

Meltdown in MARBELLA

The Godfather, a Face Lift & Mr Clean
by Elena Suárez

For property owners in Marbella, the corruption and malfeasance of the city's council has been a nightmare of truly appalling proportions with an emotional cost difficult to calculate. Some 600-700 properties risk being demolished, whilst around 18,000 others are blighted by illegality. Amazingly, what was one of the richest towns in Spain is now virtually bankrupt with an infrastructure on the point of collapse. The scandal of Marbella is a story that verges on the incredible.

To some extent, it all began with the property crash of 1989. Marbella was already notorious as a place where the jet-set rubbed shoulders with criminals and shady businessmen. For twenty years its glorious climate had attracted the wealthy, beautiful and dubious from around the world, creating an air of glamour that was a draw to tens of thousands of retiring and holidaying north Europeans. However, the 1989 crash left the city rudderless and the local people

discontented with the controlling PSOE political party.

Into the breach walked a larger than life multi-millionaire property developer and football aficionado, Jesús Gil y Gil, who was elected mayor in 1991. His over-whelming electoral majority was obtained, ironically, on the back of promises to clean up existing corruption and to provide cheap housing. Importantly, he also claimed he would promote Marbella internationally and re-stimulate the property market.

A forceful, loud-mouthed autocrat, Gil y Gil was nothing if not dynamic and quickly set to work, re-vitalising Marbella just as the property market started to boom. Ignoring the restrictive and regionally authorised 1986 Town Plan, he allowed licences for buildings virtually irrespective of a given plot's

legal categorisation. Despite numerous complaints from the central planning authority in Sevilla, individual properties and huge urbanisations were erected on protected land or green zones. Furthermore, infrastructure requirements were ignored amidst an explosion of rampant and unregulated construction as the property boom accelerated through the 1990s.

Gil y Gil's right-hand man, deputy mayor and heir apparent was Julián Muñoz. Nationally famous as the boyfriend of Isabel Pantoja, one of the most glamorous folk singers in Spain, he was briefly mayor of Marbella upon Gil y Gil's resignation in 2002. Subsequently, he was charged with the authorisation of payments for projects that never occurred and the bribery involved in providing licences to developers for building projects.

Incredibly, Isabel Pantoja denied knowing about his actions despite allegations she handled large amounts of cash herself.

However, behind the scenes lay the 'puppet master' with his hands on all the strings. Juan Antonio Roca had come to Marbella as an unemployed builder before becoming chief of urban

**Caught
red-handed:
another
disgraced
former mayor
of Marbella,
Julián Muñoz**



**“Astonishingly,
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Jesús Gil y Gil (aka 'The Godfather')
- the story of Marbella's downfall
began the moment he was elected
mayor in 1991

Women behaving badly:
former mayor Marisol
Yagüe and her deputy
Isabel García Marcos



Muñoz seizes control of the city

**“ Roca is
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‘I am the town
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**Roca bye baby:
from multi-millionaire
city planner to a life
behind bars?**

◀ planning in the early 1990s under Gil y Gil. Within fifteen years he had amassed an astounding fortune that included several hotels and fincas, a ranch with thoroughbred horses and bulls, a private jet, vintage cars and an art collection that included paintings by Juan Miró. It has been alleged that Roca controlled some 120 companies, had nine mobile telephones and had authorised licences on an estimated 600 real estate deals worth billions of euros. His wealth, so he claimed publicly, came from having won the lottery a somewhat unlikely eighty times during his lifetime.

During the period between Gil y Gil's death and his own arrest last year, Roca was so powerful that it was said no major deal within Marbella went ahead without his approval. Indeed, he is believed to have stated, with some accuracy: "I am the town hall". Certainly, it appears his power was sufficient to ensure that Julián Muñoz's term of office as mayor was cut short - with his subsequent replacement by the more pliable Marisol Yagüe. The latter, a somewhat arrogant and vain woman, now stands accused, amongst other things, of accepting €1.3 million in

bribes, a free face lift and a flat for her son in Madrid.

The endemic corruption surrounding Marbella town council started to unravel in 2005 when a young and incorruptible judge, Miguel Ángel Torres, was placed in charge of investigating money laundering in Málaga. This massive problem was found to be inextricably linked to property development and led the judge inevitably to Marbella, the town hall and a mire of housing fraud, licence abuses, bribery and corruption.

Operation Malaya was swiftly mounted in 2006 and within three months Judge Torres was coolly reeling in the major 'players'. Twenty-three people were arrested including Antonio Roca, mayor Marisol Yagüe and her deputy, Isabel García Marcos, who had been known previously as an anti-corruption campaigner. Astonishingly, the police announced that they had seized a mind-blowing €2.4 billion worth of cash and assets. This haul included €830,000 in cash, 275 works of art, 103 horses, 14 cars, 24 historical weapons, five kilos of jewellery and a helicopter. Within days, Marbella council had been dissolved by the ▶

The Players



The Godfather

Jesús Gil y Gil
Mayor of Marbella 1991 - 2002
Owner of Atlético Madrid football club
Convicted of embezzlement 2002
Died 2004



Puppet Master

Juan Antonio Roca
Marbella City Planner
From dole to one of the
richest people in Andalucía
Arrested 2006



The Puppet

Marisol Yagüe
Mayor of Marbella 2003 - 2006
Apparently received a face lift
and €1.3 million in bribes
Arrested 2006

The Hypocrite



Isabel García Marcos
Deputy Mayor of Marbella
€378,000 in cash found in her safe
Arrested 2006



The Voice

Isabel Pantoja
Spain's answer to Shirley Bassey
Accused of receiving dirty money from
boyfriend Julián Muñoz
Arrested last May but released on bail
Denies all involvement at every opportunity



The Lieutenant

Julián Muñoz
Gil y Gil's right-hand man and
boyfriend of Spanish flamenco
star Isabel Pantoja
Mayor of Marbella 2002 - 2003
Jailed 2006

Mr Clean



Judge Miguel Ángel Torres
36-year-old examining judge
Retiring, charming and thorough
Head of Operation Malaya
Promoted to the criminal court in Granada

◀ Spanish national government, the first time such an action had occurred since Spain became a democracy under the 1976 constitution.

