

Editorial:

Preserving our Heritage

There is no doubt that Gozo is being catapulted into Europe, and expectations are high that this will be followed by considerable benefits to the island. Among these are the tangible economic benefits to business with, hopefully, diffusion of profits into the pockets of the average citizen.

Equally important are developments which lead to a betterment of our environment and way of life. Among recently announced changes we find two proposals which are bound to enhance our environment and promote wider appreciation of the heritage of which we are mere custodians.

The first of these is no doubt the declaration of the Dwejra region as part of world heritage. Not only is this an area of exceptional geographical beauty, but it also harbours in its tiny confines a collection of flora and fauna unique to the islands, and to the world. A seminar held in June 1999 emphasised the uniqueness of this part of Gozo which, a generation ago, was hardly thought of as more than a place for swimming restricted to the inhabitants of Għarb and San Lawrenz. As part of world heritage, and as a result of the EU funds made available for this purpose, this particular spot will be enhanced and publicised world-wide. This has been made possible through injection of EU funds for the purpose.

Another piece of good news, long awaited for particularly by those living in Xaghra and Marsalforn is the closure of the rubbish dump which has been such an eyesore (and a nose-sore), as well as a health-risk, again with the assistance of EU funds. With the projected rehabilitation of this area, there is no doubt that it could be changed from a neglected dump into an attractive belle-vedere.

There is still, however, a stark contrast

between the efforts of the Government at national and European level to bring Gozo up to the mark, and the lackadaisical approach by the average Gozitan citizen to these challenges. There is still a great deal to be done to convince one and all that it is essential to aspire to European standards in all walks of life. We are still witnessing rusting refrigerators used as improvised dividing walls in fields, while the ubiquitous discarded plastic drip-system tubing decorating every niche of our valleys. We see rubble accumulating outside every building site, and buildings boarded up for years because work on them was suspended. Above all, at this time of the year, we are shamed within the international arena by an increasing number of hunters who find release of their primitive instincts in killing every bird of passage, to which the word "protected" is just a fatally misleading epithet.

There should be a continuing campaign to inform the public of what it means to upgrade standards. While the closure of a smelly waste dump is essential, it is equally important to ensure that separation of waste should start at the home. It is unlikely that provision of several large containers at a single point in a village will induce the average householder to start separating garbage into different containers, and much more effort should be placed on educating the public on the need for this to be done.

There is also a need to instil into the public the need for discipline, whether it is for parking, smoking in public, or respect for the rights of others. Above all, there should be a continuing effort to inform the public about the relevance of our heritage, not only that of archaeological or historical importance, but also about the physical and natural environment which is so often taken for granted and abused.