

## Parliament to move to Opera House PM calls for national pride in City Gate project

Christian Peregin

The government is forging ahead with the idea of moving Parliament to the old Opera House in Valletta in a project that should see the theatre and City Gate rebuilt by world-famous Italian architect Renzo Piano.

The project should be finished right at the end of this legislature, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi said yesterday as he unveiled the plans.

Speaking at Castille, Dr Gonzi said Parliament will be removed from the President's Palace where it will be replaced by a number of museums. The plan is to transfer it to the site of the old Opera House, which would also feature a cultural centre facing Republic Street and will be designed with this dual-purpose in mind. The shops currently housed inside the building will be relocated.

The idea to have Parliament transferred to a rebuilt Opera House had sparked a raging controversy when it was first suggested in 2004 by then Infrastructure Minister Jesmond Mugliett.

The Prime Minister yesterday said the government chose not to rebuild the Opera House as a theatre because it did not want to saturate the area, which already has three theatres. Moreover, the footprint of the ruins was not big enough for today's theatrical requirements.

Dr Gonzi and Infrastructure Minister Austin Gatt discussed the proposals with Mr Piano personally in Paris last week.

The idea is to have an entrance that invites people into the city as well as a unique landmark that integrates the national heritage of Valletta, Dr Gonzi said.

Mr Piano's contact with Malta started in 1985 but his master plan for Valletta was shot down by public opinion.

Dr Gonzi yesterday emphasised that the new plans will be updated from the ones presented more than 20 years ago, to suit current trends.

The project will have to be concluded within the next four years.

The two projects will cost between €60 and €80 million and will not be co-funded by the private sector, Dr Gonzi specified, saying he does not want the entrance to Valletta to become a hub of business but one of culture and heritage.

"Mr Piano knows Malta and Valletta well. He sees Malta as being at the centre of the Mediterranean, an island between two continents that needs to be brought back to the stature it deserves, in its historic context," Dr Gonzi told members of the press.

The Prime Minister said he wanted to entice visitors to explore Valletta and so these projects will be undertaken in the context of a complete regeneration of the capital city by 2018: from City Gate to Fort St Elmo, with the President's Palace as the fulcrum.

The palace is to be restored to its former glory, housing various museums and exhibitions on its ground floor, while leaving the President's quarters where they are today. The square facing the palace will also be upgraded.

Old plans to turn Freedom Square into a car park, and to rebuild the bus terminus underground, were also scrapped. Instead, Freedom Square will be the link between City Gate and the Opera House and will be regenerated to welcome visitors.

The bus terminus will be reduced in size as part of the public transport reform which will see fewer buses working more frequently. It is planned that the terminus would not have to house more than 20 buses at any given time.

Dr Gonzi added that Merchants Street, which this year was freed from the open market, will continue to be restored with the use of street furniture and should also be complete within four years.

EU funds will not be used for City Gate or the Opera House, because according to Dr Gonzi this would commit the government to reaching a number of employment and touristic targets.

On the other hand, projects such as Fort St Elmo, the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour will probably be EU funded, Dr Gonzi said.

Fort St Elmo is to be restored to become a centre of culture and the arts, with part of it used to enhance tourism with a special focus on the cruise liner industry.

Dr Gonzi said both the government and Mr Piano were willing to listen to NGOs and the public about their suggestions but he called on the Maltese to take pride in this national project.

"This project has been 60 years in waiting. It is satisfying to have finally taken a decision and brought one of the most famous architects in the world on board," Dr Gonzi said.

Taxpayers will have to fork out between €15 and €20 million each year for the Opera House and City Gate project but Dr Gonzi is confident that the country can afford such an investment, especially because it will strengthen Malta's position at a crucial time of global recession.

He added that all deadlines will be published as soon as everything is finalised with Mr Piano.

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## COMMENTS

G . Mangion (2 days, 21 hours ago)

PM calls for national pride in City Gate project

Yes Indeed and Many thanks Agree.

this is a National Project let away with political feelings, at the the end Everybody is going to gain, Our Valletta City deserves the best, Grazzi PRIM.

James Muscat (4 days, 21 hours ago)

@ Mr. Russel...the Reichstag was not a reconstruction, it was a renovation...quite a bit of it was still there, the same definitely cannot be said of the opera house.

If the Birmingham town hall's website is correct, it was built in 1834...its neoclassical facade was actually considered pretty contemporary at the time and again, was recently renovated, not rebuilt.

And @ Edward Caruana Galizia...there's a huge difference between a heritage building that exists, like that grandmaster's palace and one that was destroyed, like the opera house.

Your plea for aesthetics will not be answered by building replicas of the past, but by a carefully designed infill to the opera house site which can only be judged once plans are released.

Until then, you can occupy your time by reading some key conservation literature which you are evidently unfamiliar with. On one of these comment boards Karl Ebejer mentioned Cesare Brandi's 'Teoria del Restauro', which would be an excellent place to start.

Carmel Borg (6 days, 18 hours ago)

Deja Vue. Tens of times. Been tantalised with a new City Gate & Royal Opera House for ages. In their present stage, they are a mess. I feel general consensus here and lots of national pride by the level of response. But I continue failing to understand why

a) Govt is continuing with this direct order. I repeat another's appeal; why not organise an anonymous international competition ? b) Why move parliament to city gate? it is easily accessible to the public but a luxury car show by the Hon Ministers is not the proper 'welcoming' scene for a Noble city. Why not convert Fort St Elmo to house the parliament ? It will again become decisive for Malta's future, has ample parking facilities, ample room for conferences, offices, regenerate the area, etc. cruise-liner cultural centre my foot - cruise passengers hardly have a chance to say 'Amen' wherever they go before they are whisked back on board to proceed with the itinerary, let alone visit a cultural centre ! Well, may be the place may be a trifle too damp and salty for the MP's state of the art (and not so fuel efficient) chariots!

