

Prime Minister Visits Aljezur

Portuguese Prime Minister José Socrates has assured Amovate that the regeneration of Vale da Telha is now a vital component of the Government's new coastal plan for South-West Portugal.

Señhor Socrates, the first Prime Minister of Portugal to visit Aljezur in 22 years, was introduced to Amovate President Peter Johnson by Francisco Nunes Correia, the Minister of Environment, Spatial Planning and Regional Development during the visit on Friday, August 28.

The Environment Minister had chatted with Peter and committee members Matt D'Arcy and John Bergstrom-Potter over lunch during a previous visit in June.

And he told the Prime Minister when he called Peter over to introduce them to each other: 'Amovate does very good work in this area.'

The Prime Minister, speaking in English, told Peter: 'We have a plan for Vale da Telha and it will happen. You may have been promised these things before by Government but never before by me, and I promise that the Polis Litoral for this area will be carried through.'

He added, smiling: 'You must be patient. It will take a little time but I assure you it WILL sort itself out. I guarantee it.'

The presentation of the €47m Polis plan was introduced by Aljezur Camara President Manuel Marreiros, alongside the ruins of the Fortaleza at Arrifana, followed by a film presentation.

There then followed an address by the Environment Minister before the Prime Minister—who says he loves Aljezur, having holidayed in the area many times—wrapped up the proceedings.

Polis, whose work will be carried out between 2009 and 2013, takes in some 150km of the south-west coastline, from St Torbes, outside Sines, round Cape St Vincent up to Burgau. It is designed to improve the coastal strip, restore and protect natural coastal systems, improve 16 beaches and six fishing villages and create new tourism products in a manner sympathetic to natural and cultural heritage.

Marreiros, welcoming the Camara Presidents of Lagos, Sines, Odemeira and Vila do Bispo who are all partners in the project, declared:

'If Paradise existed in this world, it is here.'

He says that Aljezur has a promising future and they are keen to develop it in such a way that the young people, currently moving away in unacceptably large numbers—leaving behind an ageing population—are found jobs and persuaded to stay.

Marreiros, who steps down as President this autumn to move into the wider political field—the Prime Minister welcomed the fact that he would not be lost to politics—said that he always had four major aims during his Presidency.

One was to develop the fishing and shellfish industries of the area in such a way as to create a large number of jobs for local youngsters, removing obstacles, some of which are thrown up by the Green lobby pressuring for a reduction in fishing quotas and the curtailment of the ‘harvesting’ of such varieties as mussels and percebes.

He wants all restrictions to be moved ‘to give our young people hope for the future’ and welcomed the Polis initiative as a way to achieve those aims. But he cautioned: ‘No plan must go against the will of the people.’

The Polis plan includes the regeneration of six fishing villages in the areas affected, including Arrifana and Portinho dos Fornos at Carrapateira, both in the Aljezur Camara, to make the catching, landing and processing of seafoods more efficient and consequently creating more jobs.

Another of his aims was to regulate the urbanization of Vale da Telha to legalise the area and regulate the zoning balance between residential areas and Green Belt.

The third was to see the National Park and its resources given more protection, and the fourth to provide the by-pass around Aljezur, removing the congestion in the centre of the town.

‘I thought some of it would never be resolved,’ he admitted. ‘But with the Polis project I now KNOW it will be resolved.’

Environment Minister Correia told the gathering, which included national Portuguese print and electronic media, that Polis would create 4,000 touristic beds designed to blend into the landscape using only natural resources from the respective areas and making the most of the spectacular coastal views.

And he stressed that Vale da Telha is an important part of the project which will ‘look into solving the problems of Vale da Telha.’

Prime Minister Socrates said he was surprised that no other Prime Minister had visited Aljezur in almost a quarter of a century. But he smiled: ‘I am a fan and I love Aljezur and all of this area.

‘I have been on holiday here many times and when I was Minister of the Environment I wanted this area to become top of the agenda. Only now can it happen.’

He joked: ‘The President of the Aljezur Camara has been pushing the coals closer to his sardines, but I am Prime Minister of all the Portuguese and only now could it happen.’

Then he added: ‘But I understand, and he does have a point—this area has been neglected and forgotten.’

“But now we are onto it and you are going to see a lot of improvements, the protection of nature, the welfare of the local environment and an improvement in the quality of life of the residents.’

***Story from notes translated by **Bartolomeu Ferreira de Sousa**