

A 'normal' evening of frustration at Mater Dei

It was not crowded on Friday evening at Mater Dei's Emergency Department, yet people were kept waiting for anything upwards of three hours. Things got worse when one of the three streams was closed as the doctor moved to another stream to help out and the people on the two lists somehow found themselves on one list, much to their anger.

As time went by, people's comments got worse and worse. It is not just that the opening of a brand-new hospital had raised expectations far higher than can be maintained, but actually that the service one gets these days is actually worse than that given in the bad old St Luke's days.

It may have been a one-off, or people were on holiday, but people said it was always like this.

There are far too many security people, police, porters all going round in circles and yet, in this day of IT, everything depends on a girl with a hand-written list. Isn't there a better way of managing things?

MEUSAC's Core Group to meet on Friday

NOEL GRIMA

The newly reconstituted Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee's Core Group will hold its first meeting next Friday in the Sala Vassalli at the Mediterranean Conference Centre.

The Core Group includes representatives of all four political parties: Nationalist Party: Paul Borg Olivier (substitute Jean Pierre Debono); Labour Party: George Abela (substitute Luciano Busuttil); *Alternattiva Demokratika*: Carmel Cacopardo (substitute: Stephen Cachia); and *Azzjoni Nazzjonali*: Josie Muscat (substitute: John Spiteri).

The chairperson is Parliamentary Secretary Chris Said while the head of MEUSAC is Vanni Xuereb. On the government side, the Core Group includes Principal Permanent Secretary Godwin Grima, the Permanent Representative to the EU Richard Cachia Caruana, the acting head of the EU Secretariat at the Office of the Prime Minister, Graziella Pullicino, as well as Permanent Secretary at the OPM Peter

Portelli, and Cecilia Attard Pirotta, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The rest of the membership reads like an MCESD meeting and consists of chairman Sonny Portelli, trade union leaders including GWU's Tony Zarb but curiously not UHM's Gejtu Vella. Still unnamed are three organisations to be elected from among the NGOs represented on the sub-committees, and two people to be nominated for their competence and expertise by Dr Said.

The agenda for next Friday, after introductory speeches, include clarifications about the Core Group's role and the mechanism it is proposed to abide by; information on the nine sub-committees that will be set up; an the call for expressions of interest from NGOs and how they will be chosen; details on how MEUSAC intends to work with the House of Representatives; Maltese MEPs and ECOSOC, as well as a discussion on MEUSAC's proposed plan of work in the coming 18 months.



MIA reports 14.5 per cent increase in passengers carried

Malta International Airport, in which Flughafen Wien AG holds a stake of 40 per cent through a consortium and 10.1 per cent of the shares directly, reported an increase of 14.5 per cent in the number of passengers to 1,405,897 million for the reporting period.

This was announced by the parent company when it revealed its annual results last week.

Revenue recorded by the Flughafen Wien Group rose by 13.7 per cent to €272.7 million for the first six months of 2008. EBITDA increased 10.7 per cent to €104.4 million and EBIT 14.8 per cent to €69.9 million.

With an increase of 12.8 per cent in the number of passengers to roughly 9.7 million, Vienna International Airport again outpaced the branch in Europe, which grew by 3.9 per cent according to Airports Council International.

The development of traffic included increases of 22.5 per cent to destinations in Eastern Europe, 10.6 per cent to the Middle East and 23.8 per cent

to North America.

The low-cost carriers again reported above-average growth with an increase of 55.7 per cent, which raised their share of total passenger volume at Vienna International Airport to 23.3 per cent; the seat occupancy for these airlines equalled 66 per cent.

During the second quarter of 2008, the Flughafen Wien Group acquired 33.2 per cent of the investment owned by the minority shareholders of the Slovakian subsidiary KSC Holding a.s., which in turn holds a 66 per cent stake in Košice Airport. This transaction is subject to the approval of the cartel authorities, which is expected in the second half of 2008. Košice Airport recorded an increase of 55.8 per cent in the number of passengers to 264,434 during the first half of 2008.

Friedrichshafen Airport, in which Flughafen Wien AG owns a stake of 25.15 per cent, reported a slight 1.1 per cent decline in passengers to 315,409 for the first six months of this year.



Inmates at CCF endure humiliating strip-search after receiving visitors

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A person who regularly visits his friend in prison told this newspaper that his friend has started to avoid receiving visitors so that he would not have to be strip-searched.

Following a visit inmates receive, two prison wardens ask them to strip completely and bend over. They then have to endure a full body cavity search and if one of the wardens happens to be in a bad mood, inmates would be asked to stay on for a sec-

ond one.

The source said this humiliating procedure could easily be avoided with modern technological systems such as those used in other developed countries to search for drugs inside inmates' bodies.

"These are things that happen in Third World countries, certainly not in the EU. It is difficult to remain silent when you know that someone you care for has to endure something so horrible. My friend tells me that he would rather speak to me on the

phone than have to be strip-searched every time I visit him, and I really don't blame him," he said.

He added that young inmates as young as 15 have to endure the exact same strip-search as their fellow inmates. It is bad enough for an adult to have to be strip-searched, just imagine how much more traumatising it would be for a teenager, he said.

A humiliating act indeed, which does not even seem to be leaving its desired effects. It is a well-known

fact that the drug problem in prison is rampant.

In any event, cannot inmates be given the choice not to be strip-searched if they speak to visitors through a Perspex divider that would avoid any form of contact between them?

Besides, being the country that is striving to be a centre of excellence in information technology, has nobody ever heard of body-scanning machines that show intimate body parts underneath people's clothing?