

# MEUSAC core group meets officially

MICHAEL CARABOTT

The Malta EU Steering and Action Committee's Core Group yesterday convened officially for the first time at the Mediterranean Conference Centre in Valletta.

Chris Said, parliamentary secretary for Public Dialogue and Information, chairs the MEUSAC while Vanni Xuereb is its head.

Dr Said said that the MEUSAC was re-established in May 2008 and has three main activities: Consultation, information and research and support on EU programmes and funding.

He said that EU politics, laws, regulations and directives are no longer something foreign to Malta and everything that goes on within its institutions has a direct bearing on this country.

"We must debate and we must stimulate debate and we must consult on

all matters that will have an effect on Malta," he said. Dr Said also said that he was extremely hopeful on the relevance of the core group, pointing out that there was a very wide representation of civil society, trade unions, political parties, industry and employers.

MEUSAC head Dr Xuereb echoed Dr Said's comments about a wide cross section representation. He also said it was positive that Malta had put its divisions over EU membership behind it and that everyone was now focused on pulling in one direction.

Dr Xuereb said that in the coming months, MEUSAC needed to determine the method of consultation and that the process to establish sub-committees also needed to begin. The sub-committees include: General Affairs; Economic and Financial Affairs; Justice and Home Affairs; the

Environment; Employment; Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; Competitiveness; Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; Agriculture and Fisheries; Education, Culture and Youth.

Dr Xuereb said the committee was looking forward to picking up where it left off five years ago. He said that when the MEUSAC was formed prior to EU membership, it was a positive experience which had involved many sectors of society in discussion and consultation.

He said MEUSAC had two other functions, to offer information and assistance over EU funding and programmes while the funding unit will offer help to local councils in participating in EU programmes and other opportunities. During yesterday's meeting, GRTU director general Vince Farrugia said that the MEUSAC needed to avoid falling

into the trap of entering into consultation meetings, only to have decisions later imposed.

The MEUSAC core group includes: principal permanent secretary Godwin Grima, permanent EU representative Richard Cachia Caruana, acting head of EU Secretariat Graziella Pullicino, permanent secretary OPM Peter Portelli, permanent secretary Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cecilia Attard Pirotta, head of Information MEUSAC Gabriella Pace, chairman MCESD Sonny Portelli, AD's Carmel Cacopardo, AN's representative Josie Muscat, CMTU's Arthur Rossi, GRTU's Vince Farrugia, GWU's Tony Zarb, Gozo Business Chamber's Joe Grech, Employers' Association's Alexander Bonello, FOI's Ray Muscat, MHRA's Alexander Bonello, MLP's George Abela, PN's Paul Borg Olivier and the UHM's Jesmond Bonello.

# Deficit increases by €74m

Data from the Government Consolidated Fund indicate that the shortfall between recurrent revenue and total expenditure for the first seven months of the year compared to the same period last year increased by €74.6 million and amounted to €283.5 million, the National Statistics Office reported yesterday. An increase of €131.1 million in total expenditure was only partly offset by an increase of €56.5 million in recurrent revenue.

During the first seven months this year, the Consolidated Fund recorded increases in revenue of €26.7 million and of €24.4 million from Taxes on Income and from Value Added Tax respectively.

Social Security Contributions also added €15.1 million during the period under review. At the same time, revenue from Licences, Taxes and Fines declined by €7.3 million while revenue classified under Miscellaneous Receipts declined by €10.0 million.

Recurrent expenditure amounted to €1,204.2 million, an increase of €129.1 million compared to the first seven months last year. Major increases in recurrent expenditure were recorded under Social Security Benefits, which added €35.1 million, while the Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care and the Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology added €29.9 million and €12.3 million respectively.

During the period under review the interest component of the public debt servicing costs amounted to €108.0 million, a comparative increase of €4.7 million over 2007.

The government's outlay on its Capital Programme for the first seven months declined by €2.8 million and amounted to €132.4 million. During the period under review capital expenditure under the Ministry for Investment, Industry and Information Technology, and under the Ministry of Health, the Elderly and Community Care increased by €9.9 million and €9.3 million respectively. On the other hand, capital expenditure under the Ministry of Finance declined by €37.7 million.

Loans taken up by the government for the first seven months of the year amounted to €106.0 million.

The central government debt outstanding at the end of July amounted to €3,486.9 million, an increase of €159.6 million compared to the gross central government debt outstanding at the end of July last year. While long-term borrowing increased by €149.3 million, short-term borrowing and foreign borrowing declined by €11.2 million and €6.3 million respectively. At the end of July, the euro coins issued in the name of the Maltese treasury, which are considered as a currency liability pertaining to the central government, amounted to €28.3 million.

# Mater Dei Hospital builds on its green initiatives

ANNALIZA BORG

A number of bicycle stands have been installed outside the Outpatients Department at Mater Dei Hospital in a bid to improve the hospital's green initiatives.

Mater Dei green leader Claire Farrugia explained to this newspaper that the bicycle stands at level 0 can be used by both visitors and staff members.

They are situated at a central and safe place close to the motorcycle parking lot outside the Outpatients Department.

There are already a number of people who come to work by bicycle, so having an adequate number of bicycle stands was a must, Ms Farrugia said.

"As a hospital we should be foremost in promoting physical activity and ways and means towards a cleaner environment," she said. "Having more people using bicycles will diminish the need for using cars and subsequently, contribute towards a better environment for all."

Besides this initiative, the green leader at Mater Dei Hospital is coordinating a number of other green ideas, such as the collection of spent batteries of pagers and other electronic devices widely used in the hospital. Another idea is that of having recycling trolleys for the collection of clean recyclable waste including paper, plastic and glass.

Currently, Ms Farrugia is appointing staff members who are willing to act as a link between the hospital's 3,800 staff members. Green tips are also being sent via email to hospital staff on a regular basis.

In the near future, Ms Farrugia will also be seeing to the lighting system which should be changed in order to consume less energy during day time.



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