

Money, money, waiting to be picked up

NOEL GRIMA

In such a time of international and national recession, not many people are aware that there is a huge amount of EU funding just waiting to be applied for and used.

This was the amazing situation that was brought to the attention of participants at a Meusac seminar for Gozo SMEs held last week at the Ta' Cenc Hotel.

Although the hotel conference room was quite full, there are at least 3,500 SMEs in Gozo alone, employing 5,000 people – as Parliamentary Secretary Chris Said pointed out – apart from the SMEs in Malta which should also be made aware of such EU funds available just for the taking.

The following is a synopsis of the eight presentations made. A fuller summary can be found on the Meusac website in the section entitled Events.

Training Aid Framework (Christian Cassar - ETC)

The aim of the programme is to promote access to training for people actively participating in the Maltese labour market in order to increase and/or improve their skills and to enable undertakings to become more competitive through the adoption of skills and knowledge, thus improving quality of life. It is managed by the Training Services Division at ETC and ends on 30 June 2013. The total budget envisaged is €10,758,000.

The trainee can be self-employed or an employee on an indefinite or definite contract, either fulltime or part-time (above 20 hours a week). Trainers can either be graduates in a related subject or with at least two years' work experience in the subject, plus they must complete a 'Train the trainer' course.

Small enterprises can get up to 80 per cent of the course expenses on general training, while large enterprises can get up to 60 per cent. The maximum aid an employee can receive per year is €4,000.

There were 650 applications in the call made last February.

Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (Ray Cassar – Koperattivi Malta)

('Young' can be anyone, even those aged over 60, as long as he or she is beginning the work activity. It can also apply to children of businessmen who want to branch out.)

New Entrepreneurs (NEs) must have a sound educational and vocational background, a viable business idea and plan, vision, commitment, initiative and creativity. They must be willing to work for between one month and six months with an experienced entrepreneur in another EU country of their choice, earning some €1,000 a month.

Host entrepreneurs are experienced and successful entrepreneurs who own or manage an SME in the EU and are willing to share their entrepreneurial experience, benefit from the contribution of NEs from another country and commit to work with NEs towards developing their entrepreneurial skills and know-how.

Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (Pedro Fernandez Alvarez, Malta National Contact Point)

The Eco-Innovation Programme is addressed mainly to companies that have developed an environmental product, service, management practice or process that has a proven track record but is not fully marketed due to non-technological barriers.

It facilitates access to finance, such as loan guarantees from banks but, unfortunately, is not available in Malta as none of the banks showed any interest.

Co-financing is in the proportion of 40-60 per cent, depending on the type of applicant. Budget: €28 million. Duration maximum: 36 months.

A proposal could be submitted even by a single applicant, including an SME, and funding is available even for partly hardware investment. Calls are made in March and the deadline is September.

One Gozo company that has benefited from such funding is Cottage Products (Gozo) Ltd.

7th Framework Programme

(Karen Fiorini, national contact point)

FP7 is the EU's main funding tool for supporting research and technological development from 2007 to 2013 and has a total budget of over €53 billion. It supports research in selected priority areas and aims to strengthen the scientific and technological base of European industry and encourage international competitiveness while promoting research that supports EU policies.

The vast majority of funds are allocated to cooperation and collaborative research across Europe through trans-national consortia. Fifteen per cent is allocated for SME participation.

A second pillar is People, for staff exchanges, recruitment of experienced researchers, networking activities, workshops and conferences, research costs and equipment costs (for SMEs only).

The third pillar is Capacities – funds to outsource research to complement one's core research capability.

Cross Border Cooperation (Maria Schembri – Meusac)

This aims at avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the enlarged EU and neighbouring countries and creating at EU borders an area of economic prosperity, as well as stability and security. EU co-financing of 90 per cent is available.

Partnership (standard projects) entail a minimum of three countries, of which at least one must be an EU Mediterranean country and one a Mediterranean partner country within the programme eligible areas.

The deadline for the submission of applications is 20 October 2009.

Priority 1: The promotion of socio-economic development and the enhancement of territories.

