

Comment & Letters



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Malta-Libyan oil dealings

The dramatic events in Libya are continuously evolving and I am convinced that, thanks also to the revelations of Al Jazeera, WikiLeaks and other independent media, there will be many more questions that have to be answered by the two parties in the Maltese Parliament, in particular the Labour Party which, unfortunately, refrained from condemning clearly and loudly Muammar Gaddafi and his cronies until the very end, which coincided with the fall of Tripoli.

In a previous article, I had already mentioned the dealings that former Labour MP Dennis Sammut, former Prime Minister Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici and former party treasurer Joe Sammut have had with the Libyan regime. From the way they are still behaving and talking it would seem that Dr Mifsud Bonnici and the former treasurer have pledged their full allegiance to the Gaddafi regime members.

What, if I may ask, is Dr Mifsud Bonnici and Mr Sammut's interest in safeguarding the tyrant and his cronies? Is the interest political, financial, or other? We Maltese have a right to know because our democratic institutions have been in the hands of this lot for quite some time in the course of history and I shudder to think of any possible manipulations on their part to safeguard the interests of their Libyan "partners".

On the other hand, former Nationalist MP Josie Muscat and European Commissioner John Dalli must be very clear now on the nature of their association with Libya and, in particular, with any members of the Gaddafi family and Libyan politicians, if any. The country has a right to be reassured that any politician representing it in its institutions has a clean sheet with regard to dealings with dictators.

The bootlicking of Col Gaddafi on the part of a number of Maltese politicians has lasted too long. In the revisionist approach to Maltese history that has been going on in the past few weeks, we have been witnessing distortions of all types, aiming mainly towards the beatification or vilification of Dom

Mintoff! For example, much has been said about Malta's airspace control - equivalent to the Maltese search and rescue area - in the recent past. Malta's airspace control, at some 250,000 square kilometres, is spanning from Tunisia to Greece and both the Maltese government and the Labour opposition are adamant on not releasing an inch of it.

What, however, many have failed to point out is that when we became independent, Malta's airspace control and SAR area was much bigger, actually stretching from Chad to Greece and, therefore, covering a much larger area than today. For some reason or other, in the 1970s or 1980s, Mr Mintoff ceded the area covering Chad, Sudan and Libya to Col Gaddafi. I do not recall anyone worrying about our airspace area then. Why did Mr Mintoff cede this enormous area to the Libyan tyrant? Why was this done in a hush-hush manner?

Another episode nearer our times when GonziPN and MuscatPL remained mum in unison is the one concerning nuclear technology. Two years ago, Nicolas Sarkozy, a very different man from today, nonchalantly sold nuclear technology to Libya, with the excuse that this was needed for a reverse osmosis plant. Imagine what would have happened today had this technology already been delivered to our neighbouring madman? Did Lawrence Gonzi or Joseph Muscat utter a word to safeguard the security and health of the Maltese? Nothing, absolute silence! AD was, as usual, the solitary voice pointing out the potential danger.

I ask these questions because we Maltese have been for too long led by the nose with regard to relations with our ruthless and brutal neighbour. Many Maltese people, including a part of the independent media, did not ask the relevant questions at the appropriate time.

Now, we are back discussing future business relations. Being a green politician I am not so enthusiastic about oil exploration. I would rather prefer investment in the enormous Desertec project, which is aiming to tap the energy available from the rich and powerful Sahara sun. Yet, the issue of oil

exploration must be tackled. On September 2, Libya transitional council Prime Minister, Mahmoud Jibril, visited Dr Gonzi. The talks focused mainly on Libya's security. What did Dr Jibril have in mind when he spoke of the Malta-based forces that can destabilise Libyan security? They also talked about humanitarian aid, about Libyan spies in Malta (WikiLeaks also mentioned a Maltese enrolled by the Libyans to help Libyan illegal activity at Luqa airport. Who is he please?), about education, tourism and business.

But no talk absolutely of oil exploration on the Medina Bank. Malta's relations with Libya cannot be divorced from the maritime boundary dispute we have with our neighbouring country. The elephant in the room is Col Gaddafi's claim that the Gulf of Sirte is an internal sea. This claim had been militarily challenged by the US, culminating in the Tripoli bombing.

The question that Maltese politicians should be asking - but they are not, neither Nationalists nor Labourites - is: Will the new Libyan government persist with Col Gaddafi's ridiculous claim? If the new Libyan government does not, the Medina Bank would no longer be disputed and Malta would gain access to the northern margin of the oil-rich Sirte Basin.

Recent facts have shown us that there are a lot of European political interests behind the Libyan rebellion. The French have massive interests in Libya now.

Something that has hardly been reported in the press is the visit by the president of Total (the French oil company) to Benghazi some weeks ago. At that time, Italy still had diplomatic relations with the Gaddafi regime. As a result, oil concessions in the Sirte Basin were being turned over to the French by the Benghazi-based TNC government.

