

SOCIAL POLICY COMMISSION 17/18

MEETING #9

University of Malta, Takeoff
6th March 2018, 18.30

MINUTES

1. Approval of agenda
Approved Nem Con
2. Approval of minutes
Approved Nem Con

3. Upcoming events

Gabriella Sutton (KPS Commissioner): For this term's clean-up, KSU will be collaborating with 89.7Bay and their campaign 'Making Malta Green and Clean'. Andrew Zammit is a representative of 89.7Bay and he'll be telling us a bit more about the campaign.

Andrew Zammit: Hi everyone. I am the general manager of 89.7Bay. As a company, we feel strongly about CSRs and we have focused on various topics in the past, such as bullying and drunk driving. This time round, we decided to focus on the environment. It is an increasingly important topic and we would like to raise environmental awareness. The title, Making Malta Green and Clean, as you may have noticed is a Trump Campaign rip-off to make it catchy and attention-grabbing.

Letting your dog litter is not okay, throwing a cigarette on the floor is not okay. That cigarette butt will end up in the ocean, in our food even. I will pass this sample round. That is what you'll find on Maltese beaches. It isn't something that a truck dumped. It is children's toys, toothpicks and everything that is not biodegradable. Those small particles join together and form what is in that little jar. It is in turn swallowed by fish and guess what we eat, fish. 86% of a survey were found to have plastic in their system. Today we just shared a video of how plastic ends up in the sea and the quantities that are going into the sea and that amounts to approximately 8 tonnes a day. It is estimated that very soon, there will be more plastic than fish.

We are not going to solve this overnight, it requires awareness and education. When it comes to education, the central government is doing a decent job to teach on the matter. They are becoming very well aware. There's no way you'll catch my 6 year old throwing something on the floor. The problem lies with our generation. We're ignorant and obstinate and that is a problematic combination. The government doesn't like parting with money.

It was hard to convince them to not only part with money but put policies in place. General Soft Drinks have implemented a new policy in light of the new tax that Gov is implementing, forcing General Soft Drinks and other bottle manufacturers to pick up their bottles. What General Soft Drinks are planning to do is to have a massive collection scheme. They will then take it abroad and make money off of it. There are also other industries that are doing other initiatives. Eden Leisure Group has recently implemented a no straws policy. On the strength of this, the Government will be implementing it very soon.

Why am I blabbing on here? We not only want to act, we want to do a cleanup in Ghajn Tuffieħa. Every part of that area will be cleaned and can be tackled, irrespective of your abilities. Everyone can contribute towards keeping Malta clean. We will be joined by members of parliament and we're asking for your help. We need manpower. We can't do this alone. We're asking for staff members, parliamentary members, retired people and students. I'm here to ask you for your help. As Organisations and KSU we would like you to come on board on the 24th of March From 9am till 2pm. We'll have boats, shuttle vans, water, music; the idea behind all of this is: let's have every spectrum within society contribute to keeping the country clean. We'd like organisations to encourage your members and submit a formal RSVP by the 16th of march and I'd like you to send it to this email address: d.muscat@edenleisure.com. He will be co-ordinating with KSU and we're planning to have as many people as possible. The more the merrier. As Bay we obviously acknowledge any effort and we're also willing to offer some exposure to organisations. We'll put up some artwork online with the logos of all organisations as collaborating partners of the clean-up, along with PR value. You help us we help you. Do you have any questions?

Liam Curmi De Gray (ICTSA): Have you contacted other NGOs such as Scouts?

Andrew Zammit: Yes, we are trying to contact as many organisations as possible to get as many people on board as possible.

Julian Chircop (We Are): My question is on legacy. Do you have any plans for this to keep on happening?

Andrew Zammit: That's a very good question. This campaign costs a lot of money, around 125 000eur to be exact. They're not cheap and it is not up to a private enterprise to keep this going, it's up to the Government. What we want to do is create enough buzz around it for one clear reason, and I think it's working. We expedited the process for the straw issue. We're shedding light of the bottle policy. Through my discussions with the cleansing directorate, beaches were heavily mentioned. It's not going to stop happening overnight. What we want to do is continue raising awareness. Education is a key part in this and that is mainly what we want to do. The youngest generations seem to be tackled. We're trying to plan a school visit to try to explain this to primary and secondary schools.