V Fenech (6 days, 20 hours ago)

Gonzi always tries to find something to disillusion the public from his disastrous performances at the helm of the state.

Apparently a budget on the eve of a horrible budget and a full speech attacking the change in Labour's statute were not enough!

We had to resurrect Piano in order to hide the excessive increased tax burden, errrrrrmm sorry.....tariffs!

With tariffs instead of taxes and help instead of subsidies, I can't but confirm that the last resurrection of this project was also a pantomime like this one. What worries me most is how come that the Government did not mention anything in the last budget. Wonderful eh?

Nigel Lawrence (6 days, 21 hours ago)

PM calls for national pride in City Gate project----

Sure, the same national pride we have in our roads.

Joseph Brincat (6 days, 23 hours ago)

I was really born unlucky! Being one of the many baby boom proud Maltese son, thanks to the great World Leaders I have been deprived of ever seeing our Royal Opera House functioning

Sure it was the fault of Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, and I don't have to mention the americans who were always powerful with the weak. At least they provided Marshall Aid and later food stuffs under the CARE system.

But was that enough to repay the Maltese for all the bravery they had shown to safeguard Europe from collapse? Remember Malta was the unsinkable aircraft carrier!

And unsinkable it will remain if only we can have another Dom Mintoff to rebuilt the islands from the wreck that this government is leading it. The late Dr. Herbert Ganado wrote "Rajt Malta Timbidel". And today I can unashameably say "Qed Nara Malta Tinqered" and under whose guidance? -The twenty years of a Nationalist Government.

As I said at the beginning, I will never be able to see the Royal Opera House in my lifetime because I do not believe this Prime Minister anymore, because by four years for completion he actually means 40 years.

J Baldacchino (1 week ago)

Is it Mr Piano or Molto Piano?? After more than 60 years to take a decision it's Molto Molto Piano. But, is it the final decision?

If it will house the Parliament or a Theatre, why not both. After all our Parliament is nothing more than a Theatrical Arena.

Andre` Micallef (1 week ago)

Whatever happened to the plans for City Gate and the site of the Opera House which were submitted by a number of Malta's best architects about 20 years ago, at the height of the first Renzo Piano controversy? There were quite a few sensible and feasible plans back then.

I'm all for anything cultural on the present Opera House site, (even if not strictly an opera house) be it a concert hall, multi-purpose arts centre, or, as ably suggested by Lino Bugeja in a recent issue of The Sunday Times, a venue for the magnificent Flemish Tapestries and other treasures currently housed at the makeshift St John's Co-Cathedral museum, thus doing away with the equally controversial plans to create an underground museum in front of St John's. Alternatively, the Flemish Tapestries can be displayed in the Ground Hall at the Palace now housing the Armoury, when the latter is transferred to the current House of Representatives. Whatever the choice, Parliament should ideally be sited somewhere else. How about the Main Guard in St George's Square? Or in Fort St Elmo once this is finally rehabilitated? But DEFINITELY NOT in what is, in my opinion, consecrated cultural ground at City Gate.

Edward Caruana Galizia (1 week ago)

@Nick Psaila-savona

Then why dont we just pull down the entrance to Mdina while we re at it. Don't you see it s the same thing. I have no idea why the original entrance was taken down before, but if it were still standing we wouldnt even dream about pulling it down.

I think it s more along the lines of- why do we maltese seem to think that just because it looks abstrace and modern then it has to be good , never mind the fact that it doesnt fit in and/ or isn t liked by anyone. It s all well and good for architects to look at it and say it s a good structure. but really that s all it will be. What ever happened to aesthetics? OH i ve got an idea, lets take down the grandmaster's palace and ask Richard England to build us a spaceship instead. It will be modern and abstract so it MUST be a good idea! Don t you see that all around the world they do their best to preserve their historical buildings. Build modern buildings, but in a place where they fit in! ie- NOT VALLETTA!

Daniel Russell (1 week ago)

Nick

As I have stated elsewhere, it would be useful for this issue of the Opera House and that of the City Gate regeneration should be considered by Jimmy Magro's foundation re Fort St Elmo. Maybe this could be a wider foundation for the effective and sympathetic regeneration of Valletta as a whole to keep it as the architectural gem it is.

Further to your comments, what about the German Reichstag which has its old facades outside and a modern Norman Foster designed interior and top, its only concession to modernity being the glass dome on top. Also secondly, Birmingham Town Hall retains its Greek acropylipse inspired outside and a modern state of the art inside. Old and new can co-exist with sensitive design and it is not about recreating the past but something that is sustainable, compatible with townscape and above all what the Maltese people want and are proud of as it is their taxes that are paying for it. No I am not Maltese, but I love Malta very much and visit often from my home in UK where in Birmingham we have lost much heritage and yes I am a regeneration officer!

martin portelli (1 week ago)

Why parliament needs to move further up the road evades me. I do appreciate David Zammit's comment though. Our prima donnas must have a pressing need to exercise their lungs and house their egos in a fitting space. If the space is to be used at all let it be for a cultural purpose and hopefully some consideration given to the needs of the residents of Valletta. It is a suspect move though in a time of crisis, if it ever gets off the ground I just hope that citizens can truly benefit from footing the bill.

