

Integration: reasons for hope

The challenges of irregular immigration to Malta are long term. It is estimated that a sizeable core of asylum-seekers – perhaps around 5,000 – will settle in Malta and will become an integral part of the community as third country nationals (TCNs in the jargon; that is non-Maltese and non-EU citizens who have migrated to Malta and are living here legally).

The key question for policymakers is: how should Malta organise itself to cope with the relatively new phenomenon of TCNs, including black Africans, living legally among us? There are signs of hope in the air. Attitudes may be changing – even though slowly. Two tiny initiatives may be harbingers of greater things.

Three young people who originate from different countries and cultures, and who call Malta their home, have teamed up to produce a newspaper that will focus on the “integration of TCNs into Maltese culture”.

The newspaper, *Side by Side*, will be distributed free and will seek to promote integration and diversity. It will do this by highlighting the rich range of cultures already present and how these have historically contributed to the Maltese identity. Its aim is to promote integration of TCNs in society, to remove prejudices and to avoid misunderstandings.

There is regrettably a large segment of Maltese society which, for various reasons, ranging from ignorance and fear, to lack of compassion, to outright racism, has rejected any form of acceptance of the TCN community. Few immigrants develop a meaningful relationship with a Maltese person, and vice-versa.

The Maltese and immigrant communities are simply not mingling. *Side by Side* seeks to change that by acting as a bridge between the two.

Gozo Bishop Mario Grech wants his diocese to offer “tangible help” in dealing

with immigration problems. He has tasked a diocesan commission to draw up a pastoral plan to help immigrants, possibly through the establishment of an open accommodation centre in Gozo.

This, again, is a hopeful sign that the Church, among others, is prepared to exercise a leadership role in addressing the inescapable challenges that are posed by migration and the long-term integration of TCNs.

But there may be even greater reason for hope that attitudes are changing. At the height of the ill-judged push-back saga, the Prime Minister made overt references to the need for asylum seekers to be integrated in Maltese society. This was swiftly followed by an interesting article by the minister responsible for integration, Helena Dalli, in which she broached the need openly “to seriously address the reality of immigrants who are here to stay... Integration is a dynamic, two-way

process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents... We need to take significant and substantial action. How to get there must not be a source of division within our nation. Immigration reform is a concern for all.”

The mere fact of having a minister who has not only been made personally responsible for integration but is also prepared to talk openly about it is indeed a major step forward.

It is in Malta’s long-term interests to adopt a well-ordered and structured policy of inclusion, not exclusion, of those who are already living here.

As *Side by Side* will be highlighting, over the centuries, Malta has absorbed many peoples of different nationalities, cultures, backgrounds, religious beliefs and skin colours, making us the nation we are today.

We should have nothing to fear and much to gain from integration.

Letters to the Editor

Dead wood and cobwebs

■ The Finance Minister is right in wanting to rid the public sector of its dead wood, probably the most potent factor that has driven Malta down to 41st place in global competitiveness ranking.

Personally, I feel that if Singapore manages second place, at least we should be above 30th. But, sadly, in Malta petty politics nearly always trumps economics.

Dead wood mainly takes the form of unproductive personnel in the general service and in those bodies where the Government has complete or partial control of operations. The clearing process is necessarily a lengthy one because redundancies are anathema and retraining needs the understanding and cooperation of the unions and others.

However, the initial identification of the dead wood shouldn’t take more than a few months to complete. It is its clearing that requires handling with sensitivity.

While on dead wood, the task team could also usefully look for cobwebs. By way of illustration: a current minor issue concerns the forthcoming election of directors of the Bank of Valletta in which the Government has considerable control. Besides requiring prospective candidates to secure the backing of 25,000 shares, the by-laws also insist on producing a certificate of the police conduct. Hilarious.

Karm Farrugia
Madliena

Drink-driving

■ Is it not about time that the laws on drinking and driving started being enforced?

How many accidents have to happen before something is done?
Patricia Falzon
Attard

Better promoted gardens

■ How I wish that we would better promote our public gardens among tourists.

In France, one can visit Versailles, Vicomte, Chantilly, Fontainebleau or Saint-Cloud and, in Italy, Boboli Gardens are well known.

Obviously, we do not have that sort of richness, like a Hall of Mirrors, but we do have sculptors who can produce classic statues, engineers to advise on the building of small cascades and fountains, similar to the one outside the Palace, in Valletta.

Our baroque heritage must be appreciated better by tourists. Indeed, Maltese youths and children ought also to better appreciate our architecture.

Let us try to put more ‘classic statues’ in public gardens. A cascade, water falling from a two-storey high rock structure, thus enhances buildings, adding some form of a baroque garden.

My idea is to embellish public gardens and make them a living venue with theatre activities, edu-



Versailles gardens in Paris.

cational tours and an art gallery, especially classic art.

How about setting up a group to promote such an idea? Some of our ‘old’ gardens, like Ġnien Romeo Romano, that was modelled on a French-style garden, and other public gardens could thus be better publicised among

tourists. Ġnien tal-Milorda, in Pietà/Floriana and the Ospizju, deserve to be better promoted.

Let us give life to our gardens with cultural activities.

Those interested in the idea can contact me via x2fh@onvol.net.

Philip Agius
Guardamangia

Bus operator disservice

■ I am now really disgusted with the service being rendered by bus operator Arriva.

It is not just the drivers that are letting the company down. In my opinion, their Customer Service Department is even worse. It is anything but a customer service.

Every time I had occasion to contact them I was always completely ignored and I never got any reply. In the latest case, I sent them an e-mail on August 9 and

after almost a month I am still awaiting their reaction.

If it takes them four weeks just to answer a complaint, imagine how much longer it will take them to ensure that the transport service renders a good service to us commuters.

Needless to say, the situation is still the same as in the past and I will not be surprised if my original letter was thrown in the waste paper basket when received.

No wonder everybody is losing trust in Arriva and private cars are still on the road.

Mario Farrugia
Zabbar

Similar and, yet, different issues of the green type

■ The Ramblers’ Association is concerned at the uncanny similarities, and some important (but difficult to understand) differences, between two environmental issues: the recent San Blas beach-‘cleaning’ incident and the Marsalforn case when,

on March 9, voting day, early in the morning, concrete was poured on bare rock to form a platform on the sea’s edge.

In both cases business outlets were involved and, in each case, owners/operators denied any involvement in the wrongdoings.

Both owners had previous enforcement orders on their site and, apparently, still have some accounts to settle with one of the three authorities involved – Mepa, the Land Department and MTA – if not with all three.

In both cases, the Ministry for Gozo too was involved.

In Marsalforn, it took the initiative to remove the abusive concrete platform and, at San Blas, it sent heavy machinery to ‘clean up’ the beach after a request by the business person concerned. Only that, after the clean-up, a number of biggish rocks went missing.

One difference is that the San Blas case is still being investigated and it seems that the business person will be arraigned.

Another difference is that he has also been prohibited from continuing to set up tables and chairs and cannot, therefore, now serve food.

In the Marsalforn case, the police were never asked to investigate and, though the owner/operator was told to remove the tables and chairs and served with an enforcement order, it is still business as usual on the ‘removed’ and patched-up platform.

So, who alerted the police and the planning authority or the MTA in the San Blas case?

We will more than welcome any attempts by anybody to explain these goings-on.

Our association can be reached at ram205@gmail.com.

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