Malta-EU Steering & Action Committee

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PRESS RELEASE

EUROPE FOR CITIZENS 2007-2013: A VOICE TO THE CITIZEN TO ENHANCE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The *Europe for Citizens (2007-2013)* Programme aims to give the citizen a key role in the development of the European Union by promoting Europe's common values and history, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging to the European Union, enabling citizens to participate fully in the process of European integration and developing ideas and activities from a European perspective. This was stated by Natasha Jovicic, from the Citizenship Unit P7 at the Education Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) at a Malta-EU Steering and Action Committee funding information initiative to disseminate information on the *Europe for Citizens* Programme and the array of EU funding opportunities for projects fostering action, debate and reflection on European citizenship and democracy.

This Programme focuses on four action areas: 'Active citizens for Europe', 'Active civil society in Europe', 'Together for Europe and Active' and 'European remembrance'. At least 700,000 citizens are involved in EU projects funded through this Programme.

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Today's half-day Seminar addressed Action 1, 'Active Citizens for Europe', which seeks to encourage citizens to play a more active role both locally and at EU level. This Action brings together people from local communities across Europe through town-twinning in order to to promote mutual understanding, learning about other cultures in Europe and the emergence of a European identity to complement local and regional ones. Approximately €10, 000 are available for every project under this Action, Ms Jovicic stated, while she was guiding participants through this Programme.

The calls for proposals under Action 1, focusing on Action 1.1 (Town twinning citizens' meetings) and Action 1.2 (Thematic networking of twinned towns), were outlined by Ms Jovicic. When compared to other Member States, Malta fared very well, having submitted seven applications and having had five successful bids. A call is currently open for projects planned between April 1 and May 31 next year. Deadline for submission of proposals is 1 December 2008.

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Dr Gabriella Pace, Head of MEUSAC's Information Unit, introduced the *Europe for Citizens* Programme, which will run for a period of seven years (2007–2013), and which has been allocated an overall budget of €215 million. Approximately €96 million, that is 45% of the overall budget, has been allocated to Action 1. Dr Pace reiterated that MEUSAC is giving a lot of importance to the dissemination of funding information through the organisation of various seminars and conferences, which are meant to translate the EU's funding programmes in layman's language for the benefit of all potential stakeholders. She added that particular attention is being given to the provision of assistance to Local Councils and NGOs, encouraging them to work together on EU-funded initiatives..

Government's intention is to establish a Funding Unit within MEUSAC to support local councils and NGOs not only to assist them in identifying funding opportunities but also in assisting in the actual procedures that would lead to the submission of an application. Head of MEUSAC, Dr Vanni Xuereb, in his opening address said that his office is currently in the process of recruiting a Head for this Funding Unit as well as a number of funding support executives. At present, he said, MEUSAC can only offer limited services through the existing structure and small team of staff that it inherited from *Forum Malta fl-Ewropa*, together with the support of an expert consultant on EU funding programmes. Dr Xuereb stated that the text of a draft Cooperation Agreement between MEUSAC and the local councils has been finalised. He encouraged participants to seek MEUSAC's assistance to maximize the opportunities provided to local councils and NGOs through EU funding programmes.

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In his closing address, the Hon. Chris Said, Parliamentary Secretary for Public Dialogue and Information, reiterated the importance to participate fully in EU programmes and initiatives. This, he said, gives us the opportunity to implement projects that respond to local needs and also allows local stakeholders to contribute to the European Union's common aims. While encouraging participants to tap EU funds, Dr Said reminded participants of Government's commitment to support Local Councils with the co-financing element of their approved projects through the creation of a Government fund as well as through the assistance of Structural Funds. Parliamentary Secretary Said stated that Government understands the importance of twinning projects, to the extent that it has recently launched a revamped twinning policy which enables participants to take the highest benefit possible.

San Lawrenz Local Council Mayor Noel Formosa gave an overview of the projects conducted by the Council and funded through the predecessor of the *European for Citizens* programme, namely the *Active European Citizenship (2004-2006)* programme. Mr Formosa emphasised the need for more active citizenship. He said that local councils and non-government organisations should engage citizens in the European project to drive the European Union's message closer to home. The San Lawrenz Local Council has been participating in these projects since 2005, with one of its projects being selected by the European Commission as a model example for projects funded through these programmes.

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A brief overview of the new policy launched in June of this year to promote and facilitate town-twinning cooperation and understanding between localities was given by Local Government official Silvio Frendo. Mr Frendo said that 69% of local councils have signed twinning agreements, most of which have been signed with Italian and Sicilian cities. Even though twinning was introduced in Malta prior to EU accession in 1993, the new policy introduced this summer,serves as a better guide to local councils in their twinning applications. Mr Frendo encouraged participants, in their majority mayors and councillors, to engage in twinning agreements with EU member states so as to enhance the benefits of membership.

The designated Maltese contact point for the *Europe for Citizens* Programme is the European Union Programmes Agency (EUPA).

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