

PRESS RELEASE

Civil Society & the EU: Addressing the Issues while Tapping Opportunities

Following its first Consultation Seminar on food additives, flavourings and colourings last month, and the recent launch of the European Business Test Panel last week, Forum Malta fl-Ewropa (FME) has today organised another in its series of seminars this time directed towards NGOs. Besides, tackling issues of relevance to NGOs, during today's seminar, chaired by Carmel Attard Head of Information at FME, Civil Society Fund cheques were also distributed to beneficiaries.

FME's CEO Dr Gabriella Pace reiterated that the role of Forum in the context of Maltese civil society is to be the key player in bringing the European Union closer to Maltese citizens as well as that of creating a structured public space within which civil society could contribute directly to the debate. Dr Pace emphasized FME's role "as the national reference point on EU-related affairs", with its three main areas of competence being, the dissemination of information on EU-related issues, the facilitation of consultation with stakeholders on EU pipeline acquis, as well as support and awareness with regard to access to EU funding opportunities.

With reference to NGOs, which were the main key players of today's seminar, Dr Pace said that the responsibility for making consultation work is shared, and that therefore NGOs have to engage themselves effectively in European policymaking. Dr Pace

reiterated that “in fulfilling its mandate, the Forum aspires to encourage participation in European Union affairs and to generate a sense of common purpose.

Minister Michael Frendo also stressed the importance of a participatory democracy where NGOs and civil society alike are invited to give their share to the European Union’s decision making process. Addressing the issue of funding, Minister Frendo said that funding is just one facet of the European Union – NGO channel, again stressing the active role which civil society should adopt. The Civil Society Fund, Minister Frendo said, will be further expounded with particular attention on how projects should be developed. Notwithstanding this Dr Frendo said that CSF is being given a lot of importance by Government which, since 1999, has allocated Lm2 million, equivalent to €4.5 million. This year alone 53 new NGOs have applied for CSF, which shows the vibrancy of the NGO sector engaging to the democratic process of our society. Minister Frendo concluded his address by thanking all social partners, NGOs and civil society at large for their contribution to ameliorate progress in our society.

Both Grace Attard from the European Economic and Social Committee and Claudia Taylor East from the Malta Resource Centre encouraged NGOs to actively participate in debate, besides keeping abreast with ongoing discussions in the EU. Ms Attard stressed the need for NGOs to link themselves to the EESC, while Ms Taylor East emphasized the need for NGOs to network among themselves so as to reap better results from our accession to the European Union possibly even through Forum.

The Forum CEO stressed the importance of the organisation’s role in providing a politically neutral public space within which views and analyses of all shades can be offered on the EU, and in particular on Malta in the EU. Dr Pace said that FME’s role “is not to advocate or promote a particular course of action, but to provide an inclusive space available to those who strongly support EU developments, as well as to those who are perhaps more critical of the EU’s direction. ***Representative and inclusive, defined yet open.***

Stqarrija għall-Istampa

Il-Forum Malta fl-Ewropa jorganizza seminar iehor ta' informazzjoni din id-darba immirat lejn l-għaqdiet non-governattivi

Bhala parti mis-sensiela ta' attivitajiet li qed jorganizza l-Forum Malta fl-Ewropa, din il-gimgha saret laqgħa għall-għaqdiet non-governattivi (*NGOs*). Din l-attivitajiet ma kinitx biss waħda ta' informazzjoni iżda kienet ukoll okkazzjoni fejn dawn l-għaqdiet flimkien ma' *trade unions* inghataw kontribuzzjoni taħt il-Fond għas-Socjeta` Ċivili (CSF) sabiex ikunu jistgħu jwettqu proġetti għat-titjeb tas-socjeta` Maltija.

Dr Gabriella Pace, il-Kap Ezekuttiv il-gdid tal-Forum Malta fl-Ewropa, fl-indirizz tal-ftuh tagħha saħqet fuq il-fatt li l-Forum Malta fl-Ewropa għandu jservi ta' pont li jqarreb 'l-Unjoni Ewropea lejn is-socjeta` Maltija, sabiex b'hekk il-Forum jista' tassew ikun ta' servizz għall-pubbliku Malti kollu, bis-sehem ta' l-għaqdiet non-governattivi, l-*unions* u l-komunità kummercjali, is-socjeta` civili u l-korpi kostitwiti. Dr Pace kompliet tghid li l-Forum għandu jservi bhala punt ta' referenza nazzjonali dwar affarijiet relatati ma' l-UE, u li għaldaqstant għandu jkollu tliet kompetenzi: id-disseminazzjoni ta' l-informazzjoni dwar temi relatati ma' l-UE, l-iffaċilitar tal-konsultazzjoni dwar proposti legiislattivi, kif ukoll l-għoti ta' tagħrif u

għajnuna lil min ikun qed ifittex opportunitajiet ta' fondi finanzjarji Ewropej.

Il-Ministru ta' l-Affarijiet Barranin, Michael Frendo, indirizza wkoll dan is-*seminar*, u sahaq li l-Gvern jaghti importanza kbira lill-għaqdiet non-governattivi tant hu hekk li mill-1999 il-Gvern alloka Lm 2 miljuni, ekwivalenti għal € 4.5 miljun għall-Fond għas-Socjeta` Ċivili. Din is-sena kien hemm 53 organizzazzjoni għdida li applikat għall-fondi. Il-Ministru Frendo sahaq li biex il-poplu jkun jista' jibbenefika minn shubija fl-Unjoni Ewropea, dan irid jaghti s-sehem tiegħu fil-proċess kollu ta' konsultazzjoni kif ukoll fit-teħhid ta' deċiżjonijiet.

Kelliema oħra waqt dan is-*seminar*, is-Sinjura Grace Attard mill-Kumitat Ekonomiku u Socjali Ewropeu u s-Sinjura Claudia Taylor East mill-*Malta Resource Centre*, hegġew lill-għaqdiet non-governattivi biex jipparteċċipaw b'mod attiv fil-proċess tat-teħid ta' deċiżjonijiet kemm fuq bażi lokali kif ukoll fuq dik Ewropea.

Fl-aħharnett ma jistgħax jonqos milli nfakkru li r-rwol tal-Forum Malta fl-Ewropa huwa proprju dak li jipprovdi spazju għall-għaqdiet non-governattivi, *trade unions* u s-socjeta` ċivili in general i b'pjattaforma newtrali fejn l-opinjoni u l-ideat tagħhom jistgħu jigu diskussi fid-dawl tal-pożizzjoni li Malta tieħu fl-Unjoni Ewropea.