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RAPA NUI

The principal event on Rapa Nui during the period under review was the end of the fourteen-year “reign” of Mayor Petero Edmunds, and the election of Luz Zasso as his successor. The reform of the island’s political status is still waiting to be completed, while the tourism industry is booming more than ever, leading to serious debates on sustainability.

The organic law bill to transform the island from a province within the Chilean continental region of Valparaíso to a territory with special political status was introduced in Congress on 2 July 2008 (SUBDERE, 2 July 2008; for detailed discussion of the bill see Gonschor 2009) and was set on the agenda for debate on the congress floor in mid-July (SUBDERE, 14 July 2008). In late August, a Chilean government delegation visited the island and met with Governor Carolina Hotu to discuss amendments, including possible measures to control Chilean immigration (GIP, 29 Aug 2008). In November, Governor Hotu traveled to Santiago to discuss the bill directly with the legislators (GIP, 3 Nov 2009). At the end of the review period, however, the bill was still in the first stage of parliamentary procedure and had not yet left the Chamber of Deputies for the Senate (Congress of the Republic of Chile Web site, accessed 5 Aug 2009). The entire process of legislation will probably take at least two years. The preceding constitutional amendment bill, which enables the currently pending legislation, took from 2005 to 2007 to pass.

From 19 to 30 July 2008, a Rapanui delegation consisting of the internationally famed band Matato‘a and several dancers participated in the 10th Festival of Pacific Arts in American Sāmoa. As with other such festivals, the event provided an opportunity for Rapanui to meet other Pacific Islanders and thereby to reintegrate into Oceania, from which they had been alienated due to more than a century of Chilean colonialism (GIP, 17 July 2008; *RNJ*, Oct 2008). However, for the time being, this reintegra-

tion seems to be limited to the cultural field. Unfortunately, even under the upcoming new political status of “special territory,” there appears to be no prospect of a political reintegration, such as membership in the Pacific Community and the Pacific Islands Forum, in the near future.

On 9 September, the 120th anniversary of the island’s annexation by Chile, Rapa Nui received a high-level visit by Chilean Minister of the Interior Edmundo Pérez Yoma and Sub-secretary for Regional Development Claudia Serrano. The commemoration included a large gathering, featuring a cultural show by local schoolchildren. In an attempt to mitigate what was clearly an act of colonialism, Pérez stated that “more than a territorial annexation of the island to continental Chile,” the event commemorated “an encounter between two peoples, one ancestral, the other nascent.” The minister furthermore promised that Chile would grant the islanders more self-government and provide them with the technical means for it, citing the administrative reforms and infrastructural investments currently underway (GIP, 9 Sept 2008; SUBDERE, 9 Sept 2008).

On 11 October, Rapa Nui lost another of its most revered koro (elders), when singer and cultural expert Luis Avaka Pate Paoa passed away at age eighty-two. Known as “Papa Kiko,” Pate was famous for his knowledge of ancient Rapanui traditions as well as for his talented voice. Throughout his long life, he performed and recorded countless ancient songs and chants as well as more contemporary church-influenced hymns, collaborated with various

ethnomusicologists, and often went abroad with his ensemble to share Rapanui music with people of other parts of the Pacific (GIP, 16 Oct 2008; RNJ, May 2009).

By far the most important event on the island, however, was the municipal election in late October, in which the succession of incumbent Mayor Petero Edmunds Paoa was to be determined. Edmunds, who had headed the municipality since 1994, had earlier in 2008 decided not to run for office again, a decision possibly influenced by his decreasing popularity. During the last few years, Edmunds’s style of political leadership had become more and more controversial, not the least because some of his statements had come across as erratic and contradictory. Edmunds deserves credit for his efforts during his long years of local leadership to help his community progress economically, as well as his advocacy for more political autonomy and recognition of Rapanui culture. However, he was at times criticized by the local opposition for being too close to the Chilean political elite, while others pointed out that he sometimes seemed to lack initiative and tended to blame all of the island’s problems on the Chilean government.