NB

Will there be any consideration /provision for recreational facilities for Valletta's children/elderly/whole community?

Joseph Micallef (1 week ago)

The sheer cheek of it. Factories on their way to closing down, families cutting back in every way possible, utility bills through the roof, gas set to triple, fuel prices... need I continue? And an out of control government spending like there is no tomorrow. Perhaps there is no tomorrow? And we were supposed to put our hurt aside, all those party suckers who had been trampled on. Remember the emotional political speeches which were supposed to touch the heart? Now the game becomes all too obvious. The sheep to be fleeced. It's us. Dr Gonzi. You lose all credibility. Now and forever.

Nick Psaila-savona (1 week, 1 day ago)

attn Edward Caruana Galizia

Yes it's true the plans were unveiled 20 years ago or so. IT has been stated that the project will not however be limited by these plans but start afresh, so I think everyone should be more prudent before making any sweeping statements.

A note aside I would like to put forward the question: Why are we as Maltese so afraid of modern interventions? There are countless conservation projects in historically sensitive sites worldwide which are very successful. Valletta needs such sensitive developments, but at the same time we must realise that we are not living in the Knights' era anymore. Rebuilding replicas of what there was in the past simply doesn't make sense. Valletta will never come back to life if it is treated as a museum, it must be treated as a city of the future, with strong roots in the past.

Mike Magri (1 week, 1 day ago)

Mr. David Magro, i agree with you 100%...

Also, i think that the timing of the announcement of these projects is used as a cheep political move, as they have been announced just a few months before the mep`s elections, next June, and also that it has a tentative completion date of a few months before next general elections.....!!!!

It`s not that i don`t want these projects to be FINALLY done and over with.. But the sacrosant fact that such important projects were NOT even merely mentioned in the budget a few weeks ago, makes me strongly wonder beleive of political `foul play`...!!

Finally, i think that One very important fact we must ALL keep in mind, is the obligation which we all have, that after all these years, we MUST DO SOMETHING WHICH IS HIGHLY COMPATABLE with our City of Valletta, and which make us ALL proud of and to pass it on to our NEXT GENERATION, as something that makes sense..

So let`s NOT make a mess of this too with all kinds of controversies and hidden political agendas, ecc.. ecc..ecc...

james musat (1 week, 1 day ago)

@lesley kreupl...the only way that the knights would be "turning in their graves" would be if in 1566, the knights decided to build valletta in the medieval style, thinking that their contemporary style looked silly...

@ Mario Farrugia..." Dan min hu ..... ? "...he is one of the most famous architects in the world...update yourself

Also, we all appear to forget that the knights had little qualms about repairing and rebuilding mdina in their own contemporary style which rightfully adds layers of progessive history to the city...then again god knows how many stone masons at the time thought they could have done a better job of the design themselves...

I agree with all those saying that we should wait for some visuals before complaining

A. Camilleri (1 week, 1 day ago)

To continue where I left earlier on. The MCC perhaps, the Auberge de Baviere perhaps, could also be alternatives which may have been considered by the authorities. But then one has to go for the best option, for whatever reasons, and then pros and cons of this and that alternative. As for the Opera House, that too is another tough one; the Manoel Theatre is a wonderful place, but too small to host our "Opera House". The MCC is larger, and a beautiful place as well. But this too cannot really take over as an "Opera House". There is not much one can consider further than returning to the former premises. Then there is the question "Does one really have to have a specific Opera House, and in Valletta"?

A. Camilleri (1 week, 1 day ago)

Come on you guys, let's be positive. The Prime Minister had planned to get the Valletta entrance projects on his agenda, and he has now started the ball rolling. It has been years, many years, since we have all grumbled about the state of our capital's entrance, as a whole. And now that our present Prime Minister has got down to business, we still grumble! Wow! Opinion will always differ, for any project, so one has to accept and go for the majority's choice. Piano is world renowned, and we now await to see what his

imagination will come out with this time round for the different projects surrounding Valletta's entrance. As for Parliament's move to the former Opera House, that is a different question, and I too have my own doubts as to whether that is the best option. But I agree that it cannot remain where it is, and it just has to be placed somewhere. ....

K Spiteri (1 week, 1 day ago)

As a Valletta person and a person in the arts sector, I feel hurt when I listen to the Prime Minister saying that the Old Opera House will be built to house Parliament instead of its original purpose because the area will be saturated with theatres. I can assure Gonzi that with the growing rate of arts-related productions and the growing talent we have in Malta, it is imperative to re-build the Old Opera House in its original purpose. If Gonzi wants a glimpse of the importance of the Old Opera House to the artistic sector, he only has to attend the Malta Arts Festival during the summer where lots of productions are held at the Old Opera House and the feedback from the public.

Shall I ask myself whether Gonzi cares about all this?

silvan said (1 week, 1 day ago)

What confuses me here is that if the plans and designs of Renzo Piano were shouted down by public opinion, why is the government recycling the same plans again?

Why Renzo Piano again? Was there no new architectural talent (Maltese or foreign) over the last 20 years?

How many museums can Valletta hold? The way this sounds is that Valletta will become one big museum piece. There are no new imaginative uses of the land or buildings. For example, Fort St Elmo is the perfect place, historically and strategically to host our maritime forces

As far as the parliament moving to the opera house, that is the greatest visible legacy that this government will leave to the Maltese population. Instead of a symbol of enjoyment and culture for the people, we shall have a symbol perpetuating big brother government and politicians brimming with self-importance.

