

# MEUSAC core group holds its first meeting

*30 August 2008*



The Core Group of the Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee met for the first time today at the Mediterranean Conference Centre. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Chris Said, Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Information. 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.

In his opening address, Parliamentary Secretary Dr. Said emphasised the importance that the Government is giving to consultation. He mentioned how in the first four months of the current legislature, the 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. Dr. Said spoke about how 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.

Dr. Said also mentioned how prior to accession to the EU, MEUSAC's operation was successful and that 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.

MEUSAC also aims to ensure that the process of consultation on European Commission legislative proposals and on EU policy is as wide-spread as possible, ongoing and extended to all stakeholders. The latter are to be represented in an equal manner in the sectoral committees which are to be established in the coming weeks. Criteria for eligibility and the selection procedures are to be established in close coordination with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations.

Among the point raised during the meeting was the need for the Core Group to take initiatives in relation to EU policy and legislation. Some members expressed their views on the number of sectoral committees to be established which should not only reflect how the EU institutions operate but also the sectors which are of particular importance to the Maltese economy. The need for a greater dissemination of information as well as for close cooperation between MEUSAC and the Implementing

Ministries responsible for the various sectors was also mentioned. In fact, the Ministries will also form part of the sectoral committees.

Dr. Said stated that a better synergy both within the public administration, as well as among the constituted bodies and civil society is essential. He also mentioned the need for true dialogue between members of the Core Group whereby they would be willing to listen and to give value to what is said by other members.

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. He said that, "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". Dr Xuereb cited Robert Schuman's words that, 'Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.'

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 the involvement of experts. The Core Group will be meeting regularly and at least once a month.