After Edmunds decided not to run for mayor again, the Christian Democratic Party of Chile, of which Edmunds used to be the local candidate, nominated Luz Zasso Paoa, a municipal employee and one of the newly elected members of the Easter Island Development Commission (CODEIPA, a representative organization with responsibilities separate from the municipality). During the campaign, opposing candidates attempted

to present Zasso as Edmunds's handpicked successor and to carry over their critique of Edmunds to her. However, Zasso succeeded in creating her own image by advocating reforms of the municipal services and promising to employ all available municipal resources for the resolution of local issues.

In the 26 October election, Zasso won a relative majority of 46.0 percent, and thus became Edmunds's successor as mayor of the "Illustrious Municipality of Easter Island," as the office is officially called. Her main opponent, schoolteacher Akahanga Rapu Tuki—himself without party affiliation but running for Alianza, the alliance of Chilean right-wing opposition parties—received 37.1 percent. Two other candidates, Pascual Pakarati Gonzales (independent) and Hugo Edmunds Paoa (Humanist Party) lagged significantly behind, with 11.4 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively.

Concurrently with the mayor, the members of the municipal council were elected as well, in a complex system counting both party and individual votes. Of the six elected municipal councilors, two each belong to the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) and the Party for Democracy (PPD), both part of Concertación, the center-left Chilean governing coalition, and two are members of the Independent Democratic Union (UDI), a party within the right-wing opposition Alianza. Alberto Hotus Teave (PPD)—the incumbent long-serving municipal councilor, former mayor (1992–1994), and contested president of the Rapanui Council of Elders—was reelected, as was opposition councilor Amelia Olivares

San Juan (UDI). Newly elected were Ximena Trengove Vallejos and Marta Hotu Tuki for PDC, Carlos Mardones Riroroko for PPD, and Julio Araki Tepano for UDI. The four incumbent councilors Marcelo Ika Paoa (PDC), Marcelo Pont Hill (PPD), Hipólito Ika Nahoe (Humanist Party), and Nicolas Haoa Cardinali (independent in alliance with UDI) failed in their reelection bids. Pro-independence opposition leader Mario Tuki Hey, who had been elected into the CODEIPA in 2007 with the largest majority of all candidates, was another candidate for the municipal council who was not elected (Te Rapa Nui Press, 30 Oct 2008).

Following the law on regional administration, the newly constituted municipal council then confirmed the two representatives of Easter Island Province in the Regional Council of Valparaíso: incumbents Maria Cristina Pizarro Velásquez of PDC and Enzo Muñoz Fariás of UDI (Te Rapa Nui, Jan–Feb 2005; Regional Council of Valparaíso Web site, accessed 8 Aug 2009). Since their offices will become obsolete as soon as the special status bill is passed and the island's ties to the Valparaíso Region will be dissolved, the two representatives have received little attention during recent times.

A striking feature was the election of two Chilean settlers as councilors (Trengove and Olivares), compared to only one (Olivares) in the last election in 2004. This reflects the massive increase in the Chilean settler population over the past few years, during which time they have come to outnumber the native Rapanui on the island (*RNJ*, June 2006); their numbers are increasing annually by 7 percent

(GIP, 19 Feb 2009). One of the reasons why Rapanui nationalist leaders like Mario Tuki only have a chance at running for CODEIPA but not for the municipal council might lie in the fact that the CODEIPA elections are limited to ethnic Rapanui, while the municipal elections are open to any Chilean citizens living on the island. Earlier in 2008, Erity Teave and Santi Hitorangi, representatives of the Rapanui Parliament, a forum of pro-independence Rapanui leaders, had delivered a paper at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at the United Nations in New York, urging a stop to Chilean immigration to their island (Teave and Hitorangi 2008).

Besides Zasso's obvious popularity, the election results also showed that the current local power structures are very well established, and clearly not dependent on Edmunds's personal charisma. Given Rapa Nui's present dependency on monetary subsidies from the Chilean government, a vote for those affiliated with the ruling parties in Santiago was the logical choice for most voters. Since the Concertación coalition had held power continuously since 1990, it is hard to predict how the island community would react to a change of government in the metropole. For the time being, both the local politicians affiliated with the Alianza and the pro-independence Rapanui nationalists allied with them in a somewhat awkward way seem to be far from any prospect of winning a municipal election.

