

Organisers seek details on ‘huge’ Valletta carnival

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The construction of carnival floats is moving at a good pace in Marsa. Photo: Chris Sant Fournier

Carnival organisers remain in the dark over important details of March’s celebrations and are hoping they will be illuminated during today’s meeting with Tourism Parliamentary Secretary Mario de Marco.

“L-Għaqda Partecipanti Karnival is ready to adjust. What we’re asking for is for part of the celebrations to still be held in Valletta,” association president Jason Busuttill said when contacted, pointing out that carnival has been held in the capital city for the past 400 years.

In reply to a parliamentary question by Labour MP Owen Bonnici in November, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi had said the majority of 2011 carnival parades would be held in Valletta, while St George’s Square would be the main place for dance events.

When contacted yesterday, the secretariat confirmed the plans proposed included Valletta as a place where the dancing competitions, grotesque masks parades and similar celebrations would be held. These would take place on Republic Street and St George’s Square.

Given the restricted access to Valletta, in view of the various embellishment projects currently underway, proposals for the carnival floats' defilè were ongoing.

Malta Council for Culture and Arts executive director Davinia Galea said due to the major structural changes that were taking place in the capital city, logistics had "understandably proved to be problematic".

Nonetheless, Mr Busuttil said the association was not aware of whether there was going to be any seating space allocated for the people present to see the carnival in St George's Square.

"We understand the area allocated for seating cannot be as big as the one set up previously in Freedom Square, however, we are ready to adjust," he said.

The association had also requested that small floats be allowed to pass from in front of the Palace. This may not be allowed for fear of fuel leakage but Mr Busuttil said the organisers were prepared to take precautions and cover up the floats from underneath.

The association is proposing the defilè route starts at Castille, goes down Merchants' Street towards Archbishop Street, passes in front of the Palace towards St John's Square, and then back to Merchants' Street up towards Castille. These small floats will then meet up with the larger ones in Floriana.

The arts' council, which is the organiser of carnival celebrations in Valletta, said discussions over proposals were still ongoing with the association.

"The association participates with triumphal floats, maskaruni and dance companies, and it has always been the policy of the MCCA to include the association in discussions regarding the regulations for such participation and the route to be taken by the floats during the carnival celebrations," Ms Galea said.

"The association has been kept aware of all developments at all stages and has been involved in discussions to evaluate all the options and possibilities," she added.

Despite their concerns, the association commended the work being carried out and Mr Busuttil said 2011 Carnival preparations had kept up a very good rhythm.

"We'll be having a huge carnival!" he said enthusiastically.

The association's main headache remains over the storage for the floats. At present, the former quarters of the Water Services Corporation in Floriana, Albert Town in Marsa and St Elmo in Valletta offer shelter for float builders.

"The dispute between the association, the secretariat and Malta Industrial Parks (MIP) about the premises in Luqa has been resolved," Mr Busuttil said. Alternative sites have now been provided at Luqa for those float makers who have had to move out from workshops that were the property of the MIP and were occupied on tolerance until they were needed back by the entity.

“All we’re concerned about is that we have a roof above our heads for some sort of shelter. In the end, we would like to move all together to Kordin,” Mr Busuttil said. He added that a site in Kordin has been earmarked for the storage of carnival floats, however, the exact location has not yet been established.

“The idea to have a dedicated site at Kordin is under consideration,” a secretariat spokesman said.

Mr Busuttil fears float-builders may be asked to move out of St Elmo with no alternative place for them to move into.

“St Elmo was never an adequate place to work in,” Mr Busuttil said.

“It is quite a hassle to get the floats out of the small gate when it’s time for carnival celebrations. It is also a dangerous place to work in as the building is deteriorating, while the workers have never been provided with skips for waste disposal,” he added.

