

## MEUSAC core group holds its first meeting

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The Core Group of the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee (MEUSAC) met for the first time on Friday. Prior to Malta's accession to the European Union, MEUSAC was an effective instrument for consultation between the Government, the political parties, the constituted bodies and civil society. MEUSAC will now be coordinating the process of consultation on EU legislation as well as promoting debate on EU issues.

The consultation process is to be managed by the Core Group which consists of representatives of the Government, political parties, constituted bodies (including Gozo), non-governmental organisations and experts.

Parliamentary Secretary Dr. Said emphasised the importance that government is giving to consultation. He mentioned how in the first four months of the current legislature, government has already moved ahead with a process of wide-spread consultation on various themes. He mentioned how his Secretariat is seeking to strengthen national fora established for consultation on important issues.

“For this reason, the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development is being strengthened and MEUSAC has been re-established.”

He said that MCESD would continue to focus on national issues of a social and economic nature, whilst MEUSAC would be focusing on EU policy and legislation and on how this impacts various sectors of the Maltese economy. However, the two entities would also be coordinating as necessary and for this reason, the Chairman of MCESD has been asked to sit on the Core Group of MEUSAC.

“MEUSAC's operation prior to accession was successful and this experience would now be consolidated. Now that Malta is a member of the EU, Government's strategy is that of adapting to a situation where EU policy and EU law are now part of domestic policy and legislation.”

Among the points raised during the meeting was the need for the Core Group to take initiatives in relation to EU policy and legislation.

MEUSAC Head, Dr Vanni Xuereb, reiterated his satisfaction at the Core Group's wide sectoral representation which, he said, shows the willingness by all parties to achieve common goals in so far as European policy is concerned.

“Pulling the same rope does not necessarily mean agreeing about all and with everything that is being said, but should be taken to mean that all of us are convinced that we should be doing our utmost in the best interests of the country”.

The Core Group's first two priorities are to determine the mechanism for the consultation process and to establish the sectoral committees.

The former was discussed at length and it was agreed in principle that issues with national implications are discussed at Core Group level, while proposals which are of interest to specific sectors are discussed at sectoral level following a consultation procedure carried out by the Implementing Ministry.

MEUSAC is to ensure that whenever there is the obligation for consultation with stakeholders this is thoroughly conducted. The need and method for coordination and cooperation with the House of Representatives, the Maltese members of the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee as well as those in the Committee of the Regions was also mentioned.

The day's agenda also focused on the election of NGO representatives to the Core Group, the programme of meetings, how to communicate what is being discussed in MEUSAC to the public as well as the involvement of experts. The Core Group will be meeting regularly and at least once a month.