The full extent and implications of the corruption in Marbella are still coming to light. In July 2007 Judge Torres announced that he was charging eighty-six people in connection with fraud and corruption in the city. Of these, two are former mayors and twenty were past councillors. The remainder rank amongst the elite of Marbella and range from lawyers and businessmen through to developers and politicians.

As for Marbella itself, incredibly, not a single school or health centre has been built in fifteen years and a 'floating' permanent population estimated to have ballooned to around 160,000 people is surviving on an infrastructure that has not changed since 1991. To make matters worse, under mayor Gil y Gil, Marbella

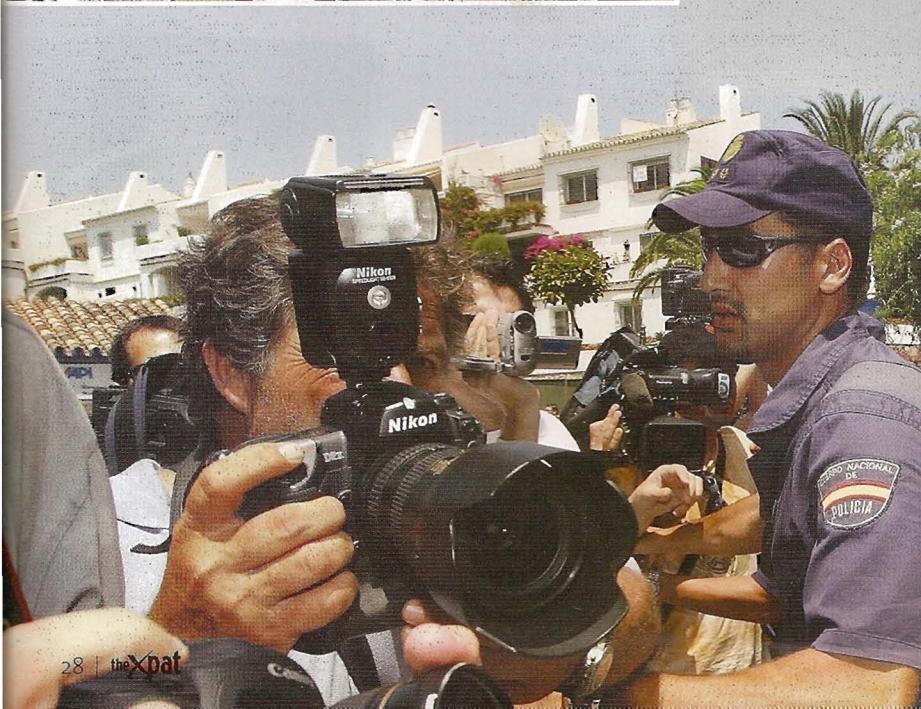
council paid neither social security contributions nor tax for its workforce - which expanded from 400 in 1991 to 3,200 in 2006.

It is estimated that Marbella is now saddled with accumulated debts of around €200 million, hampering any possible rectification of the town's traumatised infrastructure. This, of course, is the final insult to those worrying themselves sick about the legality of their homes, terrified that theirs might be one of the properties scheduled for demolition.

But perhaps the biggest scandal is that endemic corruption within Marbella had been widely known about for years by those living and working on the Costa del Sol. How was it, therefore, that it took so long for anything to be done? What it all seems to point to is an element of high-level, institutional collusion ... with the distinct possibility that this particular story is very far from over. ☒



Partners in wine:
Roca and Gil at
the height of
their powers



Marbella Timeline

1954

Alfonso of Hohenlohe opens Hotel Marbella Club and starts to construct a holiday 'village' for the wealthy.

1974

Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia visits and provides the stamp of approval for Marbella as a resort for the very wealthy.

1980s

The jet-set arrive - Sean Connery, Julio Iglesias & Co.

1989

Real estate crash.

1991

Jesús Gil y Gil is elected mayor with a huge majority and starts to re-vamp Marbella.

1995

Property boom starts.

2002

Gil y Gil resigns, is jailed and banned from public office for 28 years. Julián Muñoz becomes mayor.

2003

Marisol Yagüe becomes mayor after Muñoz is out-manoeuvred by Roca.

2005

Judge Torres directs Operation White Whale (an investigation into money laundering). He finds links with property development and local government corruption.

2006

Operation Malaya launched under Judge Torres to investigate housing development fraud and local government corruption.

March

Mayor Marisol Yagüe, deputy mayor Isabel García Marcos and Juan Antonio Roca arrested. Police confirm seizing €2.4 billion in cash and assets.

April

Marbella council dissolved and caretaker committee appointed to run council until May 2007 elections.

July

Ex-mayor Julián Muñoz arrested.

2007

May

Maria de los Angeles Muñoz elected mayor of Marbella at the local elections.

July

Judge Torres charges 86 people related to Marbella corruption.