I hope that this proposal, like the one before it, will not go through and another 20 years will pass before someone comes up with new plans without regurgitating a Piano or England master plan. Meanwhile, we are stuck with the Mintoff legacy for City Gate.

David Magro (1 week, 1 day ago)

Gonzi is playing chess...he wants to switch the attention from the increase of utility bills on to something bombastic ! X`hasibna dan bcicen ?

Martin Dingli (1 week, 1 day ago)

Maltese architects should start shouting and screaming. Where is our pride. Valletta's gate should be one of morale pride as I call it. When entering the city the gate one should look upon it as historical and a work of art. As for the Opera House becoming Parliament, that would be an insult to all Maltese.

If people in Malta will not stand and shout to stop this so called world-famous Italian architect Renzo Piano, then I am afraid Valletta's gate will be lost forever.

Valletta is such a beautiful old city with so much character that i am proud to have been part of that city as that is where i was born.

J Martinelli (1 week, 2 days ago)

@ Joseph V Grech and others

JVG wrote, "...The P.M. grasped the suggestion - in his usual 'no room for consultation'".

Is sixty years of consultation, debate, tentative starts, abrupt stalls, foreign architects' designs, local architects' designs, lay opinions, professional opinions, politicians' opinions and minions' opinions not enough? Do we start with another ten years of debate and consultations?

Is there one single project presented by a government in Malta which is not automatically assumed to be wrong?

After sixty years of criticizing successive governments for inaction, now we want to trample on plans which will rid the City of a wart so ugly and a City Gate which is practically falling to pieces.

Self appointed art critiques do not like what Renzo Piano designed and considered his works unsuitable for our Capital City. Eureka! As far as I know Mr. Piano's other works were for other cities and locales which do not match the City of Valletta both in size and architecture. Surely whatever plans he had can be and probably will be changed and will stand for more scrutiny, no doubt.

Anyone expecting a general consensus, will be grossly mistaken. Enough talk - let's have some positive action!

lesley kreupl (1 week, 2 days ago)

Well the knights will certainly be turning in their graves if the few examples of this gentleman's work I have been unfortunate enough to see is anything to go on.

Quickly, pass the plans to excavate and destroy the knights graves at St. Johns Co-cathedral so they won't be able to turn!

Valletta is such a beautiful old city with so much character - yes it needs a lot of TLC and refurbishment - but Sliema and so many other places have already been destroyed, at least try and preserve the city of Valletta.

Mario Farrugia (1 week, 2 days ago)

ghandna fiducja fil-maltin ukoll !!!!! Id disin barrani se jghamlu ? Dan min hu ..... ? Fuq kollox jien ma nemminx li il-PN kapaci jghamel progett bhal dan, kieku xi TINDA iva; esperti !! Issa drajnighom "ALJANAZJONIJIET' biss. Ghandna problemi kbar quddiemna u hargu b'din il-hrafa -

Jo Said (1 week, 2 days ago)

I believe that funds should always be set aside for investment in cultural projects. However, the old opera house was built by our ancestors and should be rehabilitated to its former splendour.

If anything, we would be saluting our elders for the suffering they went through during the war to protect our dear Islands. We have no moral right to change their wishes. It should be rebuilt as was and no funny gimmicks should ever be accepted, parliament and no parliament.

Let's show some respect and oppose those politicians who should know better.

Luke Gatt (1 week, 2 days ago)

Lets hold an election "WHO WILL WE CHOOSE AS THE ARCHITECT FOR CITY GATE x OR y"

come on guys about 8 months ago you casted your votes and if i remember correctly pn and pl put forward plans for Valletta, pn won therefore there is no need for public consultation as it was held about 8 months ago.

Anthony Miggiani (1 week, 2 days ago)

I don't know the full story, but whoever designed the current drab city gate should in no way be reconsidered, whoever it was. As for Mr. Piano's hodgepodge of cantilevered glass and construction-like appendages fiascoes...well...that should disqualify him from having anything to do with our cultural and heritage city which is Valletta. The city gate should be redesigned to reflect what historical heritage where imbued to us the Noble Knights within the City itself. As one would face the entrance to a city gate, one should be filled with exciting expectations of what it portrays to be within it, not some neo-modernistic-ego-maniacal rubbish. No, I don't even care to see what Mr. Piano will come up with. I simply don't think his credentials lend to be considered for such project.

As for the Ole' Opera House, a bliddy shame Malta hasn't the guts to resurrect it to its formal glory like most such edifices that were destroyed all over Europe during World War !!.

David Zammit (1 week, 2 days ago)

While reviving the Piano project sounds like a good idea, I must say that the idea of relocating Parliament to the entrance of Valletta initially dismayed me. It seemed symptomatic of an attempt by the state to absorb the space in which civil society should flourish. On second thoughts, however, I realised that a former Opera house is the ideal site for our Parliament. What better place could there be for it than a former Opera house? Indeed, our national genius has lost no time to apply to our Parliamentarians the immortal words the Bard put into the mouth of Polonius. These are truly:

"The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited: Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty, these are the only men."

It also shows an interesting sense of priorities that our Government, which cannot find more than 33 million Euros annually to fund the University is proposing to use up to 80 million Euros to rebuild City Gate and the Opera House, as well as 14 million Euros on the Saint John's underground extension.

