

From red tape to red carpet



CHRIS SAID

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unnecessary burdens and obtain simplification through an intensive consultation process. My office has reviewed the current situation and is formulating a programme to achieve these goals.

Better regulation is a priority for the government and is one of the areas that has featured prominently during the pre-budget consultation process. This commitment on the part of the government is manifested in the national reform programme, in the budget 2007 and the 2008 electoral manifesto in which the government proposed that the Better Regulation Unit (BRU) within the Office of the Prime Minister be strengthened.

The BRU's mandate is to simplify existing regulation and consequently reduce the administrative burdens on businesses and citizens. In

drawing up its action plan the BRU has taken an inward looking "top-down" and "bottom-up" approach, which has resulted in 111 measures. These have been subdivided into five main thrusts which are the setting up of a one-stop-shop entity or consolidation of existing entities; revision of procedures and processes; use of ICT and eGovernment services; simplifying legislation and repealing obsolete legislation; and consolidation of forms.

So far 49 measures (43 per cent) have been completed and it is the government's intention to proceed with the implementation of the action plan for simplification. The government will eventually close off the current action plan by completing all measures and embark on a plan which is more business driven in terms of the proposals put forward.

In line with the government's commitment to involve the citizen in its decision-making, the BRU is conducting a consultation process with stakeholder organisations in order to obtain feedback. This will be analysed with a view to recommending further actions to the plan for simplification. So far the BRU has met the constituted bodies that are represented on the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development, that is, the GRTU, Chamber of Small and Medium Enterprises, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CoC), the Federation of Industries (FOI), the Malta Employers Association (MEA) and the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association (MHRA). Consultation will continue with the various sectors of the business community with a view to identify and address the real administrative burdens currently imposed on the business sectors as well as to identify tangible proposals on how these can be alleviated or removed.

It is important to note that better regulation is not only targeted towards businesses but also towards reducing burdens on citizens. In this regard the BRU is participat-

ing in the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) learning team on administrative burden for citizens aimed at exchanging good practices on the reduction and measurement of administrative burdens for citizens. Line entities, departments, individual public officers and the public should also feel free to put forward their proposals to the Better Regulation Unit.

On our part we will strive to ensure better inter-departmental cooperation in order to reduce overlaps in processes, data requests and duplication of efforts while increasing data sharing and consistency in the implementation of better regulation actions.

The journey of better regulation will eventually necessitate cultural change within the public sector. Awareness building, training and internal and external communication initiatives will be strengthened so that the public administration is more customer focused to improve consistency and collaboration between different public sector organisations and win the hearts and minds of all stakeholders involved.

Dr Chris Said is parliamentary secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister

Working within our own family

For the party in government, working within the European Union and making a success out of it is a natural process. For us it is equivalent to working within our own family. Membership of the European Union was mooted by the Nationalist Party as the logical next step to go for since the same party worked on ensuring that our country becomes independent.

The policy was then reaffirmed in 1979 as the way forward for a country on the eve of the closure of the facilities that a Labour government had rented to the UK and to NATO. I shall always remember that Labour's policy at the same stage of our recent political history was immortalised in a three word memorable phrase: "The future beckons".

Within the space of the present legislature, we shall have many opportunities to see what European membership is all about. It is within these five years that we shall be able to gauge the impact of over €800 million in funds to co-finance projects that comprise the environment, roads, our heritage, tourism product, transport as well as initiatives that tap into the resourcefulness of the private sector. Moreover the reality of membership goes well beyond the use of funds for one project or another.

Labour will in the meantime be doing its utmost to make us forget that as far as they were concerned membership did not mean more than one and a half million by way of European notes and coins in the national coffers! They will also do their utmost to make us forget that they campaigned ferociously against membership and to make matters worse had not even recognised the

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people's verdict when a referendum on membership was held.

The infamous "partnership has won" slogan should not be forgotten and in March 2003 the police in Malta had to handle (brilliantly may I add) a situation where the two major political parties were both celebrating totally different results of one and the same referendum. Labour will do more. They will make former spokespersons against the European Union or who were members of an even more radical faction within their own ranks (CND) sound as though they are the latest gift to the nation in favour of working within the European Union.

I would dare suggest that a crucial test of our national sanity over the coming five years consists in measuring our

ability not to lose sight of what we have been through within our recent both personal and collective memory. We owe it to ourselves and our own rationality as human beings who are not suffering from dementia to remember that some of the present self proclaimed spokespersons for the European Union were and in the depth of their hearts remain among the most Eurosceptic that you can come across. The leadership of the party cannot be excluded from this analysis.

Thoughts about working within our own family came to my mind as government launched last Friday another consultation process about making a success out of our EU membership.

In this respect, MEUSEC under the chairmanship of Chris Said, who is the Parliamentary Secretary responsible for different consultation initiatives on behalf of government, began meeting in line with its new role and to face the new challenges that result from being within the European Union, rather than outside of it.

The worst mistake that could be made is to talk of the European Union as though it were part of our foreign affairs strategy. It is no longer a question of "us" and "them" - it now boils down to just "us". That is what working within our own family is and should be all about.

The success of MEUSEC will ultimately depend on a genuine sense of belonging that the different components of our civil society can feel and offer to the enrichment of this consultation process. When interviewed about the new process and challenges, the new head of MEUSEC, Vanni Xuereb who brings to the task a sense



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of capable leadership and vision, emphasised the importance of information, research as well as participation.

It is that sense of belonging and participation that can enhance in an exponential way the success that our country is already making out of membership of the European Union.

The most important aspect about our membership is that is not a static process. Joining on 1 May, 2004 was not the end, but the beginning. Nor is there any "end by" date - but an ongoing process that gains as much momentum and leads to as many success stories as we can ourselves make out of the same process.

Dr Francis Zammit Dimech is a Nationalist MP