

Distribution & Chain Management

Welcome to logistics city

If Milan is the capital of fashion and London the last word in finance, which European city would you say was synonymous with logistics?

Zaragoza, the capital of Aragon, would have topped few commentators' lists until recently, but it is bidding loudly for that accolade now.

One of the ancient kingdoms of Spain, Aragon is these days an autonomous community with its own parliament and its own government.

Maite Verde is one of its ministers; she holds the brief for science, technology and education. She says the idea of setting Zaragoza up as an international centre for logistics first

came up in 1999 as part of a plan for the economic development of the region.

The basis for the government's thinking is that the city is in what Verde calls "an important geographical situation." It's within 300 kms of south western Europe's most prosperous regions, centring on the cities of Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Valencia and — on the other side of the Pyrenees — Bordeaux and Toulouse, and within serving distance of around 20 million consumers.

The minister classes as much more important the quality of the transport infrastructure the Aragonese

capital has access to.

Spain's high-speed train service, the AVE, has only recently reached this part of the country as part of the link between Madrid and Barcelona. There are good roads too, and a dry port arrangement, under which Zaragoza acts as an advance hub for goods coming in and out of the sea terminal at Tarragona on the Catalan coast.

Then there's Zaragoza airport. It's not one you'll find many direct flights to, especially from outside Spain, but it's certainly not one of those regional airports with a runway like a country road and a terminal building like a

garden shed. No indeed.

The US air force had a base here for decades, finally packing up to leave after Spain joined NATO in the 1980s, but leaving behind the best air transport infrastructure available. "It's got two runways," Verde says proudly, "that are more than 3 kms in length each. It can cope with the very largest cargo planes." It can also operate all day and all night if it has to because the site the US air force chose is far enough from town for there to be no noise abatement issues.

All this, the politician concludes, has already allowed Zaragoza to lay the foundations for one of the most

The Plaza logistics facility in Zaragoza will be the biggest in Europe.

Plaza at a glance

Location — Zaragoza, Spain.

Size — 1071 hectares.

Transport links — Ex US air force air-freight infrastructure, high-speed rail links to Madrid and Barcelona, road links to these cities and to Bilbao, Valencia, Toulouse and Bordeaux.

Operators on site — 68 companies have signed up as part of the first phase.



advanced logistics platforms in Europe. She claims businesses from all parts of the world are queuing up to use it as a base for storing and shipping large numbers of high-quality products. "Let the whole world know," she says, "that Zaragoza is going to be an important logistics city."

Biggest and best

Someone who believes it is already is Ricardo García, managing director of Zaragoza's new showpiece multi-modal logistics park, Plaza.

For him, what this is about is developing the biggest and best logistics platform in Europe. "There's a site in Berlin that covers 300 hectares," he says. "We're going to be three times bigger than that."

His work to make this happen started two years ago, and García thinks it will be the end of the decade before it's finished.

In March 2002, the earlier idea Maite Verde mentioned became a real project when the organisation that García heads up bought the land — 1071 hectares if you want the exact measurement — with substantial investment coming from the government of Aragon.

By June the same year, his team started selling space; now he says the first phase is practically sold out, with companies such as toy manufacturer Imaginarium, high-tech firm Memory Set and Volvo becoming neighbours of logistics service providers DHL and Azkar and the very first company to say yes, Inditex.

If there were more tenants like Inditex — the parent company of clothes retailer (and supply chain star) Zara — the MD says he could have filled up the whole of Plaza with 25 or 30 companies.

A small number of large tenants was never likely to be the way things turned out; 68 business are already on board, promising to move at least part of their storing and shipping operation to Plaza, investing €400m and creating, García says, 4768 jobs. He's very precise about figures.

A chance with China

He's also tireless in his pursuit of new occupants. He has a visit to China in his diary, during which he hopes to