Joseph v. Grech (1 week, 2 days ago)

I believe it was Fr. Peter Serracino Inglott - who, in his Times column suggested that Renzo Piano should be brought back to undertake the development of the bombed-out theatre site in Valletta. The P.M. grasped the suggestion - in his usual 'no room for consultation' manner!

Public opinion will remain divided as to whether Piano is the right architect for the job. there is Valletta's eternal well-being at stake! Personally I am not impressed by Piano's creations - they do not fit in with Valletta's architecture. The Pompidou Centre in Paris is fast degenerating into a sorry architectural blemish. Where is our Kamra tal-Periti in this issue? A call for periti to submit new plans for the project would have been preferable considering the time span that has gone by since the first submissions. And as for housing Parliament in this building - that is ludicrous!

I believe this 'project' serves one purpose - taking people's minds off pressing problems. Need we mention them one by one? That must have been what Fr. Peter - self-acknowledged political strategist for the present administration - really wanted: diversion for the masses. And he got his way.

Charles Busuttil (1 week, 2 days ago)

This is typical of our government. Presenting a fait accompli without consultation. Reminds one of what Dr. Austin Gatt bragged about: Since we have a majority in parliament, we may proceed ahead without consultation.

Bet the final bill will be about three times as much as what it is estimated now. You wait and see!

Denis Catania (1 week, 2 days ago)

@Joe Vella: Where are we going to get the money from? Maybe more tariffs. Austin gets a Jaguar, Parliament gets the Opera house and the Maltese gets screwed again. Good job LawrencePN.

Adrian Buckle (1 week, 2 days ago)

Prime Minister Gonzi added 'that all deadlines will be published as soon as everything is finalised with Mr Piano.'

So much for consultation!

If you oppose this project, join us on FACEBOOK on

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=55347446880>

Peter Grech (1 week, 2 days ago)

Gonzi is doing it again. People immediately gulp at the bait and start chatting their brains out, forgetting the critical time we are in and that we need to put our hands in our pockets and fork out the money. Well done Gonzi for the machiavellian plot. When something works wonders why not reuse it. These maltese are really a strange lot, tax them, insult them and they keep on coming.

Mark Gauci (1 week, 2 days ago)

Just as someone said a few years back - this is going to be 'the last miserable act of a miserable government.'

A parliament right at the entrance of a city - really and truly Il-Parlament tal-Malata then. When are those 69 people sitting in comfortable chairs going to grow up? Do they really think that we are stupid.

No wonder this country is in such a pitiful state

CEAgius (1 week, 2 days ago)

Again - Gonzi meeting Piano- irregular, unconceivable, not correct. So whilst Gonzi meets piano we - the tax payers pay for their fiascoes.

Valetta City Gate and the Theatre should be built to their original grandeur. It's only an excuse that it would saturate the areas and that the footprint is too small. Come on - don't give us that. The park and ride is the solution for this - or not - Valletta should be left ONLY for pedestrians thus saving what remains

of it. parking spaces should be provided for those residing in Valletta and the rest should use the electric cabs or il-karozzin.

And to add insult to injury - why should the MPs (mangia passeggia) be awarded - it's better to reduce the MPs to 35 - do we really have to carry the burden of all those MPs? Malta is overpopulated 360 degrees INCLUDING THE PARLIAMENT HOUSE. Taxpayers of any colour or creed WAKE UP.

If we are asked to pay for this project, we should at least be consulted - it's only RP and some fat cat who will benefit from this waste.

George Gregory Debono (1 week, 2 days ago)  
Parliamentary debate is not my sort of opera .

I want real opera.

J Micallef (1 week, 2 days ago)

@Louis Gialanze - well put indeed!

This is rally one hit below the belt. Maybe the Govt intends to fund it from EU monies? Or perhaps Dr. Gatt might label it as part of the EU Road Network? Ot is it 'subsidised' by our W&E bills?

I hate to think that our politicians, with an ego the size of Milky Way (not the chocolate bar), are now looking at some way to glorify themselves with this structure. Think about it - many cities have the House of P or presidential palace as something prominent, but Valletta is just the size of a car part compared to larger european cities, so we've got to be very careful not to construct omething that's overwhelming.

Why not develop the area into a Museum as I once suggested months ago during the San Gwann Cathedral discussions?

And why do we keep turning onto Piano? I know that Prof. RichardEngland has lots of praise, but do we need Renzo Piano to regenerate Valletta? Just because we fail to find the will to do it properly, ourselves?!

philip pace (1 week, 2 days ago)

I am afraid that our Prime Minister is losing the little bit credibilty that he had from last March. Anyone who thinks that he and his government is going to listen to what the people have and shall say on this is living in cuckoo land as everything has been decided.

It would be a magnificent embarassment for us if we are going to have an egocentric design by Renzo Piano.

He is good without any shadow of a doubt but he is not the one to embellish and restore the Capital City. It should be noted on how our Government thinks on the local architects and designers. These were surpassed and trampled on. I am sure that we have enough talented persons to submit good and harmonised plans but this wafer thin majority of Govt thinks differently.

Regarding the 4year time limit, this shall not be acheived as many problems shall ensue and it would the Delimara/Mater Dei revisted.

The track record of this Government is quite dismal, shabby and unrealistuc where expences and timeframes are a must.

National Pride? MY FOOT!

Dear Prime Minister do you think that we are stupid?