The newly elected Mayor Zasso was born in 1972 of a Chilean father and a Rapanui mother. She studied civil engineering at the University of Viña del Mar, obtaining her degree

in 2000 with a thesis on reforming local planning on her home island. She subsequently worked in different positions on Rapa Nui or in relation with the island. Prior to the election, she had been the director of the municipal construction office for several years (SUBDERE, 12 Nov 2008).

Zasso is the first elected female mayor of Rapa Nui, but not the first woman to serve in that office. The first female mayor of the island was Lucia Tuki, who served from 1985 to 1989 during the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet, but like all public officials at that time, she had not been elected but was appointed by the junta (RNJ, Spring 1988). With Zasso's election, however, not only half the municipal councilors and the mayor, but also the officials above her are now female, including Governor Hotu, Subsecretary Serrano, and Chilean President Michelle Bachelet.

Shortly after the election, the new mayor traveled to Santiago, together with her predecessor Edmunds, to meet with Subsecretary Serrano and Natalia Piergentili, chairwoman of the Interministerial Committee for the Development of Extremely Remote Zones, to discuss the collaboration between her municipal administration and the authorities of the central government (SUBDERE, 12 Nov 2008).

With the elections over, the rest of the review period was rather calm as far as politics were concerned, and the news concerned mainly economic data, cultural events, and day-to-day administrative business.

In spite of the world financial crisis, Rapa Nui's tourism industry continued to boom. There were more than 50,000 visitors in 2007, 20 percent

more than in the previous year. If this annual increase in rate goes on, the number of visitors is expected to rise to 200,000 by 2020. Due to tourism, the local economy is in full expansion, with an astonishing number of new hotels, car rentals, souvenir stores, and similar facilities being built all over Hanga Roa, the capital and only settlement. In 2007, 3.85 billion pesos (US\$7 million) were invested in the tourism sector, which accounted for about 90 percent of the island's economic activity. Urged by the local government and Chilean tourism officials, Chilean national airline LAN agreed to increase the frequency of its flights from Santiago to the island, and the government plans to rebuild the airport runway and terminal by 2012. While the boom provides locals with an opportunity for a prosperous future, questions of ecological sustainability are becoming more and more evident. Edgard Hereveri, president of the local Chamber of Tourism, expressed his concerns and thinks that it is questionable whether a small and fragile island with only about 4,000 inhabitants can sustain hundreds of thousands of tourists (*Santiago Times*, 23 Sept 2008; GIP, 11 June 2009).

In order to keep up with the increasing population, the Chilean government is massively investing in public services and infrastructure. A new hospital is currently under construction, financed by the government with more than 5.5 billion pesos (US\$10 million) (*Santiago Times*, 23 Sept 2008), and there are plans to build new port facilities (GIP, 15 Dec 2008).

In late October, Rapa Nui hosted an international scientific confer-

ence on organic waste residue treatments, and propositions were made to restructure the island's waste management system (GIP, 23 Oct 2008). Even more problematic than organic waste are environmentally hazardous materials like used car batteries, given that there are now almost 2,000 automobiles on the island. In May, the government unveiled a plan to ship this type of waste off the island (GIP, 15 May 2009).

Another aspect of the island's changing economy was raised when the Chilean minister of agriculture visited the island in February. Issues discussed included the mass immigration, spread of invasive species from Chile, and the lack of infrastructure in rural areas of the island, all contributing to making the agricultural sector insufficient (GIP, 19 Feb 2009). In a pattern that parallels Hawai'i and French Polynesia, most locally consumed food on Rapa Nui is currently being imported from outside, primarily from Chile.

The impact of the tourism boom is not limited to the economic field alone. In early November, the Day of the Rapanui Language was celebrated with large open-air performances (GIP, 7 Nov 2008). In spite of this and other initiatives, the language is in decline, and most of the younger generation tend to converse in Spanish rather than Rapanui, a trend that mirrors the spread of French at the expense of Tahitian in French Polynesia.

