team would include participants from digs that were held in Sant Ferran in 2017 as well as from digs during various operations in the Old Cemetery of Eivissa, in Ses Figueretes.

The historical study

Actions at new cemetery of Sant Francesc were included in the third graves plan as a result of the Mr Ferrer's historical study, which establishes in 58 the definitive number of mortal victims at the island's internment camp between 1941 and 1942 and defines three places in the cemetery where viable efforts can be made to locate remains.

Prepared on the basis of past research and the contributions of distinct witnesses, the report details the inhumane conditions –overcrowding, unsanitary facilities and food shortages leading to starvation and hunger– that prisoners on the island endured.

To determine the exact number of fatalities in Formentera prison, Antoni Ferrer adds new documentary sources. Until now he had analysed the books of Formentera's Civil Registry and the book of deaths of the parish of Sant Francesc Xavier, and Ferrer adds two more sources, hitherto unexplored: the records of the Administration of Justice of the Archive of the Consell de Formentera and the municipal census of inhabitants. The results coincide and corroborate the figure of 58 fatalities.

On the place of burial of the victims, the study explains that the new cemetery of Sant Francesc was opened in 1940, a few months before the first documented death in prison in Formentera, dated April 1941. No direct witnesses to those burials were found, but there are two secondary witnesses who coincide in indicating as possible locations two of the four quadrants of the new cemetery, located on the west side and which were already finished in 1938. The historian concludes, from the documentation consulted, that the burials were carried out according to the Catholic Christian rite. What we cannot know is whether the graves were identified at the time.

The study includes, as a novelty, not only information on the mortal victims but also on all the people who were imprisoned in the prison of Formentera -about 1,500 names- based on the transcription of lists of the registers and their processing.

Third graves plan

The third graves plan of the Balearic government will involve excavation, exhumation and identification of bodies in seven burial sites in the region. The work will be carried out by the Aranzadi Science Society, following the timetable approved by the Technical Commission on Missing Persons and Graves of the Balearic Islands, which is scheduled to begin in October with the second phase of the Son Coletes excavation in Manacor, followed by work in the new cemetery of Sant Francesc.

*22 September 2021
Communications Office
Consell de Formentera*