Michael Tabone (1 week, 2 days ago)

Valletta needs an Opera Theatre and the old opera theatre site is where it should be. A multi purpose building can be built to accomodate a number of theatrical expressions as well as art forms. There are lots of sites where Parliament can be located. MCC is one as well as Auberge de Baviere which is also in desperate need of restoration. A competition amongst Maltese architects for the design is not such a bad idea either.

Edward Caruana Galizia (1 week, 2 days ago)

If i m not mistaken they showed the plans a few years ago. Maybe i was a bit too harsh- but i just don t see how we should have such an anachronistic structure as the entrance to our capital!

Louis Gialanze (1 week, 2 days ago)

I don't believe this is the right time to undertake such a project. The people are still reeling under the hefty increases in their utility bills. Dishing away money as in the case of unseated cabinet ministers and parliamentary secretaries (along with a former leader of the opposition) is already bad enough. This one though takes the biscuit. It is not the kind of capital project intended to spend one's way out of a recession or stunted GDP growths. I am more inclined to believe that the real reason has more to do with fame and glory.

We've already had more than our fair share of personal kudos as in the case of Malta in EU, Independent Malta, Republic Malta, Presidency of the world, etc so please Mr Piano do keep in mind that in future the precious little space will also need to house lifesize bronze effigies like the ones which dot around castille square!

Joe M. Anastasi (1 week, 2 days ago)

I thought government was against abortion.

Anything "Renzo Piano" in our capital city will be akin to an abortion.

Piano's modern art and architecture is fine, but not in Valletta, thank you very much.

Kate de Cesare (1 week, 2 days ago)

What Valletta needs is rent law reform, not just for commercial properties but for private... thats whats going to change our capital from a slum to a beautiful city we can be proud of.

Re: the Opera House - I hope we're not going to end up with some wacky design which us Maltese seem to favour.. but rather go for something more classic, in keeping with whats left of Valletta's character.

a mifsud (1 week, 2 days ago)

When Renzo Piano's plans were originally rejected The Times did not have an online newspaper where evreybody with access to a computer could leave their opinion. Now it's going to be very interesting reading what so many "experts" think about the plans. Of course many people are not going to agree but a t last something is being done. If the govt consulted with all interested parties this will go on forever. Hopefully the plans will be made public and chnages allowed on suggestions by people who know what they are talking about. How are so many people opposed to the plans when they haven't even seen

anything yet? And no matter what there is always going to be opposition. The final project is good bad only in the public's eyes. Take the portomaso tower....I think it should be torn down....others think it a wonderful piece of modern architecture...

Jurgen Grech (1 week, 2 days ago)

We can build the most beautiful opera house and the most welcoming city gates in the world - as long as our capital city is polluted with all sorts of illegal immigrants from africa, china, and south america - it will never be restored to its pristine noble beauty!

I heard tourist with my own ears one afternoon complaining about the lack of security they feel, thanks to the hundreds of african immigrants wondering around OUR CITY.

wally vella-zarb (1 week, 2 days ago)

Nobody is denying that Renzo Piano has earned a worldwide reputation. However, are we blindly plummeting headlong into an attitude along the lines of "This is by a world-famous architect, therefore it MUST be good!" ?

People habitually mention the Centre Pompidou as an example of his bold and imaginative style. That building might well fit in within its location but, can anyone seriously imagine something similar in Valletta? No matter how bold and functional it is, the fact remains that it is reminiscent of a building site, complete with scaffolding and an outside chute for debris! See

[http://farm1.static.flickr.com/209/487697682\\_9ddec85e0d.jpg?v=0](http://farm1.static.flickr.com/209/487697682_9ddec85e0d.jpg?v=0)

Commission Piano for something else if you really must - but please spare our Capital from a repeat of the abomination that he proposed some years ago, which proposal was, quite rightly, soundly rejected by the people at the time.

Nick Psaila-savona (1 week, 2 days ago)

Attn Edward Caruana Galizia

Have you by any chance already seen any of Mr Piano's Plans?? How on earth do you know what they will look like and how on earth can you compare something you haven't seen to a bird toilet, let alone a glorified one??

Kevin Zammit (1 week, 2 days ago)

That money would be better spent to fix the city first. How about liberalising rent at least for Valletta so that hopefully no more buildings crumple and collapse?

EDWIN DE MARCO (1 week, 2 days ago)

I've only seen a couple of Renzo Piano's ( RP stands for rip-off!)) works in Paris. As for the Centre Pompidou in Paris, which took only four years circa to construct, all I can say is that it looks like an exercise in Kee-clamps. I bet a certain Pillow could do much better. Regarding the City Gate Project, yes, I don't like it at all. I keep smelling the same rat. I'm not bothered that my opinion doesn't count. After all, nobody's opinion counts, not even our competent Maltese architects' one. We must accept whatever the PM dishes out. However, by the time the project kicks off & will be ready, obviously costing thrice than the projected figure, Gonzipn will probably have made way for a better administration. As for the opera house site being converted to parliament & not in another opera house, the name of the new building would have to be aptly named TEATRIN!!

A word of consolation to the building contractors who have recently lamented about dwindling work.You

have a new parliament building, the windmills at issikka l-bajd...a new proposed hospital, the new american embassy in Ta' Qali, the controversial/NON-eco friendly Ghadira project etc. Buon Natale!

mario mifsud (1 week, 2 days ago)

@A camilleri

"We can now start consultation in earnest"

Hellooooo The decision has already been taken No consultation is needed

Robert Attard (1 week, 2 days ago)

Please dont tell me that Richard England is going to have his paws dug into this one too!!!! Can the government come up with a competition so that the best designs are chosen irrespective of the man behind the job!!

