

## Restoration works on historic fortifications well underway

by Scott Grech

The Phoenicia Hotel yesterday played host to a seminar held with the purpose of keeping the public up-to-date on the restoration and conservation works currently taking place on four of Malta's bastions, in Mdina, Valletta, Vittoriosa and Cittadella.



Resources and Rural Affairs Minister George Pullicino said that the progress is gathering momentum, and all four bastions are expected to be in pristine condition by 2013, at a total cost of €36 million, 85 per cent of which is co-financed by the EU.

“The appearance of the four bastions is currently blighted because of the various scaffolding equipment erected in front of the bastions to facilitate the restoration process. Such restoration works are very delicate, which is why they will take three years to complete. However, once completed, the fortifications will be restored to their former glory,” said Mr Pullicino.

In total, over 135,000 cubic metres of the walls of the bastions will be restored, totalling six kilometres in length.

“The main purpose of these projects is not only to revive the importance of these bastions, which withstood the face of adversity and protected the Maltese islands from succumbing to foreign invaders on more than one occasion, but also to consolidate the fragile terrain on which the bastion walls are built, preventing further damage and erosion on such magnificent structures,” said Mr Pullicino.

Mr Pullicino stressed that the ministry is doing its utmost to play a part in Valletta's regeneration, as not only is Valletta Malta's capital city, but it is also a “world heritage site”.

The minister also reminded those present that the Biagio Steps, currently an examinations centre, will be transformed into an interactive fortifications museum, where everyone can enjoy an overview of Malta's rich history in general and the role these bastions played throughout the course of time.

Ray Farrugia, who is designated as Director General of The Restoration Unit within the Resources and Rural Affairs Ministry, said that such works were necessary, as not only were the bastions, and also the surrounding

periphery, in a very precarious state, but the bastions themselves are a landmark of Maltese history, with scores of tourists who daily happen in the vicinity of the fortifications mesmerised by their architecture.

The Restoration Unit has, between 2004 and 2009, carried out restoration works on 90 historical sites, some of which include pillboxes, towers and palaces.

The Unit, which was set up in 1997, and is composed of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, technicians and skilled workers, includes 12 architects (eight of whom specialise in restoration works), a Research Co-ordinator, who is also an expert in military architecture, and two archaeologists.

The Restoration Unit is currently overseeing works on the Auberge de Castille, the Grand Masters' Palace, the National Library and St John's Co-Cathedral.

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