Sandrine Borg (S-Cubed): The sight you're mentioning has a lot of seagrass. Will you make it a point to educate people about this and how it's an entire ecosystem?

Andrew Zammit: That is news to us and we'll look into it.

Kurt Montanaro (TDM 2000): What about marathons and the Puttinu Walk for example?

Andrew Zammit: Am I responsible or can I be responsible for something like that? No. Unfortunately, we were sponsors for that. We should speak to them to dispose of everything properly.

Lara De Gabriele (MKSA): Perhaps we can get the poster so we'll be able to share it on our pages?

Andrew Zammit: Yes, we'll forward it to you.

Gabriella Sutton: Any other questions? , OK, thank you Andrew. We will send pass on the email address to you so you can confirm attendance. We strongly encourage you to attend and contribute to this.

On a separate note, tomorrow, between 12-2, there's going to be a consultation session. This is the space for any student to ask questions to the administration so we highly suggest that you come. It's going to be held on quad and it will be raining, it's going to be held under the tents.

Julian Chircop (We Are): Is there a possible email where we can send our queries?

Gabriella Sutton: You can email Carla on secgen@ksu.org.mt till noon. Feel free to ask any question that you might have. This is the best opportunity to put any questions forward and get a reply. Next Thursday there's going to be the blood drive. We encourage you all to donate and tell others. Next week there's the Careers and Research Expo. For all those who are still unaware of the concept, we have companies who will be on their stands and will be providing more information on internships and career opportunities. We would like to formally invite you to the launch and we would like to have you all there. We'll send you an email with all the details in the coming days. This year's arts Festival will held from the 19th till the 23rd of march and we'll be utilising Art to promote Mental Health. Feel free to pop by and take a look at the exhibitions or be part of the activities going on.

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4. Rent Issue

Gabriella Sutton: Recently in the articles there have been a lot of talk on the rent issue. Prices are always increasing and the more they increase the less they can afford it. Mark, from GUG, is here to give us a general idea of the situation at the moment.

Mark Farrugia (GUG): As an organisation, we've been trying to tackle this rent problem for a while now. The average to rent a flat is 200eur per person per month. The Government does subsidise some but it's still not enough. Besides the 200eur average you have to add the amount of food, water, electricity, internet etc. We've been trying to talk to some companies to see how we can solve this problem. We talked to Vassallo Builders to see whether they can subsidise some flats for Gozitan students. We've spoken to the Government to help us with this issue and we've tried to encourage the video conferencing matter. We know this isn't easy but at least we can start from somewhere. With regards to the rent, so far it's falling on deaf ears. Not all families can afford this and it is not fair that it poses an issue on education.

Carla Galea: Recently, I've spoken to the University architect. There's a block of apartments that are currently being built. There are going to be a lot of Gozitan students that may benefit greatly from this. It's quite a hardship for us as Gozitans. The rent issue is quite pressing, as even though the government gives us 500eur, it doesn't make sense to increase this as the rent will increase as well. The Government has to step in order to make life easier for Gozitan students. The Gov has to step in in order to make life easier for Gozitan students.

Julian Chircop (We Are): it's not just a matter of being gozitan, it's also a matter of our future. I would appreciate it if we can have a limit on rent laws. Even foreign students are complaining.

Jake Boyle (CSA): I would go one step further and push for regulation. I was paying 750eur to keep the flat. When I was moving out, the landlord just decided to remove this and there was nowhere I could go as a foreigner to get this back. There should be a board.

Geoff Cuschieri (UBG): Perhaps one can look into the standardisation of rental contracts.

Chiara Vassallo (KNZ): One cannot forget that these people also need to make profit.

Carla Galea: That's true and I completely understand that but on the other hand, there are people who need to work there. There should be law on sub-letting.

Kurt Montanaro: It's being exaggerated. People are living in garages for 600eur a month. The Government is not currently doing anything that's effective.

Stefan Galea (ESO): Even if rental prices are actually lowered, the living conditions of certain apartments is horrendous.

Marquita Vella (SIERA): I think the problem is the mentality that everyone wants to own a property. Government needs to get into the frame of mind that some people want to rent, not buy.