A Mangion (1 week, 2 days ago)

L argument huwa semplici

Ilu li waqa 60 sena dan it teatru

Ilna 45 sena indipendenti u dejjem nghidu li missna nibnuh...ilha sejra 45 il konsultazzjoni

Issa ghax kien hawn minn iddecieda, se nintefghu nergghu niddiskutu.

I-ahjar li l-kamra tal periti, david felice, jghinna ftit...u jaghti statement li jfahhar lil arkitett barrani li ntuza. Dalghodu fuq calypso radio, enzo Guzman intefa jghajjar lil gvern u lil prim talli ghazel perit barrani!!!

Joseph Calleja (1 week, 2 days ago)

The decision to turn the ruins of the opera house into a parliament will be regarded as one of the worst decisions of its kind in Maltese history. What should be in place at the entrance of OUR city (not the politicians) should be a multi purpose stage and auditorium which can house opera, musicals, theatre and ballet amongst other events.. The Manoel theatre, albeit a gem, is too small and really ill suited for opera and other big scale productions. The MCC, which should be the parliament, is acoustically deaf and has no backstage facilities and St. James is little more than a hall.

By contrast, our sister island Gozo, has two opera houses on the same street.

What kind of message are we sending out to the rest of the world by letting this happen? Don't we have any kind of pride whatsoever?

Adrian Cardona (1 week, 2 days ago)

"Dr Gonzi yesterday emphasised that the new plans will be updated from the ones presented more than 20 years ago, to suit current trends."

So if we had gone along with the project 20 years ago, now we would be looking at an outdated tired design. Will it be the same case now? Will the 'new' City Gate be just a trendy design?

I am all for doing something about City Gate, even a daring modern project if need be, but as Mr.Bugeja said further down, those disgusting flats and that horrid shopping complex below them must go. What point is there in going ahead with such a massive project only to have it ruined by those low-class blocks of mediocrity sticking out on top?

Renzo Piano can be sensitive and he can be shockingly modern. His projects have nearly always regenerated run-down areas, controversially or not. I'll reserve my opinion until I see the plans.

Scerri S (1 week, 2 days ago)

@.George Bugeja - I completely agree.

Mark Sciberras (1 week, 2 days ago)

What about the gaping hole that is the car park in front of city Gate? Remember how we were shown the landscaping plans when this necessary evil was still on the drawing board? Malta will get a lot of bad press when Valletta is Europe cultural capital in 2017 or thereabouts if nothing is done to embellish this hideous pit.

And the arrogance, by the way, is beyond belief - even for someone who does not care much about local politics. Why is not the Opera House being rebuilt, despite the huge popular support for this? Why isn't this subject to a competition as in other countries? It seems as if whatever Piano comes up with will be accepted and commissioned by the few men in the cabinet. Hands up anyone who has any say in the tastes of men like Pullicino. This is abuse of power, no less. This from the same collection of men who are now 'noticing' that Fort St Elmo is a national disgrace. Obvious that was a last minute gesture to take people's minds off the utility bills issue - and yet this is a v imp project! I fear the worst!!

Joe Vella (1 week, 2 days ago)

I just wonder if all the little elves when accusing Dr. Gonzi with arrogance are actually holding a picture of Jason Micallef in hand.

Go on Dr. Gonzi with the project, if Maltese were to listen to the MLP and all the little Elves we still be experiencing water and electricity shortages.

Eric Soames (1 week, 2 days ago)

This is the attitude of an administration that, knowing it will not be returned to power for a while, determines to push through all kinds of self-aggrandising but unpopular projects. The calling for 'national pride' in this is reminiscent, albeit in a less world shattering situation, of Bush calling any objections to his Iraq war unpatriotic.

D. Borg (1 week, 2 days ago)

All these hundreds of architects graduating each year! How come the architect for such a grand project has to be a foreigner? National pride indeed!!

A. Camilleri (1 week, 2 days ago)

Prime Minister, all I can say is well done for getting these long-standing issues off the ground. We can now start consultation in earnest, and ensure that the projects will be in order by the proposed deadline. A great challenge indeed, but we're off at last. Now let's ALL co-operate and, together, and constructively get our capital back in place. A place for our island to be proud of. Keep up your good work Prime Minister.

Edward Caruana Galizia (1 week, 2 days ago)

NO...NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. oh my god! Are we going to be the only country in europe- or the world- that doesnt have an opera house!? are we actually going to ruin our capital city by building the ugliest entrance! please no! dont do. It s going to be horrible!! i know it is! it s going to look like a glorified bird toilet, and it will ruin our identity forever! I m not joking! I may sound dramatic but come on. We MUST do something to stop it! And we must do something NOW!

J. Spiteri (1 week, 2 days ago)

Is it money well spent when considering the effect the global recession is having on our country? Aren't there more urgent issues that need to be tackled? And why is the design for this project being awarded to the 'world - famous' Renzo Piano? Are we to believe that we do not have Maltese architects who can come up with an equally acceptable design? Piano's design in 1985 was rejected; hope this time his proposal will truly complement our city's historical architecture.