Priority 2: The promotion of environmental sustainability at the Mediterranean basin level.

Priority 3: The promotion of better conditions and modalities for ensur-

ing the mobility of people, goods and capital.

Priority 4: The promotion of cultural dialogue and local governance.

ERDF Research and Development Grant Scheme (Ryan Borg, Malta Enterprise)

This scheme applies for industrial research and also experimental research, in respect of both personnel and also equipment as well as materials for a project.

Energy Grant Scheme (Ryan Borg, Malta Enterprise)

The first call saw 90 applications, 61 of which were approved, two from Gozo, totalling €3.4 million. The funds were used to enhance energy efficiency, eg the installation of intelligent lighting systems, alternative energy, etc. Twenty-eight projects involved photovoltaic systems. The second call will be issued in October but Mepa approval must be in by December. Some applications were refused because they were not signed or were hand-written. Certain applications, such as PV, do not require Mepa permits.

Tourism Grant Schemes (Daniela Azzopardi, Tourism and Sustainable Development Unit, OPM)

The aim behind this scheme was to provide funds for product upgrades and to enhance the environmental quality of enterprises. Funds were applied for in respect of the upgrading of hotels and pools, the purchase of IT equipment, restoration of heritage, building management systems, providing a better use of energy such as through RO systems, creating new websites and new tourism activities such as dive schools, and diversifying the tourism offer.

A second call will be issued on 1 October and the deadline will be 3pm on 30 November, instead of 12noon, but not a second later. Those who failed in the first call can re-apply.

Labour presents parliamentary motion, 'condemning' Austin Gatt

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The PL pointed out that this decision goes against a declaration made by Dr Gatt in June 2006, and also against the Electricity Generation Plan 2006-2015, which states that new power stations should operate on combined cycle turbines that run on gas, because they are ecologically superior and cheaper for consumers.

The motion then goes on to list a series of "condemnations" against Dr Gatt, saying he allowed the plans for the Delimara Power Station extension to fall behind, meaning that there could be longer periods of power cuts due to supply not meeting demand.

The Infrastructure Ministry

there was no delay in the planning and implementation of energy resources.

The PL is also claiming that, in choosing BWSC, the government changed its environmental legislation.

The ministry, however, rebutted this, saying emissions generated from the plant would be in conformity with the EU norms and there were no changes in local legislation.

Moreover, the Labour Party claims that additional finance will be required to dispose of the 31 tonnes of toxic waste generated daily by the plant.

The Infrastructure Ministry also refuted this argument, saying the expense to store and export the waste generated was considered as part of the

BWSC will also be using experimental equipment that could be detrimental to residents' health, said the PL.

Reacting to this yesterday, Enemalta assured the public that the equipment chosen is not a prototype. All the parts are well proven and the combination represents the best available technology to reduce emissions.

It went on to say that the extension of the power station and the area designated for the storage of thousands of tonnes of chemicals will take up a large part of the limited Delimara site, and this could create problems when new plants have to be built in the future.

Enemalta said, however, that

been occupied by a gas turbine plant, the output in megawatts is higher, giving a comparable power density.

A total of 6,600 cubic metres would still be available on the site for future phases of the Delimara development.

The Infrastructure Ministry, on its part, said it eagerly awaits the parliamentary scrutiny of the tender process.

There was nothing irregular in the tender process, and this was confirmed by the very fact that no appeals were filed at any stage of the process, said the ministry, adding that the chosen technology ensures that utility tariffs are kept as low as possible.

And in a counter-reaction to the ministry's statement, the

tender process, and if the Prime Minister trusts his arguments, then there should be no objection to an immediate parliamentary debate on the motion.

Meanwhile, in a long statement, Enemalta denied that the chosen equipment's operating costs are higher than equipment that runs on gas.

As for electricity supply and demand, Enemalta said the current capacity is well above the demand and pointed out that this will also be the case when the new plant starts operating in 2011.

Like the ministry, Enemalta reiterated that the current legal emission thresholds are in line with those set by EU environmental directives and the