This caused panic in Italy and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was forced to change Italian policy *vis-à-vis* the Libyans. Italy suddenly recognised the TNC in a dramatic overnight decision and, thus, the Italian state oil company Eni managed to keep its share in Libya.

While the French and the Italians were active on this front, the Mal-

tese government, totally taken up by our country's extremely laudable humanitarian effort, neglected this issue. It is now time to act fast.

Facts have shown that, so far, the licence given to an oil company by the Malta government to drill for oil in the Medina Bank has reaped no dividends at all for Malta but only for the oil company, Heritage Oil (UK Ltd), with its head office in Jersey. In fact, this company has raised the value of its shares on the London Stock Exchange on the basis of this promise to operate an oil well in the Medina Bank.

It would seem that Heritage Oil (UK Ltd) operates from a very modest London office and is quite far from any prospect of drilling a well because of the lack of data in its possession and because it would seem to have only one geologist working on the Malta project.

Will Heritage Oil ultimately farm out the concession to another oil company and make a profit from the transaction? Could it be that, in the end, Malta will not get its oil well (or any revenue from oil) in the Medina Bank whereas oil companies will be utilising our country's formidable oil potential to make money?

One last question does not, however, have an answer: Why is Malta offering its lucrative oil concessions to minuscule oil companies that have no interest in drilling for oil rather than to companies that have the potential to actually drill oil wells in Malta's offshore? Who is really profiting from all this? Is it the people of Malta?

The history of Maltese politicians serving Col Gaddafi's interests rather than the interests of their country is too bitter for us to forget. Let us now ensure that these politicians do not get a chance to rid themselves of their past misdemeanours and to carve up for themselves a new virginity. The publication of the names of the holders of frozen Libyan assets in Malta is an absolute must in the name of transparency.

The new class of Maltese politicians must learn to conduct business in an ethical manner, which safeguards the social, environmental, democratic and economic interests both of the Maltese and the Libyan people.

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Malta's relations with Libya cannot be divorced from the maritime boundary dispute...



Angelo Xuereb

Upgrading the Kennedy Drive project

Transport Malta has asked the public to comment on its proposal for the upgrading of the Kennedy Drive segment of the Coast Road project, stretching from Bahar iċ-Ċagħaq to St Paul's Bay, which today is one of Malta's main arterial roads.

My proposal is what I consider to be necessary for the upgrading of three major traffic junctions, and not just for the realignment of one section of this coastal road.

Any change must take into consideration the other urgent needs to improve the free flow of traffic between the Salina Coast Road and other roads leading to Naxxar, San Ġwann, Tal-Qroqq, Qawra, Burmarrad, Ċirkewwa, Bugibba and St Paul's Bay. The plan must be all encompassing and also take into consideration

the enlargement and upgrading of Kennedy Grove Park. The existing three areas adjacent to this park must be combined by removing the existing crossroads, while at the same time allocating adequate parking. This will offer a safer leisure park for families and their children.

Transport Malta's option to retain the existing Kennedy Drive close to the Salini salt pans and the Succorso should be reconsidered. When this traffic junction was constructed, the free flow of seawater around the Salini salt pans (Succorso) was reduced to a mere one-metre width, therefore creating an almost complete blockage with dead seaweed, which resulted in stagnant water. This water channel constructed by the Knights of Malta must be widened to allow a good flow of seawater and a good flow of storm

water since it is causing the flooding of Burmarrad plain. Furthermore, this low water channel around Salini could also be incorporated with the Kennedy Grove Park, thereby creating an environment which can be used by canoeists.

To ease the traffic jams in the Bugibba and Qawra areas, Transport Malta should also consider a low elevated bridge over the end sea wall of the Salini. This can connect Qawra with Salina with no crossing of the main road so as to avoid congestion. This will not affect the structure of Salini walls. Further road junctions at Qawra should also be improved.

I was surprised that Transport Malta has not considered the proper upgrading of the major traffic junction between the coast road and the road leading to Naxxar. When I was the mayor of

Naxxar (during which period I was responsible for part of this area), I had already recommended a similar proposal.

I repeat, any new proposals must take into consideration that these three junctions are connecting the three main arterial roads, stretching from St Julian's, Tal-Qroqq and Marsa to the Xemxija Bypass.

The present chaos of long queues of cars stretching for over two kilometres over the weekends at the bottleneck of these three major roads is proof that urgent traffic management improvements must be taken in hand soon.

I consider myself to have a good knowledge of Malta's roads and traffic network and I urge Transport Malta to seriously consider this workable concept proposal in more detail.

...urgent traffic management improvements must be taken in hand...

**PROPOSAL FOR UPGRADING
OF KENNEDY DRIVE PROJECT
BY ANGELO XUEREB**



A	NEW SALINA TRAFFIC JUNCTION
B	UPGRADING OF BUGIBBA TRAFFIC JUNCTION
C	NEW BRIDGE CONNECTING SALINA TO QAWRA
D	CANOEING AREA
	EXTENDED KENNEDY GROVE
P	PARKING FACILITIES