Jsmith (1 week, 2 days ago)

I am no expert myself, so I cannot quite comment on the suitability of having Mr Piano sign off our most important cultural restoration or modern reinterpretation of our long lost opera house. I can see why Mr Piano has been appointed as he is a world renowned architect...or so I read. I can only assess the gov'n't decision to appoint Mr piano once I see his plans and more importantly the finished product. Needless to say, I admire the Gonzi for having the courage to do something with the site.....but if he gets this wrong....the reverberations on the party will last for years to come. Thus, at this stage, my only contribution to this article is to advice you to individually see with your own eyes what projects Mr Piano has been responsible for. You can see this on Wikipedia or following this link. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renzo\\_Piano](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renzo_Piano) ). Have a look and see if Mr piano is the talent who will do his cousins in the south cultural justice and give us pride and joy into something we lost a long time ago.

Simon J. Aquilina (1 week, 2 days ago)

Unfortunately the government has not been inclusive enough on this subject. Consultation should have been made to see what the Maltese really want since at the end of the day it is about the capital city of Malta we are talking about. Even putting a simple website where people could put forward their comments would have been enough to get a clear picture of what the general public wants. Also I cannot understand how come putting back the original gate has not even been suggested. Can someone imagine pulling down the gate at Imdina to put a Renzo Piano design instead? It is true that Renzo Piano designs are world renowned, but has anyone considered in which context this building is going to be made? The fact is that the pulling down the original city gate was a mistake! Putting it back would be the right way forward. Only like that can we make sure that such a historical monument is enjoyed not only in photos!

George Bugeja (1 week, 2 days ago)

Whatever Renzo Piano's design may be, the entrance to Valletta will always look shabby as long as the ghastly city gate complex and overlying flats still stand.

Andrea Selvaggi (1 week, 2 days ago)

The City Gate Square should be the centre of Valletta's revival, and bring a warm welcome to those who enter the gates of Valletta of a city flourishing with activities and culture. and not a site for another excuse on costly spending for the government. 'DAR MALTA' in Brussels was not enough? do we need to spend yet more money on our government? The Opera House should be rebuilt to its original form and should

be done by a consortium of Maltese Architects and experienced maltese stone masons. No need for a foreign Architect, there are plenty here already.

mario mifsud (1 week, 2 days ago)

Calling for national pride when Gov come up with the idea without proper consultation process?  
The arrogance is getting out of hand completely

vincent a galea (1 week, 2 days ago)

This is why these Islands can never get very far. Inferiority complex is rampant in all quarters. Otherwise why do we commission foreigners. Indeed where is the national pride?

A.J. Anastasi (1 week, 2 days ago)

At long last, it seems the Government has put its feet down and decided to go ahead with this project.

Let us hope, the Government won't be put off by some criticism that emanates from some quarters, as has happened in the past and which unfortunately do not have the right qualifications and expertise to decide on such projects.

Such decisions should be left to the experts, the REAL EXPERTS and not to every Tom, Dick and Harry who happens to drop a line on these columns and who is nothing but the modern "Cassandra" of today!

I cannot think of any one more qualified than RENZO PIANO for this kind of majestic project and with the assistance of RICHARD ENGLAND (who is Maltese, like us), will make a great team together!

So, let's get started and not waste any more time. It is already sixty years too late!

But as the saying goes "It is Better Late Than Never" !

AJA

Ian Fenech (1 week, 2 days ago)

Well having a world renowned architect commissioned seems like the right move. Thank you, we had enough of Richard England projects.....

What baffles me, is the reasoning that the bus terminus will be reduced in size as part of the public transport reform, when we get complaints that there are not enough buses, especially during the summer. And let not Minister Gatt try to convince us that trams are the solution either. Our roads definitely aren't wide enough to have a tram service.

Darren Zammit (1 week, 2 days ago)

Let's opt for a fair anonymous INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION. Let's give everyone the opportunity to design/repair the entrance to our glorious capital city. In this way we will be giving a fair opportunity to everybody (even to emerging young talents) and not just commission the work to a STARCHITECT!!!

MARK MIFSUD BONNICI (1 week, 2 days ago)

Dr. Gonzi states "Taxpayers will have to fork out between €15 and €20 million each year for the Opera House and City Gate project but Dr Gonzi is confident that the country can afford such an investment,"

After the increase in water and electricity rates, car licenses, gas and a tax on drainage taxpayers are expected to fork out 15 to 20 million euro towards a project that though paid for by the war damage funds has remained derelict for over 60 years.

This must be the best proposed form of public spending in a world struggling to get out of a hard hitting economic crisis.

The only consolation is that the reduction of excise duty on spirits will enable us to drink ourselves silly whilst our earnings are being milked!!!

Charles Micallef (1 week, 2 days ago)

This long awaited project and in the case the Opera House is some 60 years overdue will certainly improve the entrance to our capital city, from the 3rd world city entrance that it is today and the idea to move the parliament into another opera house is very fitting!

How about putting a lid over that monstrosity of the car-park, it is by far the biggest carbuncle which has defaced the entrance to this jewel of a city in the Mediterranean.

I am sure that Renzo Piano can remedy this eyesore by covering it up and landscape it as part and parcel of this project.

Grace Abela (1 week, 2 days ago)

"The project should be finished right at the end of this legislature, Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi said yesterday as he unveiled the plans."

mmmmmm...anyone smells a rat?

Ramon Casha (1 week, 2 days ago)

So much for "FLIMKIEN kollox possibbli". Apparently this translates to "My way or nothing". In fact it's more like "my way, period."

The suggestion of using the site for a parliament house is by far the worst of many idea put forth for this site.

Igalea (1 week, 2 days ago)

Calling for national pride and commissioning a foreign architect instead of holding a competition among Maltese architects?

The mind boggles at this skewed reasoning.