



## PN losing ground in Gozo

James Debono

THE MALTA Labour Party has cut deep in to the Nationalist Party's lead in Gozo: while back in 2003 the gap between the two parties amounted to an unsurpassable 18 per cent, now it amounts to just 4.5 per cent.

At the moment the PN enjoys the support of 31 per cent of Gozitan respondents to the MaltaToday survey, while the MLP is trailing at 26 per cent. Yet 40.5 per cent of Gozitan respondents are either undecided or intend not to vote in a forthcoming election. It will be this category of voters which will finally determine whether Labour can snatch a surprise third seat from the island.

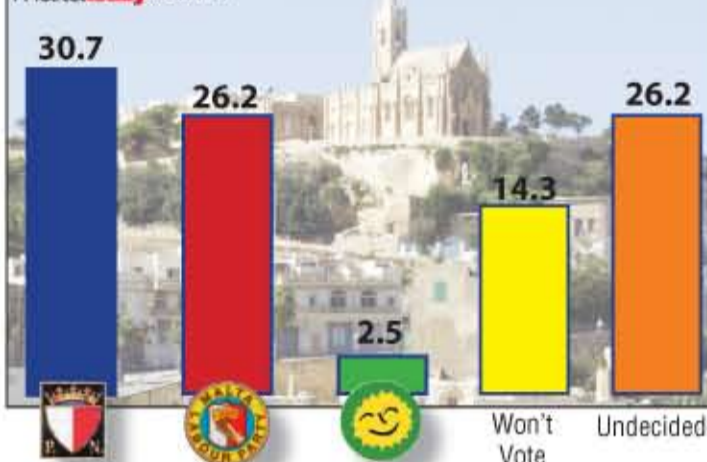
The large number of undecided

and non-voters is an indication that Gozo is not immune from the current wave of disenchantment effecting the whole country. When only undecided respondents and non-voters are taken out of the equation, the PN still manages a majority of 52 per cent – a far cry from the 59 per cent it scored in 2003. Substantial gains are scored by the MLP (3.3 per cent) and by the Greens (3.7 per cent).

Yet despite the PN's decline, Lawrence Gonzi still manages to beat his rival Alfred Sant as the most trusted political leader in Gozo. While Gonzi is 9 percentage points more popular than his own party, Alfred Sant is half a percentage point less popular than his own party. ▶ Gozo today survey pages 12-13

### Gozo - Electoral Barometer (%)

malta today SURVEY



## Maltese telecom companies to suspend Israeli interception upgrades

Matthew Vella

THE FLOODGATES appear to have opened for renewed challenges to the Malta Communications Authority's decision that favoured Israeli spy firm Verint over a cheaper system offered by Italian firm RCS, this newspaper has learnt.

Malta's telecoms operators are now reconsidering their obligations to pay for the unified legal interception system, which the MCA chose on behalf of the Malta Security Services (MSS).

They will also be considering suspending any further upgrades to their systems.

The reaction follows MaltaToday's revelations two

weeks ago of the legal action presented by RCS, which was denied the right to appeal the decision after the MCA claimed the contract was not bound by public procurement regulations since the contract was issued by the security services.

The interception system is believed to be worth anything between Lm1 to 2 million. But the award to a surveillance systems firm with close links to the Israeli government, and a trail of controversy spanning from the September 11 attacks and into Europe, have compounded the contentious choice of Verint to provide the MSS its unified legal interception system, that will tap into Malta's telephone and internet

communications.

Go Mobile, Maltacom and Vodafone each provide the Malta Security Services with legal interception technology to allow the MSS to tap all telephone calls. Internet operators are also expected to pay for the provision of the Israeli technology to the security services.

RCS, which is challenging the MCA's decision in court, claims tenderers were never informed of a "dispensation" that exempted the contract from procurement laws.

The facts even point to a later agreement signed between the MCA and the security services – a week after RCS were told their offer had been rejected – on 5 January 2006, when the MCA signed a

memorandum of understanding with the MSS, which is afforded special powers to spend money without having to account for its expenditure.

RCS is claiming the MCA's decision was illegal and discriminatory, after it was informed on 29 December 2005 that its offers had been rejected and the contract assigned to Verint.

However, in a meeting held on 3 January 2006, the MCA informed RCS that its offer had been the cheapest and was also compliant and sound, but that Verint's offer was "holistically superior".

Two days later on 5 January, the authority signed its memorandum of understanding with the security services. ▶ page 5

## Another Brit in Lm1 million drug bust

A ENGLISH national with four kilogrammes of pure grade cocaine worth almost Lm1 million has been arrested shortly before leaving Sicily for Malta. This bust took place a few weeks after a similar sting where another Englishman this time with 50,000 ecstasy pills was apprehended. Both cases involve British nationals leaving Sicily to Malta via the catamaran sea link. The operation, coordinated by the Maltese security services and the drug squad, has dealt yet another severe blow to what is being defined as a "well structured" British-run criminal organisation based in Malta.

Weeks of surveillance, led the police to alert their Italian counterparts about the imminent arrival of an Englishman who was to collect the drugs that were hidden inside the trunk of a hired car, that was left since last July in a secured car park at Catania's Fontanarossa airport. ▶ page 6

## "I don't have to apologise to anybody"

Karl Stagno-Navarra

SAN GWANN PN councillor and Francis Zammit Dimech canvasser Kurt Guillaumier believes he owes "no apology to anybody", regarding his presence at a rally of the rightwing Alleanza Nazzjonali

Repubblikana in Valletta, as well as for comments he subsequently made on a Xarabank programme that addressed the problem of illegal immigration last June.

"I don't have to apologise to anybody," Guillaumier insisted, who returned MaltaToday's

call shortly after PN secretary-general Joe Saliba explained that the councillor was summoned before the party's administrative council, heard his explanation, and received a written "apology" and a "clarification" about the matter that irked the party. ▶ page 3

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