

Wheeling the caravans away

Post mortem



The removal of squatting caravans at Ġnejna was long overdue.

Now that the EP election campaign mayhem is well and truly over, this column can resume in its hallmark outspoken fashion. But allow me to spare a few lines for an evaluation of some aspects of the campaign.

Local election results are anomalous to say the least - while green parties made gains throughout Europe, garnering an impressive 52 seats out of the total of the 736 up for grabs, Alternattiva Demokratika fared badly. I consider this unfortunate, especially since I respect AD's green credentials.

With the privileged position in the European Parliament to be occupied predominantly by the European People's Party-European Democrats (EPP-ED) block once again, having won about 36 per cent of all EP seats, my pledge to work within the largest block within the EP is more justified than ever, especially since it leads the ENVI (Food Safety, Public Health and Environment) and ITRE (Industry, Research and Energy) committees.

As the wrangling over which-MEP-will-sit-where ensues, it augurs well that the CULT (Culture and Education) committee is not sidelined and a Maltese MEP is assigned to such an important committee.

Ġnejna evacuated, at last

A big well done to Malta Environment and Planning Authority officials for finally clearing the squatting caravans away from Ġnejna Bay. Despite the fact that the land in question was private, a permit was needed to carry out the change of use and the rightful owners of the land had never consented to such an occupation.

Caravans were towed away from Ġnejna earlier in the week, a move which was predictably met with sob stories and recriminations of all kinds, some of which verge on the ludicrous. Some claimed that the move was intentionally carried out after the EP elections, as if my campaigning against the caravans before the election had won me any favours with those involved.

In addition, the same caravan owners had been notified by Mepa to leave the area a full month before the enforcement action.

Others said they had just purchased the caravan and that no one had alerted them of the lack of properly managed caravan sites in Malta.

The designation of adequate caravan sites is needed so as to introduce regulation, to avoid the indiscriminate docking of these structures in every imaginable corner of the island and also to provide an area where caravan owners may enjoy their investment without fear of being towed away.

Disturbed or derelict sites in need of a facelift, which are currently not enjoyed by the public and not ecologically sensitive, should be shortlisted.

Such a designation should not, however, indirectly promote abuse by giving a free rein to those who can pay to extend their stay indefinitely, thus effectively mimicking the Gnejna case elsewhere.

A condition which could be imposed is a time limit. For example, each caravan may stay for two-weeks or months at a stretch.

Armier sand dune in shambles

What should be a protected sand dune remnant at Armier has become a depot for all sorts of beachware.

For the untrained, the same site hosts the largest local population of a critically endangered plant - *Calystegia soldanella* (sea bindweed, leblieb tar-ramel) - which has disappeared from other beaches along the L-Añrax promontory. Biodiversity management on site is conspicuous by its absence. Will the sea bindweed be the latest addition to the list of plant species recorded as extinct on our islands?