

Courtesy of THE CYPRUS MAIL Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Lania councillors determined to fight highway plan.

LANIA councillors yesterday said they were determined to fight against the planned construction of a four-lane motorway passing directly past their village.

The councillors called a news conference in Limassol aimed at informing the public of the road's impacts on the environment and the village's sustainable development, as well as to address accusations made by council presidents of nearby villages.

The president of the network of Kourris Xilorikou communities (a cluster organisation including 12 villages in the area) has accused the majority of Lania Council of acting on personal interest. According to these accusations, those Lania councillors who oppose the road do so to avoid the devaluation of their land in the area next to the proposed motorway.

Lania Council member Giorgos Ktistis yesterday dismissed the allegation. "I am the only Lania Council member with land next to the road," he said. "We are talking about half a donum of land, which is not a lot. As a Lania native, I have inherited a lot of land in the village, which is elsewhere and not affected by the road. So these accusations are made for lack of other solid argument. "Why would we create this whole movement and get support from politicians, organisations and citizens for such a small piece of land?" Ktistis asked.

In 2004, when the initial plans came out, the network of Kourris Xilorikou communities had expressed their disagreement with the choice of location for the construction of the road, arguing it would adversely affect their communities. This year, however, these council presidents, including Lania Council President Giorgos Zikas, changed their mind, and sided with the government's choice of location.

"I honestly wonder what has changed their minds. In 2004, they saw it as catastrophic for their communities and in 2007 – hiding behind the network's shield – they suddenly see it as a gift from God. I think people can use their judgments and come to any conclusions," added Ktistis.

One of the main issues arising from this debate is the apparent absence of public consultation and participation in decision-making that directly affects the communities.

Recently-adopted laws, which came as part of Cyprus' harmonisation with the *acquis communautaire*, have provided citizens with rights, which they apparently know nothing about. An example is the Law on Freedom of Access to Environmental Information. This law provides that all involved stakeholders, including affected citizens, must be invited at a public hearing that explains the impacts and character of proposed plans. Such a public consultation was never held for the planned road project, Lania council members said.

"Lania residents are not aware of these plans, they don't know what's going to happen.

Nobody informed them of the risks, the impacts and potential problems. The situation in Cyprus is totally different to other countries, where the citizens are actively involved and well-informed," said Dinos Pelekanos, a Lania native who spent many years abroad and returned to Lania to retire.

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The Lania Council Members also expressed their disappointment at the inconsistency of the government's policy. The Ministry of Interiors, Department of Urban Planning and Housing had made a presentation to Lania Council in October 2006 on the "Master Plan for the Core of Lania". This Plan proposes the adoption of principles of sustainable development, agrotourism, development of local vineries and the preservation of the village's character. The Council members questioned the feasibility of these principles co-existing with an adjacent four-lane motorway.

"The authorities came and presented new ideas to us. They talked of sustainable development, investing in organic agriculture, agrotourism and so on. Now all they want is to build motorways everywhere. Are we suddenly expected to forget what they told us? How can we have an organic vineyard next to a four-lane motorway? How can we have a nature trail that touches this highway?" Ktistis said.

The researchers of the Lania Masterplan had also mentioned in their assessment that the present road network sufficiently serves the area's needs. Lania Council Members argue that this is evidence that other interests are behind the decision to construct the road. Allusions were also made to the application for a license to construct a golf course at nearby Alassa.

The three Council Members also expressed their determination to continue their efforts, through political pressure, by contacting MPs, arranging for another meeting with the Minister of Transport and – if the worse comes to the worse – taking their case to Cypriot and European Courts.