

Editorial:

Gozo and its Boundaries

'It isn't the oceans which cut us off from the world — it's the... way of looking at things.'
(Henry Miller)

A few changes seem to be occurring in Gozo which appear to be harbingers of bad tidings. And I am not referring to the several reports that relate to the changing morals of our younger generation, in an effort to catch up with the rest of Europe. Rather I refer to some items in the news of recent months and which threaten the integrity of Gozo as we know it.

The first item relates to our links with the mainland and the world, namely sea and air travel to Malta. The inordinate rise in fees, as well as tinkering with the schedule and reduction of number of crossings considered necessary by Gozo Channel have resulted in a drop of 27,193 vehicles and 64,463 passengers in the first five months of the year (representing a decrease of 7.8 and 4.6 percent respectively). This is catastrophic by any standard, particularly since there is no guarantee that things won't get even worse. Perhaps with the retrospectoscope one could have foreseen that lack of flexibility in size of ships will mean unnecessary expenses, particularly during off-peak hours. It is a pity that such arguments strengthen the views of those who would say that the only solution to overcome Gozo's isolation is to scrap the grandly-designed vessels and build a bridge.

Related to this is the sorry state of air connection with Malta. The inordinate cost of travel by helicopter has now made it clear that no one except business executives and those whose fares are paid for by their companies or the government can afford to make use of this mode of travel. While there was obviously a need for improvement of service, it is arguable whether the costs should have risen by this amount. It is indeed a case that links with the Malta airport, so essential to our living, should have been given special consideration and some price

arrangements made for prospective travellers. Failing this, one should consider setting up a mini-bus service direct from Malta airport to Xewkija terminal to minimize inconvenience of travellers, weighted as they usually are with luggage.

A second issue relates to the so-called 'revolutionary reforms' envisaged in the voting system, and more specifically with the worrying proposal that Gozo be carved up so that Ghajnsielem would form part of the 12th district (Mellieħa, Naxxar and St Paul's Bay). This, it is argued, has become necessary since Gozo has 7.74 per cent more voters than the national average for each district. Such a concept ignores the fact that Gozo happens to be an entity in itself, an island separated by water from the bigger island, having needs which are unique to the island as a whole. A splinter attached to another district in Malta would be meaningless. The needs of Ghajnsielem are not in any way different from those of any other village in Gozo, and have very little to do with the needs of Naxxar or Mellieħa or St Paul's Bay. It would be meaningless to draw a line dividing Gozo into two parts just to make the paperwork look more tidy. If one is worried about lack of representation of the Gozitans in Parliament there are other ways of overcoming this problem, including increasing the number of parliamentary representatives from the current five to six candidates.

Both these issues need to be taken seriously, since they have both economic and political significance. The Gozo Chamber of Commerce has rightly been very critical of the changes mentioned earlier. Gozitans as a whole have been rather quiet and unreactive – a state of affairs that can have long-term untoward effects. It is particularly incumbent on the young intelligentsia, and particularly the hundreds of students attending University in Malta, to wake up to the challenge and make their voice heard in defence of Gozo and its needs.