

Business Today



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Auditor report reopens MEPA can of worms

James Debono

A report by internal Auditor Joe Falzon re-opens a can of worms at the Malta Environment and Planning Authority with a number of permits issued before last March's election coming under the auditor's scrutiny. These include a permit issued on the eve of the election for a villa instead of a pig farm belonging to Safi

mayor Pietru Pawl Busuttil, an ODZ supermarket in Luqa constructed by Charles Polidano on land where a previous developer claims to have had his request for a permit turned down three times and the furnishing of illegal buildings with water and electricity.

Villa instead of pig farm

Falzon reprimanded MEPA for

using a newly-approved agricultural policy as the pretext to justify an outline permit it granted to Safi's Nationalist mayor Peter Paul Busuttil to construct his bungalow and swimming pool outside development zones on his former pig farm.

Falzon started investigating this case following reports on Kulhadd and MaltaToday.

The permit was issued a few weeks

before the general elections.

Falzon lambasted MEPA's – Policy and Design Guidance: Agriculture, Farm Diversification and Stables – as “a recipe for abuse”.

This policy states that an existing farm building may be converted to a dwelling subject to a number of conditions.

According to Falzon, all a developer needs to convert a farm

into residential units is a document from the Director of Veterinary Services that the building cannot be used for agriculture.

“The ease with which the applicant of the case under consideration obtained the required certificate clearly indicates what is likely to happen.”

Falzon also questions the motives behind this MEPA ▶ **page 5**

Foreign Ministry mum on possible Libyan drilling in Maltese waters

David Darmanin

The Foreign Ministry is concealing details to the press on the case of a chart published by the European Association of Geoscientists and Engineers (EGEA) indicating an oil-drilling concession by the Libyan government within Maltese waters.

The same chart was also published by Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino

Orlando in his weekly column last Saturday, wherein he claims that “Libyan authorities might be turning a blind eye to the organised illegal trafficking of humans for a very specific reason: oil.”

The chart indicates that Sirte – an oil-drilling company owned by the Libyan government – has been awarded a concession to conduct a drilling exercise in the Medina Bank.

When in the 1980s an Italian sub-contractor for the Maltese government was caught drilling for oil in the same area by the Libyan government, gunboats were sent to intimidate the company from pursuing the exercise. Although the Italian company had after this incident abandoned the project, in 1985 the International Courts of Justice ruled in favour of Malta that the area in question – the Medina

Bank – lies within the Maltese territorial boundary. This precedent forbade the drilling for oil in the area to any other country except Malta.

The Foreign Ministry however said it had “no information whatsoever that would suggest that Sirte Oil or any other company have started drilling on the Medina Bank or in any area claimed by Malta.”

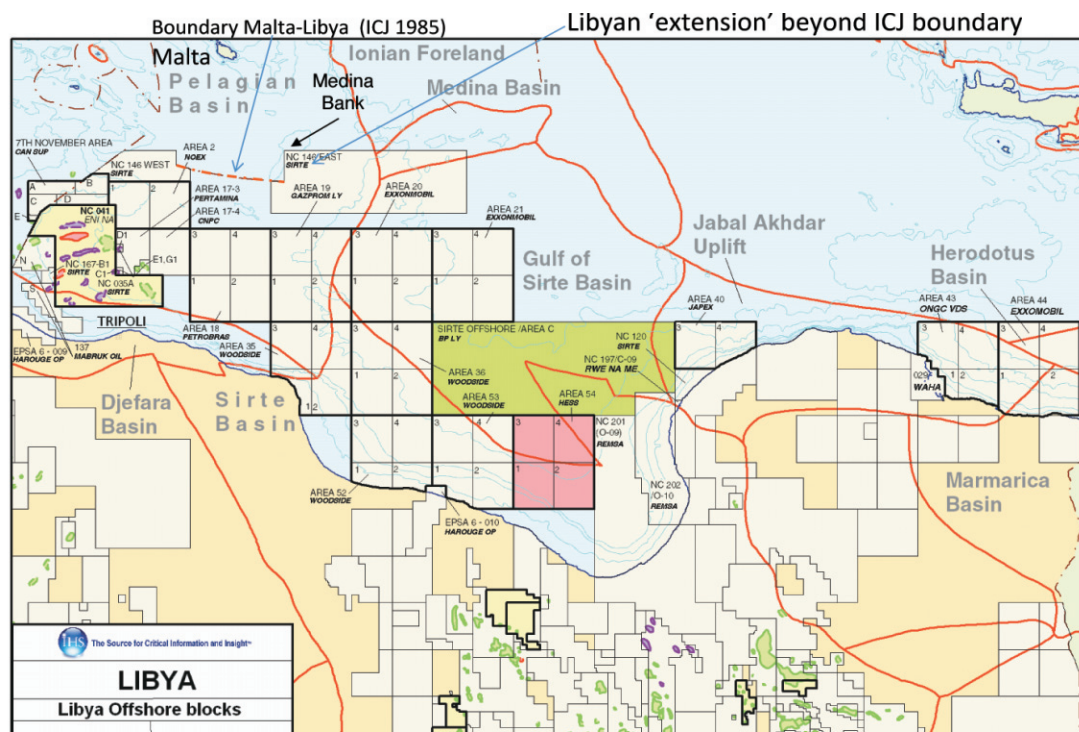
Asked whether it had been informed of oil drilling concessions, the spokesperson was vague in his reply. Without denying the possibility of such concession, the

spokesperson said “there have been no developments on the issue so far”.

Asked what he makes out of Pullicino Orlando's claim, the Ministry spokesperson said he has no comment to make in the regard.

Otherwise, the ministry official never sent replies to our questions on what government intends doing if such information carried in the EGEA journal as well as in the local media, is verified.

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From : 2009 Mohamed Zine and James Veron. Southern Mediterranean offshore basins still offer promise of oil and gas riches. first break volume 27, February 2009

World Business Highlights

FTSE 100



Geithner Says 'Vast Majority' of U.S. Banks Have More Capital Than Needed Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said the “vast majority” of U.S. banks have more capital than needed, stoking a rally in stocks as investors await results of stress tests on the balance sheets of the biggest lenders.

Stocks in U.S. Advance After Geithner Says Most Banks Have Adequate Funds U.S. stocks advanced, erasing an earlier slide, after Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said the “vast majority” of the nation's banks have more capital than needed.

Citigroup's Pandit Says He Will Repay 'Every Dollar' of TARP Rescue Funds Citigroup Inc. Chief Executive Officer Vikram Pandit, addressing shareholders after his stock price tumbled 88 percent in a year, said the company will recover and vowed to repay “every dollar with interest” of the \$45 billion the bank received in government bailout funds.

Caterpillar Says Obama 'Missed an Opportunity' to Fix U.S. Infrastructure Caterpillar Inc., the bulldozer manufacturer President Barack Obama used to help push his \$787 billion stimulus plan, called the program disappointing and less effective than measures approved by China.

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