Language loss, however, is not the only social problem the island community is facing. Mass tourism, immigration, and economic growth are also beginning to show other downsides, including increasing problems of

alcoholism, drug abuse, domestic violence, and street crime. In order to tackle these problems, in mid-November 2008, the governor's office held a conference on public security and created a task force against crime (GIP, 13 Nov 2008).

The tourism boom is also creating increasingly visible class divisions on the island, with some families profiting enormously while others continue to live in poverty. Prices on the island have reportedly doubled within the past year (*RNJ*, Oct 2008), and while this might have the positive effect of keeping the numbers of tourists and settlers in check by dissuading the less affluent from coming, it also hardens life for the Islanders.

In January, new Chilean social legislation came into effect on the island, providing a method of identifying the neediest families and making welfare programs available for them (GIP, 14 Jan 2009). By early June, there were 350 persons qualifying for one of the programs (GIP, 3 June 2009).

Another problem, more directly related to mass tourism, is its impact on Rapa Nui's historic monuments—the very reason most tourists come to the island in the first place. During previous years, various acts of irresponsibility or even outright vandalism by individual tourists significantly damaged some sites. In January, the local authorities unveiled a new strategy of educating all visitors prior to their landing about the fragility of the monuments and their responsibility in their protection (GIP, 16 Jan 2009).

In 1995, the island had been declared a UNESCO world heritage site (GIP, 11 Feb 2009). In mid-February 2009, UNESCO Director General

Koichiro Matura visited the island, inspecting the restoration of some of the monuments, especially Ahu Tongariki, which was restored with Japanese funds.

Economic growth has also increased the need of the Islanders for a good education. On 2 March, the governor's office and the municipality signed an agreement with the University of Santiago and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, in order to facilitate access of Rapanui students to those universities. Currently, there are more than 200 Rapanui attending various educational institutions in Chile (GIP, 2 March 2009).

Rapa Nui received two distinguished foreign visits during the review period, each of them referring to the island's historical connections across the Pacific. In February, the French ambassador to Chile visited the island and met with the local authorities (GIP, 12 Feb 2009), and it was later announced that France would establish a branch of the Alliance Française, an organization promoting French language and culture abroad, in Hanga Roa (French Embassy in Chile Web site, 1 July 2009). To this day, many Rapanui have ties to France, due to strong connections of the island to Tahiti, Mangareva, and other islands of French Oceania in the late nineteenth century, prior to the Chilean annexation of 1888. The ambassador's visit also represents an improvement in Franco-Chilean relations. Until the 1990s, the relationship between the two Pacific colonial powers concerning Rapa Nui was rather antagonistic, as Chile had often accused France of laying claims of sovereignty or property on the island.

On 20 April, the island received one of its highest-ranking visitors in recent history, when the king of Malaysia, Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, and his wife, Raja Nur Zahirah, visited the island and met with the governor and the mayor (GIP, 20 April 2009). The visit provided a rare instant for the Islanders to encounter what a local news editor called the “Ariki o te henua roa roa,” that is, king of the very distant land (TRN, undated article), who was nevertheless a relative, coming from the other end of the geographically most extended language group in the world (Austronesian).

During the last months of the review period, the island community worried about the health of the eighty-year-old community leader Alberto Hotus, municipal councilor and one of the claimants to the presidency of the Rapanui Council of Elders, a key and controversial political figure. Suffering from a heart attack, Hotus was flown to Santiago where he underwent bypass surgery. Fortunately, he recovered and was seen once more actively involved in local politics a few weeks later (TRN, undated article)

Anticipating the expiration of her term in early 2010 following the upcoming election of a new Chilean president in December 2009, Governor Hotu presented a report on her administration's activities in July, recapitulating her initiatives to increase citizen's participation in government, achievements in the fields of environment, education, culture, public security, health, infrastructure, land issues, social welfare, and various events her office had been involved in (TRN, July 2009). With the Chilean presidential and congressional elections upcoming and the special status bill pending in

Congress, the coming year will most likely be eventful as well.

LORENZ GONSCHOR

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