Chiara Vassallo (KNZ): Something else that the PR should focus on as well is the fact that there are so many empty places already. The rent prices are going to increase. If there's a large emphasis on vacant property, it would be an easier way to cater for this.

Luke Young (Aiesec): it can cost between 750eur and 900 eur a month for a foreigner. If Erasmus students are renting accomodation, there are less funds to be distributed and less opportunities for students.

Daniele Maniscalco (MHSA): Let's make sure that what we propose is something that the Government will actually consider doing: let's not reach for the stars as if the Government will do something amazing. We need to propose something that's practical.

Jake Boyle (CSA): In Ireland, 10% of new units have to be dedicated to social housing. Perhaps we can propose something like that.

Chiara Vassallo (KNZ): Also, Lija Residence is currently in an abysmal state.

Gabriella Sutton: What about video conferencing? It may bring out both positive and negative effects.

Lara De Gabriele (MKSA): We cannot overlook the fact that it goes against some lecturer's ethos to record lectures.

Jonathan-George Grima (MMSA): the idea of recording lectures is not even a new one. For some medical students it actually happens.

Stefan Galea (ESO) Let' say you are actually sick, you may be given a password to access it and keep tabs.

Sandrine Borg (S-Cubed): Some lecturers don't even want to send their powerpoints. Most of our lecturers won't abide by this. Some research is very easily stolen. It's not always feasible.

Marquita Vella (SIERA): Video conferencing already happens. We had Gozitan students and there's a room in IT services specifically for that. If the Gozo campus is equipped, it can be very easy to do that.

Gabriella Sutton: Just to summarise, the main points to focus on are as follows:

1. Alarming lack of regulation that there currently is
2. The possibility of looking at this from an aspect of social housing
3. Student aspects: Erasmus students and Gozo students could be affected by this. Solutions - allocating a block of flats + Video conferencing.

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Let's move on to a vote for a PR on this, again we'll be voting on the following:

1. Alarming lack of regulation that there currently is
2. The possibility of looking at this from an aspect of social housing
3. Student aspects: Erasmus students and Gozo students could be affected by this. Solutions - allocating a block of flats + Video conferencing.

Don't forget that you have a vote for a reason; if you don't vote against or as an abstention you are in favour.

Against - none

Abstentions - none

Everyone's in favour. We'll be writing a PR and sharing it with you.

5. Arising Matters

Gabriella Sutton: I was approached by Geoff and he would like to focus on Bill 14 currently being discussed in Parliament.

Ramon Bonnett Sladden (UBG): At the moment our parliament is currently discussing the Gender Based Violence Bill. It will transpose the Istanbul Convention. However, this is not yet enforceable. It's important to differentiate between the articles of the bill and the convention. Art 22 of the Bill says that this convention shall prevail over Maltese law, in the sense that Maltese law will be null and void unless it is in favour of the bill. The old Domestic violence Act of 2006 is getting superceded by Bill 14. The 'unborn child' is in the list of domestic violence victims in the current Act, but has been dropped out in Bill 14. Some MPs put forward a motion to re-introduce the unborn child, but this was voted against this week. Superceding is supposed to mean making things better not worse. The Bill is worse than abortion. The mother wants the unborn child, it is not unwanted. The mother has not consented to her baby's death. It can be violently legally killed. Moreover, the bill only refers to genders, not women specifically. This bill is incongruent with the aims of the convention. The word gender shall be a reference to men and women.

Seeing how a domestic violence act already exists, this bill will disrupt legal certainty and you always need legal certainty.

Geoff Cuschieri (UBG): If someone is being abused and they're pregnant, the baby has no protection.

Chiara Vassallo (KNZ): Isn't our law better seeing how it doesn't focus on one specific gender?

Daniele Maniscalco (MHSA): So ultimately, the transposition is already in our law due to the domestic violence act?

Ramon Bonnett Sladden (UBG): When someone opposed this bill everyone will tell them you are in favour of domestic violence so we cannot oppose the bill in general.

Gabriella Sutton: What we can do is, as UBG, forward us an email and we'll forward it to Minister Dalli.

Meeting adjourned 20.00