

The tunnel beneath the square

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Instead of getting on with paving St George's Square in Valletta as he should, Resources and Rural Affairs Minister George Pullicino continues to argue about a project he has dropped in his attempt to find inconsistencies (as he claims in his letter of April 18) in what I have written and insisting on getting "further clarifications" from me.

On the contrary, my attitude has always been that after a 10-month discussion the project should just get done.

In fact, during the last Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, where we were shown the umpteenth design for the paving, I only abstained as I still do not like a lot of the detailing or lack of it, because what interests me in the end is to see this main square paved above everything else.

The minister continues to attempt to mix up the issues of what is personal opinion and what is stated as part of one's official position.

Now he has dug up a letter I wrote to the new minister (responsible for VRP), Ninu Zammit, in 2003, in which I explained one of the VRP's pending projects, that is the car park and the paving of the square. As executive coordinator it was my job to inform the minister of the pending project. As executive coordinator I had to present what the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee had agreed to present as projects. There is no inconsistency in my writings. Up to August 2007 I wrote as executive coordinator of VRP.

But, just for the record, since he has made so much fuss about my personal opinion, which I have always stated clearly, I must correct the information he gives in his letter when he says that part of my "inconsistencies on this saga" was that in my memo of 2003 I proposed an entrance and exit "through two existing shops".

The proposal at the time was, yes, that the exit and entry would be through two existing shops that the architects said were wide enough for small cars to go through without destroying any heritage. His proposal was, however, to widen a third entrance, as can be seen in the photo, which was actually the entry to the "discovered" tunnel.

In no way were the two proposals "identical".

On the contrary, what the VRP was proposing in the past would not have destroyed anything while the present VRP's July 2008 proposal would have destroyed the existing tunnels!

I have a lot to say about this project, about all the different proposals, lack of archaeological excavations, destruction of original paving, fountains, pools etc, all the result of lack of seriousness and preparation for a project in the central square of our World Heritage city.

I have no intention to prolong this discussion but being faced with a declaration by a minister that I "should know better, much better" I had no option but to respond.

Finally, I will give the minister advice though I know he will not take it: Learn to choose between well-meaning criticism and not and learn that there are still people in the country whose only interest is to help the country and nothing else.
